



Oxfam's community-based adaptation to climate change case study:

## CREATING A RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK TO HELP VANUATU PREPARE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Mota Island, Vanuatu: Children take part in discussions on climate change problems affecting their community. Photo: Nic Maclellan.

### CLIMATE CHANGE IN VANUATU

Vanuatu's location on the Ring of Fire and in the cyclone belt increases its vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, with communities being affected by increasing temperatures, changed rainfall patterns, rising sea levels and cyclones.

These factors pose a significant risk to the health and livelihoods of all people in Vanuatu, where 80% of the population lives subsistence lifestyles, and many in remote and under serviced locations.

### WHY IS OXFAM WORKING IN VANUATU?

Climate change is a pressing issue across the country, with some members of communities significantly more vulnerable to climate change impacts, due to complex social and gender dynamics. In Vanuatu, violence against women and the exclusion of women and youth from decision-making processes is a significant problem. This often results in development plans that do not take into account the needs and capacities of women and children, increasing their vulnerability to climate-related hazards.

Participatory community climate vulnerability and capacity assessments have highlighted some of the common climate-related issues faced by communities across Vanuatu, including: coastal erosion; heavy rains resulting in waterlogging of farmland; fresh water sources becoming saline and undrinkable; and unfortified housing being damaged by increasingly harsh storms.

Community vulnerability is compounded by structural factors, such as institutional weaknesses, geographical remoteness, the absence of basic infrastructure (like safe water supplies), a lack of knowledge of risks, and poor access to information.

At the community level, coping mechanisms exist such as traditional knowledge and a high degree of mutual support through strong social networks, especially in rural areas.

Despite climate change adaptation projects being implemented by government and civil society actors, there has been a lack of coordination and collaboration between the two. As a result, communities were exposed to mixed messages about the causes and consequences of climate change, causing confusion and misinformation.

*“Climate change will greatly affect youth as we have a big future ahead of us. We might have families and want to invest in tourism but changes in climate might not allow for this to happen.”*

— A youth on Ambae Island, Penama province

## WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS?

In response to these challenges Oxfam, with partnering NGOs, implemented Yumi stap redi long klaemet jenis — the Vanuatu NGO Climate Change Adaptation Program. The program, supported by the Australian aid program, is working to increase the resilience of communities on nine islands across Vanuatu to the impacts of climate change, with a focus on the most vulnerable — specifically women, young people, and people living with a disability. It works directly at community level to increase communities’, local governments’, and civil society’s awareness and ability to plan for and manage local climate change.

Under this program, Oxfam and partners have developed the Vanuatu Community Resilience Framework, which defines eight factors that enable a community to become more resilient to climate variability and change. These are:

- basic needs;
- diverse livelihoods assets;
- fair, inclusive and responsive decision-making;
- access to traditional and external information;
- ability to innovate and take risks;
- a culture and belief system that helps to understand and act on shocks and stresses;
- internal and external social networks; and
- connected and responsive government.

Oxfam also works to better link community and civil society priorities with national and international decision makers. For example, they worked with partners to strengthen the capacity of the Vanuatu delegation to international negotiations, involve civil society and other government ministries in preparations for negotiations, and increase public awareness of climate change and processes.

*“We have a lot of lessons from Vanuatu that can influence change, but unless these lessons are echoed at higher levels, transformative change will never happen.”*

— Shirley Laban, Vanuatu Climate Action Network Coordinator

## HOW HAVE THINGS CHANGED FOR THE BETTER?

Using the resilience framework to guide activities, the program has resulted in better coordination at national level, through facilitating civil society engagement with government, and advocating on behalf of remote and isolated women, men and young people. It’s also helped increase resilience at the community level by identifying existing strengths and assets and building on these to reduce vulnerabilities.

The program has also achieved some success in helping communities re-think the implications of traditional decision-making processes. For example, a community in Port Vila has now changed its existing community decision-making structure to be more inclusive of women and youth.

*“Our delegation is wide and varied, we have members from the government, civil society, youth groups and private sector ... We prepared our delegation to be well informed of our key issues of finance, gender balance, adaptation and so forth, before coming here.”*

— Albert Williams, Head of Vanuatu’s delegation to the UNFCCC

## WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

A key insight from the program is that efforts to build resilience to climate change at the community level need to be anchored in what women, men and young people themselves identify as important. Adaptation solutions are far more likely to be sustainable when they are grounded in a community’s own strengths and values. The Vanuatu Community Resilience Framework helps ensure program activities build on existing community structures and also provides a useful means to measure progress.