

IWRM in Vanuatu : an achievement story

By Rosette Kalmet



Building Community Capacity for Sanitation Solutions



Above: Sanitation Enterprise Group with their Certificate of Participation

The Sarakata IWRM Demonstration project seeks to improve the ground water quality, sanitation-hygiene practices and health of the communities residing within the Sarakata Catchment area. The most affected areas are in the lower catchment and flood plain. The Sarakata Flood plain is home to five large communities with a population of over 3,000. This large population puts a high demand on the natural resources and contributes to the high levels of groundwater contamination through the use of unsuitable sanitation systems.

To increase community awareness around sanitation issues we ran a series of workshops to demonstrate the important links between unsuitable sanitation systems and ground water contamination. We wanted to raise awareness amongst the communities about alternative toilet facilities, improving sanitation standards and minimising sanitation-related illnesses. The workshops also tied in construction training for compost toilets in the communities. Those interested people formed a Sanitation Enterprise Group who assisted the construction of the composting toilets for Pepsi, Solway and Butmas Community.

We hoped to reach a wide audience that included a lot of women as they are at the forefront of sanitation issues, raising children and managing the household. By gaining new skills, building and gaining confidence in their knowledge, women would be able to communicate with family and friends about sanitation issues and solutions, spreading knowledge throughout the communities. On Sunday afternoons after church services we engaged with the community to inform them of the workshops. The aim was to reach as many people as possible. A lot of questions were raised and a lot of positive comments were made. Chief Nako from Pepsi said, "It is a great opportunity for the entire group to build on their skills and knowledge by building the composting toilets".

A weeklong workshop was conducted covering theory and construction. The number of people increased as they heard of the workshop and the good things the project is bringing to their community. It became clear during the week that theory alone is not enough and that interactive activities boost learning further. For example, the hands-on construction of the composting toilet by the Sanitation Enterprise Group combined with the workshop and training was a successful way for people to learn and engage. Ms Lynne Mesek, the Secretary of the Sanitation Enterprise Group said "I have noticed how women especially have improved through theory learning but most of all through the practical learning". Community members even offered comments on how to make the workshops better, what times and who to invite to make it a greater success.

Mrs Isabelle from Pepsi said "Being involved in the constructions help women to improve their skills and knowledge, they have learned a lot and it becomes a challenge for them" She said "Women who are involved in the construction now have the experience to improve their sanitation issues within their own families and communities in Santo and their original home islands".

The project team made great effort to make the workshop a success. As project manager I learned the importance of giving communities plenty of notice about workshops and liaising with key community leaders to gain their support of the workshop. Through their influence we can hope to see a greater number and variety of people attend the workshops. We also realized during the workshops that it is beneficial to have a greater number of youth attending, this is their world and they would gain a lot by learning new skills and ideas at a young age, taking it with them as they grow.

As a result of the workshop and training events people are more aware of their sanitation issues and the need to improve them. Women especially are more educated in their sanitation issues, can communicate openly with men and are making efforts to identify their sanitation needs. Mrs Mary Wilson said "What I have learned and been involved with in the last few weeks has encouraged me, I now have new skills to build my own toilet and improve sanitation practices in my own home". Women are now asking for more similar trainings and are eager to be active participants in the project and their own development.



Above: Sanitation Enterprise Group building the compost toilet, laying the concrete base