

# Wan Smolbag Community Partnership **Evaluation Report**

April 2021

# Wan Smolbag Community Partnership Evaluation Report – Executive Summary

## Introduction: Background, Methodology and Context

Established in 1989, and employing over 140 people, Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB) produces high quality theatre, film, radio and community programming that encourages discussion of critical social issues in Vanuatu. Operating on an annual budget of approximately AUD 2.5 million per year, WSB receives core funding from the Australian Government (DFAT), the New Zealand Government (MFAT), and Oxfam. For the period from January 2018 to March 2021 DFAT contributed AUD 4.27 million and MFAT contributed NZD 3.37 million. Oxfam provided funding of VUV 18 million per year. All core donors intend to continue their relationship with WSB. This evaluation focused on WSB's work from 2015 to present, and considered the effectiveness of WSB's programming overall, as well as their work in the area of gender equality. The relevance, efficiency and sustainability of WSB's work was also considered, as a lower priority.

The WSB evaluation was carried out through a document review, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, as well as a brief online questionnaire. Former volunteers were also invited to submit written responses to a set of questions. In total 84 individuals provided input into the evaluation. An audio file and notes from a September 2020 workshop involving 23 WSB staff members were also analysed. The Team Leader remotely conducted one focus group and 28 interviews, and a three person in-country team completed three focus groups and 18 individual interviews. As well, 35 individuals completed the online survey and eight individuals provided written responses to questions. Purposeful sampling procedures were used and triangulation was achieved by using a range of data sources. Unusual or contradictory information is noted in the text. The full report includes three 'In Focus' sections offering in-depth analysis of specific areas of WSB's work.

WSB's context is unique and their work responds to communities and individuals who are under serviced, and whose voices, needs, and issues are rarely heard and reflected in mainstream Vanuatu society. This may be the case because of their gender identity, social class, educational level, ability/disability or because they belong to a highly stigmatised group. In fact, the unique demographic that WSB engages with across the diversity of what it means to be 'ni-Vanuatu' requires active consideration. Vanuatu's limited services often do not reach these individuals and communities, and they often do not receive recognition, support and engagement from government, church and civil society in Vanuatu. The realities of this complexity and diversity – and the innumerable and distinct challenges and barriers these individuals face – must be recognised.

In the period under review Vanuatu experienced a number of significant events that have contributed to shifts and adjustments in WSB's work, and put increasing pressure on their target communities. These include Cyclone Pam and a significant El Niño event in 2015, and Cyclone Harold and the impacts of the COVID 19 global pandemic in 2020. Communities around WSB are also impacted by issues of insecure land tenure and displacement. These complexities highlight the limitations of an overly linear or literal approach. In several respects WSB exceeds the mandate of a typical 'development' organisation. They have been active in Vanuatu for more than 30 years and their distinctive approach combining creative arts with responsive community services and programming is unparalleled in Vanuatu and the region.

## Effectiveness

WSB's overall effectiveness was rated at 8.2 out of 10. WSB was identified as having an exceptional – and multifaceted – reach that was strengthened in recent years through the use of technology. The diversity of WSB's work and the communities they engage with was seen to extend their reach,

as was the accessibility and affordability of their programming. While ‘dose’ is harder to assess, online survey respondents said that in their view more than 50% of beneficiaries had engaged with WSB more than once. Given the breadth of WSB’s work, and the range of activities and outputs, most beneficiaries experience multiple engagements or exposures. The familiarity, relationship and reputation of WSB also extends their reach and amplifies dose. While COVID-19 is having an increasingly significant impact on the communities WSB works with, its impact on WSB’s overall effectiveness did not appear substantial at the time of the evaluation. WSB’s work and their style and approach allows them to ‘pivot’ as they have with other issues including Cyclone Pam.

**Health** WSB’s health programming in this period included: sexual and reproductive health clinics in Port Vila and Luganville, an outreach clinic in Pentecost and regular mobile clinic and outreach services; a general health clinic in Port Vila; and peer education programming, including active engagement with VPride (an LGBTQI+ organisation supported by WSB) and outreach to marginalised groups (e.g. sex workers and men who have sex with men). Over the five years from 2015 to 2019 more than 75,000 people accessed health services, more than 378,000 condoms were distributed, and more than 36,000 people participated in peer education (20,000 plus were women). Overall, the quality of WSB’s health services was rated at 8.5 out of 10 and their effectiveness was rated at 8.4 out of 10.

Key strengths of WSB’s health programming in this period included: the provision of free, discrete and non-judgemental clinic services located at the doorstep of vulnerable communities; accessibility to women and girls in particular; provision of family planning services for women with increasing acceptance and support from male partners, and benefits for families, communities and society; and as the only place offering sexual and reproductive health services for highly stigmatised populations including sexual minorities and sex workers. Challenges included a reliance on Vanuatu’s Ministry of Health for supplies that often run out (even at times, critical family planning supplies). WSB has done their best to work around this issue, however it sometimes impacts service delivery.

**Nutrition** WSB’s nutrition programming in this period included: lunch catering (for staff and open to the public); drop-in youth cooking classes; events catering (that also offers casual employment for youth); an agricultural plot focusing on composting and plant cultivation and food security and resilience; a diet and exercise counselling program for people with non-communicable diseases (NCDs); community outreach and support; and collaboration with government on crucial issues including childhood malnutrition. WSB’s Nutrition Centre also played a key role in the response to Cyclone Pam, feeding up to 700 people per day for three months. Overall, the quality of WSB’s nutrition services was rated at 9.2 out of 10 and their effectiveness was rated at 8.2 out of 10.

Key strengths of WSB’s nutrition programming in this period included: responsive programming to meet diverse community needs including the provision of practical training in transferable food cultivation and food safe preparation skills; meeting the diverse needs of marginalised youth through active engagement with other programming including literacy and sports; highly effective individualised support for people with NCDs focusing on improving diet and exercise; exceptional community disaster response focused on meeting basic needs and building resilience; strong and active partnerships with government including helping to address childhood malnutrition and conduct community outreach; and a regionally unique and systemic approach to food security that takes into account co-related issues such as poverty and gender. Challenges included limitations in infrastructure and human and financial resourcing.

**Environment and Resource Management** WSB’s environment and resource management programming in this period included: the work of the Vanua-tai community-based resource monitors; locally and regionally engaged work on the impacts of climate change; and collaboration with the Vanuatu Fisheries Department regional Pathways project to support more effective community-based fisheries management. Overall, the quality of WSB’s Vanua-tai Resource Monitors was rated at 8.6

out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting a greater awareness of environmental issues at the community level was rated at 8.0 out of 10, and WSB's effectiveness in supporting more effective local resource management was rated at 8.0 out of 10.

Key strengths of WSB's environment and resource management programming in this period included: the use of theatre and other engaging outreach and communications approaches like comics and workshops; long-term community level conservation approach through the Vanua-tai; active and mutually supportive and reinforcing collaboration with government, particularly in the fisheries sector; and the effectiveness of WSB's approach in engaging women (who play a crucial but less visible role in resource management) and bringing consideration of social inclusion into a space typically dominated by men. Challenges included a disruption to a planned fisheries play tour because of COVID-19. WSB was able to pivot, however, and is developing a film product instead.

**Waste Management** WSB's waste management programming in this period included: working with neighbouring communities on waste separation, composting, recycling and waste removal; outreach to schools on waste management; and conducting composting and recycling at WSB. This work intersects with WSB's contributions to building community resilience, watershed management, and addressing the impacts of climate change (the latter two were also the topic of recent WSB films). Overall the quality of WSB's waste management and community clean-up work was rated at 7.9 out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting people to engage in more efficient waste management was rated at 7.8 out of 10.

Key strengths of WSB's waste management programming in this period included: deep historical engagements around waste and watershed management with Tagabe River communities (adjacent to Port Vila's aquifer and main water supply); the provision of two decades of waste removal services to communities with no municipal waste collection, contributing to a cleaner and healthier living environment; the only organisation teaching and practicing an integrated waste management approach in Vanuatu; and extending government work and efforts in this area. Challenges included the impacts of poverty, insecurity of tenure, population growth, lack of municipal services, and the influx of plastic and non-biodegradable materials. WSB's work in this area highlights the importance of measuring effectiveness in more contextually informed and complex ways.

**Youth Programming and Sports** WSB's youth and sports programming in this period included: diverse classes and activities offered from three locations in Port Vila, Luganville and on Penecost; sports programming that offers the only multipurpose astro turf field in Vanuatu and hosts several major sports leagues including futsal, hockey and basketball. From 2015 to 2019, over 9,500 youth were registered at the Youth Centres in Port Vila and Luganville, and in 2020 there were over 1,200 players registered in WSB's sports programs. Overall the quality of activities at WSB's Youth Centres were rated at 8.3 out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting youth and other vulnerable and 'at risk' groups to explore and develop their talents, skills and abilities was rated at 8.9 out of 10.

Key strengths of WSB's youth and sports programming in this period included: the diversity of services and classes on offer and the 'one-stop-shop' aspect; diverse options for out of school youth including literacy training, skills development, casual work and, for some, support in the transition to paid work; responsiveness to the needs of diverse youth while offering a safe and highly integrated and inclusive space; being a 'second chance' to youth dealing with particularly complex life experiences; and providing a quality experience for international volunteers. Challenges in this area included some negative perceptions about the population of youth WSB serves, disruption to some programming in early 2020 because of COVID-19, and the complexities of achieving strict gender equality in sports because of restrictive social norms relating to women and girls in Vanuatu society.

**Creative Media** WSB's creative media programming in this period included: plays and workshops offered at their theatre in Port Vila and in various communities, and the production of several short

informational videos (including on COVID 19), documentary films on a range of topics, completion of their highly popular eight season series *Love Patrol*, and a short series *Ded Laf*, along with several other feature length films and the production of a radio series. All of WSB's films are available on their YouTube channel (some have more than 400,000 views) and all of their products continue to reach a broad, diverse, and often a regional audience. Overall the quality of WSB's plays and community workshops was rated at 9.4 out of 10. The overall quality of their films and other creative media products was rated at 9.6 out of 10.

Key strengths of WSB's creative media in this period included: the considerable talent and effectiveness of the 39 full-time actors (one third are people with disabilities, 41% are women), and the numerous casual and part-time actors (youth drama and film extras); WSB's ability to produce high quality creative products while developing local technical expertise in areas like cinematography and sound editing; the educational and transformational aspects of this work that extends the work of other partners, and bring issues to life in a way that is accessible and relevant to diverse audiences; and WSB's significant local 'legitimacy' that enables them to raise difficult issues. Challenges in this area included a concern from a small number of individuals around how domestic violence is sometimes depicted. This is a complex area, however, and there are also cautions about becoming too overtly message focused. Others found WSB to be particularly effective in this respect.

**Human Rights and Diversity** WSB's human rights and diversity programming in this period revolved around their significant support for women and girls, both within and beyond WSB (see Gender Equality), and their work with people with disabilities and trans/gender diverse individuals. Key strengths in this area included WSB's unique provision of a 'safe space', and their creation of an environment that is inclusive and that supports the rights of diverse people who experience marginalisation in mainstream Vanuatu society. WSB was consistently recognised for their ability to create a sense of inclusion across a range of differences, without stigma, fear or shame. WSB was also identified as modelling, encouraging and leading social change in areas including the rights of the LGBTQI+ community and the rights of people with disabilities, particularly through their work with VPride and Rainbow Theatre.

## Gender Equality

This evaluation was also tasked with considering WSB's effectiveness in promoting gender equality (within and beyond WSB) and to identify potential areas for strengthening. Overall, WSB's effectiveness in supporting gender equality within WSB was rated at 8.9 out of 10. Key strengths relating to gender equality within WSB included: support for actors and staff who experience domestic violence; creating a safe space for women and girls in all their diversity to be seen and heard; modelling and supporting women's leadership; clear and progressive language in their written policies and procedures on issues like domestic violence and sexual harassment; active tone-setting and zero tolerance for harassment and bullying; and support for women's economic empowerment.

WSB's effectiveness in supporting gender equality through their activities and programming was rated at 8.9 out of 10, and their effectiveness in supporting gender equality in Vanuatu society was rated at 8.5 out of 10. WSB was also rated favourably compared to other organisations in influencing change in the way that women and girls, trans women and gender diverse individuals, and women and girls with disabilities are viewed. Key strengths in WSB's activities and programming included: the provision of free sexual and reproductive health services; creating an environment in workshops and plays that is more conducive to women's engagement; fostering inclusion through sports; modelling women's empowerment and leadership; and challenging harmful social norms.

Areas for possible strengthening<sup>1</sup> around gender equality at WSB included: striving for more equal numbers of men and women in certain areas (e.g. sports, some Youth Centre programming), although achieving strict equality may not be realistic or appropriate in all areas; engaging in training with staff around gender equality and addressing harmful social norms; further strengthening WSB's internal response to domestic violence perhaps through targeted information or a 'policy'; the provision of dedicated, well-contextualised counselling services at WSB, although this would likely need to be brought in from outside of Vanuatu; gathering more sex disaggregated data and engaging in gender analysis, while avoiding an overly technocratic approach; and the possible development of a gender and diversity policy at WSB, but only if it is something that makes sense to WSB.

## Relevance, Efficiency and Sustainability

As a lower priority, the evaluation also considered aspects of WSB's relevance, efficiency and sustainability. WSB's relevance to issues facing individuals, families and communities in Vanuatu was rated at 9.3 out of 10, their relevance to issues facing young people was rated at 9.3 out of 10 and their relevance to the government's strategic priorities was rated at 8.9 out of 10. Overall, WSB was found to be highly relevant and responsive to community needs, reflecting the 'real' lives of people in Vanuatu, and with a unique capacity to pivot to emerging issues. No aspects of WSB's work were identified as no longer relevant, and confidence was expressed in WSB's ability to adjust as needed.

In terms of efficiency, WSB was found to offer very good value for money, with respondents rating this at 9.1 out of 10. WSB also compared favourably to other organisations in this area and was identified as operating efficiently and with small margins, particularly given the scope and quality of their work. While two partners commented on minor inefficiencies relating to WSB's management style and donor expectations, the responsibility for addressing this was not located with WSB. There were also some inefficiencies identified around project management for extra-to-core funding, however this work also adds significant value for WSB, and benefits partners and donors as well. Inefficiencies in WSB's new approach to monitoring, evaluation and reporting were also identified.

In the area of sustainability, WSB was recognised as contributing to environmental sustainability in several areas including waste management, the work of the Vanua-tai, their support for fisheries management and climate change mitigation, and in the area of resilience. The social aspects of WSB's work, particularly through plays and films, and their consistent messaging and community education efforts over more than three decades were also seen to be sustainable. In terms of financial sustainability, WSB's provision of free or inexpensive services and products was seen as crucial to their effectiveness, with WSB recognised as a 'public good' and filling significant gaps in government service delivery. WSB's past two reviews (2009 and 2012<sup>2</sup>) and analysis completed by two Australian business advisors (2006 and 2016<sup>3</sup>) all concluded that financial sustainability and cost recovery were not appropriate or realistic goals for WSB.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Effectiveness is a complex thing to measure, particularly in relation to WSB. Their work focuses on more marginalised issues, individuals and communities in Vanuatu, and exhibits significant diversity, longevity and breadth. WSB actors and staff are also beneficiaries and this contributes to the complexities of 'measurement' with their experience as part of WSB impacting their own lives, as well as the lives of their children, extended families and their communities. WSB's work in the creative arts is also unique and transformational, and difficult to measure. It allows people in Vanuatu to see

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to clarify that these suggestions were solicited in the evaluation, and do not necessarily imply that these changes are essential or necessary. There was a clear sense that gender equality was already a strength of WSB and 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Gray et al, *Mid-Term Review: Wan Smolbag Vanuatu*, May 2009 and Heidi Tyedmers, *Wan Smolbag Theatre Mid-Term Review Report*, December 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Barber, *Commercial Opportunities for Wan Smolbag Theatre*, 2006 and Nick Gorshenin, *Wan Smolbag Financial Sustainability Review*, 2016.

themselves reflected back in stories depicting the realities and complexities of their lives. All of these aspects require that we look for, see and think about things like effectiveness and change in more nuanced, contextualised and complex ways.

In answering the priority question for the evaluation around effectiveness and WSB's contribution to longer-term change among the individuals and communities in which they work, WSB was found to be highly – and uniquely – effective. WSB's work to further gender equality in Vanuatu – while not an explicit focal area for the organisation – was also found to be highly effective. WSB's work, approach, and the issues they focus on also exhibited a high level of relevance. In considering efficiency, the evaluation found that WSB was extremely efficient overall, representing significant value for money. Overall, WSB's work was also found to be sustainable across a range of variables. When asked how much they loved or appreciated WSB, the overall rating was 9.5 out of 10, with 26 people (74%) rating WSB at 10 of out 10.

### **Recommendations for WSB's Consideration**

1. **WSB should continue working in the same manner, building on existing strengths where possible.**  
WSB as an organisation currently exhibits significant maturity and effectiveness across a diverse range of activities. WSB should continue to work in the way they have been working, building on their existing strengths wherever possible (and as resources allow).
2. **Any further work around gender equality at WSB should be preceded by more focused consultation.**  
WSB was found to be significantly effective in the broad area of gender equality. If further work to strengthen gender equality at WSB is undertaken this should be guided by a more focused consultation and driven by WSB in accordance with their needs.
3. **WSB should consider expanding their management capacity** (as funding allows<sup>4</sup>). Despite efforts and improvements in the period under review, WSB still appears under-resourced in this area. Another two (or even three) management positions would allow WSB to continue to provide a high level of staff support, while maintaining their pace, quality and diversity of activities, and also managing their donor relationships and responsibilities effectively.
4. **WSB's should consider expanding work in their Nutrition Centre** (as funding allows<sup>5</sup>). WSB's Nutrition Centre was recognised as exceptionally effective through this period across a range of areas from food security to integrated approaches to health and well-being, and in partnership with government. With additional resourcing it offers significant potential for impact.

### **Recommendations for the Consideration of Core Donor Partners**

5. **MFAT, DFAT and Oxfam should continue their core funding support for WSB through a five-year joint funding relationship (at a minimum), at the same or increased levels.** WSB has demonstrated that they are a highly effective, responsive and efficient organisation, offering a unique and diverse range of programming that addresses significant needs and gaps in Vanuatu society. There is a strong case that core funding at or above current levels should be provided to WSB for a five-year period at a minimum – and longer where possible.
6. **WSB's core donor partners<sup>6</sup> should support focused work early in the next phase of funding to strengthen WSB's monitoring, evaluation and reporting in a way that is also effective for WSB.** While technical support from donors was focused in this area over the past few years, it is not clear that the new format of reporting is effective or manageable for WSB. Support should focus on helping WSB to develop more accessible and manageable processes and formats.
7. **WSB's core donor partners should ideally seek to resolve questions around financial sustainability and cost recovery in relation to WSB in a more enduring way.** Practical consideration, previous reviews and evaluations, and in-depth analysis offered by two business advisors all clearly demonstrate that financial sustainability and cost recovery are not viable options for WSB. Ideally this matter can be resolved by donor partners in a more enduring way.

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<sup>4</sup> It is likely that WSB will not be able to meet this recommendation without additional funding support.

<sup>5</sup> As per footnote 4 above.

<sup>6</sup> This recommendation was reserved for donor partners as they have been influential in directing WSB's current reporting format.

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# Wan Smolbag Community Partnership Evaluation Report

## Introduction

### Background

Established in 1989, Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB) currently employs over 140 people and operates on an annual budget of approximately AUD 2.5 million per year. WSB produces high quality theatre, film, radio and community programming that encourages discussion of critical social issues in Vanuatu, including domestic violence, child abuse, corruption and environmental conservation. WSB also provides targeted opportunities for youth (particularly those identified as out-of-school, unemployed and/or 'at-risk') through various training programmes and activities offered at their Youth Centres, including sports facilities, a nutrition programme, and literacy education. In addition to these areas of engagement, WSB operates sexual and reproductive health clinics in Vanuatu's two urban centres of Port Vila and Luganville and delivers targeted programming and services from a small centre on Pentecost.

Overall, WSB's vision<sup>7</sup> is for a strong and well-governed Vanuatu, across all sectors of society, from rural to urban communities, and inclusive of everyone, particularly those who are more marginalised. This is a Vanuatu where:

- An environment for change is cultivated and promoted at all levels, through opportunities for dialogue and engagement around key social, environmental and governance issues.
- The rights of all people, regardless of gender, age, physical and cognitive ability, education level, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and economic, ethnic and social status, are heard, supported and protected.
- All people are equipped with the information and knowledge to engage in decision-making processes that affect them, and are empowered to participate freely in society.
- Those who are entrusted with authority and power are held to account to ensure the decisions and actions that are taken by people today do not compromise the health, wellbeing, environment and livelihood opportunities of people tomorrow.

WSB's intended purpose, short, medium and long-term outcomes and overarching program goal can be found in their 2018 logical framework that is included as Appendix 6.

WSB operates in a particular context. Vanuatu has a young and rapidly growing population, with increasing issues of poverty, particularly in urban areas. The Government of Vanuatu's (GoV) capacity to provide services and opportunities for youth and other marginalised community members is limited. WSB currently receives core funding from the Australian Government (DFAT), the New Zealand Government (MFAT), and Oxfam in Vanuatu through the Wan Smolbag Tripartite Partnership. The Australian bilateral aid program has supported WSB since 2005 with a contribution of AUD 4.27 million for the period from January 2018 to March 2021. New Zealand's bilateral aid programme has supported WSB since 2006 and contributed NZD 3.37 million for the same period. Oxfam has supported WSB since 1997 and provides funding of VUV 18 million per year. The three core donors intend to continue their relationship with WSB beyond their current agreements.

This evaluation will provide WSB's core donors with a solid foundation to support WSB's – as well as their own – forward planning processes. In anticipation of the next phase of support to

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<sup>7</sup> WSB's vision is included in their *Roadmap for Change 2014-2025*.

WSB, an evaluation of work carried out from 2015 to present forms the basis of this evaluation. This will include specific analysis of WSB's work promoting gender equality. A review and refresh of WSB's guiding document, Roadmap for Change 2014-2025, is part of this scope of work but will be handled separately. This evaluation was carried out from October 2020 to February 2021 and included document review, interviews and focus groups with WSB staff, donors and a selection of WSB's partners. Targeted groups of beneficiaries were also interviewed. The evaluation was guided by an Evaluation and Review Plan and the collaborative approach was supported by a Reference Group (see below) that provided guidance and feedback as needed.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the WSB Evaluation was to work collaboratively with WSB and key partners to:

1. Conduct an evaluation of WSB's programming from 2015 to present that draws on monitoring and evaluation work completed to date, and includes further information gathering and evaluative work to gauge the effectiveness – and to a lesser extent the relevance, efficiency and sustainability – of WSB's programming;
2. Complete a preliminary gender analysis of WSB which identifies efforts and achievements to date as well as opportunities for further action in promoting gender equality.

In addition, the Terms of Reference for this work also included a review of WSB's Roadmap for Change 2014-2025 and associated documents, and support for WSB in identifying needs outside of their day-to-day funding envelope. These will be addressed in separate documents.

## **Key Stakeholders and Intended Users**

The WSB Evaluation and Review was governed by a Reference Group with representatives from the key stakeholder groups in the evaluation including: MFAT (Esther Jens, Second Secretary and Minnie Takaro, Programme Manager); DFAT (Cathy McWilliam, First Secretary and Pamela Carlo, Senior Program Manager); Oxfam in Vanuatu (Elizabeth Faerua, Country Director<sup>8</sup>); and WSB (Nelson Johnson, CEO, Siula Bulu, Health Programme Manager, Jodi Devine, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Peter Walker, Artistic Director and Jo Dorras, Scriptwriter). This Reference Group represents the primary intended users<sup>9</sup> of the WSB Evaluation Report.

## **Methodology**

The WSB evaluation was carried out through a review and analysis of key documents (see Appendix 3), and through a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a variety of stakeholders (see Appendix 5). Interviews took place throughout November 2020 (see Appendix 4). A brief online questionnaire was also circulated to key stakeholders in late November to facilitate the collection of more quantitative data (see Appendix 1). As agreed with the Reference Group, individuals who had volunteered with WSB in the period under review were invited to submit written responses to a set of questions, and they were also invited to participate in the online survey. An audio file and notes from a WSB workshop in September were also analysed. This workshop involved 23 staff members from ten areas across WSB, and focused on exploring several of the preliminary evaluation questions.

In total 84 individuals provided input into the evaluation<sup>10</sup>. The Team Leader, Heidi Tyedmers, conducted 28 individual interviews that ranged from 30 minutes to 3.5 hours in length (in a few cases a second interview was conducted). These interviews were carried out remotely and included all donor partners, international, regional and Vanuatu-based partners, as well as WSB staff. The Team Leader also carried out one focus group interview (remotely), and collected written responses from eight individuals (six were former WSB volunteers). The in-country team

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Faerua represented Oxfam Vanuatu until 14 November 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Other members of WSB, Oxfam, DFAT and MFAT may also utilise these findings for informational and decision-making purposes.

<sup>10</sup> This does not include the 23 WSB staff members who participated in the workshop in early September.

consisting of Hellen Bani, Shirley Vira and Sam Obed completed 18 in-person interviews, primarily with community and youth beneficiaries, but also with a limited number of actors, WSB staff and partners. As well, the team held three focus groups – one with actors and the other two with beneficiaries. A total of 35 individuals participated in the online survey.

Guiding questions (see Appendix 2) were used to construct dedicated interview guides for various stakeholders, including WSB staff and management, donors, partners, volunteers and beneficiaries. As the scope of the WSB Evaluation and WSB's work itself is quite broad, and this evaluation is based on analytical rather than statistical inference, purposeful sampling procedures were used. Notes were kept on key documents, and responses to all interview questions were organized and systematically processed. Interviews were recorded for note taking purposes only (where consent was given), and information was checked for accuracy where necessary. All stakeholders were informed about the purpose of the evaluation, and provided their consent to participate before interviews were carried out.

Given the interest of all parties to take stock of the overall effectiveness of WSB's work over the past six years, effectiveness was treated as a higher priority. Efficiency, relevance and sustainability were treated as secondary, and explored with a smaller group of stakeholders (WSB management and core donors). Triangulation was applied to the extent that similar questions were posed across a range of respondents and in different formats (semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an online survey). Key documents – as well as background research – were used to cross-check information and inform analysis. Unusual or contradictory information is noted in the report, and direct quotations are included to illustrate key points. The report includes three 'In Focus' sections offering a more in depth look at specific aspects of WSB's work.

## **Independence**

This evaluation, including the analysis and recommendations, reflect the evaluator's professional judgment based on over 12 years of in-country experience carrying out research, community engagement and donor evaluation in Vanuatu, and more than two decades working in Pacific focused academic and civil society roles. A presentation of preliminary findings was carried out with the Reference Group on Tuesday 15 December 2020. Feedback provided in this session was taken into consideration in the drafting of the report and stakeholders have been consulted for fact-checking and follow up as necessary. The Reference Group was also given an opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Evaluation Report. While a collaborative approach was taken throughout the evaluation, ultimately the WSB Evaluation Report reflects the evaluator's independent professional judgement.

