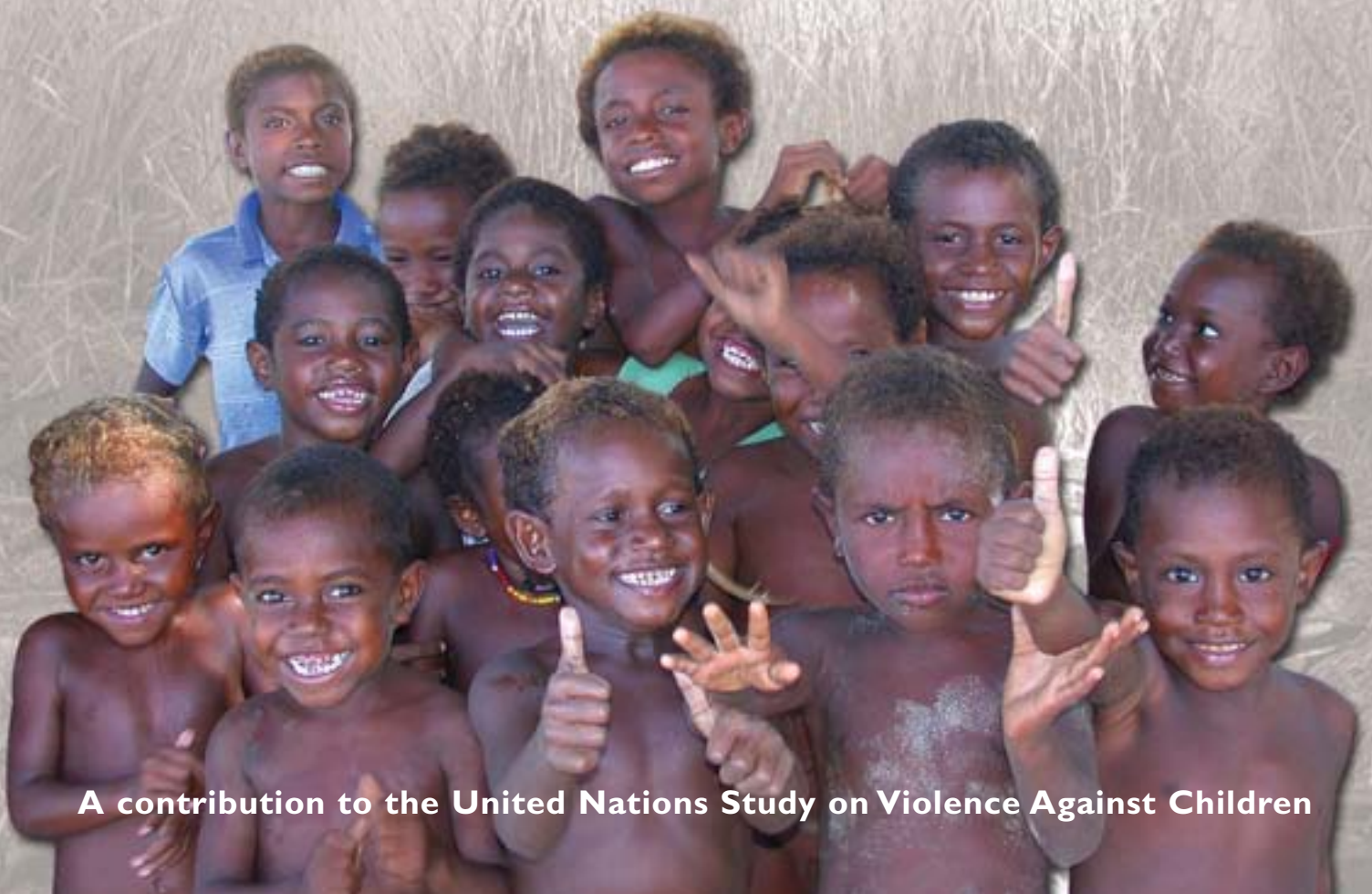


# **Strongim pikinini, strongim laef b'long famili**

enabling children to reach their full potential





# **Strongim pikinini, strongim laef b'long famili**

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enabling children to reach their full potential

**a special report**

**WORLD VISION** is a Christian relief and development partnership that serves more than 85 million people in nearly 100 countries. World Vision seeks to follow Christ's example by working with the poor and oppressed in the pursuit of justice and human transformation.

Children are often most vulnerable to the effects of poverty. World Vision works with each partner community to ensure that children are able to enjoy improved nutrition, health and education. Where children live in especially difficult circumstances, surviving on the streets, suffering in exploitative labour, or exposed to the abuse and trauma of conflict, World Vision works to restore hope and to bring justice.

World Vision recognises that poverty is not inevitable. Our Mission Statement calls us to challenge those unjust structures that constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values. World Vision desires that all people be able to reach their God-given potential, and thus works for a world that no longer tolerates poverty.

# Contents

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<b>Acknowledgements</b>	4
<b>Acronyms and translations</b>	5
<b>Foreword</b>	6
<b>Introduction</b>	7
<b>Methodology</b>	9
Ethical considerations	
Challenges and limitations	
<b>Country and community context</b>	11
Vanuatu	
Solomon Islands	
Papua New Guinea	
<b>Research findings: Understanding violence - cross-cutting themes</b>	17
Perceptions of childhood - its changing nature	
Participation of children and young people	
<i>Kastom</i> and modernity	
The importance of government	
The role of civil society	
<b>Moving forward (aspirations)</b>	33
Engaged individuals	
Supportive communities	
Supportive policy and programmes	
A note on the commercial sexual exploitation of children	
<b>Recommendations</b>	36
<b>Appendix 1</b> Additional country information: Overview of initiatives to address violence against children	38
<b>Appendix 2</b> Survey tools	47
<b>Appendix 3</b> World Vision Child Protection guidelines	58
<b>Bibliography</b>	61

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## Acronyms and translations

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<b>CRC</b>	(United Nations) Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organisation
<b>GO</b>	governmental organisation
<b><i>kastom</i></b>	a set of beliefs, practices and values based on stories passed on from generation to generation
<b><i>nakamal</i></b>	meeting place; village hall
<b>NCC</b>	National Children's Committee
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>PCP</b>	Pacific Children's Program
<b>PHC</b>	primary health care
<b><i>pikinini</i></b>	child/children
<b>SCA</b>	Save the Children Australia
<b>VHW</b>	village health worker
<b>VNCC</b>	Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs
<b><i>wantok</i></b>	literally “one talk”; familial, language and cultural links that bind people together
<b>WVV</b>	World Vision Vanuatu

## Foreword

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Violence against children in the Pacific is often the result of a complex mixture of societal and economic pressures. Whatever the cause, all children have the right to be protected against violence. Poverty is widespread in the Pacific; in the mid- to late 1990s approximately 40% of people in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu and 25% of people in the Solomon Islands were reported to be living below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> Poverty is said to be increasing due to the inequitable distribution of the benefits of growth. Critical issues for the poor have consistently been stated as poor access to cash-earning opportunities and social support, particularly education and health. The United Nations' Human Development Index ranked the three countries between 118th and 137th in a total of 173 countries in 2005.<sup>2</sup>

World Vision has been working in the Pacific for over 30 years, with a particular focus on children for a large part of that time. Starting in 2000, World Vision began accessing more government grants and special funding from its Support Offices; and from 2003, this represented 100% of programmes in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG. Yet World Vision Pacific Development Group is committed to focusing on children. The team believes, along with World Vision globally, that children are the most effective agents of change.

This research into children and violence has provided an important opportunity for our staff to learn research methodologies (both theoretical and practical) focused on children and their communities. The findings from this research will guide World Vision Pacific as it moves again into child-focused programming.

significantly, it will help communities to better understand the environment in which they are raising their children, enabling them to take the good aspects and mitigate those aspects that are less positive.

I warmly congratulate the contributors and the authors, who are mainly World Vision staff from within PNG, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. A special thanks to Melanie Gow and Karl Dorning for financial and technical support and for putting the final version of the report together.

