

IWRM in Tuvalu : an achievement story

By Litia Tafoa



Incorporating gender mainstreaming into the Tuvalu IWRM project

During preparatory meetings for key stakeholders in Tuvalu, strong interest was revealed for gender mainstreaming beyond just WASH practitioners and the IWRM Team. This was underlined as more women than men attended a large proportion of stakeholder engagement activities. To address this the IWRM Team initiated a Gender Mainstreaming Workshop for community members in collaboration with Institute for Sustainable Futures. National Steering Committee members, women representatives from the 7 communities of Funafuti, government departments and youth groups were all invited to attend the workshop.

The IWRM Team invited the Director of Finance and other staff members in the department who were interested to go. He was unable to attend the meeting and suggested that I attend as it would be useful for us to gain knowledge about gender issues. I have never been to a gender workshop before and know a bit about gender but have never learned why it is important. Through the workshop I have learned that we have to consider women, particularly as it comes to our traditional and conservative community, sometimes there is too much male dominance in Tuvalu, and for me it is good that they give this workshop to send the message out there that women are important members of society as well.

The biggest challenge in Tuvalu with gender mainstreaming is because of our traditions, men always think it is to do with the ladies, that it is ladies business, to empower the women, but it's not just about women it's about both sexes working together. So our challenge is to have men accept that. Some of the men at the workshop were open to this idea, there were optimistic people and sceptics. Some men say they accept the ideas of gender mainstreaming but in practice, no. There is disconnect between what they are learning and how they behave. So about 50/50 at the workshop were okay or indifferent.



Participants at the Gender Mainstreaming Workshop



Litia Tafoa, a participant at the workshops, outside the government offices in Funafuti

Next time they have a workshop they should invite more men and more people in general. It is important however that they keep involving men in this discussion. It might also be a good idea to have separate men and women's workshops then bring them together for a day or two of combined workshop, That way people can feel comfortable to ask questions in the beginning without men or women to offend, then all together we can discuss what has been taught.

I found the workshop really helpful, it made me see there is more to gender mainstreaming than I thought. Sometimes even us ladies think that we can do better than men and the men think they can do it better than us. But for our women in the workforce we need to recognise that we can do everything the same, both men and women, and that we should have the space to be equal. It really helped having Asita as a local representative presenting, who can explain in detail to us what is this, and what is that, because not everyone understands English that well. The training was so good that I recommend they do it every year, with more participants. Even some of the men wanted more in-depth training after attending this workshop.

As a result of the gender mainstreaming training in Tuvalu the IWRM project conducted women's meetings to discuss the technical aspects of the eco-sanitation toilets and how these sanitation facilities affect women and what are their perspectives on them. These womens group workshops gave the IWRM Project the insight that the eco-sanitation toilets would be better received if placed close to or inside the home. An aspect that has been incorporated in to the National Water and Sanitation Policy. Women also had objections to using the human compost and so further effort was made to resolve this through testing of the compost and sharing the findings with all stakeholders.

Due to cultural traditions women are usually not allowed to speak however this is starting to change and some women are now speaking at community events. Women who attended the event are now more confident to engage in workshops. There has also been ongoing stakeholder engagement with women's groups from outer islands to introduce and gather support for the eco-sanitation facilities and to understand any issues that they may have.