## **Limitations**

This evaluation was carried out during the global COVID-19 pandemic with the Team Leader located in Canada, and the in-country team based in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Stakeholders were interviewed in diverse time zones and locations around the world. While the evaluation itself proceeded relatively smoothly under these circumstances, there were unanticipated delays (unrelated to the evaluation) as well as significant extra work involved in analysing data, compiling responses, and developing the draft report. This has impacted the timing of the report, but not the quality or analysis.

The scope of the work was significant. The inclusion of four evaluation criteria (effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability), as well as focused consideration of gender equality across the organisation required attention to numerous factors and issues, and made some of the interviews very long. WSB's work is also unique in its breadth, diversity and the longevity of the organisation itself. In order to adequately reflect the range and depth of the organisation,

consider the full evidence base, and achieve the level of rigor required, this has resulted in a report which exceeds the number of pages specified in the Terms of Reference. It is hoped that the Executive Summary will mitigate this, while allowing users who are looking for more in-depth analysis and evidence to seek it in the longer report.

Finally, given the timelines in the evaluation and the limitations relating to COVID-19, travel to WSB's Northern Care Youth Centre (NCYC) in Luganville and their location in Pentecost was not possible. Staff from Luganville were interviewed by phone, and the Team Leader is also familiar with WSB's work in both locations given her experience conducting previous work with WSB and in Vanuatu. Both locations were also discussed with WSB's Port Vila-based staff where relevant. It was not possible, however, to get a sense of either location from a beneficiary perspective. As a result, the findings relating to effectiveness in particular, while relevant to the organisation as a whole in many respects, are likely more applicable to WSB's Port Vila location.

## Findings and Analysis

### Introduction: Context and the Need for Nuance

The revised Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Principles for Use stipulate that evaluation criteria should not be applied mechanistically, but rather in a more thoughtful and nuanced way that considers the intervention itself and the circumstances of beneficiaries<sup>11</sup>, while reflecting the broader operating context<sup>12</sup>. It is, therefore, worth pointing out at the start that WSB's context is unique, even within the broader setting of Vanuatu. It is telling that even people who were born and raised in Vanuatu commented in the evaluation that WSB had opened their eyes to the complex realities of poverty and marginalisation in Vanuatu society. Much of WSB's work responds to communities and individuals who are inadequately serviced, and whose voices, needs, and issues are rarely heard and reflected in mainstream Vanuatu society.

While there is no uniform set of issues facing these communities and individuals, they can broadly be characterised as people in Vanuatu society who are typically left out or left behind (because of their gender identity, social class, educational level, because of what it means to be a person with a disability in Vanuatu, or a sex worker, or even a woman in a village context). One ni-Vanuatu respondent referred to WSB's key target communities as the 'poorest of the poor'. While these are clearly value laden statements, and are themselves homogenizing, the unique demographic that WSB engages with, across the great diversity of what it means to be 'ni-Vanuatu' requires active consideration. WSB's work targets individuals, communities and issues that are still 'marginal' to the mainstream of Vanuatu society across a range of variables.

For example, WSB's target population could be women in the coastal villages where WSB's play *Twist mo Spin* was performed, who were never part of conversations about fisheries in the past, but who play a crucial role in food security and coastal fisheries management. Women who vitally depend on dwindling marine resources for the livelihoods and wellbeing of their families. Or they could be a transwoman who is laughed at every week as she attends church, and is harassed and verbally assaulted as she moves around town. Someone who is legitimately in fear of being sexually and physically assaulted, and whose voice and issues are left out of almost everything, including national level gender policies<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> This evaluation has opted to use the term 'beneficiary' instead of rightsholders or participants, as it is more commonly used – while also acknowledging the limitations and challenges inherent in this terminology.

<sup>12</sup> OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use*, 2019, page 6.

<sup>13</sup> An Oxfam report authored by Caitlin McCormack et al titled *Gender and LGBTQI+ Policy and Programming in Vanuatu: Opportunities, challenges, capacity, and tools for change* published in September 2020 effectively outlines many of these issues and the context for LGBTQI+ individuals in Vanuatu.

Or they could also be a group of young men, described by one partner as ‘the lost boys’ with ‘clearly antisocial behaviour’, who hang out around the Youth Centre day in and day out. In the words of this partner:

*...they were lost boys. You could see them... one had his hair half bleached and the eyebrow bleached, and this look, with a leather jacket. But you know he was pottering about. And he was there! And I thought that was quite nice too, that he could go somewhere with his group of mates.*

These are some of the people that Vanuatu’s limited services typically do not reach and who experience a lack of recognition, support and engagement from government, church and civil society in Vanuatu – but who find a place at WSB. The realities of this complexity and diversity – and the innumerable and distinct challenges and barriers these individuals face, from stigma to the inequitable impacts of climate change – must be recognised.

Beyond these specific contextual issues there is a further context that needs to be taken on board more actively in relation to development and the politics of development funding itself in the context of WSB’s work. This is marked by inherent power dynamics, and the potential to get lost in the rhetoric, and default to an overly linear and literal approach. If this is mobilised without adequate critical thought and reflection it can verge on dogmatic<sup>14</sup>, and may even serve to limit effectiveness. While these are relevant cautions for any work in the broad space of development, they are perhaps even more necessary with an organization like WSB, that in several respects exceeds the mandate of a typical ‘development’ organisation. This was raised by stakeholders themselves in the evaluation, including two partners who emphasised the need to recognise, value and support what they identified as ‘the magic’ that is WSB.

WSB has also been active in Vanuatu for more than 30 years – reflecting significant continuity of staff and overall mandate – leading several stakeholders to assess effectiveness through a longer-term lens. While significant effort was made to highlight work particularly within the timeframe under review, WSB’s current effectiveness builds on, and benefits from, this long history. Finally, WSB’s distinctive and prolific format of combining the creative arts with responsive community services and programming is unparalleled in Vanuatu and the region. In some ways, it is unique in the world. As a result, there are few touchstones and effective points of comparison. In the words of one partner:

*It’s hard to put a measure on effectiveness, as so much of what WSB does is difficult to capture in metrics.*

As will be revisited in the conclusion, all of these factors require that this evaluation remain attentive to the unique nature of the work, and to the complexity of the issues, people and spaces that WSB engages with. It also demands a more critical and nuanced consideration of what words like ‘effectiveness’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘efficiency’ actually mean – and should mean – in this context.

## **Effectiveness: Is WSB achieving its objectives?**

WSB’s objectives are captured in their 2018 program logic, and articulated in greater detail in their annual work plans, and in their Roadmap for Change. WSB’s overarching objective is to:

*Create and promote an environment of change at all levels [of Vanuatu society] through opportunities for dialogue and engagement around key social, environmental and governance issues.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> There is also significant irony in working with an organisation that so effectively highlights and parodies these dynamics in their own creative work. *Love Patrol* Season 8, for example, critically questions a number of ways that ‘development’ work is mobilised, and the inherent tensions and contradictions.

<sup>15</sup> *Wan Smolbag Program Logic*, 2018 (available in Appendix 6).



Their work is strategically broken down into three broad areas: health, environment and governance. This evaluation was tasked with considering to what extent WSB has contributed to change – from the individual to the societal level – across various aspects of their work, and to provide examples of WSB’s contributions to longer-term change where possible. In addition, this evaluation was also tasked with considering WSB’s effectiveness in promoting gender equality.

In the past six years from 2015 to 2020 a number of significant events have impacted WSB’s broader context. These are worth outlining briefly, as in each case these have contributed to shifts and adjustments in WSB’s work, and have put increasing pressure on their surrounding communities. In March 2015, Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu with devastating effect. This major cyclone was followed by an El Niño event resulting in a long-term drought that stretched into 2016, and exacerbated the impacts of the cyclone for many communities. Both of these natural disasters impacted WSB’s work, the lives of staff, and WSB’s target communities directly and profoundly, particularly in Port Vila and surrounding areas.

Many communities around WSB have also been impacted by issues of insecure land tenure and displacement over the past several years. For example, the ‘Destination’ community – home to approximately 300 people<sup>16</sup> – was in the words of a 2019 report, ‘forcibly evicted overnight in October 2014’<sup>17</sup>. This report highlights the specific impacts on young people like ‘Roslyn’ a 23-year-old single mother who had worked as a peer educator at WSB and participated actively in WSB’s Youth Centre until she was forced to resettle in a relatively remote community outside of town<sup>18</sup>. In 2018, 150 people were similarly evicted from the MCI community adjacent to WSB in a period of four hours<sup>19</sup>. Both of these communities, and the young people who lived in them, had been actively engaged with WSB for many years. Most of the communities around WSB continue to experience the ongoing threat of displacement and insecurity of tenure.

In 2020, while Vanuatu experienced only one confirmed case of coronavirus, border closures starting in March – and the resulting loss of work and increasing economic hardship – had a significant impact. In April 2020, another severe tropical cyclone, Harold, struck Vanuatu, resulting in substantial damage to communities engaged with WSB’s centres on Santo and Pentecost. While the communities around WSB are already marked by significant transience – with individuals circulating to and from the islands and other communities as circumstances dictate – these major disasters and land issues add another layer of complexity, and directly impact the communities WSB works with on a day-to-day basis. With this broader backdrop in mind, the following sections trace the effectiveness of WSB’s work across the range of their activities from 2015 until present.

## Effectiveness in General

When asked how they would rate WSB’s overall effectiveness, respondents to the quantitative survey rated it at 8.2 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). In the interviews, partners, core donors, and WSB staff agreed that WSB had quite an exceptional – and multifaceted – reach, and this had only been strengthened in recent years through the use of technology. Several people mentioned WSB’s YouTube channel specifically, and the high number of views it receives, as demonstrated in the following quote offered by a core donor:

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<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Day and Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, *Learning from survivors of development-induced displacement: Operationalising Vanuatu’s new displacement policy toward an inclusive Capital city*, 2019, page 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, page 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, Page 17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Richard M. Nanua, ‘Over150 Evicted in “MCI OPS”’, *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 19 September 2018.

*...the work they're most well-known for is their film and theatre work. And its potentially some of the most powerful or effective work that they do...[and] they always have massive audiences in all of their theatre work. But also, when they put their films and things on YouTube they get hundreds of thousands of views of these films which is fantastic, and just shows the huge reach they have within Vanuatu and beyond.*

In fact, WSB's top three films on their YouTube Channel include: *Yu No Save Ronwei Lo Lav* with more than 400,000 views, and *I No Bisnis Blo Yumi* and *Tears I Foldaon* with well over 200,000 views each<sup>20</sup>. WSB's 15 short informational videos on COVID-19 posted in late March 2020 already have thousands of views. As is clear from the extensive use of mobile phones, and the comments on YouTube, WSB reaches an audience across Vanuatu, the Pacific and beyond.

Beyond WSB's social media presence, the diversity of what WSB does, and the diverse communities they work with were also highlighted by several respondents in response to questions about reach. Several people also identified accessibility and affordability as extending WSB's reach in significant ways, in some cases to communities and individuals without the means to access other services and programs. This is highlighted in the following quote offered by a WSB partner:

*I think they have a continued wide reach into certain communities that no other organization really does. Like the LGBTQI+ community and the sex worker community, for example. Both of those groups are underserved in Vanuatu, with WSB really being the only organization actually trying to actively support and provide services.*

While 'dose'<sup>21</sup> is harder to quantify and assess, in the online survey most respondents who felt knowledgeable enough to answer, said that in their view more than 50% of beneficiaries across most areas of WSB's work had engaged with WSB more than once (see Appendix 1). Given the breadth of WSB's work – and the range of activities and outputs – most beneficiaries typically experience multiple engagements or exposures. Interestingly, several stakeholders who were interviewed shared personal stories of attending the Youth Centre or having acted with WSB as a young person. This aspect, and the longevity of WSB's work (they celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019), has meant that a number of people have effectively 'grown up' with WSB.

This familiarity, relationship and reputation built up over time extends the reach and amplifies the dose of WSB's work in significant ways, as demonstrated in the following story, offered by one respondent:

*The first time I understood about the environment was through WSB and having them come and do that play and the movie they produced about saving turtles. And I remember being actively involved with my father. We'd go out to release the turtles in North Efate...and I was so inspired by WSB for that.*

This individual also remembered the words to a song from that play (from over 20 years ago), even singing it in the interview. They had been six, and described going with their father to participate in turtle work alongside the turtle monitors (now the Vanua-tai) in North Efate. This individual also said, 'The first time I learned about my body was when WSB came to [my school].'

A WSB staff member similarly described going into one of the storage docks with a new staff member and finding the puppets that were used in the mid-1990's for the play (and subsequent film) *On the Reef*, and the memories this evoked. They also described another experience when they discovered that they were working with a government partner who had acted in WSB's 1996 film *Kasis Road*. This individual went on to say:

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<sup>20</sup> WSB's YouTube Channel is located at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGnek6DwtibWls5kuy-k1Tw>. These numbers reflect the number of views as of 22 February 2021.

<sup>21</sup> 'Dose' refers to how many times people participate in or are exposed to materials or activities.

*A lot of people do have positive experiences of Smolbag, or positive knowledge. I think it feels to me that it is an important part of Vanuatu and people recognise that and recognise the youth that have been helped. Maybe it would be a very personal thing for each person, but I think there would be a memory of how Smolbag had impacted each person's life...*

Several WSB staff members talked about how much they themselves had learned at WSB in areas like nutrition and sexual and reproductive health, as recounted in the following quote:

*When I came to Smolbag I came with my own perceptions on everything - on family planning, on young people, on gay people...but working with Smolbag – and that's one of the things that has been really good for me and I think my kids, because I have transferred those, not just knowledge, but change in beliefs. So now I believe very strongly that everybody HAS to have the space that they need to grow, regardless of where they come from, what race they are, all of those things. And that was something that wasn't there when I was not at Smolbag. That has resulted from working at Smolbag for so many years.*

Several staff, including one who was raised outside of Vanuatu, said they had learned about waste management and subsequently changed their own practices as a result of what they had been exposed to at WSB. One former WSB volunteer – who had grown up in Australia – said:

*WSB has changed my views on climate change and other environmental issues. The awareness and education around reducing waste, the benefits of solar and how we as humans are slowly destroying this earth with the bad habits that have [been] instilled in us over generations.*

Another regional partner said they were amazed by the stories of ni-Vanuatu colleagues (men and women) who had all been part of WSB at one time or another, as youth attending the Youth Centre, or actors in *Love Patrol*. In fact, most individuals who were interviewed had their own memories and stories of change to share as a result of WSB's work.

The evaluation was also tasked with checking in about impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. While COVID-19 was identified as having an increasingly significant impact – financially and otherwise – on the communities WSB works with, the impact on WSB's overall effectiveness did not appear substantial. The nature of WSB's work, and their style and approach, allows them to 'pivot', as they have with many other issues including Cyclone Pam. For example, a Northern tour of *Twist mo Spin* was disrupted by COVID-19, but the remaining funds will be used to transform the play into a film. Activities at WSB were also suspended in early March (some, like sports, for several months), and this may result in a dip in participation numbers in 2020. Overall, however, the impact of COVID-19 on WSB's effectiveness at the time of the evaluation seemed manageable.

The following sections highlight the findings of the evaluation relating to various aspects of WSB's work. It is challenging – and somewhat inaccurate – to isolate WSB's work into discrete areas of analysis, however, as so much of what they do across the organisation is interlaced with any number of other aspects. This coherence and synergy – and their holistic approach to people and issues – relates directly to their effectiveness. For example, young people joining WSB to play a sport will likely also benefit from sexual and reproductive health services, attend the Nutrition Centre, and watch a number of plays and films. They may also take on casual work, and explore their interest in art, chess or hip hop in their spare time, as illustrated in the findings below.

Many staff members at WSB also came into the organisation as beneficiaries – and continue in this mixed role – making it difficult to draw a clear line here as well. As one example, most of the peer educators started off as youth beneficiaries in sexual and reproductive health training. There are numerous other 'cross-overs' in the organisation as well. For example, the actors in Rainbow Theatre attend classes on sewing, and at least one staff member attends literacy classes. The actors themselves have been drawn from every corner of the organisation. This integrated approach is also carried through WSB's films and plays, which typically engage a range of issues



within the same product. Several initiatives – for example, the sports program and WSB’s ongoing support for VPride<sup>22</sup> – straddle various departments. As a result, these distinctions and boundaries should be seen as somewhat arbitrary.

## **Effectiveness: Health and Nutrition**

WSB’s work in the area of health and nutrition typically encompasses the work of the sexual and reproductive health clinics and their outreach work, a general health clinic, peer education (including support for VPride), nutrition and agricultural classes, training and outreach, various healthy meals programs, catering, a diet and exercise counselling program, and special projects. In assessing the overall effectiveness of WSB in supporting people in Vanuatu to have a greater awareness of issues impacting their health and wellbeing, respondents to the quantitative questions in the evaluation rated this broad area at an 8.7 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). WSB’s work in health and nutrition was also a fundamental part of WSB’s response to Cyclone Pam.

### **Health**

WSB’s health programming includes their sexual and reproductive health clinics: Kam Pusem Hed (KPH) in Port Vila; the Northern Care Youth Centre (NCYC) Clinic in Luganville; an outreach clinic in Pentecost; and a mobile clinic service. WSB has also hosted a general health clinic since 2015, which started as a temporary service (at the request of the Vanuatu Government) during Cyclone Pam and has become an ongoing feature. The Peer Education program is also housed within the health program, and includes active engagement with VPride.

In a five-year period from 2015 to 2019, WSB’s clinics served more than 75,000 people, distributed more than 378,000 condoms, and engaged more than 36,000 people (20,000 plus were women) in peer education programming<sup>23</sup>. In assessing the overall quality of the services provided by the clinics and peer educators, respondents to the quantitative survey rated it at 8.5 out of 10. WSB’s effectiveness in supporting people in Vanuatu to make more informed choices and take concrete steps to improve their sexual and reproductive health was rated at 8.4 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). WSB currently has three nurses working in sexual and reproductive health, one nurse working in the general health clinic, and nine peer educators.

Given the more focused evaluative work WSB carried out in 2018 in the area of sexual and reproductive health as part of their revised approach to monitoring and evaluation, this aspect of WSB did not receive the same in-depth treatment as other areas in this evaluation. For example, no beneficiaries were interviewed. However, the perceived effectiveness of WSB’s programming in the broader health space was reflected in many of the comments offered by various stakeholders. WSB’s provision of free, discrete and non-judgemental clinic services, at the doorstep of vulnerable communities, was highlighted as a significant area of strength. This is reflected in this comment offered by a core donor:

*I think that one of the most important things that WSB does that isn’t necessarily something that we focus on as much is the clinic...providing the free sexual reproductive health services to youth in particular I think is extremely important.*

Respondents highlighted the value of this work for women and girls in particular, linking it directly to empowerment and agency, and as evidence of WSB’s support for gender equality (see Gender Equality section below).

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<sup>22</sup> VPride is the first organisation in Vanuatu to focus on the rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community.

<sup>23</sup> These statistics laced throughout the report are taken from WSB’s Annual Reports and reflect the period from 2015 to 2019.

In the words of one partner, 'The KPH program is addressing sexual and reproductive health for girls in a way that's really safe and friendly, and totally open for girls.' According to a WSB staff member, '...the original mandate for the Smolbag clinic...[was] to make family planning services available for women wherever they are...because women said they didn't have access to family planning for all sorts of reasons.' This individual also pointed out, however, that in the 20 years since the KPH clinic was established in 1999, there is now greater acceptance and uptake amongst men for family planning. Evidence of this was the number of men who now attend appointments with their partners, and who will even pick up contraceptive pills when needed. Commenting on this change in attitude and behaviours, this staff member said:

*You could say it's a small change, but it's a very big change in the way that some of the men are seeing what family planning can do for them as a couple and how that can help. As opposed to the early days when we used to – on a regular basis – get very angry men coming in and shouting at us and throwing things at us, and saying, you know, 'Who gave you the right to...!'. All those sorts of things. That doesn't happen anymore.*

While there is difficulty in directly associating changes in family planning behaviour with community and societal change, research suggests that, 'In small island developing states such as Vanuatu...increasing investment in family planning would contribute to improved maternal and infant outcomes and substantial public sector savings.'<sup>24</sup>

Through the period under review Vanuatu's Ministry of Health (where WSB sources clinical supplies) has often run out of supplies. This is a concern for WSB, as they are committed to continuity of access. This is particularly important for the communities WSB serves, as illustrated in the following quote offered by a staff member at their September 2020 workshop:

*When we don't have pregnancy test kits, a young girl who comes for a pregnancy test, we can't do it. And she goes away and then she doesn't come back. Because it took courage – it took her a long time to get up the courage – to come in the first place. So, we lose those kids.*

This focus on family planning as an essential service at WSB is about supporting women's choice, helping to free women and families from the significant burden of having too many children, and also addresses the significant social, economic and environmental issues associated with overpopulation. This focus, along with WSB's commitment to ensuring that their services remain free, non-judgmental and accessible, were identified as crucial aspects of WSB's work, and as a key element of their effectiveness in the broad space of health.

WSB's commitment to openness and accessibility – in the words of one donor partner, 'Providing the protected and safe space for people to access [health services] without discrimination, without stigma' – also led to WSB's work with sexual minorities in Vanuatu, and their unique relationship with VPride. This broad area of work was identified by stakeholders as particularly effective. The evolution of this work took place over more than 15 years of 'bravely'<sup>25</sup> responding to the needs and issues facing diverse individuals in the communities where WSB works. The following two quotes illustrate this evolution:

*We started off the work with sex workers first in 2004-5. And when we went out into the community, we found some young men who said they were also sex workers...and so we expanded our project to include MSMs [men who have sex with men] and then transgender [individuals]. And to reach those people we employed sex workers and we employed TGs [transgender individuals] and MSMs so that they could go out and reach their peers for us...So we've had TGs on our Peer Education program since 2007, I think. For a long time. – WSB Staff*

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<sup>24</sup> Elissa C Kennedy et al, 'The case for investing in family planning in the Pacific: costs and benefits of reducing unmet need for contraception in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands', *Reproductive Health*, 10/30, 2013, page 1.

<sup>25</sup> One donor partner commented, 'WSB has been brave. Brave in how they see [the] LGBTQI [community]. And we have learned about the LGBTQI network from WSB.' The LGBTQI+ community in Vanuatu remains highly stigmatised, and there is likely even more bravery demonstrated by members of this community in having the courage to stand up in a more visible and active way.

*The group started around 2007. It started because of discrimination and stigma against LGBTQI people. So, they decided to form this group – this association – in 2007. And back then, I don't know how many members it started with in that group – I think just four or five members. And they came to WSB and [WSB] started to teach them how to do Peer Education, and they had them go out into the field. They went out into the field and did awareness around HIV, STIs, teenage pregnancy – all kinds of things like that. And at that time, as they went out into the field, they started to identify other LGBT members, and they came [along] too. They carried on like this until 2017 when the group had become a big group, and so they went to go and register as a body. And today the group is big, and has branched out to [other islands]...and we're based at WSB. – VPride Member*

With the leadership of key members of the LGBTQI+ community in Vanuatu including Gillio ('GG') Baxter, who played Andi in WSB's *Love Patrol* for many years and is a leading trans advocate in Vanuatu, this early work contributed to the establishment of VPride in the mid 2000's<sup>26</sup>. Currently most of the staff members of VPride have come through WSB's Peer Education Program, and several continue to work as Peer Educators with WSB. While WSB's work to create a 'safe space' for VPride and other marginalised individuals and groups will be taken up in the section on Governance below, WSB's health program created the important foundation for the emergence of this movement. This includes their ongoing support to VPride in securing and managing longer-term funding and in capacity building. In the words of one VPride member:

*WSB was like a shelter in the beginning. And it was like that until the time that VPride registered as a small organisation...WSB provided shelter, [and] a space at WSB that VPride could use to set itself up and carry out its work...WSB has also helped the members of VPride a lot, especially around capacity building training and workshops. [What kind of capacity building?] Finance, life skills, peer education. WSB also helps by doing awareness through their films. They make films and include parts in the films for LGBT. This helps to raise awareness, so people are aware of the issues LGBT people experience. Abomination, and Super Security - those are the titles of the films - and Love Patrol.*

Commenting on the overall effectiveness of WSB's work in the area of health, and particularly the value of WSB's approach to supporting diverse and often marginalised individuals and issues in Vanuatu society, one partner commented:

*I think also their willingness to engage with marginalised and vulnerable groups as equals in a way that is respectful and caring means that they have greater influence and access into those communities – and on how others view those communities. And I think they're constantly in tune to the types of service provisions that, for example, sex workers need. Not just what the services are, but how to provide them in ways that are respectful as well, so that the services are accessed. I think that has been, to be honest, a need I don't see anyone else really filling in the same way. Without judgement.*

## **Nutrition**

Programming at WSB's Nutrition Centre includes: lunch catering, which provides staff lunches as well as being open to the public; drop-in youth cooking classes organised around a different local food ingredient each week; events catering, which also provides casual employment for youth; an agricultural plot offering training on diverse initiatives including composting and growing plants from seeds; the diet and exercise counselling program which assists people with non-communicable diseases (NCDs); and community outreach that also includes programs targeting childhood malnutrition and active collaboration with government.

In assessing the overall quality of the services provided by the Nutrition Centre at WSB, respondents to the quantitative survey rated it at 9.2 out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting people in Vanuatu to make more informed choices about what they eat and take concrete steps to improve their nutrition was rated at 8.2 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). WSB currently has seven staff working in their large industrial-style kitchen, in catering and in the garden area, and take on

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<sup>26</sup> Although it took the organisation until 2017 to be legally established as a charitable association in Vanuatu following backlash from the President of the Vanuatu Christian Council who in 2013 'made a call to all Chiefs, Government and other NGOs to not welcome VPride.' Frida Young Feminist Fund Website: <https://youngfeministfund.org/grantees/vpride-organization/>.

additional casual staff as needed. As part of the broader offerings at WSB's Youth Centre, the youth classes and the staff reflect the overall modus operandi at WSB, that if you come through the doors, opportunity awaits (see Governance: Work with Youth below).

For example, one staff member in the Nutrition Centre continues to attend literacy classes. This individual only knew their alphabet when they joined WSB's Youth Centre, having finished school at Class 6 – and they continue as both staff and beneficiary. Several women from nearby communities who were interviewed said they had learned how to prepare food at the Nutrition Centre, including learning about personal hygiene, food safety and cleanliness. They had all completed a WHO-endorsed food safety training program through WSB, and now have a certificate which allows them to sell cooked food elsewhere. A Rural Training Centre on Malekula sends youth to the Nutrition Centre each year for practical training, and several beneficiaries have gone on to work in local restaurants, business, or have found work as seasonal workers.