*Don Bradford*

**National Director**

Pacific Development Group  
World Vision

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in AusAID's *Pacific Regional Aid Strategy 2004–2009*.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations' *Human development report 2005*, [http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/hdi\\_rank\\_map.cfm](http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/hdi_rank_map.cfm)

This study provides an insight into the world of children and their formative environment from both a customary and a legal viewpoint. It will help the world to better understand the issues facing children in the Pacific. Most

## Introduction

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*“The way to decrease violence is to work together with all our leaders in our village.”*

– young male child, Solomon Islands

The truth in this single statement may not seem especially astounding. Yet too often, the role of communities and families in ensuring children's right to security and protection is undermined. The limited support given to vulnerable families and communities to provide for and empower children requires urgent attention. This is true not only in the Pacific communities studied in this research. World Vision has undertaken considerable research on violence against children in a variety of countries and contexts over a number of years. The organisation's *Safe World for Children* campaign, launched in 2000, has looked in-depth at several forms of violence, from child abuse and neglect in Romania, Brazil, Kenya, Ghana and Myanmar to commercial sexual exploitation in Cambodia and domestic abuse in Latin America. In each case the fundamental role of families and communities in protecting and empowering children was a core finding.

Addressing violence against children depends on a myriad of responses: from national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donor governments, United Nations (UN) agencies and mechanisms of international law, community leaders, parents and children. Whilst this report does refer to the role of each of these in offering protection to children from violence, its particular focus is on the centrality of families and communities in this. In addition, this research started with the premise that in all communities there are both traditional and modern attitudes and actions that can empower and protect children.

From the research perspective, the methodology was designed not only to see in which ways children were at risk of violence, but more particularly:

- to examine the positive ways in which communities support children, their parents and other caregivers;
- to identify concrete examples of the resilience of children to such difficulties; and

- to seek ways to build upon the positive interactions children have with their families, broader community and national bodies.

World Vision does not see children simply as victims of abuse and violence. In keeping with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC),<sup>1</sup> World Vision is firmly committed to the belief that children, through their participation in all matters affecting them, can themselves be agents of change within their communities,<sup>2</sup> and that the perspective of child as victim can often be counter-productive and lead to the disempowerment of children and increased vulnerability to abuse.<sup>3</sup> This perspective had a major impact on the design and implementation of the research. This understanding also has the potential to result in lasting impact on the way in which World Vision programmes in the region and the organisation as a whole works with children.

The CRC, ratified by the three Pacific Island countries (PICs) that form the basis of this study (Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands), provided a framework for the research. Article 19 of the CRC – which obliges States to protect children from violence – was the starting point in determining what constitutes violence and understanding the role of those, at all levels, who are charged with the care and protection of children:

*1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.*

*2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of*

*social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.*

In keeping with the CRC, therefore, the use of the word “violence” in this report incorporates a wide spectrum of action or inaction that affects children in a negative way:

- physical abuse, including all non-accidental physical injury or punishment that places a child at physical risk
- emotional and psychological abuse, which is the “failure to meet the child or young person's need for love and security or psychological need for stimulation and nurturing”<sup>4</sup>
- sexual abuse
- neglect, which is “depriving a child or young person of certain basic needs essential for their safety, health, and normal growth and development”<sup>5</sup>
- exposure to family violence

In addition, violence is also seen in the context of the deeper structural antecedents that might increase the vulnerability of children and young people to abuse or neglect. These are sometimes political, sometimes economic, sometimes relate to a lack of infrastructure for children (such as health care and education) and sometimes relate to cultural and traditional practices that may not be in the child's best interest. World Vision acknowledges the broader concept of violence, but this research is limited largely to what is being termed cultural and social violence.<sup>6</sup>

This report will feed into the United Nations Secretary-General's global study examining violence against children, yet its purpose is far wider. Through this research, World Vision seeks to listen and learn from communities, families and children about how best to protect children from violence and to adjust its programmes and policies appropriately. The research has also provided an important capacity-building opportunity for national office staff who have assisted in developing research methodology and conducting research, in some cases for the first time.

World Vision, as one of the world's largest NGOs and having a clearly articulated vision of building a better

world for children, chose to undertake a study on its programme in the Pacific (in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) as this is a region that is often ignored by the wider international community. Through this study we hope to generate improved responses and interventions to protecting children from violence and to draw attention to the urgent support required for vulnerable families and communities.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, entered into force 1990.

<sup>2</sup>Article 12 of the Convention states that “State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”.

<sup>3</sup>J Kitzinger, 'Who are you kidding? Children, power and the struggle against sexual abuse' in A James and A Prout (eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood, Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, Falmer Press, London, 1997.

<sup>4</sup>Pacific Children's Program (PCP), *Child protection in Vanuatu. A report of a baseline study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices*, Suva, Fiji, June 2003, p1.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p2.

<sup>6</sup>This will be clearly defined in the section titled “Research findings: Understanding violence – cross-cutting themes”. The terms “cultural violence” and “social violence” are preferred to “harmful traditional practices” as the latter term has tended to be applied in a limited way to particular forms of violence.

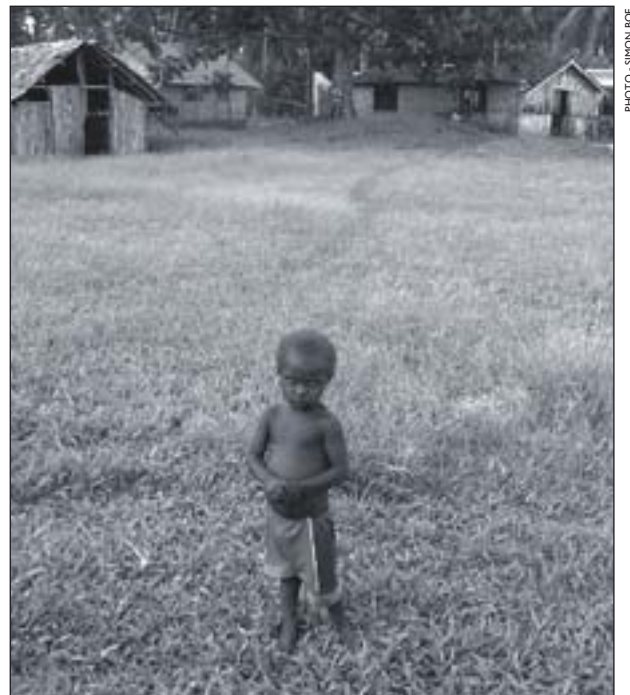


PHOTO: SIMON BOE

*This child from Santo, Vanuatu, is one of many who will benefit from the work of families and communities to protect and empower children.*

## Methodology

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This was not a quantitative study and therefore, extrapolation of numbers for generalisation about any issues was beyond the scope of the research. However, the qualitative activities outlined below did provide an insight into the complexities and richness of childhood and adolescence in the three Pacific Island countries (PICs). It is possible to take lessons learned from these situations for application to other similar contexts.

The methodology was designed by a small team from each of the World Vision country offices as well as members of the Pacific Regional Office, Melanie Gow from World Vision Australia and Karl Dorning from the Burnet Institute, acting as a consultant. As mentioned above, key to the development of the research methodology was the belief in children as active participants in their communities and the fact that most, if not all, cultures have extremely positive methods of nurturing and disciplining children. Thus the development of a key research question aimed to reinforce these concepts from the very beginning. This question was developed after much discussion and was framed in the following way:

*“How can children and their families and communities be supported to reach/develop the child’s full potential?”*

Following this, a series of sub-questions were developed. These sub-questions focused on:

- an understanding of childhood and the role of children in society;
- an analysis of the dynamics between the traditional (*kastom*) system of bringing up children and the non-traditional and/or Western systems, particularly in relation to violence against children;
- gender issues relating to children;
- the impact of change and transition on how children are perceived and treated, particularly the

impact of issues such as economic change (for instance tourism), ethnic conflict, land disputes, rural-to-urban migration, influence of other cultures, natural disasters and HIV/AIDS;

- values, practices and aspirations parents and communities have for their children and that children have for themselves, and how these might be met; and
- the role played by the government and civil society organisations, such as church groups and NGOs, in the nurturing of children.

