Research Partnership Case Studies

Gender in Pacific WASH

Background to the research:

The Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS) and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) were successfully awarded a grant from the then Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) to investigate success, enablers and measures of gender outcomes in water and sanitation initiatives in the Pacific, to inform policy and practice. The research was carried out from 2009-2011.

ISF-UTS and IWDA worked in partnership with Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE) in Fiji and World Vision in Vanuatu. The research focused on two Pacific case studies that incorporate participatory strategies and support community decision making processes as part of water and sanitation initiatives, but were not focused on gender equality as a primary outcome: World Vision's Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) initiatives in rural Vanuatu and Live and Learns water governance and sustainable communities projects in Fiji.

The field research used a strengths-based approach that was informed by principles of empowerment, appreciation and participation. The intention was for the research to build on existing strengths and be a learning process for all involved. For participant organisations, documenting successes and enablers was hoped to lead to a stronger focus on gender, and increased capability to integrate gender into water and sanitation projects. At a strategic level, the research aimed to support integration of gender in a sector with significant potential to contribute to gender equality.

The research findings have been translated into a set of guidance materials for organisations undertaking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities, to enable uptake of practical strategies to incorporate gender into WASH initiatives, and assist non-specialist practitioners to understand what positive gender outcomes 'look like'.

http://www.genderinpacificwash.info/index.html

Women exploring their experience of WASH activities in their community. Source ISF – UTS

Interest in the research partnership

All partners engaged in this research expressed multiple interests, highlighting that the value of research needs to be understood through different organisational perspectives.

For in-country partners (World Vision Vanuatu and LLEE) the research offered an opportunity to:

▶ Highlight the work of local organisations and their programming to the broader sector – research outcomes can be used as an evidence base to seek future funding

▶ Strengthen programming, based on lessons learned from the research

▶ Develop the skills of local implementing teams

From the perspective of the ANGO (IWDA), interest in the research was to:

▶ Contribute to strengthening practice of in-country partners

▶ Contribute to knowledge in the sector, with specific Pacific examples (recognising the dominance of Asia and Africa examples at that point in time)

▶ Document outcomes and learning to generate an evidence base from programming, and evidence to strengthen future work

▶ Learn from the collaboration with academics

Similar to ANGO interest, researchers' (ISF-UTS) interest was also to contribute to the sector, recognising the need and evidence gap regarding the benefit of integrating gender considerations in WASH programming.

So how and why does a research collaboration get started? As noted by one partner – the research built from individual passion and interests, which catalysed organisational interest and commitment to contribute to the sector, and then the establishment of broader institutional arrangements which enabled this.

Outcomes of the research:

Research partners identified common themes, highlighting how research partnerships can support complementary and mutually reinforcing benefit for staff and organisations involved in research.

Staff and organisational development.

All partners stated the value of building staff and organisational learning through the research, this was particularly evident for in-country partners and IWDA who gained confidence through the research process.

"Research – we have thought oh scary they are coming to see what we have done, what we haven't – but now we don't have that view. As an organisation, we have learnt – It is ok if we haven't done much – we still value the learning and gain knowledge to improve" (In-country NGO).

"We were seen to be capable by an international research team, seen as equals in the research, That was very valuable for us" (In-country partner).

"The research built up confidence in working with research partners" (IWDA).

Skills transfer was an important outcome through the research and valued by in-country partners. These skills have since been translated and adopted by local staff and applied to different settings.

"The research work helped me to develop my own research skills" (In-country NGO).

"Then we localise the tools, beyond the research, we weave these tool into other programs" (In-country NGO).

A contributing factor to staff development and increased confidence was the style of researcher engagement:

"They were very respectful to local culture and local team. It gave us confidence to give our views and thoughts and we were able to provide that. Some consultants – you get the air that they know more than the local staff. You feel like as local person, 'I can't say this in case it's wrong'. This wasn't the experience with them the researchers in this activity" (In-country NGO).

Organisational credibility:

The research built organisational credibility for all research partners.

As noted by an in-country partner representative:

"The research, it helped put us at a different level again. We had lots of interest in our work following the research. We were approached by other organisations in country to conduct training for them" (In-country partner).

Following the research, further commissioned work as well as successful grant applications were also accessed by ISF-UTS, IWDA and LLEE.

"The research helped us in a role we wanted to play – to influence change in the sector and expand what we were able to achieve by working with other development organisations towards change' (IWDA).

"The research was a catalyst for ongoing work and enabled us to contribute to thought leadership in this area, including right up until now" (ISF-UTS).