Another aspect of the Nutrition Centre that has grown significantly over the period under review is their diet and exercise counselling program. While staff at the Nutrition Centre offered informal nutritional advice around diabetes management before 2015 (primarily to WSB staff and their family members), the establishment of general health services at WSB following Cyclone Pam supported the further expansion of this important work. In this area WSB focuses on assisting people with NCDs like diabetes and high blood pressure to learn how to control their disease through diet and exercise. While the reach is still relatively small given the intensive nature of the work and limitations in staffing, this area was consistently identified in the evaluation as highly effective.

A government partner expressed significant pride in the fact that they had sponsored a nurse in WSB's general health clinic to attend a training program on NCD screening. The diet and exercise counselling program typically involves once a week screening visits to this nurse, along with visits to the Nutrition Centre where beneficiaries learn about the types and amounts of food to eat, and how to exercise to lower blood sugar levels. Several beneficiaries who were interviewed reported having blood sugar levels over 20<sup>27</sup> when they were first diagnosed. Several had been struggling to manage their health issues over many years, with little to no significant change. Even after treatment in Vanuatu's formal health system, one woman said her blood sugar levels had fluctuated between 10 and 16, which is still high enough to negatively impact health.

After learning about managing her diabetes through diet and exercise at the WSB Nutrition Centre, however, one 47-year-old woman commented:

*I have never experienced anything like this before. Now I'm happy, I feel good, and I am incredibly privileged to have been part of a program like this.*

This woman, who is based on another island in Vanuatu and attended WSB's Nutrition Centre expressly to be part of this program, said she now helps her friends with simple diet plans and shares exercises that she learned that can help to lower blood sugar. This individual also said she now dances and exercises to music on her own, which her family finds funny and a little odd – but she doesn't mind. Another 40-year-old woman who is also diabetic described WSB as a 'life-saving' space, and commented:

*That word 'safe space' is perfect for WSB. They teach you about things you don't know about. Children who can't read and write can learn here. I feel happier and healthier now than when I used to go to the hospital for treatment.*

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<sup>27</sup> Normal blood glucose levels are 4 to 7 or 5 to 9 after food.

A 49-year-old woman who suffered from diabetes for over ten years before going to the Nutrition Centre for help described the service as ‘very effective’ and said she now practices ‘healthy eating habits’ as a result. She also shares what she has learned with family and friends, including making them aware of foods that contain sugar. She feels strongly that this program should be expanded and taught to other clinics in Vanuatu.

*For me the best thing about WSB is the [NCD] program...I thought I was a victim of black magic and I felt like I couldn't make it anymore. But through WSB my health has come back to normal. My sugar level was 21 when I first went but now it's at level 5, which is impressive. WSB helped me.*

WSB’s work in this area ties into their work in the areas of agriculture, resilience and food security as well. For example, WSB’s work in this area encourages people to eat more local food where they can – especially salads, greens and fruits and vegetables – and to move away from an overreliance on packaged and processed foods where possible. The Nutrition Centre also works closely with the sports program in this area, as illustrated in the following comment offered by a former WSB volunteer:

*Some of WSB's most effective work is being done through the Nutrition Centre and the sports team supporting communities to improve their health and engage in physical activity and healthy eating through sport. In response to community need the Nutrition Centre is running an NCD clinic and is always busy.*

While this individual suggested that these partnerships across WSB could be strengthened by improved communication within the organisation, limitations to the human and financial resourcing for these focused and highly labour-intensive initiatives are likely a significant factor as well. One manager commented that there was the potential to do more, adding, ‘...from a community perspective, it sounds like it’s something that people want and need’.

Doing more, however, would require more staff, more funding, and more resources. In the meantime, this small but powerful initiative will continue to change the lives of individuals in a relatively small but meaningful way. In the words of one staff member:

*You're giving back control to people over their disease, and they can own this. And they can see how much better they feel when they're following the guidelines that you've helped them with.*

Overall, the Nutrition Centre was highlighted by numerous stakeholders in the evaluation as an area that was marked by significant change through the period under review, and as an aspect of WSB’s work that was particularly effective. A key part of this was the Nutrition Centre’s unique role in WSB’s disaster response following Cyclone Pam. This response not only strengthened relationships with numerous partner and donor organisations and government in a lasting and ongoing way, it also had a significant impact on the communities WSB serves.

#### **In Focus 1: The Quiet Effectiveness of WSB’s Dynamic and Community-Responsive Nutrition Centre**

WSB’s Rainbow Theatre had just started to tour their cyclone preparation play *Bae I Kam (It Will Come)* when Cyclone Pam’s 160-kilometre winds struck Vanuatu on 13 March 2015, demolishing homes and buildings, destroying food crops, and disrupting the water supply for countless families and communities. The El Niño drought that followed lasted into 2016, exacerbating these impacts. The greatest burden was carried by the poor and by children who experienced, among other things, long-term food insecurity, and rising cases of malnutrition.

These disasters had a profound impact on the communities within and surrounding WSB. When asked about changes at WSB through the six-year period under review, many focused on the leadership demonstrated by WSB in their response to these disasters. While staff across the organisation grappled with the impacts on their own families and homes, the organisation pulled together in the days immediately following the cyclone to provide emergency shelter for more than 250 people – nearly half of them children<sup>28</sup>. Over the following months, WSB’s Nutrition Centre became the heart of this response.

<sup>28</sup> All of the information relating to WSB’s Cyclone Pam response and activities were taken from their 2015 Annual Report, particularly the Executive Summary.

Quickly taking on 18 casual staff (many had no previous experience except as beneficiaries of WSB's nutrition classes), the Nutrition Centre provided more than 60,000 nutritious lunches to families in their surrounding communities in the six months following Cyclone Pam. For the first three months this entailed having as many as 700 people per day – the majority children – pass through the Centre in a three-hour period, five days a week. In the words of one leader from a nearby community, who also described WSB as the 'best' NGO in Vanuatu:

*It was a rare thing that an NGO has done. It's never happened before in Port Vila, but WSB did it. They saw our needs – because so many of us lost our homes and our property – and they stepped up to provide support.*

This support allowed people to focus on cleaning up their communities, rebuilding their homes and gardens, and saving money.

Through this time WSB also worked with their surrounding communities to build resilience through establishing permanent water and power supplies, and working more intensively on sanitation (including distributing sanitation kits and engaging in ongoing community waste and watershed management – see In Focus 2). They also conducted agricultural outreach including seed and seedling distribution, and training on how to grow fast yielding plants. This support led to increasing engagements and stronger relationships with nearby communities. One woman from a nearby community joined the Nutrition Centre after Cyclone Pam and is now a crucial part of the team.

Ongoing partnerships with the Vanuatu government were also strengthened through this time. One government representative described WSB's impact by saying, 'My hand only reaches the community level through the support of WSB' and went on to say:

*We always include WSB in our meetings, even if they're not involved directly in what we're talking about. Their input is important to us because they are really involved with the community - and they fed a lot of people after Cyclone Pam.*

As a member of the GoV's Nutrition Sub Cluster, WSB was invited to support a training programme for rural mothers on how to make nutritional baby food from local ingredients. Highlighting the 28.5% of children who experience stunting in Vanuatu because of nutritional deficiency, the government representative added:

*The community isn't very interested when we just go out to do awareness. But the mama's become very interested when they get to be 'hands on' in learning how to cook!*

This 'hands on' experience is made possible through WSB. Describing this relationship as a 'really, really positive collaboration', a WSB staff member said WSB's support had, '...enabled [the Ministry of Health] to do more than they have done...because although they're trained in nutrition, they've never done food demonstration on the scale that we do it.'

WSB's high energy biscuit (HEB) initiative grew out of a similar collaboration with government and focuses on addressing malnutrition for children between six months and five years. As nutrition screening has shown, while malnutrition is prevalent across Vanuatu, it intensifies after disasters like Cyclone Harold (which devastated several of Vanuatu's islands in April 2020). Since Vanuatu's borders have closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vanuatu has been unable to source and import HEB's. So WSB stepped in. WSB is now close to producing HEB's for use in disasters, as well as for distribution in parts of Vanuatu where chronically high levels of childhood malnutrition and stunting have been identified<sup>29</sup>.

According to a regional nutrition expert, while there are small initiatives focused on local food products in other parts of the Pacific, the scope of WSB's work in the area of nutrition and food security is unique in the region. Another regional food security expert described WSB as 'out in front' of the experts, with their more systemic approach to food security that takes into account co-related issues such as poverty and gender. This individual added:

*It's not just about knowledge. It's about reaching out to people. It's forming relationships, and it's giving them practical experience that can change their knowledge and then their own practices. There's no shortcut. And I think the way WSB's doing it is very effective. In fact, I think it's probably the best way to do this.*

While COVID-19 resulted in a brief closure of classes and programming at the Nutrition Centre in March, as it became clear the virus was not in Vanuatu they opened back up. A WSB staff member commented that through this time, 'How important those youth classes are now, has become clear to us, because its somewhere people can get something to eat.' One woman from a nearby community with significant mental health issues has also found a safe and welcoming place at WSB's Nutrition Centre over the past several months, as described here:

<sup>29</sup> Loop Pacific, 'High Energy Biscuits for malnutrition treatment to be manufactured locally in Vanuatu', 19 July 2020.

*She's made her way down to the Nutrition Centre because she remembers that it was a place where she was able to get free food after Cyclone Pam, and she's been needing something to eat. So, we've been giving her lunches out of the Youth Class lunches.*

As demonstrated in their multifaceted, highly responsive and impactful work since 2015, WSB's Nutrition Centre is not, in the words of one staff member, 'just somewhere that you learn how to cook', but it also offers 'freedoms for people who are living on the edge of society who really need it.'

## **Effectiveness: Environment and Resilience**

WSB's work in the broad area of environment and resilience typically encompasses the work of the Vanua-tai Resource Monitors<sup>30</sup>, community waste management (including composting and recycling, and waste removal), work around the Tagabe River, and work in support of coastal fisheries management. In assessing the overall effectiveness of WSB in supporting people in Vanuatu to have a greater awareness of environmental issues facing their communities, respondents to the quantitative questions in the evaluation rated this at 8.0 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). Climate change is a theme across WSB's work in this space, and has been strengthened through their recent collaboration with the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership.

### **Environment and Resilience: Community Fisheries and Resource Management**

WSB's work in community fisheries and resource management spans several decades. In the mid-1990's WSB helped to establish community-based 'Turtle Monitors'. The work on turtles expanded through the years to include a broader focus on marine and resource management. Several of the now 'Vanua-tai' Resource Monitors were recently licenced by the Vanuatu Fisheries Department as Authorised Officers, who '...have the power to enforce fisheries laws and impose fines for violations'<sup>31</sup>. This will likely consolidate and extend the effectiveness of the work of the Vanua-Tai, as well as the work of the GoV in this area. Vanuatu currently has only a handful of officers serving populations dispersed across more than 60 islands.

As WSB is focusing their annual evaluative work on the Vanua-tai Resource Monitors in their 2020 Annual Report this evaluation did not focus very deeply on this aspect of WSB over the period under review. The work of the Vanua-tai, however, provides the foundation for WSB's more recent support to community fisheries and resource management, and was identified as particularly effective by several stakeholders. In assessing the overall quality of the work of the Vanua-tai Resource Monitors, respondents to the quantitative questions rated it at 8.6 out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting people to engage in more effective natural resource management in their communities was rated at 8.0 out of 10 (see Appendix 1).

One of WSB's key contributions to environmental and resource management through the period under review has revolved around their play, *Twist mo Spin*. This play was developed by WSB in 2018 with the support of a variety of national, regional and international partners. According to one of these partners, this initiative helped WSB to 're-energise' a crucial relationship with the Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD) through the Pathways Project (a regional community-based fisheries project embedded in the VFD). On their website Swedbio, a funder of *Twist mo Spin* describes this initiative as aiming to:

*...support and improve the spread of knowledge and information on sustainable coastal fisheries management in Vanuatu, through a creative, interactive theatre platform that communicates the importance of fish for people and the role that coastal communities can and must play in managing resources.*

According to a range of stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation, WSB's *Twist mo Spin* has played a key role in furthering community-based fisheries management (CBFM) in Vanuatu in

<sup>30</sup> This work started more than 25 years ago with a focus on turtle conservation and are often still referred to as 'Turtle Monitors'.

<sup>31</sup> 'Vanua-tai Network Celebrate Silver Jubilee – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and AGM', *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 3 October 2020.

several unique and compelling ways. *Twist mo Spin* was featured in a Guardian photo essay in September 2019<sup>32</sup>, and the enthusiasm and appreciation for this initiative from partners in Vanuatu and beyond was significant in the evaluation. One partner said that reading the report on *Twist mo Spin* had made them ‘so, so happy’ because of a story of community change that had come about as a result of the play, as demonstrated in the following quote:

*I recall reading it [and] being so, so happy. And I remember specifically one story that they shared, which was about a community where the fisheries authorities and the Department of Fisheries had been working for a long time, but they had not seen any real change in the way that people fish. And indeed, in this particular place they did actually fish in a destructive way... And so, after this play, the community leaders themselves had agreed to ban fishing of - if I recall correctly - parrot fish, because parrot fish has such an important role in the ecosystem which they had learned [about] through the play, and through the comic books.*

WSB’s work in supporting community-based conservation through the medium of theatre builds on deep experience. An article on CBFM in Vanuatu lists WSB’s early turtle monitoring work, starting in 1995, as one of three key CBFM milestones in Vanuatu over the 30-year period from 1980 to 2010<sup>33</sup>. This early work also centred around a play ‘I am a Turtle’ that WSB developed in 1995 to mark the Pacific Year of the Turtle<sup>34</sup>. Working intensively with community members in North Efate in the creation of the play, the story line involved a turtle hunter being transformed into a turtle, with the plight of the turtle subsequently ‘presented from the turtle’s perspective’.<sup>35</sup> According to a regional fisheries report, the power of this approach ‘dramatically affected the way people now thought about turtles’<sup>36</sup>.

Following the play, these communities decided to set up community-based turtle monitors, with the support and engagement of WSB. Growing from a handful of monitors in 1995, there are now as many as 500 monitors in 2020. While men have predominated in this work (for a variety of reasons<sup>37</sup>), as early as 2001 WSB started to actively engage women in this work as well<sup>38</sup>. One of the first turtle monitors from North Efate now manages WSB’s Vanua-Tai network. The value of this long-term work was described by one staff member in the following way:

*I think it has value because it means there are people in almost every island who are passionate about conservation. As you know, a problem with conservation is there’s just no enforcement, but at least there’s someone there at that local level, who knows the laws [and] knows what is important to look after and conserve.*

More than 20 years later, WSB’s contribution to CBFM with *Twist mo Spin* echoed some of the approach and the effectiveness of their earlier work. As was done with the first turtle play, WSB’s *Twist mo Spin* was followed by a workshop. In its initial tour to three islands in Tafea province this new fisheries play directly reached over 1300 people<sup>39</sup>. One regional fisheries expert described the effectiveness and value of theatre for this kind of work in the following way:

*We have weekly contact with all the sites that we work in – that’s 33 different communities across all of Vanuatu. And without exception, each one where the play was carried out, the response was overwhelmingly positive. But particularly, the comments that came out were that this is SO much better than the standard community meeting, where a Fisheries Officer comes in and explains what the rules and the regulations say, and then we all go. Because firstly it’s just a subset of people in the community that join those meetings. And*

<sup>32</sup> ‘Troubled waters: telling the story of fish in Vanuatu theatre – in pictures’, *The Guardian*, 14 September 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Rolenas Baereleo Tavue et al, ‘What influences the form that community-based fisheries management takes in Vanuatu?’, *SPC Traditional Marine Resource Management and Knowledge information Bulletin* #37, November 2016, page 23.

<sup>34</sup> Francis R. Hickey and George Petro, *Documentation of Wan Smolbag’s Vanua-Tai Resource Monitor Program in Vanuatu*, March 2005, page 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, page 36.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> This aspect of WSB’s work has had fewer women than men through the years. Equality in numbers may not be possible and perhaps should not be the main focus in this area, as will be taken up briefly in the section on Gender Equality.

<sup>38</sup> Francis R. Hickey and George Petro, *Documentation of Wan Smolbag’s Vanua-Tai Resource Monitor Program in Vanuatu*, March 2005, page 16.

<sup>39</sup> UN Environment, *6<sup>th</sup> National Report for the Convention on Biological Diversity - Vanuatu*, August 2019, page 128.



*secondly, its – to be honest with you – boring. And it doesn't really touch on the pertinent issues in that community, at that very time. And that's what the theatre did.*

For the Fisheries Officers who have worked closely with WSB on the development and delivery of *Twist mo Spin*, as well as the workshop and the informational comics that were produced, there was a high level of appreciation for the way that WSB had contributed to strengthening and furthering their own work in CBFM:

*One thing that stands out is how WSB really...if you want information to go out there, WSB really thinks that through. How will the information reach that person, and impact that person. They really think about it, that it must have an outcome...we have also learned that we have to do it more like this, in order to go down to the level of the communities.*

*As a Community-based Fisheries Officer, we work with the community. And WSB, because it was set up and has worked for a long time, they have experience in how to work at a level that goes down to the community: understanding, language, how you can impact and engage communities. So, it is very effective.*

Reaching 'the community', however, is not the only goal. Over the years, fisheries experts have come to appreciate the crucial importance of including and engaging women in this work. Typically, fisheries meetings have involved only men, with the space dominated by male community leaders and men who fish. This is the case, despite the important role that women play in coastal fisheries management, particularly in the near shore environment, and despite the vital importance of women's contributions to the wellbeing of their families and to food security in general. WSB's work to support CBFM in Vanuatu was identified as particularly effective in this area. In the words of a regional fisheries expert:

*Social inclusion, recognizing the role of women, giving women a voice in decision making, that's something that is a big challenge for fisheries. And it's a sensitive issue also to bring into the establishment. To sort of do things differently so that women play a bigger role. And we found with the engagement of WSB that that became a topic that was discussable...even at senior levels within the Fisheries department, they saw the effectiveness of it.*

An article in the Pacific Community's *Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin* published in September 2019 focuses specifically on WSB's contribution – and its effectiveness – in this area. This article describes the standard model of fisheries outreach as a 'one-way information stream', which is further challenged by: limited attendance; reluctance to speak out or challenge conventions; underrepresentation of marginalised groups; and community fatigue from monotonous meetings<sup>40</sup>. The article goes on to state that not only does this impact effectiveness, but that, 'This burden is often borne disproportionately by women'<sup>41</sup>. The regional fisheries expert quoted above described how the combination of WSB's play and subsequent workshop created an environment that supported women in taking a more active role:

*...the play ends on a very strong note, where a Fisheries Officer comes to the village, and there's a discussion or argument that sort of emerges between the men and the women. Both of them blaming one another for the declining fish stocks. And that's essentially where it then ends. And then you go into the workshop. And because it ends on that note, we had – on several occasions – REALLY strong women's voices in the workshop, standing up and saying, 'You know, what that woman was saying in the *Twist mo Spin* play, it's true! We're not listened to.' Far stronger than any kind of fisheries meeting that we had before. So, I think for a sensitive issue like that...the collaboration with WSB has brought that into the Fisheries Department and into the discussion around CBFM, and I think that's a big win.*

This individual described how following one workshop a group of women went on to 'play a really important role in putting through certain regulations in the Fisheries Management Plan [for their] community'. Fisheries Officers also recognised the value and effectiveness of WSB's approach

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<sup>40</sup> Pita Neihapi et al article, "'Twisting and spinning" theatre into coastal fisheries management: Informing and engaging communities to address challenges', *SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin* #30, page 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

in this area, highlighting WSB's unique ability to engage diverse community members – and women in particular – at the community level, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

*I'm referring to the Twist mo Spin play that we did...how the play was developed and was acted, it doesn't only capture fisheries issues, it captures gender issues. It also captures food security issues. It also captures livelihood issues and other social issues that are all [part] of that play that makes it more interesting and more exciting for communities to watch, but also to relate to. The scenarios took you on a journey through different lifestyles that youth, children and the elderly can also relate to. I would say I've never seen...one like Twist mo Spin. It's VERY effective.*

*...this is something that we don't see in our communities. Because most of our communities are very prominent – in anything, in any discussion, any meetings – it's like men are supposed to talk and they are the rightful people to talk. But then when you see women talking in those communities, then you can see that the play and the workshop provide the platform where both genders can be talking together, in dialogue, discussing, on a certain issue.*

Beyond the effectiveness of WSB's approach in the area of social inclusion and gender equality, WSB was also identified as highly adaptable and flexible. In recounting their own experience touring with *Twist mo Spin*, one individual described how the truck that brought them out to their pilot sites kept getting stuck on the roads on Tanna because it was the rainy season. One community where the truck got stuck, '...demanded, actually, that the play be done, right then and there'. WSB responded to this request and gave an impromptu performance of the play. This individual went on to comment:

*But, you know, this is where Smolbag sets itself apart...they're flexible and they run with the rhythm of communities in that sense. So yeah, they took the gear out and they did [the Twist mo Spin play] right then and there. There was a council meeting going on and they did the play there too. And that's how it sort of spread and became really effective in that area.*

The theme of adaptability in relation to the effectiveness of WSB's work was continued in 2020 when, due to the threat of COVID-19 and the subsequent State of Emergency, the planned tour of *Twist mo Spin* to Vanuatu's Northern islands could not take place. Tour related funds were put towards developing the play into a film. According to one regional partner, this, 'flows really nicely' into their next planned partnership with WSB that aims to develop a CBFM information package for community use. The comic books WSB developed for this project will be part of this package, as will the film, keeping '...the messages in "*Twist mo Spin*" alive in local conversation beyond the project's lifetime.'<sup>42</sup>

### **Environment and Resilience: Waste Management**

WSB's work in waste management has focused primarily on community waste management initiatives, including working with community members on waste separation, composting, recycling<sup>43</sup> and waste removal. This work has mainly targeted WSB's neighbouring communities living at the edge of the Tagabe River, and intersects with their contributions to watershed management. It also intersects with WSB's efforts to highlight and address the impacts of climate change – in whatever limited ways this is possible for communities that are making the least contributions to these issues but arguably suffer some of the greatest effects. WSB's waste management work also includes outreach to schools, and active programs to support waste separation and composting at WSB itself.

In assessing the overall quality of WSB's work in the area of waste management and community clean up, respondents to the quantitative questions rated this at 7.9 out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting people to engage in more efficient waste management in their

<sup>42</sup> Pita Neihapi et al, "'Twisting and spinning" theatre into coastal fisheries management: Informing and engaging communities to address challenges', *SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin* #30, page 28.

<sup>43</sup> At this stage, only metal recycling is available through a private company, RecycleCorp. This service is only available in Port Vila.

communities was rated at 7.8 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). While these assessments are still relatively high, they are slightly lower than the assessments in other areas. This aspect of WSB's work is also at times singled out as potentially less effective, including sometimes by WSB themselves, who are also challenged by the difficulty and the enormity of this work. In the words of one staff member:

*Just to go back to waste. I mean, it's the bottom of everyone's priority everywhere. And especially in Vanuatu, there's so many other issues. People are living in substandard, hot, awful housing. You can't pay school fees. Even more so now, people are losing work. Your kid is sick, you can't get proper health care for them. So that's just bottom on the priority list I think, and rightly so. So, it's a really hard area to work in.*

These challenges also relate to the more intractable nature of this particular complex of issues, which are challenging everywhere<sup>44</sup>. This area of WSB's work is significantly impacted by a number of issues including: the realities of poverty; insecurity of tenure; population growth; urban creep (which has not been matched by municipal service delivery); and community waste disposal practices that have not been adapted to compensate for the massive influx of plastic and other non-biodegradable materials. The importance of measuring effectiveness in a way that takes these issues into consideration and in a way that is more contextually informed, nuanced and complex, is highlighted by an analysis of WSB's work in the interrelated areas of waste and watershed management.

### **In Focus 2: WSB's Contribution to the Complex Space of Waste and Watershed Management**

The roots of WSB's work on the Tagabe River stretch back more than two decades to at least 1999. Like all of WSB's work, this initiative originated – and evolved – in response to community needs. According to one staff member, 'We first started...hearing from Health Force – because a lot of them lived in Blacksands – how badly the river was, in their view, being treated and how much rubbish was being thrown in...[So] we made a play about the river and took it to all the riverside communities. And then we did a major clean up.' During this initial clean-up campaign, they removed four cars from the river underneath the Blacksands bridge.

In the early years, WSB's work to clean and protect the river included planting trees. Regional programs like SPREP have recently begun to intensify tree planting efforts on the riverbank with a GoV official commenting at the launch of this program in 2018, 'These forests are the filters of our water, without them, the rivers would choke and die.'<sup>45</sup> Some of the trees Health Force planted 20 years ago were described as 'incredibly high now' – at least the ones that haven't been harvested for home construction or to meet what are perceived to be other more compelling community needs. WSB's early work also focused on raising community awareness about sanitation and waste management, primarily carried out through community plays, and strengthened by WSB's evolving relationship with these communities.

It soon became clear to WSB, however, that these efforts would not make a long-term difference simply because – like so many of the world's poor – these communities did not have access to basic waste collection services<sup>46</sup>. According to an ADB report, 'There is little or no waste collection at the edges of [Port Vila Municipality] or in the peri-urban settlements. In those areas – home to around 40,000 people – waste is dumped and often burned near where it is generated.'<sup>47</sup> In the case of these Tagabe and Blacksands communities, it often ended up in the Tagabe River and contributed to health problems and other environmental issues.

Starting in 2002<sup>48</sup>, in direct response to this gap in essential service delivery, WSB set up a regular waste collection service in several of their neighbouring communities that live adjacent to the Tagabe River. As Port Vila Municipality has not extended waste collection services to these areas (the ADB report estimated that as of 2014 only 60% of Port Vila's waste was collected by the municipality<sup>49</sup>), WSB has continued to provide this crucial service to these peri-urban settlement communities, now for nearly over two decades. While it is not clear how many truckloads of waste have been removed in total, WSB reported that more than 59,000 bags of rubbish were removed over a three-year period from 2015 to 2017.

<sup>44</sup> For example, waste collection strikes in the Canadian city of Toronto in 2002 (16 days) and 2009 (36 days) – long known for its cleanliness – resulted in littering and rubbish piled up everywhere, despite numerous waste drop-off locations throughout the city.

<sup>45</sup> *Urban Forestry Project Commences in Port Vila, Vanuatu*, 17 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.sprep.org/news/urban-forestry-project-commences-in-port-vila-vanuatu>

<sup>46</sup> *WSB 2019 Annual Report*, page 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Solid Waste Management in the Pacific: Vanuatu Country Snapshot*, ADB, June 2014, page 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Tagabe River Catchment Management Plan (2017-2030)*, Vanuatu Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, page 21.

<sup>49</sup> *Solid Waste Management in the Pacific: Vanuatu Country Snapshot*, ADB, June 2014, page 1.