These key areas were then broken down into further questions appropriate for key informant groups consisting of community leaders, parents and other caregivers, youth and children (*pikinini*).<sup>1</sup>

It was decided that a number of (mostly participative) tools would be used for data collection, including focus group discussions, key informant interviews, mapping, timelines, drawing, seasonal calendars and the writing of diaries by the researchers themselves. In addition to these tools, Activity Days were held in the target communities in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, which served to socialise CRC principles as well as to regain trust amongst community members who were accustomed to being interviewed but felt that their community had not directly benefited from previous research activities. Essentially, the Activity Days comprised sport, games and music for children and youth but also encouraged adult participation through preparation of food and assistance with the planned activities. A sample of these tools is included in Appendix 2. The study also draws on interviews with NGO personnel and secondary sources including other studies that have recently been conducted into the situation of children in these countries (see Appendix 1).

## Ethical considerations

Any research involving children must be carefully constructed and implemented. The following issues were taken into account to ensure that children were in no way adversely affected:

**Informed consent from all, including children:** This included being totally clear about the focus of the research and how information would be used. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and children participated only with parental permission. Photographs were taken only on the understanding that they might be used in documentation about the research and all participants had the option to stop participating in the process at any time and records of interviews destroyed if requested.

**Options for counselling:** We were aware that some children, particularly children in the Solomon Islands who had experienced armed conflict, may still be suffering from related trauma. In addition, when children become engaged in talking about issues of violence and abuse, they will often be reflecting on their own situation. It was decided, therefore, to ensure that all children and adults would be given the option to speak with trained counsellors if required during and after research tasks.

**Child protection:** All staff involved in the research had read and understood World Vision's child protection guidelines (refer Appendix 3) and used this as a basis for conducting interviews and other activities with children.

**Obligation for action:** It was felt that if the research uncovered cases of ongoing abuse of children, there was a responsibility to act on this, keeping in mind the best interests of the child.

**Feedback to community:** In the interest of transparency, it was decided that all findings would be discussed with community members (though, of course, maintaining individual confidentiality).

## Challenges and limitations

**Limited time:** There are limitations to all studies and this was no exception. Time is always the enemy; there is never enough of it and there is always more information that is waiting to be collected. Lack of time dictated the small sample size that was used, two communities in each country representing (to the extent possible) urban and rural settings in each. Means of communication in PICs can at times provide challenges for the sharing of information between countries, such as delays with emails or the

inability to email large documents. This is a structural issue specific to particular countries and which will continue to limit independent research efforts until there is government support for upgrading lines of communication.

**Land disputes:** The research team in Vanuatu experienced a setback due to a land dispute within the first rural community. As they needed the full support of the community, another rural community was identified. This reduced the time available but also indicated the very real impact of such problems on the lives of community members.

**All for one and one for all:** Even though separate activities were developed for different age groups, it was not unusual for everyone in the rural community to want to be involved in everything. To a certain extent this affected the openness with which people (children and adults) could speak about issues affecting them.

**Impact on staff:** Finally, it must be acknowledged that this was a very difficult issue to deal with. In retrospect, during the organisation of this study there was little time given to consider the impact of this kind of research on the researchers (most of whom were nationals of the three countries) and who themselves may either be survivors of violence or implicit in some ways in violent acts. During a discussion with Elizabeth Cox<sup>2</sup> following the data collection, it was noted that violence within families in PNG is an extremely common phenomenon and that there were few families that are untouched. Assuming that this is the case, then it is fair to assume that data collectors themselves would have had mixed feelings and emotions about collecting such information and this could have had an impact on the way in which data was collected and reported. To ensure that any negative consequence is addressed, staff will be fully debriefed and counselling offered when and if necessary.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this study, and in concurrence with the CRC, children are defined as being under the age of 18. *Pikinini* are pre-adolescent children and youth adolescents to the age of 25 or, in some cases more (depending on marital status etc). For this study two groups of children/youth were engaged – *pikinini* from 7 to 12 years old and youth from 13 to 18 years of age.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Cox has worked in PNG doing community development for over 30 years. Most recently she has worked with ESCPA, UNICEF and ECPAT to undertake research on the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and has also supported research by Human Rights Watch on police brutality.

## Country and community context

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Whilst each country included in this study has its own experience of history and culture that is inherently unique, there are a number of cross-cutting themes and issues common to all which have implications for addressing violence against children.

This study has chosen to focus on what is identified as cultural and social violence. However, it is recognised that there are many forms of violence that impact the lives of children – economic, structural and political, for example. Reflecting this, the country and community context in which children live impacts and influences their development. For instance, what access do children have to school, to health services? What awareness or training is being undertaken on issues of violence in the community? Are youth offered viable employment, vocational training, or access to secondary and tertiary education? This section outlines briefly some of the primary contextual issues important for understanding the countries and communities of the children and families in this study.

### Vanuatu

Vanuatu comprises 83 islands that extend 1,176kms in a north–south direction. Its total land mass is relatively small, covering 14,760 square kilometres.<sup>1</sup> Currently, the population of Vanuatu is approximately 207,000 with 98.7% of the total population being Ni-Vanuatu. Approximately 50% of the total population is under 18 years of age. The annual national population growth rate is high by international standards, being at an average of 2.6% (urban 4.2% and rural 2.2%).<sup>2</sup> Whilst the fertility rate has declined over the past 30 years, it is still high at 4.8% and the size of the total population is still increasing. Amongst families in communities with which World Vision Vanuatu (WVV) works in Espiritu Santo and Tanna, it is common to have between four and nine children. A study conducted under the Vanuatu Young People's

Project (VYPP) during the late 1990s predicted that the number of employable people in Vanuatu could increase by 95% between 1991 and 2011.<sup>3</sup> The high population growth rate, in conjunction with the fact that almost half of the population are children, is of concern as economic opportunities are not increasing to match this growth. Young people predominantly face unemployment or under-employment. If they are employed, they may face issues such as being paid insufficiently, poor working conditions and issues associated with self-employment.<sup>4</sup>

Agriculture provides the majority of the population (about 80%) with a livelihood that is predominantly subsistence-based, with farmers making a very modest income from exporting or selling to the local market; agricultural products include copra, beef, cocoa, kava, vanilla and root crops.<sup>5</sup> However, Vanuatu has been experiencing an export deficit. The great reliance on imported consumer goods such as rice, clothing, processed food, electrical goods and vehicles, medical supplies, fuel, machinery and industrial materials keeps the cost of living relatively high. Tourism is another significant productive sector that provides employment for Ni-Vanuatu young people. With 2005 designated as “Year of Tourism”, the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu is focused on further developing the tourism industry. While national legislation provides some protection for children from exploitation in formal employment, prevention of exploitation in non-formal employment still requires considerable attention.

With the population dispersed over 65 islands, which have rugged and mountainous terrain, and almost 80% of people residing in rural areas, the challenge of ensuring equal access to social services (such as health and education), the media, communication channels and the markets is immense. This isolation is further complicated by the fact that the country is disaster-prone, with a large proportion of its total population exposed to earthquakes and

tropical cyclones.<sup>6</sup> In addition, there are active volcanoes that contribute to the destruction of crops and water quality by causing acid rain, as well as the threat posed by eruption.<sup>7</sup>

Literacy levels are about 66% for the total population. Educational opportunities are limited in Vanuatu, with high repetition and drop-out (push-out) rates due to a number of reasons, including parents being unable to pay school fees and the few places available at secondary level.<sup>8</sup> Access to secondary school is particularly difficult, with the average transition rate from Year 6 to Year 7 over the past five years being 48%.<sup>9</sup> There is difficulty in accessing schools in isolated areas and very low access to tertiary education.<sup>10</sup>

Despite some improvements in primary health care (PHC), there are still a number of significant health problems facing children. The limited ability of teenage girls to prevent unplanned pregnancies can be partly demonstrated by the significant increase in the number of teenage mothers over the past five years. This increase is significant in comparison to the number of mothers aged 20 and above during the same period.<sup>11</sup> In relation to developed countries, the infant mortality rate is high at 66 per 1,000 live births.<sup>12</sup>

Access to a healthy and safe water supply as well as to safe methods of sanitation is still a challenge for a number of isolated rural communities and overcrowded urban settlements. Other health issues commonly affecting children are skin diseases, low weight, acute respiratory infections (ARIs) and malaria. The most common causes of death for children aged below one year are neo-natal conditions, respiratory infections, diseases of the nervous system and infectious/parasitic diseases. For children aged between one and 14 years, the most common causes of death are infectious and parasitic diseases.<sup>13</sup>

The nation's first Prime Minister, Father Walter H. Lini, demonstrated government support for the rights of children on 30 September 1990 when he signed the *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* at the World Summit for Children.<sup>14</sup> Following this, the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu ratified the CRC in 1992.