The research also provided a foundation for more research focused on WASH in Vanuatu, informed by the foundation of this research.

"After this research there's been other research done with WV WASH in Vanuatu and I believe that is to do with the report that was produced from this research and the publication of the report" (In-country NGO).

Longevity of multiple research outputs and influence in the sector:

A variety of research outputs were produced for multiple audiences relevant to influencing policy and practice. Importantly the research outputs have had longevity and continue to influence the sector. Outputs included:

▶ Practical Resource Guide (including flash cards, poster) – local relevance strengthened by co-creation with all research partners and use of a local artist to illustrate key messages

▶ Country Case Study reports

▶ Short form 'Case Study Snapshot' for each country

▶ PowerPoint presentations to conferences, workshops and symposia

▶ Publication of journal articles

The knowledge produced through the partnership has also been taken up by others in the sector and flowed on to influence a focus on gender and WASH. Examples include:

▶ Replication of the research approach by WaterAID in Timor Leste

▶ Development of a Gender WASH Monitoring Tool by Plan International Australia first in Indonesia and Vietnam and now used globally

▶ Use of the Resource Guide as a key resource to inform the CS WASH Western Pacific Sanitation Marketing and Innovation Project (IWDA, Live & Learn International, International Water Centre).

The research also influenced the development of a DFAT aggregate indicator on women's leadership at community level. The research was part of an early agenda for gender and WASH and demonstrated a strong appetite for this topic. The research was one piece amongst others that has served as a foundation for the design of DFAT's $110 million Water for Women fund **http://dfat.gov.au/news/news/Pages/water-for-women.aspx**, as well as a paper for the High-Level Panel for Water at the global level.

The practice of partnership

All partners had only good things to say about the partnership, and lessons learned from the experience have informed ongoing practice of research partnerships.

"With a bit of hindsight, the whole process of setting up the partnership became a model of what good partnership looks like" (IWDA).

Informed by the partner recollections some key steps along the way included the following:

Joint proposal preparation by ISF and IWDA.

ISF-UTS and IWDA worked on preparing the proposal, but due to restricted timing and no budget being available, in-country partners only became involved once the proposal was won. Because of the funding arrangements, local partners were not able to be part of the research conceptualisation, though this would have been the preference of IWDA and ISF.

Establishing the partnership face-to-face.

A whole day meeting between ISF-UTS and IWDA was described as foundational in setting up shared understanding of research objectives and ways of working together. Preparatory meetings were held in country with in-country partners.

Co-creation through respect and drawing on strengths of each partner.

Respect and appreciation of each partners' contribution to the research was echoed by all partners. This involved:

▶ Building from insights and strengths of players around the table

▶ Enabling, sense of equity, not privileging of different types of knowledge, non-hierarchical approach

▶ The international teams really recognised the local partners, local knowledge was appreciated and respected

▶ Local staff of the organisation were involved in the research, getting local staff to be part of planning implementation, this is what really mattered for us

▶ Leveraging the different strengths of each partner

Advice from the experienced:

Informed by their research partnership experience, here are a few words of advice from the research team:

▶ Create enough space for relationships to be formed through the partnership – this creates trust, essential for working relationships, and importantly good research outcomes

Research participants in Vanuatu discuss results of a participatory voting activity. Credit: International Women's Development Agency.

▶ Where appropriate, take a strengths-based approach within the research to address fears or concerns about research

▶ Ensure access to good data collectors and facilitators – best to draw on local staff or partners who have established relationships with the community and who importantly understand community dynamics that may need to be navigated as part of the research. This is also the ethical approach

▶ Factor in a translation phase within your overall research process – not just practical translation – but sense making with all the partners about what the research findings mean, and how these can be best communicated to different stakeholders. In this project, this included local partners trialling the Resource Guide and then revising for publication

▶ The researchers don't have to be the only ones responsible for producing research outputs – development practitioners can also take the lead and might be best placed to translate research findings into practical guidance

▶ Choose your partner(s) wisely – based on shared values, interest and commitment in the research focus. Build in fun and nurture your relationships, and be patient and open – it takes time to really understand organisational strengths and cultures

▶ Ensure there are outcomes of skill development for local teams – think about what is the added value for local research teams, and what expertise can be left from the research

Insights on communicating research findings:

Ensure research is communicated back to the community in creative and engaging ways – pictures, diagrams and video.

"80% of the team and community aren't going to read" (In-country partner).