Without WSB's intervention, would these communities take up this work on their own? Perhaps not. Behaviour change in this area represents a massive and fairly intractable global challenge. For example, despite the availability of recycling options, a highly educated and relatively wealthy population, and years of information campaigns focused on waste reduction, Australians produce 1.5 kgs – and New Zealanders 2 kgs – of waste per person per day<sup>50</sup>. A recent study estimates that the residents *and* businesses of Port Vila produce 1 to 1.5 kgs of waste per person per day<sup>51</sup>. This is the case in a context with few alternatives, far lower levels of education, poorly resourced government departments, a nascent environmental movement, and much lower levels of awareness.

In fact, in a context like this, effectiveness cannot be measured by simple metrics like 'reducing waste streams in the environment'<sup>52</sup> and by expecting this community to, in the words of one respondent, 'take on that initiative' as proof of behaviour change. In a setting of urban poverty where people live without access to land for gardens, rely on cheap packaged food by necessity, and where the cost of bus fare is often a luxury, the expense of buying bags, hiring a truck, and paying municipal dump fees would be practically and financially prohibitive. This is supported by the 2014 ADB report that states 'High tipping fees, together with the remote location and poor condition of the access road, are major disincentives...'<sup>53</sup>.

As WSB has recognised, in this context it would be inappropriate to shift the burden for this kind of essential service to the poorest communities themselves – and to measure effectiveness by measures which are impossible to achieve anywhere in the world. Particularly in a space like waste management – despite our global aspirations – effectiveness needs to be measured in other ways. For example, describing WSB's work in this area the GoV's Tagabe River Management Plan (2017-2030) states:

*Prior to the waste collection service provided by WSB, there was minimal waste collection as households (majority residing in informal settlements) cannot meet waste collection fees. Consequently, waste was dumped into the river or nearby vacant lots, polluting the river and leading to illnesses such as skin infections. Since the waste collection service, cases of skin infections have lessened.*<sup>54</sup>

WSB's contribution to improvements in health through their support for waste management in these communities – while difficult to measure – was supported in comments made by community members themselves in the course of this evaluation who said that as a result of WSB's work, 'There are fewer illnesses – especially things like malaria and diarrhea – because our community has changed so much. It is so much cleaner than before.' And that, 'When you compare our community today to what it was six years ago, our community has come to live a clean and healthy lifestyle, because of the hard work that WSB has done.'

In the waste management scheme that WSB has set up with these communities, a small income stream has been created as well. A WSB staff member commented, '...when we pick up the rubbish we do it with mamas. The mamas come in the truck and they pick up the garbage, and they get a bit of money from that', adding that there is often wrangling about who will get to go each week. WSB's approach also focuses on the benefits of composting, the problems with plastic, and the value of diverting waste from land fill by, for example, supporting the separation of tins for recycling. According to one community leader:

*The Sanitation program has made a big change in our community. There isn't rubbish everywhere, like there was before. We have learned to put the rubbish where it should go. And we separate it into things that can be recycled, separating tins, and separating whatever can be composted so that we can use it for gardening and other things.*

A GoV report estimated that 50% of Port Vila's waste in 2014 was made up of compostable materials, and recommended that 'Encouraging the separation of kitchen and yard waste at the household level to feed animals or for composting, would further reduce waste to landfill.'<sup>55</sup>

WSB has also been at the forefront of practicing, supporting and teaching waste separation and composting to school children, community members, WSB staff, and youth for many years. In fact, the GoV report cited above goes on to specifically recognise WSB for their 'integrated waste management approach' in these Blacksands and Tagabe peri-urban communities. This report adds, however, that apart from WSB's work in these communities, this approach 'seems to be absent' throughout the rest of Vanuatu<sup>56</sup>. It is also telling that in the GoV's *Tagabe River Catchment Management Plan (2017-2030)* WSB is the only NGO specifically acknowledged for their efforts in protecting this important watershed<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Sensoneo *Global Waste Index 2019*. Available at: <https://sensoneo.com/sensoneo-global-waste-index-2019/>

<sup>51</sup> *Solid Waste Management in the Pacific: Vanuatu Country Snapshot*, ADB, June 2014, page 2.

<sup>52</sup> John Fargher & Associates, *Wan Smolbag Support – Performance Assessment*, December 2018, page 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Solid Waste Management in the Pacific: Vanuatu Country Snapshot*, ADB, June 2014, page 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Tagabe River Catchment Management Plan (2017-2030)*, Vanuatu Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, page 21.

<sup>55</sup> *National Waste Management and Pollution Control Strategy and Implementation Plan 2016-2020*, Vanuatu Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation, page 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, page 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Tagabe River Catchment Management Plan (2017-2030)*, Vanuatu Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, page 3.

This highlights another aspect of WSB's effectiveness in this space. As WSB's recent film *Saving Tagabe River* points out, the river itself is important because 'The Tagabe River and its underground aquifer are the only source of water for the 50,000 people living in Port Vila and the surrounding areas.' The communities living near the river also depend on it as their primary source of water. WSB's waste collection work not only supports cleaner communities, decreases the prevalence of disease, raises awareness, diverts compost and tins from the landfill, and provides casual income earning opportunities, it also contributes to the protection of this crucial water source.

The ADB study on waste management in Vanuatu concludes by suggesting that interventions in this context should focus on two areas: improving and extending the waste collection system and addressing underlying governance issues<sup>58</sup>. Both are areas where WSB has made a direct contribution. While the regulatory environment continues to be limited and challenging, particularly for these highly transient communities living close to the river (with insecure land tenure, and low levels of literacy), WSB's interventions have been recognised and valued by a range of stakeholders in this area as well, including several within government.

In fact, the direct relationship between a WSB community play on sanitation and watershed management and the strengthening of governance mechanisms from the community to the national level is demonstrated in the following quotes:

*This play really made people understand. Lots of times when you just tell people things, people don't really take notice and see the importance. But when you put it in a play and act it out, people come to really get a clear picture of what you're trying to say to them. – Community Member (from a nearby community)*

*Why [WSB's work] is relevant is how they take the information and simplify it so the community can understand. When the community understands, it changes the way they think, and they start to take initiative and ownership... – WSB Government Partner (Member of the Tagabe River Management Committee)*

*Due to WSB's unique ability to transmit messages through theatre to low-literacy audiences, the Ministry engaged them to write a play and then perform it throughout the affected communities over a period of some months. This greatly assisted in obtaining the communities' understanding of and support for the catchment protection measures the Government was trying to introduce, and assisted in getting a community advisory committee established, which became the Government's liaison point with the community. – MP Ralph Regenvanu, Leader of the Opposition and former Minister of Lands*

In the past six years – particularly as WSB's work with these communities intensified following cyclone Pam – WSB has also supported several communities in obtaining water supply systems, installing compost toilets and in accessing power. While Health Force – the group that catalysed this work in their home communities more than two decades ago – is no longer a formal part of the organisation, WSB has carried on with the difficult and complex work of waste management in these communities, even managing to make it fun at times. In 2019 the full WSB Youth Centre went to the Tagabe River to help with a big clean up. After that, they held a 'Rubbish Carnival' where youth collected rubbish in exchange for tokens to participate in fun activities where they could win prizes.

Of course, through all of this, the complex realities remain. In the words of a WSB staff member, 'Individuals [in these communities] have to deal with something they can't deal with – we can't deal with anywhere in the world – plastic. Which is why the ocean is filling up with [it] at an incredible rate.' Several businesses close to the Tagabe River also regularly engage in the dumping of waste or effluent<sup>59</sup> into the river, with little to no regulatory oversight or accountability. As with most poor and marginalised communities, people living close to the river are also forced to suffer the unequal burden of living in close proximity to commercial waste. The part of the Tagabe River where Health Force and WSB removed four cars nearly two decades ago is now only deep enough to hold half a bicycle. Poor management of the aquifer, population growth, and of course climate change, are all contributors.

These problems seem – and perhaps even are – insurmountable, particularly for any one organisation given the multiple and complex intersecting factors. A deeper look into the corners of this difficult space, however, indicates that change has taken place. The communities themselves have become cleaner, healthier, more informed, and more able to advocate for themselves. WSB's work has likely diverted many bags of compostable or recyclable waste from the landfill. Collectively, WSB and these communities have also contributed to the protection of this vital watershed. This is not perfect work and there are no easy solutions. WSB's long-term, quiet, practical, community-engaged work on waste management, however, has made a difference.

<sup>58</sup> *Solid Waste Management in the Pacific: Vanuatu Country Snapshot*, ADB, June 2014, page 4.

<sup>59</sup> Matt McIntyre et al, *Mainstreaming Environmental Considerations and Traditional Knowledge and Practices into Policies and Programmes for the Mele Catchment (Tagabe River) Area in Vanuatu*, SPREP, 2004, page 37 and Jason Abel, 'Community voice concern over rubbish dump in Tagabe', *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 20 October 2018.

## Effectiveness: Governance

WSB's work in the broad area the organisation refers to as 'Governance' is extensive. It typically includes their work in creative media, from plays, films, and radio to publications and associated community engagement aspects such as workshops. It also includes their wide-ranging work with youth in Vanuatu, primarily through their Youth Centres in Port Vila and Luganville and their outreach work on Pentecost – as well as sports. It also includes their significant work to support human rights, social inclusion and diversity, a focus that effectively cuts across the whole organisation. In fact, their work in most areas, whether in health or in waste management, intersects with governance in a variety of ways. The appropriateness of this term will be taken up below in the section on Governance: Human Rights and Diversity.

As in other parts of the organisation, it is somewhat false to separate the aspects WSB includes under 'Governance' into discrete categories. WSB's Rainbow Theatre – a group of actors with disabilities – is intermeshed with the Youth Centre (several participate in classes), and is a key feature of WSB's creative media repertoire, with plays on topics from cyclone preparedness to family violence. Youth (as detailed below) may participate in several Youth Centre classes, take on work as casual staff, and may even act in a Youth drama or film. VPride is similarly interconnected with the health and peer educator's program, and in WSB's creative media through their involvement in key films. VPride's recent fashion show was also hosted at WSB and featured actors and members of the Youth Centre as models.

### Governance: Work with Youth

Opened in 2005 as a pilot project<sup>60</sup> to help WSB respond to the increasing number of young people hanging around the theatre with very little to do, WSB's youth programming has grown to become a significant and vital aspect of their work. Operating out of three locations in Port Vila, Luganville and on Pentecost, WSB offers a range of classes and activities to educate, engage and entertain young people, many of whom are not in school. In Port Vila, WSB's Youth Centre has the only multipurpose astro turf field in Vanuatu, and their Sports Program has catalysed and now hosts several major sports leagues, including futsal, hockey and basketball. From 2015 to 2019, over 9,500 youth registered at the Youth Centres in Port Vila and Luganville.

### Youth Centre in General

In assessing the overall quality of the activities at WSB's Youth Centres, respondents to the quantitative questions rated this at 8.3 out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting youth and other vulnerable and 'at risk' groups to explore and develop their talents, skills and abilities was rated at 8.9 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). Youth programming at WSB's NCYC in Luganville currently offers the following activities and classes: computer, music (keyboard, guitar, drums, vocals), sewing, crocheting, dance (Hip hop, Rockstep, 'Cowboy' dance), a Zumba-like dance called 'Fun Dance', fire dancing, and boxing. While Cyclone Harold in early 2020 had a significant impact on programming in both Luganville and Pentecost – devastating many Pentecost communities and resulting in NCYC losing its roof – the latter part of 2020 saw programming beginning to pick up again.

At the Port Vila Youth Centre the activities and classes on offer for youth include: Hip hop, 'Fun Dance', art, music (keyboard, drums, guitar), literacy, computer, circus, juggling, voice, yoga, and a sewing class. The Port Vila Youth Centre also recently started offering a chess class that was described by a WSB staff member in the following way:

*Chess is the coolest thing ever. There's a kid called X, who you've seen in Youth Drama. And the kids just love him. And he's kind of like a superstar guy who's made chess cool.*

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<sup>60</sup> 'Wan Smolbag Theatre – 30 Years On', *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 23 February 2019.

While youth drop in, and come and go through the Centre there is a core group that has attended the Youth Centre for several years, and in many ways find a kind of second home there. A WSB staff member referred to a group of young women who attend regularly as the ‘orbiters’ – showing up on a daily basis, moving around the Centre, and participating in diverse activities. This is a reflection of the dynamism of what WSB has to offer and the uniqueness of the ‘one-stop-shop’ nature of the space. It also reflects a significant lack of services and activities for youth in Vanuatu, particularly those who have been forced out of school early for any number of reasons including financial difficulties and learning differences. According to one donor partner who commented in this area:

*Vanuatu has the Pacific’s highest population growth and one of the largest youth populations. Government support for youth services is inadequate and WSB fills a critical gap.*

To illustrate how actively many youth engage with the Youth Centre, a group of six young women (aged 14 to 18) who were interviewed for this evaluation said they had participated in hip hop, nutrition, gardening, circus, youth drama, sports (including karate, boxing, and the gym), sewing, computer classes, and art. They also said they sometimes worked as extras in WSB plays or films, or found casual work assisting Rainbow Theatre or in the Nutrition Centre. One of these young women described herself as a ‘lonely girl’ before she started to attend WSB where she learned hip hop among other things. She has also made many more friends. While she described having only ‘boyfriends’ before coming to WSB, she now has a lot of female friends as well. She said she is happy about this, because they always have fun together.

When they were asked about the best thing about Youth Centre activities and programs, this group of young women said that WSB helped young people to find jobs, to earn money through paid work or through allowances at WSB, and that it also helped school dropouts to learn new skills<sup>61</sup>. Two young women with disabilities described how they had learned how to sew at the Youth Centre, and how valuable this was for them. In the words of one of these young women:

*I am happy that a space like this was made possible, and that someone like me can be part of something, and learn, which some people might think I cannot do, due to the condition I am in.*

Both of these young women mentioned that they now have the skills to sew clothing and to earn money from this as well.

Many of the current staff joined WSB as youth or as beneficiaries of various programs, from Peer Educators to actors, and even the current Sports Officer. The current Acting Manager of NCYC described starting at WSB in 2010 at the Youth Centre, beginning in youth drama and taking on small parts in *Love Patrol*, and later joining Health Force Theatre and becoming an established hip hop dancer. One young man who said he had attended ‘every activity at WSB’ over the years expressed appreciation for the opportunity to now be working in a paid role at WSB and for all that he had learned, saying, ‘I owe it all to WSB for this life-changing experience.’ Another young man, commented about his time at WSB:

*My experiences in different activities and plays at WSB have made me a better person. My character has changed, and I am more responsible, and can make better judgements. It is something I am very proud of.*

Another young man who was described by his peers as a ‘baby of WSB’ had attended activities and programs there from a young age starting with the literacy program. He started off learning how to write his name, and how to count and recite the alphabet, later moving on to being able

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<sup>61</sup> One individual suggested that WSB might want to consider developing what they called a ‘Young Peoples Toolkit’ with information about how to apply for jobs or enrol in further education, go for interviews, vote, manage money, and look after themselves and their mental wellbeing.

to form words and write a sentence. He said he was 'very grateful' for the opportunities WSB had given him. Over more than ten years at WSB this young man had gone on to become a professional athlete and dancer, even participating in international competitions in the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. In his words, 'WSB has made me useful, despite the little education that I have.' These sentiments were shared by several individuals who described the work at the Youth Centre – and the effectiveness of that work – in the following way:

*In the time I spent there and even after I left it has always been clear to me that WSB is one place in Vanuatu where all people are welcome for who they are. This is the most special thing about WSB, and what makes them so good at what they do. From educating the country on often quite tabu topics, to attracting talented and passionate Ni-Vanuatu to lead the widest variety of classes available in the country, and being a home for so many youth to grow up in over the years, I feel that WSB very effectively enacts its drive to be a place for everyone, every day. – Former WSB Volunteer [Youth Centre]*

*So many great programs and events that reward, inspire, create that are well attended and the fact they are 90% staffed by Ni Vanuatu a lot of whom started as youth at the Centre shows the motivation is there. – Former WSB Volunteer [Sports Programs]*

*They started off as a small theatre company but the way that they have been able to just expand...you know, they're located in a place where there's a high population of school dropouts, and kids and youth. And that space - that safe space - that they've created over time, and all the different types of activities. You can see how they've evolved, and they've managed to keep up with all the different things that are relevant for youth in that space [and] the different backgrounds they all come from as well. You know you've got kids who might have been straight from the island, you've got kids who've grown up there their whole lives but have not had the opportunity to go any further in their schooling. Through sport, through nutrition, through awareness programs, through film, through music, through dance - their impact has been AMAZING. I have seen some amazing leaders come out of that organisation, and the work that they do. And I have personally worked with a few...[WSB has] been amazing in the way that they make the space for a wide range of different people, from different parts of this country, different backgrounds, different levels of education. And they're able to hone into whatever skill sets they come with, and work with them to build their capacity and that specific skill. And then use them to then coordinate programs, be part of events...yeah, I think their impact has been WIDE reaching since they started. – WSB Partner*

Several partners, like the WSB partner quoted here, had direct personal experience with WSB's Youth Centre. Another individual in a senior position in government said they had participated in the futsal league, and had attended painting and music classes at the Youth Centre while in high school. A regional partner described how most of their Vanuatu-based colleagues had personal experience with WSB activities, including as extras in plays or films. Emphasising the value of this experience, particularly for the female members of the team, this individual said:

*...amongst the women in our team...all of them said that as a young girl the Youth Centre – and the activities and opportunities that WSB put out – was something they really valued. Because often as a child growing up, they would say, you know, the sports and all that was very boy-oriented. And WSB also had an equal space for girls – for young girls. And that always stuck with me.*

There is also at times a measure of 'controversy' associated with the Youth Centre. This perhaps relates to the significant conservatism in mainstream Vanuatu society, and the population of youth – some of whom could be described as 'at risk' – that WSB serves. Much of this 'controversy' also comes from people who have no direct experience of the Youth Centre. For example, a few of the young women talked about how their parents had the idea that youth came to WSB to 'smoke marijuana' or to find 'boy-girl' relationships. They also added, however, that their families were supportive when they saw what they had learned, and the opportunities it opened up, such as participation in international competitions or access to paid work.

Another female beneficiary acknowledged this perception in some segments of Vanuatu society, but located responsibility for this with individuals themselves, and as a matter of personal choice:

*WSB is a place where those who lack skills or education go to learn, but it depends on every individual person and their choices. If you choose to learn something from WSB you will learn, but if you choose to start a*



*relationship in WSB you will surely achieve that too! WSB is alright – it is us as individuals who get ourselves into problems.*

Ultimately marijuana smoking, alcohol abuse, and teenage sex are prevalent in any society, and they are part of church and village communities in Vanuatu as well. WSB serves a diverse – and at times complex and troubled – population of youth. For many of these young people, however, the Youth Centre also creates a platform to engage in change. This idea of WSB as a ‘place for second chances’ was raised several times, including by this actor in Rainbow Theatre who said:

*When you come here you can see that lots of people, some are dropouts, some have never gone to school at all. But WSB takes them all in and supports them so that one day they can become someone in their community and society. For those who haven't been to school, Smolbag supports them in literacy...they teach them how to write and to count. So, in that way you can say that WSB is a space for people – you could call them ‘second chances’ – and WSB provides that. And if you really look at WSB, there are others who came here when they were really young. And they've stayed with WSB until now, when they're big. WSB never says to them, ‘Okay, you've been here long enough’. No, they still employ them, and train them. Even if you go to the private sector, you can see people who will tell you ‘I learned that at WSB’...WSB gives space to people who need a second chance, and even people who never had the chance to learn at all, they come to WSB and learn all kinds of things.*

The nature of what it means to offer this kind of ‘second chance’ was illustrated in stories shared by two staff members working in different areas of WSB:

*In the Youth Centre you see massive changes in the youth. So, you see some youth who...you think [are] making a positive change, and then they come to the Centre drunk. And you're just like ‘Oh! Why?!’ And then there's a couple [of young men] last year...[who] had a really bad problem with alcohol. And it led to them actually being banned from the Centre for a few months. But this year, they seem to have really taken that ban seriously...They were allowed to come back this year, and they seem to have really made a change. They haven't been drunk at the Centre...this whole year which is surprising – and good – and they've been teaching as well. So yeah, it's nice to see when kids really make a change in their own lives.*

*X comes from a very low literacy background. And he lives in an area of [town], that is...I think there are a number of gangs around. And although he's an incredible athlete... he's had issues with marijuana and found it hard to concentrate on work. So, we've only ever employed him part-time because he hasn't – until this year – been able to dedicate himself to his work. And we've had issues [in the past]. But he has changed so much...he has these incredibly useful skills and strengths. And this year he's changed massively – his level of dedication to his work and wanting to do extra, and taking the initiative to do things himself...it's a massive story of change, but it's taken time. He's been [here] for as long as I have. So, about nine years.*

While both of these stories referred to young men who were dealing with particularly complex life experience and circumstances, a WSB volunteer who had worked in the Youth Centre and in Vanuatu for several years cautioned against the assumption that all youth who attend the Youth Centre are in need of this kind of ‘change’. This individual's comment highlights the fact that other aspects of effectiveness are also relevant in this space:

*I'm not sure I would categorize all youth...going to the Youth Centre as being in need of change, but more so in need of the exposure to experience that help[s] them connect their interests and passion to other like-minded people and opportunities. It's all about exposure and access to opportunity...which WSB works to deliver...to its youth, on top of just being a place to feel safe, understood, and surrounded by a huge, fun, diverse, incredible family.*

One staff member described how WSB had actively engaged in setting the tone for the Centre over more than a decade, creating an environment for all youth to participate (see section on Gender Equality below). For this individual these focused efforts were now reflected in the overall environment at the Youth Centre and around WSB. In this staff member's words:

*...in the early days of the [Youth] Centre we had to deal a lot with kids fighting all the time and that sort of thing. But I think as the years went by, they learned that when you're here everybody can have the same space. Because nobody's fighting anybody for it. You can have the same, you can do the same things as everybody else is doing. I think we've been quite serious about ensuring that anybody who comes into the*

*area has access to what we can offer, but also that they feel safe and that they know that when they're in HERE, if something happens, they will be protected, or they'll be helped.*

This was also reflected in comments offered by the youth themselves. One member of the evaluation team who interviewed a group of six young men between the ages of 17 and 25 – many of whom had participated in Youth Centre activities over several years – summarised the youth's comments about this intentional environment at the Youth Centre in the following way:

*Everyone agreed that WSB treats everyone as equals. Their reason being that WSB is made up of LGBTQI, people with special needs, young and old, educated and uneducated, who all work alongside each other. Gender is also considered in every aspect of WSB. One young man who started coming to WSB a few months ago said that he was surprised by the number of LGBTQI and people with disabilities who attended the Centre, and also how people treated them with respect. Normally, outside of WSB, LGBTQI would experience discrimination because of who they are, and people can also make fun of people with disabilities.*

When asked about the best thing at WSB, a young man in this focus group said:

*It's a place where everyone feels like they belong: people with disabilities, LGBTQI, and people who face discrimination in society. WSB has created a place where everyone feels safe and is able to show who they are.*

This idea of WSB as a 'safe space' was also raised by several other individuals in the evaluation and will be taken up more actively in the third and final In Focus below.

During the evaluation, a number of individuals commented that Cyclone Pam – and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic – had resulted in some programming disruptions that were most actively felt in the Youth Centre. However, Cyclone Pam also ultimately 'built up that community bridge' in the words of one staff member, strengthening and solidifying the Youth Centre's ties to neighbouring communities in particular. One community leader who had become more actively involved with WSB following Cyclone Pam described WSB as a 'valuable resource' for his community, adding that 'Our children participate in activities and can play at the international level through futsal and other sports.'

### **Sports Programming**

WSB's sports programming is a significant aspect of their broader youth and community programming, and continued to expand and evolve in the period under review. Currently, WSB offers sports opportunities in futsal, basketball, boxing, hockey, table tennis, karate, beach volleyball, a gym program, and aquatics. WSB hosts several of Vanuatu's sporting federations and leagues and offers the best facility in Vanuatu – at their Port Vila-based astro turf field – for sports like futsal and hockey. In 2020 there were over 1,200 players registered in WSB's sports program, with at least half of this number registered in futsal. There are also another nearly 150 people involved as team managers and coaches.

WSB's sports programming has also engaged a number of international volunteers over the period under review, all of whom had positive things to say about the overall effectiveness of the program. In the words of a former volunteer:

*The WSB Sports office is the only program of its kind in Vanuatu. It offers a variety of sport and ranges from kids to adult programs. Many of the National Sport Organisations engage with the WSB sport office to assist with facilitating and delivering sporting programs to youth and adults. The Oceania Sport and Education (OSEP) organisation utilised the staff and facilities at WSB multiple times throughout my time with WSB. The WSB Sport Office looks at engagement, inclusivity, gender equality, leadership, respect, and athlete development around different sports, with a focus on new sports that may increase engagement with youth.*

A number of WSB staff members also recognised the value of sports programming, particularly for young people who may be marginalised across a number of factors. Some of the actors in

Rainbow Theatre said they had actively participated in sports like table tennis and 'sitting volleyball', and commented that through participation at WSB a number of people with disabilities had been able to participate in para games at regional events like the Pacific Mini Games. One staff member commented that WSB actively tries to include people with disabilities, particularly through strength and conditioning programs and by engaging them in games so that they can participate more actively in the overall life of the Centre.

Several individuals also talked about the value of sport to engage youth with little education, and the significance of exposure – through sport – to international experiences. This is illustrated by the following comment offered by a WSB staff member:

*Sports is an amazing thing for youth with very little schooling, who have been able to travel overseas...most of the young people in hockey would come from squatter settlements, [and have] very little education, [and] very little opportunity to do much at all. But through sports they have been able to travel overseas and become part of a national team, because of the facilities at WSB.*

There were somewhat more mixed perspectives offered in the evaluation on gender equality in sports. Some of these issues will be taken up in the section on Gender Equality below. One individual (who had limited experience with WSB) commented that in their opinion overseas travel opportunities were more available to men<sup>62</sup>. However, there was also significant evidence of WSB's efforts, particularly in the area of sports programming, to try to encourage more active engagement of women and girls, including in what could be considered 'non-traditional' sports in Vanuatu. This was especially the case from 2015 on, when WSB initiated their Women in Sports program<sup>63</sup> and actively sought the support of international volunteers to strengthen this area specifically. According to one staff member:

*Here in Vanuatu, we exclude women from some areas, and some sports – we think that there are sports for just boys...and we don't allow them to participate. What WSB is trying to do – and it's challenging, but it demands that we try our best in all our programs – [is] to provide the space for women too. And we've seen some big changes. There are some sports where the numbers of women have really increased. And there are others that really don't have too many women....For example, boxing – the number of women is small, and the number of men is big. But we're trying to change that. At the beginning it was only men. But today, for sure, there would be a few women who are involved in boxing. In training, and even in the competitions, women are now a part of that.*

Of the more than 1,100 people who participated in sports<sup>64</sup> at WSB in 2020 approximately 29% were women. In terms of coaches and team managers less than 15% were women. Again, this is likely reflective of the various restrictions for women in sports in Vanuatu more broadly. Some sports like boxing and futsal are seen to be 'men's sports', and others like beach volleyball and aqua aerobics are seen to be for women. While women still make up only 23% of futsal players, there are now ten dedicated women's teams in WSB's futsal league. In the Shefa boxing league, which WSB hosts, while women make up only 6% of the overall membership, WSB's team is the only one that includes women (three women to seven men).