#### **Shapi community**

Espiritu Santo is the largest island in Vanuatu in land size<sup>15</sup> and has the second largest population, at 30,900. Here, two communities were selected for this research, as



PHOTO - ANTONIA KAUZ

Children from the Jarailan community, Vanuatu.

World Vision Vanuatu (WVV) has developed solid relationships with communities by implementing various projects over the past decade.

Shapi is a community in Luganville, which is the second largest urban centre with a population of about 3,000. WVV projects are typically based in rural areas, but an urban community was also selected to enable comparisons with the selected rural community. WVV staff are well acquainted with the various religious leaders in the community, which made initial consultations easier.

With over 500 households, Shapi comprises a complex mixture of religions and indigenous cultures from different islands within a single area. There are about 150 children under the age of five years, 713 children aged between five and 12 years, 200 youth between 13 and 17 years of age, and 175 youth aged between 18 and 25 years. Community leadership is represented through church leaders (Presbyterian, Catholic, Anglican, Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Ministry Centre and Assemblies of God), various chiefs either from Santo or from other islands, women's groups and youth groups. People have moved from various islands, for example, Pentecost, Maewo, and Ambae, and from other parts of Santo, to be in town for a variety of reasons including: employment opportunities; access to education and health services; churches and other religious sectarian movements; sports facilities and associations; and cultural groups.

The main forms of a livelihood for the people of Shapi include: producing agricultural products for family consumption and for selling; managing or working in a shop; owning or managing a kava bar; and cooking meals at the town markets. Available services include: four pre-schools; three primary schools; a dispensary; three high schools (Years 7–10); easy access to the hospital, police station and law courts in Luganville; transport infrastructure; electricity; water supply; and lines of communication (phone, radio, television). Transport is either in the form of walking, private taxis or getting a lift (effectively sharing private vehicles). Youth who have not had a complete formal education have access to a Rural Training Centre and training initiatives run by local NGOs. In terms of further education, there is a University of the South Pacific (USP) sub-centre in Luganville and just outside are a few colleges for further education. Some students also have access to the newly established Vanuatu Agriculture College.

Other services include the Samna Counselling Centre in Luganville, which provides training and workshops on

raising awareness of domestic violence to communities on a demand-driven basis. The centre's staff conducts training of trainers (TOT), which enables women to facilitate the workshops in neighbouring communities. Legal advice is also provided. A girls' club has recently been established at the Foundation of the People of the South Pacific (FSP) Youth Drop-in Centre in Luganville. Weekly meetings are held on topics ranging from early childhood development (ECD), first aid, electrical mechanics, personal health and other life skills. The meetings are targeted at girls aged between 15 and 25 years.

### **Jarailan community**

WVV approached the Jarailan community, having previously conducted Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) training with community members as well as facilitating two functional literacy classes. Situated in the south-west area of Espiritu Santo, Jarailan is just under one hour from Luganville. The total population is approximately 450, with 62 households. There are 140 children under five years of age, 104 children aged between five and 12 years, 33 youth aged between 13 and 17 years, and 32 youth above the age of 18 years. It must be noted that this disaggregation of data based on age is a very close approximation as a significant number of children and youth do not know their own age (especially the ones that were born in the homes instead of a health facility).

Community leadership is represented through the customary chief system (Paramount Chief and Assistant Chief), religious leaders (one pastor, deaconess, a female church elder), church board members, two women's groups, youth leaders, and members of various committees. (See Appendix 1 for a diagram of the community structure.) Community members, including children, are very respectful to the Paramount Chief and pastor and often seek their counsel for problems that may arise.

People's livelihoods in the community are predominantly based around gardening to produce food for their families and maintaining kava, taro and copra plantations. Older children manage their parents' kava plantations, and the money made from the produce goes to the child's education or supports the family, such as in times of illness.

Children and youth of Jarailan have access to: a pre-school and primary school; basic health facilities in the form of an aid post that was previously supported by Rotary; a functioning water system; a nearby Rural Training Centre (for school leavers without a formal education); and basic transport and communication infrastructure (radio within

the community and access to a telephone four kilometres away). About 84 children currently attend school. WVV holds two literacy classes in the area, which a few children of Jarailan attend as they have dropped out of school or still have problems with reading and writing despite going to school.

A village health worker (VHW) has been working at the community's aid post for about eight years and has seen great improvements in the health of Jarailan's children as a result of the national government's immunisation programme. However, the VHW faces ongoing challenges in maintaining adequate medical supplies to treat common ailments such as chest infections/mild colds, fever,<sup>16</sup> and sores (boils and other skin infections). A clinic that the community uses for more serious accidents or health issues is situated three kilometres away from the village. It is an issue if someone needs to access the hospital urgently, due to a lack of reliable transport. While there is a water supply system installed, the community has been experiencing problems with it due to it not being properly constructed in the first instance and a lack of maintenance over the years.

Whilst the Samna Counselling Centre has training to raise awareness of domestic violence in the South Santo area, the Jarailan community has not yet requested this training.

## Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands are spread over a geographical area of 249,000 square nautical miles, with a population of approximately 450,000 people, and the country has 80 distinct languages. Ethnic unrest in 1998–2002 arrested development in the Solomon Islands and the government became largely dysfunctional. Many services, such as school and medical supplies, stopped altogether and there was no effective law enforcement. While the unrest primarily affected the people of Guadalcanal Province, other provinces also suffered.

The sheer number of islands, language groups and cultural identities poses challenges for the delivery of effective basic services that have a primary impact on the well-being of children. As with neighbouring Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands are prone to natural disasters, lying on an earthquake belt containing a number of active volcanoes and being vulnerable to cyclones. Such conditions provide obvious challenges in ensuring the development of services that benefit children, particularly schools and health centres. With only 16% of the population residing in

urban and peri-urban areas, it is partly the hope of access to services that has led to increasing rural-to-urban migration over the past decade.<sup>17</sup>

The Solomon Islands have a rapid population growth rate: approximately 30 to 40 children are born every day. Many of these children, from both rural and urban areas, have poor access to government services. Demand for basic government services such as education, health care, sanitation, access to clean drinking water, and communication, is greater than the government's current capacity to deliver. Only some 30% of children finish secondary school.<sup>18</sup> Several NGOs and churches also provide basic services but there are still many families for whom these services are inaccessible.

Solomon Islands children can be categorised into three groups according to their level of access to services. The group with low-level access are those children who have no access to education, most of whom live in rural areas. The group with medium-level access comprises those who sometimes travel with their parents to towns where services are available. The group with high-level access have consistent access to government services and often live in or near urban areas. Children with low and medium access to services are considered most vulnerable. Given that 85%<sup>19</sup> of the population live in rural communities, this means a significantly high proportion of Solomon Islands children fall into the vulnerable category.

Whilst the health and education sectors have received the largest proportion of government budgets, there are numerous challenges to the formal education of children and young people in the Solomon Islands. Education is not compulsory, nor is it free, and this must be seen as an immediate deterrent – particularly for poor families who may have to choose between sending a child to school and meeting daily survival needs.

According to a recent report, 44.5% of boys and 54.6% of girls aged above 15 no longer attend school (the majority of these in rural areas) and the upper achievement for most is the completion of primary education.<sup>20</sup> This is of extreme concern to girls in particular, as the literacy rate for women is only 17%. Non-formal educational initiatives exist and focus on increasing basic literacy programmes and cultural and traditional training, as well as more focused skills acquisition programmes to increase employment opportunities. In addition, some UN programmes stress the importance of life skills education.<sup>21</sup>

The Solomon Islands ratified the CRC in 1995.