"Cycle of information going back to the community, closing the feedback to community, and giving back to community; this is closing. We need to do more of it" (In-country partner).

Ensure all partners are involved in the data analysis – to build local skills in data analysis and importantly make sense together about what the research findings mean to local programming practice and policy.

"To be involved in data analysis is also important. Collection is easy - what you do – and how you make sense of this work – that is really important as well. Data analysis and meaningful analysis with local staff is really important. We have had experience to talk together about the data and to make sense of it together" (In-country NGO).

Insights on collaboration from the perspective of in-country partners:

Budget for as much time as you can to be together in-country – of course budgets often don't allow for this, but see how far you can push the budget!

For international partner(s):

► **respect and learn from your in-country partners**

"Of course, they have technical know-how. Whilst having technical knowledge and expertise, it's still good to have an eye and ear on what will be provided from local staff and local people - using local expertise and local knowledge to complement/ supplement the technical know-how from the external researchers?" (In-country partner)

► **build relationships with in-country partners – spend time in country**

"To engage in a more open and confident way, we need to know who we are going to be working with. Partners are working from a distance. We should encourage time to spend together. Face to face is important. To be able to explore challenges, capacity, context. To be able to get good value – time together – face to face is really important" (In-country partner).

► **local teams to be part of early stages of the research design**

► **support skill development of in-country partners to enable participation**

"The tools are sent across – we are asked to provide comment. We need more skills in developing research areas in order to be able to provide that input. This kind of thing should take place at earlier stages – this is especially important" (In-country partner).

For local partner(s):

► **have confidence to speak up and value your own contribution to the research**

"Local offices need to build confidence. Confidence has a big role in having conversations. Could be daunting but it is important. To know place in the local environment; to know our strengths. Also important to understand limitations and to be honest about it: 'this is who we are, this is what we tried', to also be honest to acknowledge what we need to build on" (In-country partner).

► **know your organisational strengths and limitations and share openly**

► **be clear about your interest in the research and expected outcomes**

► **Research TORs should be clearly state what each partner is responsible and also where responsibilities are shared.**

"Be clear from the beginning, the ways of working together. What do you want to get out of it? Which organisation is a good fit – in terms of culture, agenda, resources, and leverage from this? What you are trying to understand through the research? Ask the question, 'why you are doing this? What is the value of it? Don't be pre-conceived about it. Be open to researchers bringing into it their own thinking" (In-country partner).

Men exploring their experience of WASH activities in their community. Credit ISF - UTS.

Lessons learned:

Insights from the case study resonate with broader perspectives on research partnerships:

▶ Choose your partner wisely – do you share the same interest in the topic of interest and passion for your research to contribute?

▶ Take the time to meet face to face and form an understanding of ways of working and what partners want out of the partnership

▶ Budget for time in country with partners to co-create research design, implement the research together and make sense of findings together

▶ Build in skill development of local people as a key outcome of your research

▶ Plan multiple research outputs to maximise value for multiple stakeholders – what is the beneficence for the community (research participants); local organisations and partners, ANGO, researchers and the sector more broadly?

▶ Keep promoting research outputs – the volume of information in the 21st century means that good, relevant resources can become invisible to web searches quite quickly!

Journal publications and other resources related to the research:

Carrard, N.R., Crawford, J., Halcrow, G., Rowland, C. & Willetts, J.R. 2013, 'A framework for exploring gender equality outcomes from WASH programmes', *Waterlines: international journal of water, sanitation and waste,* vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 315-333.

Willetts, J., Halcrow, G., Carrard, N., Rowland, C. and Crawford, C 2010, *Addressing two critical MDGs together: gender in water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives*, Pacific Economic Bulletin Volume 25 Number 1

Willetts, J.R., Carrard, N.R., Crawford J., Rowland, C. & Halcrow, G. 2013, '*Working from strengths to assess changes in gender equality*', *Development in Practice*, vol. 23, no. 8, pp. 991-1006.

Willetts J, Halcrow G, Carrard N, Rowland C and Crawford J, 2010, '*Addressing two critical MDGs together: gender in water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives*', Pacific Economic Bulletin , vol. 25, no. 1, p. 162.

http://www.genderinpacificwash.info/system/resources/m/isf_iwda_vanuatu-case-study.pdf

https://www.iwda.org.au/assets/files/Gender-Matters-1.pdf

http://www.genderinpacificwash.info/guidance-material

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSfSPXnqP4U

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyswiCLAH7U