Staff in the sports program – and one partner – also talked specifically about programs like 'spider polo' which was being offered as a Sports for Development program at WSB, and said, 'In that program they learn about gender equality too. And I found that at the end of the program, you could see a change. The boys treated the girls as if they were equal.' One of WSB's donor

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<sup>62</sup> It is not clear that this is supported by the evidence, however, particularly if domestic travel is included. Travel opportunities in general, particularly international ones, are fairly rare, and some tournaments are restricted to either male or female players. Women and girls are often more constrained in their ability to travel as well. Without looking at the specific instances and individuals, over time, it would be difficult to draw any simple conclusions. See the section on Gender Equality as well.

<sup>63</sup> WSB 2015 Annual Report, page 55.

<sup>64</sup> With the exception of swimming. WSB did not provide gender disaggregated statistics for swimming, although anecdotally, it seems that approximately 50% of the swimming coaches are female.

partners also commented on how effective they thought WSB had been in including women in non-gender typical sports like futsal:

*Having that sports facility there, its allowing access for more young people to go and play. But not only young people, it's also women being able to participate. I mean, we have a women's futsal team! We have church members that visit Blacksands and this young mother, she had two children, but she was going to play sports...and yeah I was just like, 'Okay, we have a futsal team then!' They are playing! Women are playing sports. So, for me that is something...As a woman Vanuatu, it would be hard for your partner to let you go and play sports. But having a place where you can go, and the kids can come as well, and the access to it, it's a change that I've seen over the years. And also, futsal...is a men's sport [here]. And he's allowing his partner to go and play! That says something about the change that is happening.*

Several volunteers and staff talked about changes in various aspects of the sports program over the past few years, reflecting WSB's efforts to engage more women and girls across all aspects of sport. WSB's gym and aquatics programming had previously been dominated by men – in part because sports like swimming have inherent barriers to women and girls' participation, given what one volunteer referred to as 'female clothing restrictions', as well as challenges relating to the difficulties of managing menstruation in the water. As illustrated in the following quotes offered by four different volunteers (two male and two female) and one staff member, there have also been noticeable changes over the years:

*There is a keen interest from community in health programs, this was evident by the response to the Healthy Mama's program...We had a very minimal budget and resources but were extremely successful. We supported over 40 women to develop habits around exercise and physical activity, including running of gym sessions every day (before, during and after work). Over time women felt comfortable to ask questions about their health and started to make significant changes to their diet and their level of activity. These changes then influenced their family behaviours and gave women the confidence to actively play with their kids, exercise at home and in their communities and advocate for changes in their family diets. These changes were sustained beyond the life of the program and are still evident today. – Former WSB Volunteer*

*...we had a really good gym volunteer last year and she ran a health and wellness program, so we got lots of women into the gym, which was really nice. And we ran a 10-week challenge. So, the challenge was between different departments of Smolbag that involved 'Zumba', coming to the gym, and aqua aerobics. So that was really nice. I think there were a lot of women who were coming down, who'd never really thought about exercising before. But [they were] coming down early in the morning to run laps around the astro turf because also – if you wear tights and you exercise [as a woman in broader Vanuatu society] – you know you get harassed. And it was just nice for them to have a safe space to exercise in peace, and also feel confident. – WSB Staff*

*The swimming program had a majority of male coaches and athletes involved in the program [at first]. It was [like that] until I met a young lady by the name of B who changed this. B is a strong and confident woman and displayed great qualities of a leader. Through her hard work and commitment to the program she became the Head female Aquatics Coach alongside her male counterparts. B took it upon herself to work with the younger female athletes and lead them into swimming and coaching. The WSB Aquatics team now has 4 female coaches. – Former WSB Volunteer*

*During my time volunteering in the Sports Office I experienced a shift with more girls and women becoming involved in sport. WSB supported multiple events that were aimed at increasing gender equality through sport. In my role I was continuously supported to continue running women programs, identifying strong women to work with and develop into Coaches. - Former WSB Volunteer*

*Different departments do this better than others, and it is still a difficult area for change in Vanuatu as it is still very much a patriarchal society. I found in hockey programs, women and girls only felt safe and willing to fully participate if men were not there. This is not always the case, but quite common. I believe some programs at WSB are female exclusive, and some are female dominated, but maybe there could be more work done in educating males on positive behaviours towards females. – Former WSB Volunteer*

While some of these points will be taken up in the section on Gender Equality below, WSB's efforts to engage more women in sports – particularly over the period under review – came through clearly in the evaluation. One donor suggested that WSB could potentially improve how they register and track participants at the Youth Centre in general, which is something that staff

also raised. Overall, however, Youth Centre programming including sports appeared to be well-integrated across WSB, and was an aspect of WSB that a range of stakeholders identified as both effective and necessary. This is illustrated in the following comment offered by a former volunteer:

*I believe the work of WSB is very effective and absolutely integral. The entire sports office had fantastic success running sports but including a great deal of education and support for all the Youth Centre attendees as well as all other trainings and tournaments held on the turf. They linked well with other areas of the theatre and Youth Centre to provide nutrition, skills training, sexual health and family planning education, women's, disability, LGBTQ+ inclusion programs, anti-domestic violence messaging and many other great initiatives.*

A staff member who had come through the sports program articulated this view of WSB's active practice of being inclusive, and effectively being, 'a place for everyone, every day'. When asked 'What do you love about WSB?', this individual replied:

*We don't leave anyone out. If anyone wants to come to WSB, WSB has a place for you. That's a big thing. And it's not just awareness that we're doing, it's something that is put into action. It's something that is really there. You can come with any ability, any gender, and WSB has a place for you. You can come and you'll learn something. WSB may not give you everything you want, but it has something for everyone. That's something I really like at WSB, and I like supporting it. I'm here at WSB, I work at WSB, and I support that thinking too...*

### **Governance: Creative Media**

WSB's work in creative media is also extensive, and intersects with activities, issues and individuals across the whole of the organisation. It is also one of the key elements that sets WSB apart. Their body of work in this area spans more than three decades, with their community plays in the early 1990's establishing their reputation throughout Vanuatu, and across the region. Their 1997 Blacksands Community Play project ambitiously involved over 70 untrained actors from nearby peri-urban settlement communities, including a young lead actor who was completely unable to read and learned all of his lines by heart. This work led to WSB's first expansion into service delivery with the establishment of their KPH clinic.

WSB's film work, as evidenced in their highly popular YouTube channel, is now nearly as extensive as their body of work in live theatre. Starting in 1992 with their HIV/AIDS film, *Like Any Other Lovers*, they have produced short informational videos, documentary films on a range of topics, the highly popular eight season edutainment series *Love Patrol*, the short series *Ded Laf*, and numerous other feature length films. These films have covered complex and diverse topics from homophobia to sexual and domestic violence. All of WSB's films are available on their YouTube channel and continue to reach a broad audience given the proliferation of mobile phones. As detailed in the section on reach above, their most popular film *Yu No Save Ronwei Lo Lav*, has more than 400,000 views.

In addition to their plays and films, WSB has produced several radio series, including one on job readiness developed with the Australia Pacific Training Coalition. Their workshop and training materials, and other products like comic books, are a key part of WSB's creative media repertoire and are often developed for use in tandem with film and radio products. These have been used in schools, communities and even in correctional facilities, and are circulated around Vanuatu and the region. In assessing the overall quality of WSB's plays and community workshops, respondents to the quantitative questions rated this at 9.4 out of 10. The overall quality of the films and other creative media products was rated at 9.6 out of 10 (see Appendix 1).

While the creative media aspects of WSB are often credited to the talents of two founding members<sup>65</sup> – Peter Walker and Jo Dorras, who have functioned as the Artistic Director and the

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<sup>65</sup> This aspect will be taken up more in the section on Sustainability.

Scriptwriter respectively since WSB's establishment in 1989 – this significantly undervalues the diverse contributions and talents of many other individuals who are crucial to any of WSB's creative media work. This is highlighted in the following quote from a local newspaper article in 2019 marking WSB's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary:

*Film too has created many full time and part time jobs and new skills in Vanuatu. WSB's previous boom operator, Edwin Kalanu, was used by Jackie Chan, when he filmed in Tanna. Our chief camera operator, Francis Wai is currently on a DFAT scholarship studying cinematography. Danny Marcel spent the 8 years of Love Patrol studying the overseas lighting directors who worked on the project and now he is responsible for the lighting of all WSB films. Films mean long, long days for production managers like Michael Maki and Donald Frank who have to ensure everything is ready before dawn when shooting starts to capture that beautiful morning light.<sup>66</sup>*

In commenting on the value of the contributions of the actors themselves to the effectiveness of any final product, WSB's main scriptwriter, Jo Dorras, commented:

*On a personal basis I like seeing something I've written rehearsed. Because you're sitting there for ages with this thing, and you're not sure if it's any good. And you're not sure what it is. And then you see the actors pick it up, and take it and make it alive, and make it theirs. Something that was just dead on the paper. I mean that is, for me, terribly exciting.<sup>67</sup>*

*I'm always amazed by what the actors do, how they make words into a character – and not necessarily one you've seen in your head.<sup>68</sup>*

In fact, in 2020 WSB employed 39 full-time actors between their main theatre group and Rainbow Theatre, 41% of whom were female, and one third were people with disabilities. Several of these individuals have had limited access to education. At least fifty percent of the main group have worked at WSB for more than 15 years. Part-time actors are also scattered across the organisation – in the Youth Centre and VPride, for example, and even in the administrative office. WSB also employs a talented group of technicians, producers, camera people and editors, who play an essential – but far less visible – role. Currently there are four full-time and five part-time employees in this area (one of whom is a woman). There are also two people (one woman, one man) employed full-time in WSB's publications department.

One actor who has been at WSB since 2004, said she loves being part of the organisation, describing it as, 'Actually one of the best organisations to be a part of, not just for the money, but for the work.' She went on to say that every core actor is part of decision making regarding films and plays, and ensuring that they are suited to the context. Youth at the Youth Centre share all kinds of stories with her, both joyful ones and painful ones. She also said that as a result of being part of WSB, she now has the courage to give sensitive reproductive health advice to her own teenage daughter. One actor in Rainbow Theatre commented, 'I am part of the team who does the plays and one thing I have realised about the plays is that I also learn from them. I have a very low educational level, but I know more and have achieved so much more through WSB.'

This educational aspect, and the value of a WSB play or film to create a platform for dialogue and to inform a variety of audiences – even the actors themselves – was highlighted in several different ways by a range of stakeholders. In the words of one partner:

*As much as possible I try to take my kids to their plays, especially if they are plays that touch on sensitive issues like sexual assault, rape, incest. I use that as a learning or a point of discussion for my own children. So, I take them to these plays and then I allow them to watch it, to view it, and then I have conversations*

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<sup>66</sup> 'Wan Smolbag Theatre – 30 Years On', *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 23 February 2019.

<sup>67</sup> *Wan Smolbag: The First Five Years*, Alexander Street, 1995. At time 20:50.

<sup>68</sup> Mikaela Nyman, *Sado – A Novel and Expressions of Creativity and Rhetorical Alliance: Ni-Vanuatu Women's Voices*, PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2020, page 317.

*afterwards with them about it. About what their thoughts are, how that made them feel, and just what is important when it comes to respecting other people and what isn't appropriate and what is appropriate.*

As detailed, particularly in WSB's contributions to fisheries management through their play *Twist mo Spin*, diverse stakeholders also highlighted the value and effectiveness of WSB's work in furthering their own initiatives by bringing even very dry issues and topics to life. In the words of a recent partner who worked together with WSB to develop training and educational content:

*...I think having an NGO like WSB is of SO much value to us, to be able to do that. Because without them – yeah, we might have eventually made [something] - but we didn't have their expertise. And their knowledge and their skill in how to take what can be very dry content...and make it something that people actually sit and listen to for 25 minutes! And learn from it. So, I think that is the value that cannot be underestimated.*

For at least three stakeholders, including this one, the appreciation for WSB's work in other Pacific countries was also highlighted. One partner shared that colleagues in the Solomon Islands 'loved' the product that WSB helped them to produce, and the work has become a model for partners across the Pacific.

Several stakeholders, including regional and local civil society partners also talked about the effectiveness of WSB's work in terms of the 'legitimacy' they have as an organisation. This was articulated by two regional partners in the following way:

*You know, the classic trap - to do things [in a] very participatory [way] is that you edge off into...this is the way they do it in the community, so that's the way we'll do it. And that's good, but it also ignores a space where you can challenge ideas. And Smolbag has the legitimacy...everyone knows that they are doing things in...an accepted way. And because they have that legitimacy, they can push the boundary a little bit, and they can challenge people to question things. And not many organizations or people are in that position to do that. They don't have the long-term presence, the legitimacy in people's eyes, to be able to stand there and do those things. And the actors, the facilitators, the whole staff at WSB, they walk around with that legitimacy on their back, and that's a powerful thing.*

*I think their work is based on building relationships and building trust. And there's no quick way to do that. But WSB's been working in communities for a long time and has built up that social capital through the theatre work or TV programs, and through listening to local communities and responding appropriately. So, I'm just a very strong admirer of what they do and how they go about it.*

For several partners this legitimacy enabled WSB to raise challenging topics and controversial issues in a way that was identified as unique – and powerful – in the context of Vanuatu. Stakeholders also highlighted WSB's capacity to address what one donor partner described as, 'topics that are quite sensitive and culturally not really talked about' in Vanuatu society – and that no other local or international civil society organization could effectively broach.

In the evaluation, a small number of individuals (primarily from one organisation) expressed some discomfort with how gender-based violence is sometimes depicted in WSB's creative media work. While all of these individuals identified WSB's work overall – including their work in this area – as highly effective, they wondered if this aspect might be strengthened. In the words of one individual, 'Sometimes it seems like they'll have, for example in a film, they'll depict domestic violence. And it doesn't necessarily then provide messaging around a solution for that. Or encourage change necessarily.' This was identified as a 'tricky' issue, however, and depicting issues like rape and domestic violence in theatre or film is confronting and complex work.

In relation to this broad issue of how to depict violence appropriately and effectively, WSB commented that they often make significant efforts to present domestic violence in particular in a more stylised way, for various reasons:

*You can't really [pretend to] punch someone and make it look real...you wouldn't think it was anything or you'd think it was funny. So that's one of the reasons. And...men hitting women can just make everyone*

*laugh. So, if you do it in a way that they're not expecting...you also see the full person. The expression on their face. You get a much different view of it.*

In general, however, WSB also straddles a complex space between creating believable, relatable, and realistic content that *also* informs and entertains. Within the broader space of theatre there is a significant critique of the use of overt or obvious messaging. This has particular resonance for theatre that is intended to be accessible to marginalised populations. Critiquing this as an example of 'bad practice', one book on theatre in the context of community work states:

*The form has already been dogmatised by many...who seek to use formulae to deliver TfD [Theater for Development], dance or video that reinforces a 'message' decided upon by a government or development agency.<sup>69</sup>*

Becoming too overtly 'message' focused risks authenticity and legitimacy, and may ironically even diminish WSB's effectiveness. Interestingly, one of the actors in Rainbow Theatre recounted their own story about a WSB play that had depicted a graphic scene of domestic violence, and the way they had been changed as a result of that experience:

*For me, violence is this thing. So, when I came here and acted in a play dealing with violence, and when I saw how that play went, I just got so cross! For example, my friend X who acted in a main part, he wanted marijuana...and my feeling when I saw how he treated his girlfriend. Yes, it was a play, but he broke her hand! It was just a play, but for me I just wanted to hit him! And he just made me feel so strongly that violence is a bad thing. And I realised that violence is something that we just shouldn't use at all. At home now, if I see my brothers hitting their wives, I just feel that's so wrong. And I HAVE to speak to them....so in terms of the plays, there are parts that have made me change as well.*

As with so many things, people's responses are highly subjective. The actors themselves – who have grown up in a context where violence is often normalised – also bring their own tone and experience to these moments. In an area like this, as it intersects with confronting, complex and highly personal experiences, it may be that WSB will need to continue to tread a fine line.

Other partners also appreciated the somewhat controversial or unsettled and unsettling aspects of WSB's work – which do not only relate to depictions of violence – describing this in terms of shifting power, and as a necessary catalyst for thought and discussion. This point of view is illustrated in the following two quotes:

*I appreciate how WSB plays don't always have a happy ending. And sometimes they don't really have an ending. Because they reflect reality. And I know that they get a lot of criticism for that, but I also find it thought-provoking and powerful. And in that way positive. I don't think 'positive' always needs to be happy and uplifting. And I can think of a couple of plays that they've done on domestic violence that were extremely thought-provoking because they didn't end well. And I can also think of lots of the content of [Love Patrol] that challenged harmful social norms around gender and sexuality. And I think that's really positive.*

*The politicians don't like them, because they are saying the right things! They are saying the right things. But it's discomfoting the politicians. And that's about shifting that power. And influencing that power.*

In the context of shifting power – but in a much more personal way – one 49-year-old community beneficiary talked about the impact of the short film *Vot Blong Yu I Sikret* on her own voting practices. When asked if engagement with WSB had led to any changes in her own life, she said that her late husband used to choose who they would vote for in national elections. After she watched the film *Vot Blong Yu I Sikret* however – produced by WSB in 2000 for the Vanuatu Electoral Commission – she began voting for who *she* believed would be the best candidate.

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, 'Introduction', *Theatre and Empowerment: Community Drama on the World Stage*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, page 4.



As will be taken up further in the conclusion, WSB's plays and films are also seen to be effective because they are fun and enjoyable – and relatable. The power of this aspect to transform thinking and behaviour was highlighted by several stakeholders in the following way:

*I shouldn't romanticize it like that, but I think that's honestly how I feel every time I see a WSB film. I feel like they show a different way of being softer, of being respectful of each other. And it mimics in real life. You can feel that when you're there. – WSB Partner*

*[WSB's work] relates to community situations. For example, if they are about to do some work, to tour a play, they...go to the expert as well as the community...So once the play comes out, it is very informative, both for the experts as well as the community themselves. [The communities] can REALLY relate to that. They present the issues not as just issues, but they present the issues in relation to community life...in this way it makes it more fun to watch the theatre, more enjoyable. It has emotional moments, and certain scenes that make you happy and excited. Which gives you a sense of experience that you can carry on when you leave. And whenever you come to experience something like that [in your life], you can easily think about that moment that you watched the play. You can relate to that. – WSB Government Partner*

*I think the fact that it's one of the few places that – through their theatre and films – has been able to show us ourselves. We see ourselves in the stories that they tell. And especially in the most recent years where their films have become more nuanced, where they show complicated relationships...and it makes us more empathetic, it makes us more understanding. The fact that they break it down I feel is incredibly powerful. Especially because we don't have language in Vanuatu – and Bislama – to sometimes talk about these issues in more depth. Through seeing it visually I just think that impact has been...I don't think anyone who has seen a WSB film walks away feeling like they haven't learned something. I feel like everyone is touched by whatever they provide. – WSB Partner*

## **Governance: Human Rights and Diversity**

WSB's work across all areas exhibits a strong foundational commitment to improving governance – more broadly defined – in Vanuatu society. In this broader sense governance moves beyond the narrow definitions focused solely on formal government and public institutions. For example, the United Nation's Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner describes their own approach to governance as encompassing the following elements:

*...full respect of human rights, the rule of law, effective participation, multi-actor partnerships, political pluralism, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, an efficient and effective public sector, legitimacy, access to knowledge, information and education, political empowerment of people, equity, sustainability, and attitudes and values that foster responsibility, solidarity and tolerance.<sup>70</sup>*

While a small number of partners (primarily from one organisation), queried the appropriateness of the use of 'governance' for the activities that WSB typically includes in this area – specifically their work with youth, creative media, and on human rights and inclusion – from the broad definition above, this is perhaps less puzzling.

In fact, WSB's overall approach resonates clearly with this definition of governance across all aspects of their work from waste management to sexual and reproductive health – and even sports. WSB's focus on meeting people where they are at, and on working together to address key needs and issues in an environment that is based in tolerance and inclusion are key elements of this. This aspect not only highlights a major area of synergy and coherence across all of WSB's work, but it is also integral to their effectiveness. In assessing WSB's effectiveness in supporting people to have a greater awareness of human rights, justice and broader issues of governance, respondents to the quantitative questions rated this at 8.2 out of 10. WSB's effectiveness in supporting people to collaborate more and improve respect for diversity and human rights was rated at 8.6 out of 10 (see Appendix 1).

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<sup>70</sup> UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, About Good Governance, Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Pages/AboutGoodGovernance.aspx>

In considering WSB's work in the area of social inclusion and diversity – and human rights more broadly – people often highlight WSB's work with people with disabilities, primarily through Rainbow Theatre, and their long-term relationship with VPride. In the words of one donor partner, 'In the areas of people with disabilities and trans/gender diverse people, WSB is leading the way for organisations in Vanuatu.' In describing the greatest area of change WSB has influenced in Vanuatu society, several people identified the societal shift WSB has supported through their work with gender diverse individuals, and their role in the emergence of VPride. This is illustrated in the following comments offered by two of WSB's partners:

*[What is the biggest area of change WSB has influenced?] Definitely the LGBT community. For sure. They have definitely – starting with Love Patrol...I think that was definitely the game changer of being able to show visibility of LGBTQ people on the big screen. And then most recently, that's evolved to having this incredible fashion show that they held last month...I've worked with VPride directly...and they talk about how WSB is the only safe space that they can come to.*

*I think, obviously, the support that WSB has provided to VPride over time is critical to their existence and emergence. And safety, in terms of having a safe space. That's becoming more and more important, and I think VPride is becoming stronger, and able to advocate more. And I think WSB's played a really important role in creating a space for that. I think that's really, really important. And I think it's a really important role for WSB to play, because they occupy a different space [than we do]. They can be braver and take a few more chances than we can. They somehow manage to sort of stand on their own and are able to do some of that stuff. So, I think that's really, critically important.*

While WSB as a 'safe space' will be taken up in the final In Focus below, this idea of WSB as an inclusive environment that supports the rights of diverse people who experience marginalisation in mainstream Vanuatu society was raised by several individuals, in a variety of ways.

For the members of VPride who were interviewed for this evaluation, this aspect of WSB was framed in terms of 'understanding'. In the words of one member, 'WSB understands us. Our lives. When we come to WSB we can do anything, because down there they already understand us.' Another member of VPride added:

*Yes, WSB understands us. And when we go there, they support us in terms of our rights. And too, it's a youth drop-in centre. And when we go there and mix in with all the youth, we feel safe. They come from all different communities, but when we're in there they come and mix with us and join in with us. And we feel that we're safe when we move around any place there. Even if we feel afraid, we know that we're safe because the...staff would deal with it if anything happened.*

The benefits of this are not only one way. A WSB staff member talked about what VPride also contributed to WSB saying, 'The work with VPride has been enriching for not just them, but for lots of the members of Smolbag'. One individual at VPride commented that WSB was leading work in this area, but in a way that was mindful and appropriate, saying, 'WSB is going step-by-step and ensuring that it's causing no harm.'

In terms of WSB's support for people with disabilities, the emergence and consolidation of Rainbow Theatre over the past six years was identified as a key area of strength. This was significantly assisted by three-year funding from WorldVision starting in 2018 which supplements WSB's core funding and helps to support salaries, play development, and outreach for Rainbow Theatre. Several actors talked about the benefits of being employed through Rainbow Theatre, with one saying, 'Before we were never able to put food on our family's table, but now we can.' This is about more than simply earning an income. One female actor described this in the following way, 'Being someone with a disability and being able to support your family is something to be proud of. My family can see that people like me can also do things that able-bodied people do.'

Several of the actors in Rainbow Theatre highlighted the fact that being a person with disabilities in Vanuatu society is very hard. In the words of one actor, 'People see your disability instead of the ability you have', adding, 'We are seen and treated differently by society.' Another actor felt that people with disabilities were the most neglected people at the community level saying, 'We're just down – down at the bottom'. One actor described this as like being in a 'dark corner':

*Before we just stayed home. We had nothing to do. You can say that we were just there in our 'dark corner' and that was it...when we came out into the public, people discriminated against us, because of our disabilities. Which meant that we didn't have the chance to come out and exercise our rights. When we came here [to WSB], maybe there aren't a lot of us. But I can tell you that for me, I didn't go to school. I can tell you that honestly. Even when I was small, I would go to school, but I faced too much discrimination. They teased me because of [my differences] at school. So, I just stayed home and didn't go to school anymore. When I came here [to WSB], with all of my friends [in Rainbow], we have learned SO many things that we never knew before. We have learned so many things – sports, and other things that an able-bodied person might experience. I can tell you honestly, coming here we've learned SO many things. If I'd stayed at home, I wouldn't be able to speak up. And now we can. Even though we might not have gone to school, this place has taught us SO many things. And we're not stuck in our dark corners anymore. We've come out, and we can join in with able-bodied people. And it makes us so happy.*

Similar comments were offered by other Rainbow actors who described WSB as 'a home for people with disabilities' and a 'place where you can be who you are'. Another even said, 'When we came here [to WSB], it's like we're able-bodied now.' A WSB volunteer talked about how Rainbow Theatre was shifting the way that people in Vanuatu thought about and approached people with disabilities in the following way:

*The Rainbow Theatre group are leading the way in improving policies and procedures for people with a disability. They are changing the social construct of what it means to be disabled through their performances...*

Several stakeholders also talked about the reception Rainbow Theatre receives in the schools, villages and communities they visit to perform plays on everything from cyclone preparedness to domestic violence. For one of the young women who has benefitted from WSB's work in this area as an actor in Rainbow Theatre, it is about support as well as a sense of community, and belonging. In her words:

*We build each other up in WSB. We belong to something important, and we stand for what we believe in. WSB has supported us financially and has provided people to assist us. This space has meant everything to every one of us with special needs.*

This quote articulates key aspects of something that was, perhaps, most remarked upon in the evaluation: the idea that WSB is a 'safe space' and 'a place for everyone, every day.' In commenting on the value of this kind of 'safe space' in the context of Vanuatu, one partner said:

*I think [it is important] particularly for young girls or girls in general, adolescent girls, young women, and particularly for people who are diverse whether through their ability/disability or gender/sexual orientation/identity. I think the culture in Vanuatu is one where people feel a great sense of shame a lot or are not able to speak up. They have to hide and not be seen, or they're not actually physically safe. So, I think for those particular groups – or even boys who might be at risk of various things – I think for people to have a space where they can feel safe – physically safe – respected, that they belong there, and that they can have a voice and that they can speak up. You know I think that's incredibly important and doesn't exist in day-to-day society for young girls and diverse people in particular. And I think creating that space is critically important to their human rights, but also to their well-being and their aspirations, and their development for the future.*

The way the creation and provision of this kind of 'safe space' contributes to WSB's effectiveness is illustrated in the following analysis.