### **Veuru community**

The Veuru community is situated on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, 120 kilometres from Honiara, the capital city of the Solomon Islands. This community has encountered many hardships. It was seriously affected by the ethnic tensions and was divided, with half of the community supporting the militants and the remaining population taking a neutral stance. The victims are slowly recovering emotionally, however the daily life of the village is still adversely affected by the impact of the ethnic tension. Church groups in the area have supplied some access to trauma counselling.

Landslides, flooding, poor infrastructure, limited access to government services and high prevalence of basic health needs are constant challenges facing this community. Access to health services is insufficient and compounded by poor communication and sanitation.

The children in this particular community have limited access to basic services, whether provided by the government or NGOs. They have no access to education and the literacy rate is as low as 5%.<sup>22</sup>

The main daily activities that children undertake are gardening and fishing, and there is very little in terms of social activities. They are also used as babysitters, and are expected to buy cigarettes, and more, when ordered by their parents. Children in the Veuru community are still afraid to move around freely as they did prior to the ethnic tension.

World Vision Solomon Islands has run literacy programmes in this community in the past, and has an ongoing relationship with continued programming here until at least 2007.

### **Fulisango and Feraladoa communities**

The Fulisango and Feraladoa communities are on the eastern edge of Honiara and are considered transitional communities populated by people coming to Honiara from rural areas. This type of migration is an increasing trend, particularly for youth seeking employment opportunities and money. The people in these communities often lack the support of *wantok* (literally “one talk” – meaning close friend or family) structures, money and local knowledge. These factors, compounded by the higher cost of living and lack of affordable accommodation in Honiara, mean that people often live in this community out of necessity rather than choice.

The children in these two communities have medium-level access to services such as basic health care, education,

communication services and infrastructure. They also attend school every day and enjoy freedom of movement, travelling to and from school unaccompanied. Children are more included to speak out and express their opinions. This may be a result of their exposure to urban and youth culture through movies, music, clothes and social interaction with other youth. This exposure may also have negative consequences and increase the risk of children becoming involved in or exposed to crime, drugs, alcohol and violence.

Unemployment in this community is high; the main source of income is the growing and selling of produce at the markets. The daily activities for children include helping their parents collect water, gardening, disposing of garbage, cleaning up the home and (for older children) serving as carers for younger children.

## **Papua New Guinea**

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is located in the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, and comprises four large volcanic islands and approximately 600 small islands. PNG has a total land mass of 462, 840 square kilometres and has a rugged terrain with altitudes over 4,000 metres.<sup>23</sup>

PNG is one of the fastest-growing developing countries in the South-West Pacific, having a total population of 5.6 million and an annual growth rate of 2.2%. PNG also has one of the highest infant mortality rates (64%) due to the poor health status of women in the country and a poor and often inaccessible health system. The country is young, with the majority (some 70%) of its population being children.

The vast majority of PNG's children live in rural areas; however, there is an increasing number of people migrating to the urban areas due to the deteriorating state of essential services such as health, education and basic infrastructure. This migration is causing an expansion of unplanned settlements with inadequate services and a dependency on cash income to meet basic household needs.

The PNG government officially ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, without reservation, in March 1993.

### **Mahuru and Keisi communities**

Mahuru and Keisi villages are typical Port Moresby urban setting communities; apart from the traditional Motu-Koitabu land owners, the majority of people are migrants who represent second, third and fourth generations. These

communities are dependent on cash income and have limited access to arable land.

Mahuru village has a total of 33 households and a population of approximately 300 people. On average there are nine members in Mahuru households. The total population under 18 years of age is 148 and only 30% of the communities are engaged in income-generating activities.

Keisi village has a smaller population of approximately 180 people and has a total of 26 households with an average of six members per household. Keisi village has an entire population of migrants and only 7% of the population is engaged in income-generating activity. There are over 80 children living in the settlement.

Like much of PNG, the Mahuru and Keisi communities generally live in extended family groups, and overcrowding is a major problem as communities have a high population density. Unemployment in these communities is relatively high with 80% of the population unemployed. According to the 2000 National Census data, some 35% of children attend school.<sup>24</sup> World Vision PNG is currently partnering with this community to build capacity in income-generating activities.

#### **Meiwok and Ulingan communities**

Meiwok and Ulingan are neighbouring villages located within the Almahmi local-level government in the Bogia District of Madang Province. The area is approximately 140 kilometres north-east of Madang town. Both villages are located along the coast. Subsistence agriculture continues to be the central way of life in these communities and a main source for generating cash income to purchase basic necessities.

Meiwok has a population of approximately 302 people and a total of 37 households with an average household size of eight people. The majority of the population grows its own food and 64% are engaged in income-generating activity. The total number of children in the community is 183.

Ulingan village has a total population of 203 and a total of 33 households with an average household size of six people. Eighty-four percent of people grow their own food and also engage in income-generating activities. There are 125 children in the community. The Meiwok and Ulingan communities are traditional coastal communities with fishing, hunting, gardening and cash cropping still very much part of their daily routine. Only 50% of children attend school.

#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, *The state of health behaviour and lifestyle of Pacific youth. Vanuatu report 2001*, Suva, Fiji, 2001, p25.

<sup>2</sup> National Statistics Office, *The 1999 Vanuatu national population and housing census. Main report*, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 2000, p39; Ministry of Education, *Education for all: Vanuatu national plan of action 2002–2006*, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> J Mitchell, *Young people speak... A report on the Vanuatu Young People's Project*, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Port Vila, Vanuatu, April 1997 – June 1998, p iii.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p vi.

<sup>5</sup> About 85% of exports are agricultural products.

<sup>6</sup> UNDP, *Reducing disaster risk: A challenge for development. A global report*, 2004; E Tari, *A situation analysis of children and women in Vanuatu 1998*, UNICEF Pacific, Fiji and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 1998, p3.

<sup>7</sup> The islands of Ambae and Ambrym have recently experienced such problems with volcanic activity.

<sup>8</sup> Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, Division of Policy and Planning Services, Department of Education, Primary and Secondary Statistics, *Annual report year 2000*, p14.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p17.

<sup>10</sup> E Tari, *op. cit.*, pp38–46.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics provided by the antenatal ward, Vila Central Hospital, June 2005.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, *op. cit.*, p25.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p29.

<sup>14</sup> National Children's Committee, *Vanuatu country end of decade report*, presented to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session, Port Vila, Vanuatu, December 2000, p3.

<sup>15</sup> The land size of Espiritu Santo is 3,677 square kilometres.

<sup>16</sup> Fever is most often first diagnosed as malaria and so the VHW's records show a high rate of malaria amongst community members. However, WVW researchers were later advised by a volunteer pharmacist, who trains dispensary workers, that fever is not always attributable to malaria and that aid post and dispensary workers can be overly cautious about malaria.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Health and Medical Services, *The comprehensive review of health services report*, Honiara, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> AusAID's *Pacific Regional Aid Strategy 2004–2009*.

<sup>19</sup> Solomon Islands Government, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> I Scales, *Youth in Solomon Islands: A participatory study of issues, needs and priorities*, Hassall and Associates International, Canberra, Australia, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, *The education for all 2000 assessment: Country reports: Solomon Islands*, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> World Vision Solomon Islands research, *Women's literacy project*, 2004–2007.

<sup>23</sup> PNG Government and UNICEF, *Situation analysis*, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> *National census, 2000*, Papua New Guinea, 2000.

## Research findings: Understanding violence – cross-cutting themes

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Whilst data collected in the course of this research cannot necessarily be generalised across the three countries, communities were chosen to represent the situation of children in both rural and urban settings of each. Thus, while findings are specific to the context of those particular communities, it is fair to suggest that the situations described are common for many children. As discussed previously, the research aims to contribute to the UN Study on Violence Against Children, and in particular to share “ideas for action to prevent and reduce such violence and to suggest ways in which these might be strengthened at local, national, and international levels”.

Understanding a notion such as violence is not always an easy task. There were many differing views on what constituted violence across the six communities that were surveyed. It must be acknowledged, too, that although the researchers for the study were nationals of their respective countries, some involved in the write-up and analysis of data for this report were from other cultures and, therefore, all involved had their own particular bias. Hence, as a basis for analysis, this report is grounded in the *Convention of the Rights of the Child*. However, even this has limitations; as we will see, there is no common understanding even of what constitutes a child.

In the end, violence and children is an extremely emotive issue. Many of us who read this report will be parents ourselves, and we will all have been children – hopefully, we still are, at least at heart. Many of us will have experienced situations in which we have been the objects of violence by members of our own families or others. Perhaps some of us have even been the initiators of violence. The aim of this report is not to be judgemental. Rather, it aims to contribute to understanding what is in the best interests of the child from all perspectives: the child's first and foremost, the parents', the community's and the nation's. And from all of those perspectives, this report aims to identify clear

and appropriate steps that will enable individuals and communities as a whole to build societies in which the human rights and dignity of children, young people and adults alike are respected and honoured.

There were numerous areas relating to violence and children that were beyond the scope of this small research project. We did not, for example, seek to comprehensively address issues of commercial sexual exploitation of children, or violence against youth by the police, an issue that is becoming particularly concerning in PNG at the present.<sup>1</sup> Nor did we look in detail at the impact of the conflict on children in the Solomon Islands or the trauma of children involved in armed conflict.

In Vanuatu, a baseline study of knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices (KABP) related to child protection issues was conducted under the Pacific Children's Program.<sup>2</sup> According to this study, physical and emotional abuse of children is common in Vanuatu, with 73% of respondents seeing or hearing abuse in various forms. The study found that most children may experience a form of physical or verbal violence from parents, peers and other adults with the frequency, severity and impact of the act of violence culturally defining whether it was abuse. Extreme cases of violence are culturally considered to be most destructive.

Though there is reference to these and other determinants of violence in this report, including those that are economic and political, the focus of the research was on communities, families and individuals and the social and cultural worlds in which they live and grow. In part, this was to address a lack of empirical research in this area. But equally importantly, the research aimed to identify long-term and sustainable solutions to the violence visited upon children, through identifying factors in their everyday environment that can contribute to their well-being and protection:

most importantly, their family, neighbours and community – resources that already exist and have a vested interest in the nurture of the young.

We have defined cultural and social violence as a form of violence emanating from detrimental traditional practices that govern the understanding of childhood and the socialisation of children. It indicates an acceptance of violent behaviour towards children based on learned experience and inter-generational sharing. We call this cultural and social because we recognise that not all negative practices are cultural but rather have become socially acceptable regardless of the initial source or origin. There are many factors or cross-cutting themes that precipitate or contribute to this social and cultural violence, which are often linked.

Violence against children is often sanctioned by culture (*kastom* and religion) and, in the form of discipline, is sometimes seen as the most effective way of correcting children. This ingrained attitude towards the way society treats children is often the most difficult to challenge and change as it is based on tradition and it has “worked” in the past.

Sometimes violence is brought about by cultural practices that have, in the past, not been harmful or indeed have even supported the well-being of children. The custom of bride price is one example where in the past (before a monetary economy) the well-being of the bride and her family was ensured through the practice. Traditionally, the practice of bride price is a means of cementing social relationships between clans. The groom's family demonstrates its appreciation of the bride's family giving away its daughter by offering gifts. However, with the introduction of a cash economy, the bride has become more of a commodity than a symbol of positive social relations as she is exchanged for money rather than culturally and socially significant items. Today, moreover, it is increasingly leaving girls vulnerable to early marriage, sexual abuse, exposure to sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) and unwanted pregnancy, as well as being seen as an economic chattel.

Of particular importance in PNG (and perhaps to a slightly lesser degree in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) is the role that adoption practice plays in increasing the child's vulnerability to violence. In the past, traditional adoptions, like the practice of bride price, brought families and communities together and the well-being of the child was generally of paramount importance. The informal adoption practices that prevail today do not only happen within the extended family, but extend also into other casual arrangements outside of the family. Such adoptions are not regulated or approved by the State and in many cases take place against the wishes of one of the natural parents.

There is a current friction between aspects of modern law and traditional ways that has the potential to cause division within communities and which, in turn, will have an impact on the best interest of the child.

There are structural determinants of violence towards children. These include the nature of governance and transitional economy which, though different in each country, has resulted in political and armed conflict, corruption and a lack of viable education and health services for children and families. Structural determinants also include a lack of a clear legal and judicial framework (in terms of policy and practice) that both protects children and provides them space to articulate their own needs and aspirations.

The following sections will look in detail at each of these dimensions and provide specific recommendations that will address harmful practices and look for ways to increase the well-being of children.

## **Perceptions of childhood – its changing nature**

Childhood is a changing phenomenon. Biologically, the growth of children follows a standard progression, but there is much literature today that would suggest the period of life known as childhood is socially constructed.<sup>3</sup> By that, we mean that the way in which children are perceived, treated, spoken to, thought about and written about is not predetermined and has not always been the same. It is affected by changing social norms, historical events, economic realities, and much more.

Life for children in the Pacific is, at this point in time, undergoing a great deal of change. This has been brought about by myriad factors including the transition of Pacific economies, urbanisation and what many see as the associated erosion of cultural values that have for so long sustained and nurtured the lives of children and adults alike. Even practices commonly accepted in many parts of the world, such as the compulsory schooling of children, were not always held in high esteem by respondents of this study. Indeed, a number saw that modern education brought children into conflict with the established customs upon which the family and the community have been based for generations.

It is important to understand the way in which people within cultures and societies perceive children and the way in which childhood is constructed socially, as it helps to understand why people behave the way they do towards children and to identify behaviours that may be harmful to

children and why. The study, therefore, sought a broad range of opinions about children and the changing nature of childhood, including the insights of children and young people themselves.

Religious leaders saw a child as a gift from God. Most saw that children were dependent upon their parents for security, comfort and emotional support, as well as the more obvious basic needs such as food and shelter. Others saw that a child was the “result of a man and woman living together” or a reproduction of oneself. Some defined childhood according to age: “a child is between the age of 0 and 12” or referred to it as the “learning age”, or, said “a child becomes an adult after 18 when he puts into practice what he has learned”.

Generally, in PNG, children are valued as sources of group strength in clan lineages. However, the most important value of children throughout PNG is found in the social theme of reciprocity where the old age security is the responsibility of grown children to care for the elderly parents. The economic value of children for their potential labour is not particularly significant in traditional communities. Preference regarding gender varies by culture. In many cultural groups, the child's health, strength and physical appearance are believed to derive from the child's environment and the type of upbringing. The majority of adult respondents in PNG felt that being talkative, loving and playful were characteristics of childhood.

In Vanuatu, some adults saw children as a resource for the future. One respondent said:

*“[children] cannot tell the difference between right and wrong so therefore parents must have to teach them about some good principles such as: children must obey their parents and elderly people; children must obey and respect their teacher at school; children must not use bad words when they get angry with another child; children must have respect for elderly people.”*

– a rural participant, Vanuatu

Leaders saw the role of the community as providing care and protection for their children along with good teaching in order for them to develop to their full potential. Respect was seen as a key quality for children to develop as it was respect that held together the community custom, traditions and laws. Some community leaders identified the importance of respect being reciprocal:

*“A child is a picture of a parent therefore parents must take responsibility to care for their child.”*

– community religious leader, Vanuatu

Rural and urban respondents alike felt that cultural values were important (both traditional and religious). There was an acknowledgement that these values were changing as a result of modernity. One parent in Vanuatu mentioned that a child is more broad-minded at the present time as society is being influenced by the modern education system. Some parents noted that children from rural areas were more respectful than their urban counterparts, even though the urban child would be more intelligent. Such statements are reflective of one of the ever-present struggles with countries in transition from traditional societies to capitalist economies:

*“Knowledge is what children learn from school today, but still children do not respect. Whereas before there was not much education for all but still the people were wise enough.”*

– community member, Vanuatu

Associated with this was a reflection of the increasing individualism being brought by this transition that was also having an impact on *kastom* and respect:

*“With the life before, people grew up in nakamals [meeting places] whereas in this day people grow up individuals.”*

– community member, Vanuatu

Also, there is a lament for a time and a place that soon may be only a distant memory when people, families and communities knew self-sufficiency and how to live from the land and the sea:

*“And also, before, people did not need to spend much money, because they can find their own food, either by hunting or growing their own food in the garden. In this present time, children are not capable enough to do those things again on their own.”*

– community member, Vanuatu

*“The nature of my childhood is totally different from the childhood now because there are too many attractions that can bring youth and children into problems. Now I can see that there are too many young girls who are getting pregnant at a younger age and the population of Shapi is growing. The values and practices*

*that are important are that parents should encourage the children to go to church, talk to them about family life and provide them with a job.”*

– one teacher from Shapi, Vanuatu

The rural community in the Solomon Islands had strong responses relating to cultural changes to childhood being positive, with particular mention of changes such as the establishment of a school in the village and access to literacy programmes. The research findings indicate that life for children in the rural community has been improved by these new services. The urban community in the Solomon Islands, however, felt strongly that cultural changes to childhood were bad. This was interesting as the urban community generally has better access to services than the rural community. The data indicates a level of struggle for children within this urban community and may also reflect the negatives associated with urbanisation in combination with the impact of Western culture, both of which are seen as having negative effects for childhood.