### In Focus 3: The Many Ways WSB Creates a 'Safe Space' in Vanuatu

While the idea of 'safe space' has taken on a number of different meanings, its deeper roots<sup>71</sup> have been described as encompassing the following three elements: they can be physical spaces that are free from harm; they can be spaces that cultivate the social and emotional conditions that support trying new ideas, experimenting with identities and ways of being – and making mistakes while learning; and they can be spaces that support free expression or expression that is 'free from the dominant hegemonies that silence or restrict subaltern groups'.<sup>72</sup>

In this way, safe spaces are not only physical locations, but are also more conceptual spaces where people are able to experience themselves and others, and their lives, from various angles and with a rare measure of freedom to explore and express. All of these aspects of a 'safe space' are evident in WSB's work, and interestingly it was part of the actual language many stakeholders used to describe WSB. In the words of one partner, 'There's no one else in Vanuatu that can create that space like they do and allow everyone to freely be who they are...'

At its most basic level, WSB as a 'safe space' is about the remarkable physical space they occupy, especially in Port Vila. This now includes an agricultural plot, a full-sized astro turf field, a theatre, a health centre, a bustling youth centre, a nutrition centre and various 'docks', rooms and corners housing everything from a circus group to an environmental network. During natural disasters the physical space also shelters people. In the words of one community member, 'Our community sees WSB as a place where our safety is always guaranteed. When it comes to natural disasters, they provide us with the space we need.'

For Laurie Sansom, a leading UK-based theatre director who spent time with WSB in 2018 and 2019, the physical space and all it represents, 'blew his mind'<sup>73</sup>. Describing WSB in a 2020 interview, he commented, 'They are a totally unique, extraordinary organisation', adding, 'Really, at the heart of it, you have a theatre company that's accessible to the poorest people locally, but it's actually serving so many other basic needs.'<sup>74</sup> He has gone on to try to model some of what WSB offers and represents in a UK theatre. There are few visitors who are not similarly impressed by the expansiveness of WSB's vision, reflected in the sprawling, colourful and vibrant physical space.

For a whole range of people, WSB is somewhere they can go to explore, learn and participate, outside of the limitations of their daily lives. While WSB is a 'one-stop-shop' in terms of the range of activities and services it offers, this 'safe space' aspect of WSB is about more than just infrastructure, classes and skills. Alluding to the transformational potential inherent in the provision of this kind of space, one government partner commented:

*In general, they are brilliant I would say. They create activities that enable different people in the community to find their purpose. And we know when those opportunities are not there, it is hard for people to come out, to express themselves, or to feel part of the community at large.*

This perspective was reflected poignantly in the words of one Rainbow Theatre actor who said, 'WSB is a place where we can come and be empowered, and it takes away those things that are inside of us, like fear or shame...'

This aspect of being part of a community – across a range of differences, without fear or shame – is regularly identified as a defining element of WSB. By creating a place for 'everyone, every day', WSB provides not only a place for diverse people to go where they can be free from harm, but also where they can experience what it means to be accepted, to get along, to learn from each other, and maybe even find the space to dream. This aspect of WSB is best articulated by some of the people who move around that 'safe space' on a daily basis:

*In WSB there is a mixture of different people with different dreams and goals: people with disabilities, VPride, those who have a low education level like me come in and grow their skills and knowledge in different things. It's a safe space to learn, where people cannot judge you for what you are. People with disabilities can express themselves and have their voices heard. It is a place where people respect each other and their choices.*  
– WSB Beneficiary (Woman)

*There's no other space – as far as I'm aware – like that in Vanuatu. There's no space where everyone can come and just be genuinely themselves without being worried about being attacked or harassed. Which I think in itself is really important. That is why we get so many different types of people down at Smolbag and I think that's what makes it so special. And you get people with disabilities, you get people who are LGBTQI. You get all different types of people. And I think it's really important...I think it helps people understand each other too.*  
– WSB Staff Member

<sup>71</sup> These roots have been located in early feminist and LGBTQI+ activism according to Natalie Djohari et al in 'Rethinking 'safe spaces' in children's geographies', *Children's Geographies*, 16:4, 2018, page 351.

<sup>72</sup> Natalie Djohari et al in 'Rethinking 'safe spaces' in children's geographies', *Children's Geographies*, 16:4, 2018, page 351-352.

<sup>73</sup> Laurie Sansom, 'Northern BroadSides' Laurie Sansom: Our new mission is to reflect the multiplicity of local voices', *The Stage*, February 14, 2020.

<sup>74</sup> BBC Radio 4, 'Quality Street in Halifax, Jasdeep Singh Degun, Artist-led Hotels', *Front Row Daily Podcast*, February 21, 2020.

*It's like you could say that WSB is an open place. It's for everyone. It's a good place where we can go, and be who we are there, more than anywhere else. Because the people who work there already understand us. That makes it so that it's a safe space, and a safe place where we can go and do whatever we'd like. We can take any program we have and do it there.*

*– VPride Member*

*WSB is the only place that has created a space for people with special needs to be together with able-bodied people and emphasizes the importance of inclusion. We have a space provided for us and can be involved in activities that we feel we are able to do. This place has made us stronger, and we use it to educate ourselves, empower ourselves and others like us, educate the community and society about people with special needs, and also advocate for ourselves. For those with special needs WSB has meant everything to them.*

*– Member of Rainbow Theatre (Woman)*

Young people in the evaluation also actively reflected these views, both in the acceptance they themselves experienced, but also in the way they said WSB had shifted their views of others. This shift was even described by an elderly male community leader, who expressed admiration for WSB as a space that 'includes everyone'. Like much of mainstream Vanuatu society, this leader described originally having 'negative' feelings about members of the LGBTQI+ community in Vanuatu. As a result of being at WSB, however, he said he now understands, 'They are human beings and have the same rights as everyone else. And I am learning to accept them as who they are.'

While this may not be everyone's experience of WSB, the unique potential for acceptance, and even freedom and empowerment, is ubiquitous across all aspects of the physical and conceptual space that WSB creates and enables. According to the government partner quoted above, this is the case because WSB 'encourages dialogue' and 'participation', in a way that represents and embraces the diversity of who we are 'as people, living together'. Focusing specifically on the gender inclusive aspects of the space WSB creates at the community level, this individual went on to say:

*This is rarely seen throughout our communities in Vanuatu, and the cultures that are in place. But having WSB doing those plays in the community I would say is a plus. And we NEED more of that. We need more of that to be in the communities...because it encourages those other groups within the community to be able to participate in decision making. To be able to [participate] in discussions, so that they themselves feel part of the community...*

For many individuals, WSB represents one of the only places they are able experience this sense of safety and freedom – to be part of a community in a way that exceeds simply physically belonging there. It fosters possibilities, creates and holds space, and furthers an appreciation for diversity and inclusion. All of these aspects of what it means to be a safe space relate directly and significantly to WSB's effectiveness. While this aspect – this 'magic' – would be difficult, if not impossible, to quantify and measure it does not make it any less important or transformational.

## **Effectiveness: Gender Equality**

This evaluation was also tasked with looking specifically at WSB's effectiveness in promoting gender equality as a higher priority question. This included consideration of how their work supports and furthers: the elimination of violence against women and girls; women and girls in leadership; and women's economic empowerment. The evaluation was also tasked with identifying opportunities to improve and strengthen this work moving forward. As detailed in the *WSB Evaluation and Review Plan*, a gender audit was beyond the scope of this evaluation. While issues around intersectionality (particularly relating to disability, age, poverty and SOGIE<sup>75</sup>) are deeply relevant to the communities WSB works in and with, these aspects may not receive the treatment they merit in this evaluation.

As in all other parts of WSB's work, it is difficult and even inaccurate to separate out specific elements. Gender equality is no exception. Findings relating to gender are spread throughout the report, particularly in areas like sports, reproductive health and fisheries management, where gender was highlighted specifically in relation to WSB's effectiveness. As was also illustrated in the findings above, the lines between community and staff are often blurred at WSB. Many staff members come from their target communities, and beneficiaries are located both within and

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<sup>75</sup> SOGIE stands for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and is used somewhat interchangeably in Vanuatu with other acronyms like LGBTQI+.

beyond WSB. In this respect, any work relating to gender cannot only focus on WSB's work 'out there', but also needs to consider the environment within the organisation.

In the broader gender and development space, there is clear support for the idea that work in gender equality is significantly strengthened when more 'gender just' norms and practices are embedded within organisations themselves. In fact, the lack of embedded norms and practices in gender-focused organisations could arguably be identified as one of the greatest stumbling blocks for the progression of work in this area in Vanuatu. Oxfam Canada, for example, emphasises the importance of organisational level strengthening, based on the understanding that:

*...partners can become more effective change agents related to gender equality and women's rights at the local/community level when their organizational structures, policies, procedures and programming are also democratic and gender just.<sup>76</sup>*

Therefore, any consideration of gender equality in relation to WSB should ideally take their internal organisational practices and ethos – what it means to be part of the organisation – into active consideration. This was taken as a starting point in this aspect of the evaluation.

### **Gender Equality Within WSB: Key Areas of Strength**

Interestingly, even though WSB is not typically considered to be a 'women's rights' or 'gender' organisation in an explicit way, gender equality was universally recognised as a strong feature. Whether it was located in their focus on supporting actors and staff who experience violence in their own homes and lives, or in creating a safe space for women and girls in all their diversity to be seen and heard in the organisation, WSB was typically identified as both exceptional and effective in this area. One partner said that WSB 'leads by example' instead of using any 'outright deliberate' advocacy approach. Several individuals identified WSB's approach as more 'organic' and perhaps less articulated. At least two stakeholders described WSB as effectively having 'mainstreamed' gender equality into their organisation.

Overall, in responding to the quantitative questions in the online survey, respondents rated WSB's effectiveness in supporting gender equality within WSB, and through their organisational practices, at 8.9 out of 10. Interestingly, the women actors who responded to the survey (representing slightly more than half of the female actors in the main group) each rated this question at 10 out of 10. This speaks to what it feels like for some of the women who work at WSB. These actors had been part of the organisation for more than a decade, and in some cases more than two. Of course, their perspective would not represent the full diversity of opinions across the organisation. However, the full group of staff and former volunteers who responded to the online survey also rated this at 9.1 out of 10. One female actor described WSB as, 'A place where everyone's opinion matters.'

Staff and others who were familiar with WSB's organisational practices highlighted the way WSB managed domestic violence in particular within the organisation – and the evolution of this approach – as illustrated in the following comments:

*Its good, the support that is being provided by WSB to its staff - both men and women. Its good. And especially with the young women who are having issues at home, that support is really there. The culture within Smolbag – when I started it was quite...you know it reflected a lot the culture that existed in communities where there was a whole lot of men who felt that it was okay to treat women a certain way. But over the years that has been talked about. And also, the women – the young women – now are strong enough to stand up and say, 'We are not having this. This is not how we want to be treated.' And there's that culture change within Smolbag, that's addressing those challenges in terms of gender.*

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<sup>76</sup> Oxfam Canada, *The Power of Gender-Just Organizations: Toolkit for Transformative Organizational Capacity Building*, page 7.

*Before I came to WSB I'd never heard of or seen an organization that had within its codes of conduct a no-tolerance policy for any forms of violence against women and girls. For me that really sends out a strong message to men especially, that this behaviour is unacceptable. And it's against the law. And if you continue with it, you will face consequences...having a strong system within the organization to deal with that issue – to help victims, and also if perpetrators are in the organization to hold them accountable – I think it's really something that should be encouraged for all organisations.*

While WSB does not have a dedicated gender policy (see below), there is specific reference to domestic violence and clear language relating to assault and fighting, and general verbal harassment in their Human Resources Manual, particularly in the Code of Conduct and Discipline section. This manual also contains a detailed section on Sexual Harassment, which explicitly prohibits a range of behaviours from physical and sexual assault to verbal harassment, sexual pressuring and 'leering'. This section concludes with the statement 'Sexual harassment is not tolerated at WSB and any employee found to be in breach of the above general rules shall be subject to suspension/dismissal.' Staff reported that the manual, including the Code of Conduct, is reviewed on an annual basis with WSB employees, and they are expected to sign a form stating they have reviewed and understood the contents.

Clear language around adherence to policy (including WSB's Child Protection Policy) is also part of every employment contract. Interestingly WSB offers paternity leave<sup>77</sup>, exceeding their legal responsibilities, and supporting the greater engagement of men at WSB in the lives of their families. This contract further states that WSB is '...committed to providing an environment that supports diversity and equality and as such will not tolerate bullying or harassment in our workplace.' The contract lists domestic violence, violence committed against another employee, public fighting, and 'discrimination, bullying or harassment' of another employee among the grounds for termination. In the evaluation it was clear that these were not simply policies on a shelf but articulated and active practices, as highlighted in these comments by staff:

*And [WSB] also addresses any issues of discrimination or GBV [gender-based violence] promptly. Perpetrators are held accountable and if the behaviours don't change, they lose privileges or even lose their positions. So, gender equality is taken very seriously. And safety of young girls especially – both young boys and young girls – coming to the Youth Centre is paramount.*

*...we've had some incidents involving violence [at home], and the WSB management have taken the initiative to deal with it. Which shows that WSB is concerned about women who are facing violence at home...Maybe there are one or two incidents that management or senior staff aren't aware of. And those might not be addressed. But in the cases that have happened – when there's been a situation of a woman at WSB facing violence at home – WSB management has taken the initiative to address it. Which makes women feel that they have been looked after. They've been looked after, and it sort of gives some assurance – it encourages and empowers them to stand up and be able to speak out. To speak out around whatever issue, or when violence has happened in their home. So that's really good. And that's one approach that management has taken. And it really, really helps women inside of WSB.*

While these policies and practices do not 'solve' every situation, they provide victims/survivors with support – should they choose to seek it and act on it – and clearly identify what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. There is also active tone-setting in the organisation. Some of the youth who were interviewed commented that there was no tolerance at the Youth Centre for any kind of verbal bullying and harassment, and that these kinds of things would be reported to the administrative office and there would be consequences. Given the overall depiction of WSB as a 'safe space' by numerous stakeholders (as detailed above), it appears that WSB's overall approach in this area is also quite effective. In describing what that 'safe space' is like within WSB and in their community work, particularly relating to women, one staff member said:

*I do feel that quite often in group meetings where someone stands up for something or makes a very particularly articulate contribution about...something related to gender. I've witnessed – and its anecdotal*

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<sup>77</sup> Paternity leave has been identified as a feminist issue. WSB's paternity leave is for two weeks at full pay.



*often – but its lovely when you've created a space in a post play discussion or something, for a woman to say something without fear of, you know, people will get cross with her. You've kind of created a space where things can be shared. Or even if they can't say it, but they say to you privately in the evening or something you know, 'It was so good that that was talked about today'. Even coming to see you and tell you about that...I find that quite moving.*

There are also women in leadership positions spread throughout WSB. For example, in the Nutrition Centre all three leadership and administrative positions are filled by women. One staff member pointed out that contrary to broader societal gender norms in Vanuatu the younger men on staff also do more of the cooking. At least half of WSB's management team are women, and some sections like finance are predominantly female. In 2020 women and people who identify as female<sup>78</sup> made up just over 45% of WSB's overall staff, and a slightly higher percentage of their more than 100 full-time employees. In the words of two former volunteers:

*I think WSB does a brilliant job in supporting gender equality. The organisation promotes equality throughout and there were women working in all sectors and very close to 50/50 on the staff overall as far as I can recall, and importantly in positions of power as well.*

*WSB teachers and staff are perfect examples of gender diversity. There are strong, powerful women working across all areas within WSB. As a female working in a male dominated field, I never felt uncomfortable or unable to express my concerns with my male counterparts. I felt extremely supported and encouraged to run programs that would see an increase in women and girls' participation, even [in what was] seen as a male dominated sport...*

WSB's work in the area of skills development – for example, in Youth Centre programming – also contributes to women's economic empowerment. The number of diverse women who derive an income from working with WSB – including through casual work – also contributes significantly to this area. Beyond economic empowerment, WSB actors also embody women's leadership in important ways. Female actors are often recognized as leaders and breadwinners within their own families and communities. Perhaps even more importantly, they model the possibility of women's leadership in communities where – even today – community members may have rarely seen a woman speaking in public. The value of this is highlighted in the comment made by one staff member:

*Even from very early on - in 1994 I think, in [Island X] - we'd just performed at [X] high school and the principal came up to us and said it's just SO important to see that you have women centre stage in these plays. It's just such an important example for young women to see other women, not afraid to act, share their emotions on stage, etc. So, I think in that sphere...I would say that's quite a powerful thing that we're doing.*

### **Gender Equality in WSB's Work in General**

Moving beyond the organisation itself, respondents rated WSB's effectiveness in supporting gender equality through their activities and programming at 8.9 out of 10, and their effectiveness in supporting gender equality in Vanuatu society at 8.5 out of 10. Respondents were also asked to compare WSB's work with other organisations working in the area of gender equality. In assessing WSB's effectiveness in influencing change in the way women and girls are viewed – compared to other organisations – respondents rated this at 8.6 out of 10. In assessing WSB's effectiveness in influencing change in the way trans women and gender diverse individuals are viewed – compared to other organizations – respondents rated this at 9.6 out of 10. Finally, in assessing WSB's effectiveness in influencing change in the way women and girls with disabilities are viewed – compared to other organisations – respondents rated this at 9.1 out of 10.

As these findings show, respondents found WSB to be particularly effective in this area. These findings were matched by much of the commentary gathered from stakeholders in interviews and focus groups. As demonstrated in the broader findings relating to effectiveness, WSB's work

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<sup>78</sup> There is a need for sensitivity in collecting gender and sex disaggregated information in respect to gender diverse individuals.



was seen to directly support and foster greater gender equality in Vanuatu society in several areas. For example, this was highlighted in terms of the space WSB's play and workshop had created for supporting women's participation in fisheries management, and in the delivery of free sexual and reproductive health services for women at their clinics. Even in the area of sports programming, while fewer women participated overall, WSB's efforts to foster inclusion and to use sports to further gender equality was also evident.

WSB's work in creative media was also consistently highlighted as a significant area of strength, and stakeholders raised it often in relation to gender equality. This is illustrated in the following comments offered by different WSB partners:

*A lot of the productions will have a strong female character or portray issues faced by women and girls – but also other gender identities as well that are discriminated against in society. And that space is promoted as a space where people of all genders are free to voice their opinions, voice their concerns, take part in decision making, and access any services or support that's available from the organization. [They are] given the same opportunities.*

*[There] was that scene in Ded Laf where the girl got the guy to use a condom. I just felt like she had such ownership of her body and she was so sure that, 'We're not doing this unless we have a condom! That's it.'. And I felt that was POWERFUL. I felt that was really something.*

*I really believe that through their movies and plays, they have made a huge impact on how society views and treats women, because they explore those really deep issues.*

*The work they do through drama and video presents a high quality of information to challenge existing norms and stereotypes about the role of women and girls in Vanuatu society. They are trailblazers in a lot of this work in providing a safe space where people can share and challenge opinions.*

Of course, much of this work is complex, and difficult, particularly when it challenges established norms. In WSB's September workshop a staff member commented on these complexities in the following way:

*Outside of WSB life is really hard for women, in my view. For example, when we worked with young people in a play in [a rural area], lots of school-aged young women thought it was just fine for their boyfriends to be hitting them, because the girls do things to 'deserve it'. That's their view. It's like [the young women] don't even know they have rights, or that they can even do things. They blame themselves. Lots of girls have that view. We help to change it, but it's not like we're going to reach the level where they think a woman is equal to a man. But we're trying, we're trying to change some of the attitudes...*

Challenging harmful social norms is complex, slow and uneven work anywhere, and some perspectives are more intractable than others. One staff member talked about this in terms of 'messiness', saying that these complexities of attitudinal change are reflected among WSB staff as well. This individual used some of the actors' personal stories shared in WSB's 2006 documentary film on the play, *Solid Sistas*, to make this point. The play itself, performed in 2004, follows a young woman, Jenny, who wants to start a band. The play focuses on women's lives and gender equality in Vanuatu – and the difficult work of challenging social norms – touching on expectations about women's behaviour, women's roles in society, and domestic violence.

The film itself documents the development of the play and includes reflections from the actors on the relevance of the play to issues in their own lives, as well as to Vanuatu society. In a poignant twist on art imitating life one young female actor who is at the time living with a male actor in real life makes the following comment about their relationship:

*When we are at work, we are equal. When we go home, it's different again. I have to stay in and do lots of housework, washing, cleaning. Sometimes he helps me clean the house and cook...*

Another actor recalls in the film how – before he worked at WSB – he had picked up a stool in a fit of anger and struck his then girlfriend with it, splitting open her forehead. Of course, this behaviour if it was brought to their attention would not be tolerated in WSB. The staff member who raised this example of ‘messiness’ commented:

*There's messiness in life everywhere and there's certainly messiness of life in Smolbag...you know, people's attitudes within Smolbag. [Actor X] has recently said, about gay people, when [they first] arrived at Smolbag, [they] couldn't understand what Smolbag was doing, getting involved in this. And it completely changed [their] opinion about gay people. And I think some men have changed their attitude COMPLETELY towards domestic violence.*

While the actor couple above later split up, the story – and others in the documentary – highlight the complexities of this work, and the slow and uneven nature of change, particularly in this area. A comment offered by one older male community leader about gender equality at WSB in the course of the evaluation offers a glimmer of hope, ‘There is gender equality in WSB and we have tried to adapt into that as well.’ How long these ‘adaptations’ take, what form they take, and how long they are sustained, however, is never straightforward. There are many other factors at play, and social norm change is complex and difficult – messy – in any context. To WSB’s advantage, they bring sustained work in this area, spanning more than 30 years, and they actively seek to live their core values to the greatest extent possible. In the words of a former volunteer:

*There is always more that can be done for women and girls but WSB is a beaming voice of gender equality in the community, but even more importantly models its values through having women in leadership positions at the Youth Centre...I always felt that WSB staff embraced women as equal far more than what I had experienced outside of the Youth Centre grounds.*

### **Gender Equality and WSB: Areas for Potential Improvement**

There were a few areas where stakeholders suggested that gender equality and support for women and girls at WSB might be strengthened. It is important to clarify that these suggestions were solicited in the evaluation, and do not necessarily imply that these individuals believe these changes to be essential or necessary. Many of the suggestions were also offered by individuals, and may not represent perspectives across the whole organisation. Overall, as detailed above, WSB was found to be very effective in the area of gender equality. In fact, every individual who offered suggestions did so in a way that recognised the strength and effectiveness of WSB’s work, including in this area. There was a clear sense from several individuals that, ‘if it ain’t broke don’t fix it’. This was expressed by one partner in the following way:

*That's the thing. They have such a magical, wonderful thing. And you don't want to make recommendations and [say], ‘Well, you should be like [iNGO X]’. Because no, no one wants you to be [iNGO X]. That's not who you are. There are amazing things you're doing that are way different and way more amazing than what we do. So, you don't want to make recommendations like, ‘Well, you should be more like other organizations that follow strategic planning and goals and whatever, for development’, because we know that's how it works with development organizations. That's why I kind of go with, look, if they expressly said, ‘Well, we want to be more conscious about [gender]’, then there's lots of ways that could be done. But you don't want that to be imposed in a way that would kill the magic.*

### **Equal Numbers of Men and Women?<sup>79</sup>**

In response to questions about strengthening WSB’s work in gender equality, a number of individuals identified parts of the organisation where there were more men than women. Some of these areas came out in the main body of the evaluation, including sports. According to one volunteer:

*They do a really fantastic job but of course there is always room for improvement. The sports office was heavily male-dominated, and more funding could have had more females in coordinating and coaching roles.*

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<sup>79</sup> Each of these subheadings are framed as questions, as it is unclear that they are essential or necessary, and any work in this area should be guided by WSB.

In the September workshop staff also talked about trying to more actively engage young women in classes and programming at the Youth Centre. In Vanuatu this can be a complex issue, however, as women's freedom to be outside of their household and the burden of housework and childcare that even young women carry can be prohibitive to their participation in these kinds of activities. In other areas, including the technical work in filmmaking, the predominance of men (most of WSB's film crew are male) was identified as a 'worldwide problem'. Staff in this area expressed that they had tried to involve women, but have been largely unsuccessful to date.

There is also a challenge in seeing straight equality as the goal for WSB, and measuring all success by this benchmark. In areas like aquatics or even marine conservation where diving to assess a reef might be required, restrictions about what women and girls can wear and do in a community make this difficult. In all of these areas, success may need to be measured in different ways. For example, in 2015 WSB's focus on women in sports led to a tripling of female futsal players<sup>80</sup>. WSB launched this initiative as a community outreach program targeting women in a way that combined sports, nutrition and reproductive health training – so there were other benefits as well. WSB's efforts ultimately helped to establish the first league division for women<sup>81</sup>. While there are still three times more men participating in futsal in 2020 than women, the 'win' may be that women are playing futsal at all, and that many have continued to play over the years.

### **Addressing Harmful Social Norms Through Training?**

A focus on straight equality and numbers may also distract from other important considerations. For example, higher numbers of women in the organisation or in activities may not actually result in greater gender equality, particularly in terms of addressing harmful social norms. In fact, helping staff to develop a better – and more complex – understanding of gender equality and gender analysis, and how to be more attentive to these issues, was also raised as an area that could potentially be strengthened. For example, one former volunteer offered the following observation:

*There is support to gender equality on the whole, but there are most certainly times where WSB boys and/or men are rude, tease or physically harass female members and it is not dealt with effectively. Maybe there could be additional training to Staff, Security and bystanders about how to deal with these instances. Again - a difficult area to make change as it is so common at home or in the villages nearby.*

This idea of strengthening work with men and boys – both staff and beneficiaries – was also raised by two staff members themselves in the following way:

*I think at WSB we do lots of things, [and] some things are beyond what we can do on our own. And another thing, we're talking about women. But what about the men too? Do they understand enough? Do we do enough training with men, so they understand the [negative] effect that they're having on their partners? I think that the Youth Centre has a key role to play – for young men who are not on our staff. Maybe we should be doing more programs...usually we insist that all new Youth Club members have a session on reproductive health. Maybe we should actually look at a constructive gender – we wouldn't call it that for those people – but examining with smaller groups of teenage men who join...some of what's expected of them in this sphere.*

Another staff member said there might be value in providing training for staff in the area of gender equality, given that this is not an area of specialisation for many of them:

*I think we can improve on the way we plan or run programs in terms of being more aware of the gender dynamics in the group of people we are aiming to work with. But I think that needs to be something that the staff are aware of and that the staff are trained to be able to do. Because not all of us – in fact many of us – are not trained to think, or to look at things or to think with a gender lens on. We're not trained to do that. And unless we know what to look for it's difficult to do it effectively. You know, without somebody pointing it out. So, whether it's people trained to do that or whether we have a gender specialist who can look through things*

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<sup>80</sup> WSB 2015 Annual Report, page 30.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

*and say 'You missed this out. Or you should do this, or you should do that. Or you shouldn't do it like this.'*  
*You know, whatever is done. I think there is space for us to improve around gender, with something like that.*

Clearly any intervention like this at WSB should be tailored to address the diverse needs and positionalities of all staff in the organisation. It should also complement and fit in with their style of work, and focus on adding value rather than giving them more to do.