Caregivers and community leaders felt that the child had clearly defined responsibilities both within the family and within the community as a whole. Most of these required the child to act in a particular way, such as to obey and show respect, to help in family chores, to run errands, to be the “right hand of the mother” whether a boy or a girl. In PNG, almost all parents interviewed said that they gave children small jobs such as washing, fetching water, gardening and fishing. Though in some instances, this assignment of tasks for children in urban areas occurred less frequently than in rural settings. Some saw such responsibility as being clearly defined along gender lines:

*“Girls have to help the mother to do the housework, for example, cooking, washing, sweeping the house, cleaning the yard and taking their younger brother or sister to school. Boys must help their father with responsibilities such as collecting firewood, working in the garden, bringing food from the garden and hunting.”*

– respondent from rural area, PNG

But children's other responsibilities came from the virtue of being children in a family, reflected in comments such as, “A child acts as a bond of marriage between the parents” or, “A child's presence can solve problems (such as arguments) because of their existence”. Children were also seen as an influence on the community in that they ensured

that community activities were constructed around them, such as the choir or sporting competition – events that brought people together.

Equally, the responsibilities of the parents were well defined, particularly in the rural setting where they were seen as having a job to earn money to meet the cost of living, farming to produce root crops for marketing and domestic use, paying school fees for the children, management of the family and discipline of children at home. In the rural area studied, the family was seen very clearly in its extended form, made up of father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunty, grandfather and grandmother. The role of the extended family, too, was to ensure that a child was cared for and not just the responsibility of the biological parent.

The concept of community is particularly important in the rural context where:

*“Community and village are the same because it is made up of families coming together. They are people with the same customary laws and beliefs.”*

– community leader, Vanuatu

Children themselves viewed childhood in a multitude of ways. In the Solomon Islands, words such as happy, playful and inquisitive were used as well as noisy, lazy, aggressive and mocking. Children in Vanuatu who were asked, “What does it mean to be a child?” answered in a similar fashion: to play, to go to school, to hunt and help in the family. Girls noted that they take on responsibility at an early age. One girl in Vanuatu noted that she began looking after her baby sister when she was only seven years old herself. Others noted that their responsibilities in the house started from a very young age, for example helping their mother around the house at four, cooking and gardening at the age of six. They noted that when their mother was not at home they had to take on that role.

Rural youth from Vanuatu involved in the study noted that the responsibility of small children was to go to school to learn and go out with friends. They felt that there were a number of differences between childhood today and in the past, noting that previously a child grew up in an environment where there are not many people around but that, with the population growth today, there was a marked increase in the number of children in the community. This made it more difficult to control children or to discipline them when parents might say one thing only to be undermined by a member of the extended family

or another adult in the community. They noted too that in the past children tended to obey their parents much more than the present time:

*“...because they are scared of being smacked. Whereas today, children do not listen to their parents because education has got an influence on them.”*

– youth respondent, Vanuatu

They also said that a child is a bond that holds a family together.

## Participation of children and young people

Closely linked to the way in which children are perceived or “socially constructed” is the way in which children participate in both family and community life. Article 12 of the CRC states that:

*State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

Whilst it was obvious from the data collected that communities value, love and nurture their children, and that they do participate (often without choice) in numerous activities within the family and community context, the opportunity for children and young people to voice their opinions or perspectives was extremely limited. This was true across all countries.

One increasingly pressing concern arising from the study is the lack of space for the participation of children and youth in any form of decision making. Whilst there are forums in which community issues are discussed they are (adult) male-dominated and do not, as a rule, give any space for the voice of children or youth. This is of particular importance to youth, struggling to come to terms with influences of modernity, both through the formal education system as well as through exposure to the media and contact with foreign ideas through tourism and other facets of the increasingly global economy. This research project is not the only one to come to such findings as the following suggests:

*“The participation of youth and women threatens the ‘custom’ that describes the*

*participation in community decision making as the preserve of older males. Young people often expressed the active undercutting by older males of their assuredness to speak in public meetings. Attempting to ‘mainstream’ youth, especially young women, into village governance systems that are if anything even more conservative now, will be difficult.”<sup>4</sup>*

Listening to children and youth is particularly important in urban areas where they are faced with what some might argue to be the darker side of modernity: alcohol and drug abuse and criminal activity. Such problems that significantly affect the young cannot be dealt with in isolation from their thoughts, insights and solutions.

Most respondents felt that it was important for children to have some responsibilities in the house and these, particularly in the rural area, were differentiated by gender. Girls would help their mother around house (sweeping, cooking and cleaning), mind siblings and tend the garden. Boys generally helped their fathers collecting firewood, working in the garden, bringing food from the garden and hunting. There was no clear indication through the data that children were exploited in these activities. Rather, children seemed to be proud that they were participating in “adult” activities. For instance, the use of knives by children at a young age in Vanuatu was thought of as positive by the children interviewed, as they were more like their parents.

Both rural and urban communities in the Solomon Islands listed the home as a place where children can participate in activities and decision making. Urban respondents listed a larger range of places including church, school, and youth groups, which may indicate that the urban community offers children more of a voice outside the home. This was a general impression gathered from the children’s responses as a whole, as urban children tended to be far more outspoken and articulate about their situation than their rural counterparts.

Data from PNG indicated a greater burden of work for children and young people. Well over half of the urban adult respondents mentioned that children contributed to the economy of the family through selling small goods such as betel nut and cigarettes. It was also mentioned that children help in the community and the garden (where families have access to one). Similar data was collected from the rural respondents but with a larger number saying that their children helped the family in cash cropping in their gardens.

Children and young people mentioned that much of the work they contributed to the home was done without parental supervision (even young children eight or nine years old). Girls' tasks included washing dishes and clothes, cooking and fetching water as part of their daily activities. Babysitting was also another major daily activity. Boys, on the other hand, spent time collecting firewood, hunting, fishing and gardening (clearing land).

In summary then, as in most societies, children of these three countries are seen in a variety of ways:

- in a religious sense, as a gift from god and an expression of a marital relationship
- as an economic unit of the family
- as someone who can take responsibility for the care of siblings
- as small people who like to play and are characterised by a spirit of joy and exuberance and who need to be moulded to understand the importance of respect and tradition

Within each of these perceptions, there is the potential for the best interests of the child to be promoted. At the same time, there is an equal potential for violence or the abuse of children's rights; for example, whilst it may be appropriate for children to play some role in family chores or even assist in some elements of the formal and informal economy, the overworking of children, particularly in harmful or heavy tasks, will affect their health, may detract from their ability to access education and is very clearly a breach of law.

Childhood is not static; it is influenced increasingly by the globalisation of economies and ideas. This has the potential to bring individual children into conflict with parents, families and communities. Whilst such conflict is not unique to Melanesian cultures, the fact that each of the countries is in a state of considerable economic and social upheaval would suggest that the potential impact on childhood and conflict is particularly high.