### **Further Strengthening WSB's Organisational Response to Domestic Violence?**

While staff clearly identified the effectiveness of WSB's organisational response to domestic violence – in their policy and their actions – two staff members made specific suggestions aimed at strengthening this work during WSB's September workshop. One female staff member commented:

*I don't know if we're doing enough. Yes, it's true that we have something in place already...But I actually have friends [in WSB] who have been through this, but they don't look at WSB as the first place to come...to ask for help...For example, if it was me, I wouldn't actually know exactly what to do to get help. And it's like I know that there is something there, but I'm not sure if I'd go there...*

One male staff member who thought that WSB could be doing even more to support women in the organisation said, 'We know that WSB works well in this area, but it should be even stronger.' This individual later suggested that perhaps a 'policy' could be developed, describing it in the following way:

*...at Smolbag we should have a policy. Something that will guide women who are at Smolbag. Sometimes women have fights or something at home, but it takes a long time for WSB to help them. Sometimes it's because the women don't say anything. Or sometimes it's because the woman is hit one, two, three or four times [before it comes out]. But we should have a policy to guide women in this area.*

In the discussion that followed, this was clarified as information for female staff who experience violence to be more aware of their rights, cognisant of the practicalities of the processes and options available to them, and what they can expect from WSB. In some ways, these suggestions reflect – perhaps more than any weakness in WSB's practices and processes – the intransigence and complexities of domestic violence. It is also clear, based on best practice, that no woman-focused policy should in any way force or require women to disclose violence, nor should it dictate in any way how a woman should respond. However, these comments suggest that further targeted information – perhaps included in a policy (see below) – may be of value.

### **Need for Skilled, Contextualised Counselling?**

The discussion in WSB's September workshop also included comments about the difficulties of managing complex situations with staff – including the time burden for management who are already very busy and wearing many hats. Support was expressed at this meeting for perhaps having a dedicated counsellor at WSB, who could deal with some of these issues, and who could also provide more general counselling and mental health support to staff and others at WSB. This need for counselling services was also identified by someone who was interviewed in the evaluation. In their words:

*I think this is not just something that's a challenge in WSB but also its more general across Vanuatu society – that there's very little support mechanisms or systems for very troubled young people who go through a horrendous childhood or are maybe having to cope with substance abuse and its effects. We've seen a couple of cases in recent years but it's very difficult to find effective support programs or support mechanisms for these kinds of cases. And unfortunately, if they become a danger to other members of [WSB], then you have to expel them or ban them from the Centre. But it doesn't address that issue that there are a lot of young people who are troubled. But how we can effectively respond with, I don't know if its counselling services. It's a big area that's not been...we just don't have the resources and the country itself doesn't have the systems and the resources.*

Counselling for men and women who are engaged in and/or impacted by violence, as well as for troubled youth, has been identified as a need for many years in WSB, and more broadly in Vanuatu. The lack of formally trained domestic violence, mental health and addictions counsellors – who work from a rights-based perspective, and avoid moralising and victim blaming – is a significant and pervasive gap. The Vanuatu Women’s Centre is currently the only place where this type of domestic violence counselling is offered. Vila Central Hospital’s nascent Mental Health Unit offers general counselling but is significantly under-resourced. It is not clear that evidence-based addictions counselling is available anywhere in Vanuatu. WSB might consider addressing this gap in the shorter-term with a volunteer with explicit training in youth counselling and gender-based violence, however, this individual would need to understand Vanuatu’s context.

### **More Sex Disaggregated Data and Gender Analysis?**

A review of WSB’s documentation in the period under review, including their Annual Reports and WSB’s *Roadmap for Change*, also highlighted potential areas for strengthening in relation to gender. For example, while the reports in 2015, 2016 and 2017 had dedicated sections on Gender Inclusion and Equality, these seemed to be absent in the later reports. Some information was presented in a way that was gender blind, even in areas where gender was highly relevant. Sex disaggregation was also somewhat inconsistent in the reporting and could be strengthened. One stakeholder suggested that the Youth Centre in particular could be collecting more information from participants including sex and age disaggregated<sup>82</sup> data at a minimum.

In terms of WSB’s *Roadmap for Change*, women and girls are covered partially under the catchall category of ‘Vulnerable, Marginalised and “at Risk” members of Society’. While gender equality and gender-based violence are referenced specifically in a few areas, this generally seems to be covered under WSB’s broader commitment to ‘principles of respect, openness, inclusivity, non-violence and equity’<sup>83</sup>. One partner commented specifically on this aspect of WSB:

*I don’t know how to phrase this right. It’s hard to tell, to what extent they are explicitly and strategically working to address gender equality. Versus actually just a commitment to human rights of everybody, and their commitment to addressing social issues, [which] leads them to do work - which is really important - in terms of women’s rights and reducing violence...I feel like they’re in the latter rather than the former. You know, if you asked me ‘Who’s their gender focal point?’, ‘What’s their strategy for addressing gender?’, ‘What are their explicit gender equality goals?’ I would go, ‘Hmm. I’m not really sure they’ve got them’. But if you ask me, ‘How does their work contribute to gender equality?’, then I would say that the work that they do on addressing social issues is...VERY much focused on women, and women’s rights, and the marginalisation and violence that women face, and [on] addressing those issues...So, in terms of the concrete things that they are doing to contribute to gender equality, I think it’s massive, and I think it’s really, really important.*

This individual went on to say that they did not see WSB’s lack of explicit focus on gender equality as a problem at all, but more of a choice, and added, ‘I feel like they’re addressing so much more than gender equality’.

This raises a significant consideration. While more strategic and consistent sex disaggregation – and perhaps even more usefully, gender analysis – could be brought into some areas of WSB’s work, there is a danger in diverting them from their broader focus, and from the actual and considerable strengths of their approach. It may be that WSB’s key strength in the area of gender equality relates to their more organic and holistic approach to social issues and equality more broadly. Oxfam Canada also cautions against an overly technocratic approach, saying:

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<sup>82</sup> Again, there is a need for sensitivity in collecting gender and sex disaggregated information in respect to gender diverse individuals.

<sup>83</sup> *Wan Smolbag Theatre: A Roadmap for Change 2014 to 2025*, page 2.

*The technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming involving 'gender checklists' and 'box ticking' adopted by many development institutions has been largely devoid of its feminist origins as a political and transformatory process intended to challenge unequal gender power relations.<sup>84</sup>*

In terms of what they actually do, WSB is perhaps closer to these feminist roots than several other explicitly gender-focused projects and initiatives in Vanuatu. As well, there really is no one else doing the kind of broader, community-focused, social justice and rights-based work that WSB does. Any work in the area of gender equality with WSB would also need to take these factors into active consideration.

### **A Gender – and Diversity – Policy?**

In the evaluation the idea of a gender policy was floated and discussed – to a limited extent – with several staff members at WSB, and some of their core donors. WSB currently has a Child Protection Policy (which was a requirement of donors) but no explicit policy focusing on gender, beyond the wording included in their Human Resources Manual and their employment contracts. One donor commented that if WSB was to have this kind of policy:

*It has to come from them. And [it has to be] simple...[and] they have to do it themselves, so they own it.*

There was a clear view that a policy like this should not be imposed on WSB or required, that it should be accessible and useful to WSB as an organization, and that it should demonstrably add value. In the words of one partner:

*I think informally that's what's happening already at WSB, but I think that WSB would have to see how, exactly, having such a policy would improve the way they're working at the moment. If it can be demonstrated how such a policy would improve what's already there, then that might be good. But otherwise, if it's already what's happening within the organisation then personally I don't see [the value].*

One staff member said that, in fact, '...lots of the policies that we have were put together years after Smolbag had already been doing exactly that. So, the gender policy would probably be reflective of how we respond and how we deal with issues of gender.' This individual added, however, that there may be 'some areas that we can improve on'. Others at WSB were supportive of exploring the idea, but wanted to know what could be included, and perhaps, more importantly, how it could be operationalised and what value it might add. Given WSB's work with the LGBTQI+ community and commitment to inclusivity it would make sense for the any gender-focused policy at WSB to include specific consideration of diversity as well.

## **Relevance, Efficiency and Sustainability**

### **Relevance**

As a lower priority, the evaluation was tasked with considering the question, 'Is WSB still focusing on the "right things"?' The consensus – across all stakeholders – was a clear yes. In assessing the relevance of WSB's work to the issues currently facing individuals, families and communities in Vanuatu, respondents to the quantitative questions rated this at 9.3 out of 10. WSB's relevance to issues currently facing young people in Vanuatu was also rated at 9.3 out of 10. WSB was also identified as very relevant to the GoV's strategic priorities (for example, as expressed in *Vanuatu 2030: The People's Plan*), with respondents rating this at 8.9 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). The tone of the responses about the relevance of WSB's work is reflected in the following comments, provided by a range of WSB's local and regional partners:

*WSB's work is reaching some of the more marginalised groups in Vanuatu society that would often be missed through other programming. The principle of "Leave no one behind" that is captured in 'The People's Plan' is really a lived experience for Wan Smolbag in my view.*

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<sup>84</sup> Oxfam Canada, *The Power of Gender-Just Organizations: A Conceptual Framework for Transformative Organizational Capacity Building*, page 10.

*[WSB] debunks myths and misconceptions about very relevant social issues in ways that other partners may not anticipate needs to be done.*

*I think WSB is highly relevant in what they're doing because they're empowering people and enhancing agency, particularly for women.*

*They are so on point!*

The OECD's DAC's revised criteria relating to relevance emphasizes '...the importance of affected people (not just donors or governments) deciding what is most important/urgent'<sup>85</sup> in determining priorities. Stakeholders in the evaluation highlighted this aspect of WSB and their responsiveness to real community needs and issues as a key strength not only through the six-year period under review, but over the past three decades. In the words of one long-time staff member, 'If you trace the history of Smolbag back from when it started to now, everything that has grown out over the years has all come out of something coming up from the communities.' Each aspect of the organisation – from the Vanua-tai to the clinics and the Youth Centre – has grown out of earlier work, and in direct response to local needs and issues.

Several WSB staff members identified the organisation's openness – supported by the core funding model – as a key contributing factor in WSB's ability to remain responsive and relevant to local needs. According to one staff member, '...the way that Smolbag is funded and the way its managed, it's very open. So, you have the freedom to try a new program.' Another staff member commented:

*I'm really grateful that our donors are so flexible and responsive, because over the years there's been so many community requests that have come up. And we've asked our core donors, 'Look, we've been asked this. Is this okay?' And most of the time - 90% of the time, or 99% of the time – they go, 'Yup, that's fine.' And so, I think that's a REALLY key strength of our partnership with donors. And I think it's a key strength for Smolbag that we're able to respond to community requests.*

This responsiveness is also reflected in WSB's ability to respond to needs and gaps in the GoV's service delivery as evidenced in WSB's work in waste management and youth services, as well as in sexual and reproductive health and nutrition. One manager talked about going into government meetings and being asked, 'Is this something Smolbag could do?' and being able to respond, 'Yeah, we can, or we'll try it'. What this individual described as 'Being more flexible and allowing things that are needed to flow through' directly relates to WSB's relevance as well.

Not only has WSB demonstrated ongoing relevance in terms of their ability to evolve, adapt and take on new programming and services over time, but the issues that WSB focuses on – and the way they engage with those issues – were consistently identified by stakeholders as reflecting the 'real' lives of people in Vanuatu. In the words of one long-term partner, '...it's one of the few places that – through their theatre and films – has been able to show us ourselves. We see ourselves in the stories that they tell.' By telling locally relevant stories and highlighting the circumstances of some of Vanuatu's more vulnerable and marginalised individuals and communities, WSB reflects the complex and nuanced realities of peoples' lives. In the words of another WSB partner:

*...the drama and the film aspect of WSB is something that is also very important. It's important in the sense of taking actual and real stories from peoples' lives – people in Vanuatu – and bringing them out into the public, so people have a chance to reflect, to review, to look at the issues that are affecting peoples' lives. And also, maybe to consider the point of view of certain members of society that you normally wouldn't consider. Especially women and girls. And young people. People with disabilities. That's always been important.*

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<sup>85</sup> OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use*, 2019, page 7.

As many stakeholders pointed out, the creative media aspect of WSB's work gives them a remarkable capacity to adapt and pivot to new and emerging issues. This was evidenced in the period under review in particular, which was bookended on one end by Cyclone Pam in 2015 and by Cyclone Harold and the global COVID-19 pandemic on the other end in 2020. Several respondents – including a number of individuals from WSB's neighbouring communities – remarked upon WSB's exceptional response to Cyclone Pam. More recently, WSB's quick work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, from adapting service delivery and programming to the powerful series of informational short films they developed and circulated as early as April 2020, was also raised by a number of individuals. In the words of a WSB core donor:

*Obviously, a huge change this year has been pivoting work and adapting to the COVID environment. And I saw Smolbag do that SO, so well, in terms of the videos they produced when COVID first came out. They're really using their skills to help people understand what [is] going on. That message – there's one where the germs are paint, and they put it on every surface – and it's just such a great strong visual.*

The evaluation was also tasked with considering whether there were aspects of WSB's work that were no longer relevant. The clear response was that everything WSB currently engages in is still highly relevant, as expressed by this WSB staff member who stated:

*Is there anything that is no longer relevant? I don't think so. I mean I think everything that we do currently is very relevant. The question of whether we drop it or not is very much dependent on the funding, and the resources that are available.*

Stakeholders expressed a general faith that WSB would continue to make determinations about less relevant aspects of their work as needed in the future. While a few individuals identified administrative challenges in the management of WSB's Pentecost and Luganville locations over the past few years, both locations were still seen to be valuable and responsive to local needs, particularly more recently in the aftermath of Cyclone Harold.

## **Efficiency**

The evaluation was also tasked with looking at efficiency, and at how well WSB resources are being used. In assessing to what extent WSB represents good value for money overall, respondents to the quantitative questions rated this at 9.1 out of 10. For respondents who were also funding aspects of WSB's work, WSB was seen to compare positively in terms of efficiency and value for money with other organisations they funded, rating this at 9.0 out of 10 (see Appendix 1). Some of the comments offered by stakeholders in response to questions about WSB's efficiency and value for money included statements like 'Hands down. Totally.' and they are 'cheap as chips'. WSB was also described as 'more efficient and better value for money' than other organisations that one partner funded. Other comments included:

*If I look at our portfolio, this was one of the smaller projects. So, in comparison to the amount of funds they have, I mean the achievements have been amazing. I've been super impressed by the work. – WSB Partner*

*If you look at all of the outputs, and the quality of them. And then look at the inputs going in. Not just the quality, but the reach. The coverage, reach, quality, compared to the inputs going in. I'm not saying there aren't little parts that couldn't be more efficient, but I think they're amazing value for money. – WSB Core Donor*

*I think [WSB] is very good in making the money they receive go a long way. – WSB Partner*

*Value for money? I think very good. Huge, huge value for money. – WSB Partner*

*From where I sit, it's very efficient in that we're getting a lot of value for money out of a relatively small amount of money. And they operate with small margins - they're not pulling huge salaries – they're all taking local salaries. So yeah, I think it's REALLY good value for money. – WSB Core Donor*



*I think they represent really good value for money. They do SO much, and they go, I think, on the smell of an oily rag! I mean incredibly good value for money. I don't think you could ever claim that they were expensive or wasteful of money. – WSB Partner*

At least two stakeholders that had provided project funding to WSB in the past several years commented that it was the least expensive project they had funded. This not only reflects on WSB's efficiency and value for money, but also the added value of having core funding support. Several of WSB's local and regional partners expressed a keen desire to work more with WSB in the future including one regional partner who said, 'If I was giving out the money, WSB would be exactly the program I'd be wanting to fund. I wouldn't change anything about what WSB is doing. I would just fund them to do more.' Overall, the comments were almost unequivocally positive, across a range of stakeholders.

Two partners who had provided funding for some of WSB's work over the past several years, however, also commented that there were perhaps some inefficiencies relating to what was identified as WSB's management style, and donor expectations. Interestingly both of these partners did not place the responsibility for addressing this with WSB necessarily, as illustrated in the following comments:

*I'm thinking about [our donors] definition of value for money...which is multifaceted. [We] always joke that it's a good thing that the team at WSB are so lovely to work with, and the end products are always so amazing, because it's not value for money to have them as subcontractors to deliver on specific items in tight grant funded timelines, because their management practices are a little bit loose, [and] their turnaround times are a little bit slow. It takes a lot of upfront effort and work from us to engage them in a way that creates the end product that our donors are seeking. So, I think in that way they're not value for money for us in terms of our staff time. But I think if I were to make an overall umbrella statement, I would say they're ABSOLUTELY value for money, because I believe that that upfront engagement and discussion time is what makes the valuable end product. And it's kind of part of the magic, if you will. And expecting them to have really tight administration processes would probably result in a less good end product, which is the point. Because it will be more rules bound and thus less likely to respond to contextual needs.*

*When it comes down to invoicing and managing that side of things, that's been a little bit up and down in terms of getting the information that will satisfy corporate standards in [our country]. But it's all fine. It's just the way that it's documented along the way. And that's the only thing that I think we could have helped them more with. And it's not their failing. I think it was ours to the extent that we probably could have provided some templates and stuff because it's not up to people working in the Pacific to understand and second guess every single requirement of aid agencies. It's up to aid agencies to facilitate that.*

These tensions around corporate requirements and processes at the donor level in Canberra, Wellington or Suva – particularly around the management of small project funding – and how these might be better managed in relation to an organization like WSB is part of an ongoing set of issues for the organisation. In an evaluation carried out in 2009, soon after WSB had expanded to its current configuration and size, the reviewer commented:

*The payment arrangements should be simplified under the proposed arrangements with a single payment and single report. Earlier efforts to streamline reporting were not particularly successful, with each donor supporting the concept of a single report but regularly asking for additional reports in different formats to suit their own requirements.<sup>86</sup>*

Donor consolidation and harmonisation were also the focus of WSB's 2012 Mid-Term Review, which highlighted the need for greater donor harmonization, and recommended moving away from a largely activity and project-based approach, which was found to be highly labour intensive for WSB. In fact, in the 2012 report WSB managers indicated that they spent on average 40% of their time on donor reporting, with one manager spending up to 80% of their time. While all of the managers who were interviewed for this evaluation said that there had been improvements

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<sup>86</sup> Alison Gray et al, *Mid-Term Review: Wan Smolbag Vanuatu*, May 2009, page 34.

in their workload in this area since 2012, there were still some inefficiencies identified, particularly around extra-to-core funding, and the project management burden that entails.

It was clear even at the beginning of the period under review, that despite earlier efforts and recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency of funds management and donor reporting this was still a point of tension for WSB. For example, their 2015 Annual Report states:

*Additional smaller development and recovery projects have helped WSB to continue and extend work. However, simultaneously the management of numerous smaller programs, alongside the usual activities has placed a greater burden on managers and other staff at Wan Smolbag. The inclusion of other projects have required greater management oversight and coordination, and improved coordination between departments. These have also increased the administrative burden on departments and programs.<sup>87</sup>*

WSB takes on smaller projects for a variety of reasons. One simple fact is that their core funding has never met all of their financial needs and commitments. For many years *Love Patrol* brought in supplementary funding that needed to be met in other ways when that television series ended. Rainbow Theatre has also typically been supported by extra-to-core funding – currently through a multi-year arrangement with WorldVision. When natural disasters strike Vanuatu, WSB is often called upon to take on additional work, which is usually funded through shorter-term project funding. WSB has also been encouraged by its core funders to ‘build diversity in its resource base’<sup>88</sup> in order to strengthen their sustainability (see Sustainability below).

A number of staff at WSB also commented that over the past several years partners had come to them looking for help in delivering a product that had run into challenges elsewhere. These were typically projects with, ‘a very big community engagement or an awareness aspect’. In fact, WSB provides a valuable service for a number of international, regional and Vanuatu-based partners, supporting them to extend – and add significant value – to their own work and mandates. While this collaboration with WSB is clearly a win-win, the management of these extra-to-core funds places a significant extra burden on WSB. This burden of extra work spans financial and project management aspects, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting. Most of WSB’s extra-to-core funders have their own donors to report to, creating layers of diverse expectations and requirements, that sometimes, ironically, trickle back to the same major donor.

Even within WSB’s core funding relationship, despite the attempt to harmonise reporting and increase efficiencies by having WSB produce one report annually for its three core donors following recommendations from the 2012 review, this was never fully implemented. Originally, this was the case because one of WSB’s core donors (Oxfam) were themselves required to provide six monthly reports to meet their own donor requirements as recipients of funding from DFAT. By 2020, however, it seemed that a bi-annual reporting cycle had once again become the norm. Beyond producing substantial six-monthly reports for their core donors (which includes the expectation that they conduct one focused evaluative assessment of an aspect of their work annually), WSB has also managed, monitored, and produced reports for what was estimated to be between 15 to 20 additional projects since 2016.

Donors also emphasised the need to strengthen WSB’s approach to monitoring and evaluation through the period under review<sup>89</sup>, in one case even linking targeted funding for monitoring and evaluation to organisational performance<sup>90</sup>. While WSB was recognised as making clear and significant improvements in their monitoring and evaluation and donor reporting recently, the process itself remains highly labour intensive and technically specialised. It is also not always

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<sup>87</sup> WSB 2015 Annual Report, page 56.

<sup>88</sup> DFAT Wan Smolbag Theatre Investment Design Summary, February 2018, page 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, page 3.

<sup>90</sup> John Fargher & Associates, Wan Smolbag Support – Performance Assessment, December 2018.

clear that the questions being asked, and the measurements used, are entirely appropriate. WSB operates in an environment where there is a limited pool of individuals with specialised skills in project management, report writing, and monitoring and evaluation, making these positions difficult – and often expensive – to fill<sup>91</sup>.

The evaluation was also tasked with asking, as a related question, whether efficiencies might be gained by ‘adjusting the WSB portfolio (through spinning off, dropping or sharing delivery costs of activities)’. In fact, WSB does engage in some ‘cost-sharing’ arrangements. Currently WorldVision’s support for Rainbow Theatre was identified as a successful example of this. There are, however, additional costs in managing these smaller amounts of extra-to-core funding as outlined above. In terms of ‘spinning off’ or ‘dropping’ activities, the comments relating to the relevance of WSB’s work suggest that this was not really appropriate. In the words of one staff member:

*Are there parts that can be ‘spun off or dropped?’ I think the whole question itself is a bit...I won’t say strange...but maybe the focus should be more about what has Smolbag done to help different groups...how has Smolbag helped them in their journey towards whatever it is they want to do?*

As this individual is getting at, over the years, WSB has been a kind of incubator, creating space for a variety of initiatives and issues to emerge. Vanua Fire and VPride are two current examples. The very popular Vanua Fire started as youth in circus classes at WSB more than ten years ago, and eventually – through many years of engagement and support from WSB – opted to become their own independent entity. In July 2019 they credited WSB in the following way on their Facebook page:

*We fire dancers are always a proud product of the Wan Smol Bag Yut Senta! Wan Smol Bag has given all of us fire dancers another chance that we made something out of, and now we have changed our lives and [are] supporting our families.<sup>92</sup>*

As described above, VPride similarly evolved from WSB’s early work with sex workers and MSM through their Peer Education network. While independent to a great extent, VPride still currently relies on WSB for mentorship and support around financial and project management. They also continue to be based at WSB because of the supportive and ‘safe space’ WSB provides.

Both of these initiatives started at WSB and evolved organically over many years. One became a fully independent entity, and the other is independent but is still more actively intermeshed with and supported by WSB to the ongoing benefit of both organisations. These examples highlight one of the more powerful aspects of WSB and perhaps the most appropriate response to the question about spinning off or dropping activities: that WSB plays a vital role in supporting various initiatives, communities and issues ‘on their journey’, and should continue to do this as long as they are able to, and as long as there is a need. There was a consensus in the evaluation that at this point in time, there was nothing that was in a position to be ‘spun off’ or ‘dropped’ at WSB.

## **Sustainability**

This evaluation was finally also tasked with considering the question of sustainability at WSB, across environmental, social and financial aspects. WSB was recognised as contributing to environmental sustainability in a number of ways, from their waste management work to the

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<sup>91</sup> This was highlighted by the departure of WSB’s long-term CEO and later Monitoring and Evaluation Manager in 2019 that left a significant gap. While this position was taken up by a talented Project Manager, this left other gaps in project management that have been difficult to fill. All managers at WSB also play a significant role in staff management. In an organisation with over 140 people, and a focus on responsiveness in areas like addressing gender-based violence and harassment, this places significant demands on management across the organisation, as identified by several staff.

<sup>92</sup> Vanua Fire Facebook page from 3 July 2019 Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/page/446566615410658/search/?q=Wan%20Smol%20Bag>

nearly two decades of work at the community level through the Vanua-tai and their more recent support for fisheries management and climate change mitigation and resilience strategies. When asked the question, 'Will the benefits of WSB's work last?', their body of work and the ways that WSB has influenced individuals, communities and society in Vanuatu were identified by several stakeholders. Here are several quotes offered by WSB's core donor partners that relate to the sustainability of the environmental and the social aspects of WSB's work:

*Environmentally, the whole Vanua-tai. All the work they have produced. I don't know how many plays have been written. The messaging that can be reproduced and redone by others – and have been. The films that can be watched and re-watched. That messaging across all of those really important social issues. The information that they've imparted to communities, people around the country...the varieties of different messaging. That information stays with people. That messaging stays and moves on...[for example] voter education has come into my mind. How to vote, your vote is secret! God, that became a mantra. And so, for me, that's their sustainability. It's around the messaging, the information and the products that they've produced, that are then used and reused and shared.*

*WSB has led a number of hard conversations on tabu topics. These conversations would have educated ni-Vanuatu people and would have changed people's viewpoints. The conversations would have slowly changed the landscape of Vanuatu society.*

*I think there's been more discussions about sensitive issues. I think from young people that I've seen...[they] are more open to heading up hard cultural areas like gender equality, LGBTQ, women in the workplace, and rights of climate change. And I think whether WSB has had a direct impact or an indirect impact, they've been there on that journey, raising those voices and perspectives. And I think, in Vanuatu the kind of social conversation about those key issues, those are the kind of context changes that WSB has been working in, where at one stage maybe they were the only voice. And now they're facilitating more and more voices.*

The evaluation was also tasked with looking more closely at financial sustainability. Many partners identified the fact that WSB services and products were free or very inexpensive as crucial to their effectiveness. This was the case specifically because of the individuals and communities that WSB serves. This is reflected in comments offered by two individuals in this evaluation:

*Aiming for economic sustainability would significantly change the nature of WSB's work. They would need to consider building up social enterprises and monetising their services and products. A result of this would be that some of their services and products would be too expensive for the community they serve to access.*

*[Financial sustainability] shouldn't be an overarching goal. And I don't think they would be sustainable without core funding. And personally speaking, I think that donors need to get over this and just move on. I think there's sustainability in other ways, in terms of how they do things, the messaging that they're producing, the legacy of the work that they're doing. And those are the sustainable elements to WSB...the skills, the knowledge. But in terms of financial [sustainability] it would be impossible. The same with the Vanuatu Women's Centre. Without core funding, it wouldn't exist. And I think donors need to decide – are these key organisations for a place like Vanuatu?*

WSB also fills a number of crucial gaps in government service delivery in areas like sexual and reproductive health, in their work with youth, and even in waste management. These services are not likely to be supported by the Vanuatu government at any point in the immediate future. Another donor partner referred to WSB as a 'public good'. WSB's past two reviews, in 2009 and in 2012, both concluded that financial sustainability was not an appropriate goal for the organisation, as illustrated in the relevant passages from both of these documents:

*WSB has very limited opportunities to enforce cost recovery. Its work is specifically aimed at those who are least able to pay, and it needs to strike a balance between seeking to recover costs and making its products and services available to those who need them most. WSB also has few opportunities to raise money locally.<sup>93</sup>*

*As has been recognized by key stakeholders, financial sustainability of Wan Smolbag is not a viable goal for the organization. Opportunities for cost recovery are very limited, with the one significant area for income*

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<sup>93</sup> Alison Gray et al, *Mid-Term Review: Wan Smolbag Vanuatu*, May 2009, page 8.

*generation being the sale of screening rights to Love Patrol. In 2012 this generated approximately 1.2 million vatu in revenue for the organization, which while not insubstantial, would not meet the production costs for even one season of the series, and represents less than one percent of the organization's annual operating costs (please see Appendix 7). Beyond its direct service delivery functions, in many ways Wan Smolbag may be seen to be addressing major gaps in the area of social services and arts and culture programming that within the context of a more robust national economy, based on higher population numbers, might otherwise be subsidized or supported through the state. Given that this is well outside of the immediate, and most likely the longer term, scope of the Government of Vanuatu, there is a reasonable argument to be made for ongoing donor support for these kinds of services and activities in Vanuatu, especially as issues around urban poverty are on the rise.<sup>94</sup>*

In fact, *Love Patrol* – arguably WSB's most broadly marketable and widely distributed creative media product – generated less than half a percent of WSB's annual income in 2012.

Over the past decade and a half two Australian business advisors have also worked directly with WSB to analyse possibilities around cost recovery and sourcing alternative funding. In 2006 one of these advisors was placed with WSB to explore 'possible commercial opportunities'. Among other things this individual analysed a successful and high-profile Cambodian NGO 'Friends' that worked with street kids and ran a reproductive health centre – somewhat similar to WSB. This organisation also ran various commercial arms that collectively generated about half a million dollars annually. However their running costs for these commercial activities were such that their net profit was only 12% of that amount. Given the size of the potential market in Cambodia and the size of the market in Vanuatu, according to this business advisor: '...if you scale Friends' profit to Vanuatu's population it works out [to] not much over \$1000.'<sup>95</sup>

This advisor concluded in 2006 that while there may be minor opportunities for generating revenue through the local Vanuatu business community or selling the professional skills of WSB's staff members<sup>96</sup>, overall:

*Conventional 'income generating activities', ie small-scale trading and commercial activities, are unlikely to produce anything other than small-scale revenues for Wan Smolbag.<sup>97</sup>*

In 2016 another advisor was brought in to, 'review existing partnerships and funding arrangements pertaining to Wan Smolbag and to determine how best to maximise the financial sustainability of the organisation'<sup>98</sup>. After exploring a range of local business and large international foundations (of which 132 foundations and companies were assessed, and 48 were contacted), this experienced and senior business advisor found that a 'new high value donor is most unlikely to be identified', and concluded that:

*WSB is arguably the most effective community welfare spend in the South Pacific, and by its nature, will rely on substantial foreign aid, until Vanuatu becomes self-sufficient in providing extensive community welfare.<sup>99</sup>*

One final issue relating to sustainability was raised by two individuals and focused on the sustainability of the creative media aspects of WSB. One individual suggested that 'staff' should be 'upskilled' to take on the work of scriptwriting and directing, but added that 'Even if the staff were upskilled, they'd probably move to another job if WSB remuneration is not attractive to them.' The second individual praised the work of WSB's main scriptwriter, but wondered whether there was a 'sustainable model for future scriptwriters.' This issue has been raised from time to

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<sup>94</sup> Heidi Tyedmers, *Wan Smolbag Theatre Mid-Term Review Report*, December 2012, page 17.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Barber, *Commercial Opportunities for Wan Smolbag Theatre*, September 2006, page 5.

<sup>96</sup> Both of which would generate a very small amount of money and may take away from other worthy local initiatives like educational scholarships. It is also not clear that selling the professional skills of WSB staff is an appropriate option.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Barber, *Commercial Opportunities for Wan Smolbag Theatre*, September 2006, page 14.

<sup>98</sup> Nick Gorshenin, *Wan Smolbag Financial Sustainability Review*, 2016, page 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, page 5.

time in relation to WSB, given the unique nature of what the organisation does in the area of creative media, and how much this work is valued.

This question around sustainability raises a number of issues. First, to some extent it omits or at least undervalues the contributions any number of individuals make to WSB's creative media products, from sound production to cinematography, and the actors themselves. It also diminishes the irreplaceable and unique nature of what many individuals across the organisation bring to WSB in general. These questions also assume that writing, and scriptwriting in particular, are easily transferable kinds of skills, particularly in a context like Vanuatu. Writing itself is, in fact, a rare commodity in any population. According to a recent thesis on the topic of women writers in Vanuatu:

*...literary efforts in Vanuatu continue to be hampered by the absence of a community of writers, institutions, publishing outlets, editorial support and financial backing for self-publishing.*<sup>100</sup>

This lack of writers represents a systemic problem in Vanuatu – and also relates to the country's size – and it is not clear that the responsibility for addressing this should lie with WSB. When questioned about this, WSB pointed out that they have actively tried to encourage writing among the actors and staff in the past, but there has been very little uptake. A former staff member used to share the writing of some workshop material, but apart from that it is not clear that – even where some capacity exists – there is any interest in working in this area, within the organisation and beyond. WSB, like many organisations in Vanuatu, struggles to find staff with appropriate qualifications to fill key positions in areas like project management and report writing, let alone in an area like creative writing where not coincidentally, no scholarship funding currently exists.

WSB actors have also improvised several plays over the period under review including a series of short pieces on violence, a play on population growth and family planning, two plays on diabetes in 2017, and a collaboration with UK director Laurie Sansom in 2019. While the organisation currently benefits from the creative talents of key individuals<sup>101</sup>, WSB is also about more than this. If these individuals should choose to finish work, the physical space itself, the youth activities and classes, and the services WSB offers, would carry on. WSB's body of creative work as well, from scripts to radio plays and the ever-increasing repertoire of films, would also be available – as would the incredibly talented actors. If necessary, scriptwriters or directors could be sourced from outside of Vanuatu. In the meantime, it seems more reasonable to value all that WSB is for their collective talent, and the remarkable contributions they are making to Vanuatu society and to the broader Pacific.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusion: The Complexities of Effectiveness

Effectiveness is a complex thing to measure, particularly in the contexts in which WSB operates. It would be simplistic – and inappropriate – to think that even multiple exposures to information and dialogue can singlehandedly stem the tide of systemic indignities like marginalisation or poverty. Demonstrating effectiveness is made even more complex by the myriad and unique kinds of things WSB does, as demonstrated throughout this evaluation. In some areas of their work, WSB is engaged in direct service delivery, and in some of those spaces change is easier to see and to measure. In other areas, including their plays and films, in their community work, and in their work with marginalised youth, measuring change is a more elusive and nebulous endeavour. This is the case by necessity.

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<sup>100</sup> Mikaela Nyman, *Sado – A Novel and Expressions of Creativity and Rhetorical Alliance: Ni-Vanuatu Women's Voices*, PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2020, page 231.

<sup>101</sup> It is worth pointing out that the key individuals who are typically identified when this issue of creative sustainability is raised – WSB's screenwriter and director – are themselves citizens, and part of the fabric of Vanuatu society.

Despite ongoing efforts to quantify aspects of ‘change’ and ‘effectiveness’, this process necessarily entails value judgements. It is relative in a way that exceeds simplified notions of objectivity and subjectivity, and begins to draw out deeper, more philosophical questions. As one small illustration, the online survey that was used to pose the series of quantitative evaluation questions was piloted with a handful of individuals first (with their consent). Even in that very small group a diverse set of responses emerged. One individual – interestingly from within WSB – rated the effectiveness across many of the metrics fairly low, and much lower than the rest of the pilot group. This individual’s responses were also much lower than the full group of respondents to the survey and in contrast with the overall results, which were uniformly high.

In a follow up discussion with this individual it was evident that their responses reflected (among other things): a deep belief in the enormity of the challenges facing human societies and the limitations of any one organization to address these issues; as well as a highly nuanced understanding of the complexities of ‘behaviour change’ itself, particularly in its linear and simplified articulation that measures ‘change’ in overly black and white terms, and places the burden for this change on the most marginalised in society. These are valid considerations, and highlight the challenges implicit in notions of ‘effectiveness’ and the limitations of simplified metrics, particularly in relation to an organisation like WSB that is working at the leading edge of systemic and complex issues and challenges.

Another aspect that contributes to the complexities of ‘measurement’ at WSB is the fact that the actors and staff are themselves part of the beneficiary group. This is not just an attempt to ‘rig the system’, but reflects a very real and significant aspect of WSB’s work – that in many ways is itself a clear indication of effectiveness. Many of the people currently employed at WSB first came through the Youth Centre doors or joined as casual or part-time actors, and found a home, a family, their passion and a career at WSB. In the words of one staff member:

*I personally am an example of how...WSB can take on someone as a youth, and put them in a different place, and help them to put food on their table at home. And it's not just me, there are other youth who are also following that path.*

These individuals are themselves embodied examples of behaviour change and effectiveness. As many WSB staff members shared, being part of the organisation has had ongoing impacts on their own lives, as well as on the lives of their children, their extended families and their communities. These impacts well exceed the financial benefits of having a job and putting food on the table, although in a context like Vanuatu these practical contributions are not insignificant.

The work that WSB does in the creative arts is also unique and equally hard to measure. It allows people in Vanuatu to see themselves reflected back in stories that show the realities and complexities of their lives. It creates space and moments of freedom – along with a sense of fun and poignancy. One of WSB’s earliest core donor partners, the British Overseas Development Administration (later DFID), emphasised the value of ‘freedom’ in relation to WSB’s work:

*Any true definition of development is about enabling people to find the freedom to find themselves.<sup>102</sup>*

How does finding this freedom relate to behaviour change though, and perhaps more importantly, how could this ever be measured? People also express their appreciation for WSB in terms of ‘love’. Where is ‘love’ situated in the rubric of change and effectiveness? How does

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<sup>102</sup> Barbara Payne, British Overseas Development Administration Representative, Suva quoted in *Wan Smolbag: The First Five Years*, Alexander Street, 1995. At time 00:50.

the power of laughter or the experience of joy<sup>103</sup> factor in? WSB has been aware of this crucial element of their work from the early days:

*We bring a village together to laugh and cry. The power of that I think is often underestimated. I mean everybody since the Second World War thinks that they've found the great secret to development. And so, I'm not going to make earth-shattering claims for changing the world. But I think we can provide a service [individuals and communities] that makes people feel good about themselves. I mean you can't achieve anything unless you have a confident community working together. And secondly then, there's information there. If there's not, at the core of it, a sense of fun, for the actors and the audience, I don't think you can achieve the second aim. I don't see how you can.*<sup>104</sup>

These creative aspects of WSB's work – and the spaces they create – require that we look for, see and think about things like effectiveness and change in more nuanced, contextualised and complex ways. Theatre as a medium – and the arts more broadly – have long been recognised as transformational, as illustrated in the following quotes:

*[Theatre] matters in its power to bring together divided communities of different kinds...and to engage creatively, productively and meaningfully with a wide range of issues from extreme poverty to AIDS, violence, human rights, sexual, racial and political intolerance and the power of the state.*<sup>105</sup>

*...at every level in society a political space is needed where people can question their social norms, politics, economics, values and culture. And they will question themselves. And [that] begins the search for an alternative.*<sup>106</sup>

*Theatre is not just a performing art. It is much more. Theatre hides within itself answers to questions such as who am I, what is my strength, etc. Theatre is something with the help of which a new revelation takes place every day, every minute...theatre is a discovery, from which we learn about ourselves.*<sup>107</sup>

In the evaluation, one of WSB's partners highlighted the value and the power – the effectiveness – of the performative and arts-based aspects of WSB's work in the following way:

*I think it has an extremely transformational potential in that...there is no threat, there is no question of, 'Should I join or shouldn't I join this'. When people come to the event, they come without any suspicion...I think they come with a relaxed feeling, thinking that now I'm going to be entertained. So that's also part of it, and that's totally fine. And then they are met in the place where they are, [and] they feel a sense of belonging, or a sense of feeling connected and understanding what's happening in the play because it is illustrating part of what they most likely have seen many times in their lives. So, they feel that they are recognized basically - recognition with the actors - so that they directly start thinking themselves, 'Okay, yeah I recognize this.' And then maybe start reflecting on, 'How did I act in that particular situation?' or 'What's my take on this?'. And maybe they've been acting in a way - all their lives and their parents in the same way - they haven't maybe even stopped to question it. And now they get another perspective, or they at least...start questioning it or looking at it from different perspectives. So, it connects to both their rational [side] and their emotions. And their bodies, in that the music goes straight into your heart kind of. It's hard to hide away...It has a very strong transformational power, I think.*

This transformational power, and this vital aspect of arts-based work as 'a discovery, from which we learn about ourselves', as well as the associated creation of a political space that supports, protects and cultivates alternatives, is a foundational aspect of WSB. Meeting people where they are at, and supporting them to 'find the freedom to find themselves' might be considered overly esoteric goals for 'development' work – and would be difficult if not impossible to measure – but this is arguably at the core of all that WSB does. In many important ways it is also the key to their

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<sup>103</sup> Richard Boon and Jane Plastow identify 'the power of joy as an agent of transformation' in 'Introduction', *Theatre and Empowerment: Community Drama on the World Stage*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, page 11.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Walker quoted in *Wan Smolbag: The First Five Years*, Alexander Street, 1995. At time 43:00.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, 'Introduction', *Theatre and Empowerment: Community Drama on the World Stage*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, page 1.

<sup>106</sup> Sanjoy Ganguly, 'Theatre – a space for empowerment: celebrating Jana Sankriti's experience in India' in Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, *Theatre and Empowerment: Community Drama on the World Stage*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, page 256.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, page 254.



effectiveness. A former volunteer described this in terms of ‘authenticity’ in a way that captures the quiet yet powerful strength of this approach:

*[I love] So many things, but the ability to change and help people’s lives in an authentic way is remarkable. I also love that they use the arts as a serious method for real change. WSB is by the people for the people.*

This ‘by the people for the people’ aspect of WSB means that they are more likely to advocate for an issue or a principal than they are for themselves. They are often too busy in the Tagabe river hauling out rubbish, and in communities listening to peoples’ stories, sitting in offices writing reports and acquitting complex budgets, finding a better camera angle, and looking after their 140 plus staff members in a way that supports them through intimate partner violence, and death and school fees in a way that few organizations would even consider. At other times they are busy having too much fun with each other, rehearsing, honing their craft, laughing, discussing, making carnivals out of rubbish, and just doing what they do. Which is why people describe WSB in terms like ‘magic’, ‘brilliant’ and ‘inspirational’.

### **Summary of Main Findings**

In answering the priority question for the evaluation around effectiveness and WSB’s contribution to longer-term change among the individuals and communities in which they work, WSB was found to be **highly – and uniquely – effective**. This was evident across all aspects of their work from the more mundane to the sublime. From WSB’s efforts to address key gaps in service delivery for youth, for sex workers, for marginalised community members, in disaster response – and even in ‘messy’ areas like waste collection and challenging harmful social norms – change was abundantly evident. WSB’s creation of safe spaces for reflection, laughter and learning – and even freedom, inspiration and ‘magic’ – were crucial aspects of their effectiveness as well.

WSB’s work to further gender equality in Vanuatu – while not an explicit focal area for the organisation – was also found to be **highly – and uniquely – effective**. Their policies – and the way they are operationalised as lived values – were described as a model for other organisations. Beyond this, WSB’s work to create space for women’s participation and to model women’s leadership, their contributions to women’s economic empowerment, and their ability to take on complex and challenging topics in their creative and community-engaged work were part of their effectiveness. WSB was also found to be leading change for diverse women and girls, several of whom described finding a ‘safe space’ at WSB. While the evaluation was tasked with identifying opportunities for strengthening, these should be seen as optional and should be driven by WSB.

WSB’s work, approach, and the issues they focus on were also found to be **highly relevant**. WSB was identified as being consistently responsive to the changing needs of the communities where they work, across a range of activities, over a significant expanse of time. The evaluation also found – echoing WSB’s previous reviews and evaluations – that WSB was **highly efficient**, and represents significant value for money. In fact, they were identified as better value for money than most other organisations working in the same space. Minor inefficiencies were identified in terms of WSB’s work in managing donor relationships and in project management and reporting. WSB’s work was also found to be **sustainable** across a range of variables. While the question of financial sustainability is raised from time to time by donors, this was not found to be an appropriate goal for WSB. This finding is supported by previous reviews and reports.

### **Final Words**

It seems highly pertinent to conclude with the last finding in the online survey. When asked how much they loved or appreciated WSB, the overall rating was 9.5 out of 10. Respondents were given the option to not comment at all, and yet 26 people (74%) rated WSB at a 10 of out 10. While there were a finite number of individuals surveyed, these kinds of views were also shared

in innumerable ways by the 84 individuals who were interviewed in the course of this evaluation, as demonstrated throughout the findings above. These perspectives are also reflected in WSB's previous reviews and evaluations. While WSB would be the first to tell you that they are not a perfect organisation, it is not a small thing to do all that WSB does – with the diversity of people and issues they engage with – so well, that so much real appreciation is expressed. The final word is left to people who were interviewed for this evaluation:

*I think it is important to say that WSB is a unique organisation in Vanuatu that has worked for over 30 years to provide communities with a voice. This has been WSB's passion and will continue to be the focus of our work – to make the lives of the individual in their community better, regardless of all the differences and challenges.*  
- WSB Staff Member

*I think WSB have something that no other institution – probably in the Pacific, working with communities - have. I cannot compare WSB with any other non-governmental organisation working in communities. They are paving the way – the way they work with communities – especially through their theatre aspect.*  
- WSB Government Partner

*WSB really understands the needs of people at the community level. It's an organisation that builds up young people, women and men through the services they provide. Their clinic helps the whole community. They provide shelter and space to vulnerable groups so they can be together and find their voices to express what they believe in. They build up peoples' knowledge and understanding through their plays and films. And they are building up Vanuatu. The government of Vanuatu needs to understand the important contribution they are making and support them.*  
- Community Member

*I love the uniqueness of them. I love the way they get information out to people in a relevant way, and in a range of ways. I think they're filling a role that no one else does. I love the feeling of going into the theatre. I love the people that work there and their clear dedication, talent and passion.*  
- WSB Core Donor

*I love that they're really committed to human rights. And to addressing the real everyday issues that young and marginalised people in Vanuatu live with every day. And that they're not afraid of taking on the difficult issues. And also, I do love that they take on so much stuff - so much different diverse stuff - that there's something for everyone. And I LOVE going to the Centre...I just love that you walk in and it's this place of wonder. There's so much energy...I think it's TRULY one of the world's magical places.*  
- WSB Partner

*Wan Smolbag is one of my favourite places in the world.*  
- Former WSB Volunteer

## Recommendations

This evaluation makes seven recommendations in relation to WSB arising from the findings above. It is recommended that:

### Recommendations for WSB's Consideration:

#### **1. WSB should continue working in the same manner, building on existing strengths where possible.**

WSB as an organisation currently exhibits significant maturity and effectiveness across a diverse range of activities. WSB was found to deliver their work in a way that is responsive to the evolving needs and realities of the diverse communities and individuals they serve, while cultivating an environment that is based in tolerance, inclusion and getting along across difference. They offer a significant public good in the context of Vanuatu society. Several of the individuals WSB's work supports – whether it is out of school youth, diversely marginalised women and girls, or underserved peri-urban communities – would likely not find support and access to services elsewhere. WSB also demonstrates a remarkably coherent vision and commitment to shared purpose across more than 140 staff members, who collectively embody WSB's commitment to being 'a place for everyone, every day'. WSB should continue to work in the way they have been working, building on their existing strengths wherever possible (and as resources allow).

## **2. Any further work around gender equality at WSB should be preceded by more focused consultation.**

WSB was found to be remarkably effective in the broad area of gender equality. This was the case in relation to their organisational practices, and in terms of the ‘safe space’ they actively strive to create at WSB. It was also clearly evident in their messaging and activities. Some potential areas for strengthening were solicited and identified in this evaluation, however, WSB should lead any change in this area. If further work to strengthen gender equality at WSB is undertaken – for example, to assist them in developing a Gender and Diversity Policy, or in the provision of training – this should be guided by a more focused consultation. This consultation would ensure that any further work in this area is well-contextualised in terms of the breadth of WSB’s work and the diverse communities of women and girls with whom they work. It would also ensure that any further efforts do not undermine existing strengths, or provide additional work and scrutiny without actual benefit.

## **3. WSB should consider expanding their management capacity (as funding allows<sup>108</sup>).**

Following recommendations in the 2012 review, donors endeavoured to work with each other and WSB to streamline reporting requirements. Donors also provided technical support to strengthen WSB’s monitoring and evaluation capacity (see Recommendation 6). Despite these efforts – and improvements in some areas – WSB still appears under-resourced in the broad management space. Given their staff of more than 140 people (several of whom are in need of extra support), managing human resources is a significant area of work and focus. Financial and project management, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting to donors is also significant for an organisation of their size and breadth. Ideally another two (or even three) positions at the management level would allow WSB to continue to provide their high level of support to staff while maintaining the current diversity of activities, and managing their various donor responsibilities. These positions should ideally be resourced at a competitive level, so that WSB can attract individuals with the level of experience and technical expertise that is required.

## **4. WSB’s should consider expanding work in their Nutrition Centre (as funding allows<sup>109</sup>).**

WSB’s Nutrition Centre was recognised as unique in the region and exceptionally effective through this period. Their work with government has extended Vanuatu’s response to key issues including childhood malnutrition (through initiatives like the development of high energy biscuits for Vanuatu) and NCD’s (through their diet and exercise counselling program). WSB’s work in this area is helping to meet clear needs at the individual level, the community-level and in government across a range of issues from food security to integrated approaches to health and well-being, and building community resilience. Any expansion in this area will need to be accompanied by infrastructural expansion as well. The current office space in the Nutrition Centre is limited and initiatives like producing high energy biscuits or providing individual diet and exercise consultations require dedicated space.

## **Recommendations for the Consideration of Donor Partners**

### **5. MFAT, DFAT and Oxfam should continue their core funding support for WSB through a five-year joint funding relationship (at a minimum), at the same or increased levels.**

WSB has demonstrated that they are a highly effective organisation. The findings of this evaluation echo the findings of previous reviews and evaluations. WSB’s experience over more than 30 years is a significant asset, as is their ongoing and exceptional ability to remain responsive and relevant to diverse and underserved communities and individuals. They deliver vital and accessible services in areas from health and nutrition to waste and resource management, and in their important work with youth. Their creative media work is regionally recognised as making

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<sup>108</sup> WSB is consistently identified as offering very high value for money while operating on a tight budget with very small margins. It is therefore likely that WSB will not be able to meet this recommendation without additional funding support.

<sup>109</sup> As per footnote 107 above.

a significant and unique contribution across a variety of areas and issues. WSB consistently manages their funds in a highly transparent and efficient manner, and represents exceptional value for money. There is a strong case that core funding at or above current levels should be provided to WSB for a five-year period at a minimum – and longer where possible.

**6. WSB's core donor partners<sup>110</sup> should support focused work early in the next phase of funding to strengthen WSB's monitoring and evaluation and reporting in a way that is also effective for WSB.**

Additional resourcing and technical support from a donor-based technical advisor was focused in this area over the past few years, and some donor partners said that in their view WSB's monitoring and evaluation efforts were stronger, particularly as of the 2019 Annual Report. It is not clear, however, that this new format of reporting and the processes that support it are either effective or manageable for WSB. In particular, the new format is highly technical, labour intensive and not very accessible, and does not contain space for considering the less measurable aspects of WSB's work, or for WSB's own reflection and learning. It is also not clear that this format reflects how WSB would like to present themselves to their public and beneficiaries. Ideally additional support in this area will involve an individual/s with experience in measuring social change and transformation in complex contexts, as well as some knowledge of WSB and Vanuatu. This work should focus on supporting WSB to develop more manageable processes and formats (including exploring the possibility of outsourcing aspects of this work).

**7. WSB's core donor partners should ideally seek to resolve questions around financial sustainability and cost recovery in relation to WSB in a more enduring way.**

The issue around financial sustainability and cost recovery appears to be something of an unsettled issue for donor partners in relation to WSB, and comes up from time-to-time drawing focus, time, energy and resources. This likely relates to misunderstandings about the unique nature of what WSB does and the context for their work<sup>111</sup>, as well as personnel changes in the donor space. Practical consideration of this issue clearly demonstrates that cost recovery is not a viable option for WSB, however, and diversification of funding sources – particularly for core funding – would be difficult if not impossible to achieve. At least two externally solicited pieces of work<sup>112</sup> authored by Australian business advisors have analysed commercial opportunities and possible diversification of funding sources for WSB and have reached this conclusion. Previous reviews have also reached the conclusion that financial sustainability is not a reasonable goal for WSB<sup>113</sup>. WSB works with some of the most marginalised and underserved communities and individuals in Vanuatu and in many respects represent a clear public good in Vanuatu. Donor partners share a responsibility for ensuring that these issues are as effectively managed as possible, and ideally that they are resolved in a more enduring way.

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<sup>110</sup> This recommendation was reserved for donor partners as they have exerted considerable influence in shaping the format of WSB's current reporting. Ideally they should work with WSB to find a more workable and effective solution. WSB's resourcing is such that there is little to no room for them to find additional funds to support this work.

<sup>111</sup> It is also not clear that other organisations that receive funding in Vanuatu are held up to the same level of scrutiny in the area of financial sustainability, or are expected to commercialise or sell their services.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Barber, *Commercial Opportunities for Wan Smolbag Theatre*, 2006 and Nick Gorshenin, *Wan Smolbag Financial Sustainability Review*, 2016.

<sup>113</sup> Alison Gray et al, *Mid-Term Review: Wan Smolbag Vanuatu*, May 2009 and Heidi Tyedmers, *Wan Smolbag Theatre Mid-Term Review Report*, December 2012.