Participation of children and young people in decision making at any level (household, community or national) is unusual. However this study and others (for example, Scales 2003) indicate that there is an increasing need for their voices to be heard. The monumental social changes that are occurring in all countries leave children and youth increasingly open to situations in which they may be the object or, in some cases, the initiator of violence; for example, children in urban settings may be open to abuse

from unemployed and drunkenly violent fathers or male youth in PNG who are no longer able to attend school, unemployed and angry and ready to commit acts of violence themselves. Such issues cannot be blamed solely on individuals. Society and mechanisms of power and governance must ensure that the marginalised (often the victims and perpetrators of violence) have a voice.

## **Kastom and modernity**

*Kastom* is a set of beliefs, practices and values based on stories passed on from generation to generation. The role of *kastom* in defining relationships between generations, genders, island groups and communities is always complex, particularly as cultural heritage varies from district to district and even village to village. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to look in explicit detail at the customary practices and beliefs of each, there are a number of elements of *kastom* that seem to have a similar impact on children in all three countries.

**Religion and *kastom*:** It is very important to note that religion and *kastom* in Melanesia are very closely linked together, often inseparable. A belief or practice that is called "*kastom*" may have its origins with Christianity. Religion, as a source of identity and social support for children, is particularly strong in urban areas where it acts as a unifying mechanism. It brings together people from a mixture of communities from other islands. For children with a particular religious upbringing and who live in communities where *kastom* is strong, a challenge is how to balance their religious beliefs and practices with those of *kastom*, particularly when they are in conflict with each other.<sup>5</sup>

**Children, identity and education:** Children may be able to draw from the more general Melanesian approach to life as a basis for their identity. This is one in which "family members, villages and communities work together to achieve individual and communal goals".<sup>6</sup> Specifically, this is the *wantok* system (literally, "one talk"), which refers to the familial, language and cultural links that bind people together. *Wantok* implies a system of responsibility and obligation that expresses itself in myriad ways, some of which can be advantageous to the well-being of children, while others are not. Traditionally, the *wantok* system (also referred to as the extended family) has formed a kind of social safety net in Melanesian countries for community members who fall upon hard times, particularly children. For example, it is not unusual for a member of a village to care for someone else's child from the same village in order that they can attend school or if a parent is ill or dies.

However for children living in urban areas, especially “illegitimate” children, this system may be very weak or non-existent.

The notion of *kastom* is very much intertwined with responsibility and respect, ideals that are valued extremely highly in all three countries. There is also a feeling that *kastom* influences aspects such as the role of boys and girls (men and women) and the way in which children are disciplined. In summary, the study found that *kastom* teaches a child to:

- show respect to others, elders, and their belongings;
- avoid becoming involved in criminal activities;
- obey their parents;
- pay attention when someone else is speaking;
- be responsible for whatever task is given to them;
- preserve the environment for future generations; and
- know more about their tribe and clan practices that enable them to survive in their environment (urban/rural).

**Gender:** In traditional societies there has been a fairly clear division of labour between genders, with women responsible for weaving, household chores and caring for the children, and men responsible for fishing, constructing houses and warfare.<sup>7</sup> Although there may be a small number of female religious elders and chiefs, men generally have been used to making many decisions and being responsible for speaking in public on behalf of the family and community. Women may be involved in decision making but this is usually carried out in private. There is, therefore, reluctance on the part of women and, particularly, children to speak openly about sensitive issues such as abuse.

The cultural construction of gender also has a particular impact on girls who, in the past, have been seen as of marrying age when they begin to menstruate. Furthermore, girls are traditionally given roles in the home such as cleaning, cooking, raising siblings and gardening and, due to this, often have less access to education than boys. Boys with greater educational opportunity are also encouraged to learn skills that will provide them with employment and income-generating possibilities such as fishing. Christian missionaries introduced a dress code to both the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, which consisted of conservative dresses for women, and trousers and shirts for men.

**Chief vs state legal system:** A key element in *kastom* is the role of the chief, which is generally perceived in many

communities of the three study countries as one that maintains law and order, particularly in rural areas. Whilst the behaviour of children is primarily the parents' responsibility, it is not unusual for the chief to take a role in solving problems that move beyond the ability of the family to control. Other community leaders, such as church leaders, teachers and health workers can play a role here too. Again, while such traditional structures can be supportive of children's well-being, they rely very much on the independence of the individuals in roles of power, rather than the state justice system. A religious leader in Vanuatu noted the importance of the chief in ensuring discipline within a community:

*“Kastom always provides discipline if there is a problem within the community. The discipline is always decided by the community chief.”*

A teacher interviewed in Vanuatu supported this view saying that in her village when she was a child, the chief would call the children into the *nakamal* (village hall), with the help of other village elders, to teach them about ways of respect in *kastom* that must be practiced in the community. She also believed very strongly that *kastom* educates children about their own identity.

Solomon Island communities traditionally come under the leadership of the chief or committees of senior community members that are often elected by the community. The role of teaching children about *kastom* is given to parents, elders in the village and in some cases primary schools. Punishment is dealt by parents and, in serious cases, the chief or committee may become involved in determining an appropriate punishment. In the Solomon Islands, parents responded that when a child forms a new friendship the parents or relatives have the right to decide if the friend is suitable.

As with the communities from the other two countries, *kastom* plays an integral part in the complex tapestry of society and everyday life in PNG. Out of the three countries, PNG suffers from perhaps the worst reputation for violence, both as a means of resolving dispute and increasingly as a seemingly random act, perhaps related to poverty, theft or a feeling of dislocation from society, particularly amongst young men and male youth.<sup>8</sup> Respondents' discussion about issues of *kastom* focused around a number of areas (discipline, which was a major area of concern, is discussed in one of the following sections). Half of the urban adult respondents in PNG expressed greater trust in the traditional system of governance (i.e. through the elders and chief) in the resolution

of cases involving the mistreatment of children (child protection) in the community. Only a quarter favoured the modern legal system. This could easily be due to the fact that poor government services mean people lean more towards their form of traditional justice to address such difficult issues. Although rural respondents seemed to show an even greater reliance on traditional (and harsher) disciplinary measures, a far greater number (almost 70%) expressed trust in both systems. Respondents mentioned that they have a community legal system in place in which peace officers or village magistrates are posted to enforce laws. The traditional system is also used to recognise the traditional status of the chief or elder and also to maintain the community's *kastom*.

Papua New Guinean children are traditionally the responsibility of adults within an extended family to care and nurture them. In PNG there are two recognised systems that are practised: customary adoption or fosterage and legal adoption. In most cases they are used to reinforce extended family ties and relationships. Fostered or adopted children then retain rights as members of both lineages. *Kastom* can protect children in many different ways, for example, if a child is adopted into another family when he/she is seen to be abused or the parents are dead. Traditionally, abandoned children are extremely rare. However, the trend is changing nowadays, particularly in the rural areas. *Kastom* can also impose rules on children that give them roles and responsibilities within their village, clan and families. It also delineates relationships between sexes; for example, traditionally in PNG a girl should not be seen playing with boys once she passes the age of 10–12 years old.

PHOTO: FRIEDA KANA / WORLD VISION



*In PNG, kastom can protect children, and shapes their understanding of roles and responsibilities within their village, clan and family.*

**Violence:** In the Solomon Islands, many children spoke of the impact of the conflict. As a result of the civil unrest from 1998 to 2002, many children had their lives and development disrupted. During this time, most children were not able to move around freely and were confined to their home, preventing them attending school and normal daily activities. Many children still experience fearful memories of the unrest, things they saw or were told or from things that happened to them and the way their family was affected. Whilst the communities studied in Vanuatu and PNG had not suffered in the same way, they too had experienced violence as a result of land dispute, ethnic unrest and urbanisation. Such conflict has a definite (and in some cases a long-term) impact on children's health and education, as well as on families on both sides of a conflict. This can result in broken families, loss of income, withdrawal from school, loss of land, injury and even death. Children often carry such trauma with them into their adult lives as well as the more direct impact of being withdrawn from school or falling ill or being injured. In particular, land disputes were often cited as an underlying cause of violence that could lead to division in the family, hatred and even killing.

A number of children and youth in all communities mentioned violence as one of the major challenges facing young people today. They saw that there were elements of *kastom* that increased children's and young people's vulnerability to violence, which included land disputes, bride price and adoption. This did not mean, however, that children did not trust the traditional ways or completely reject them. Indeed, the majority of respondents under 18 years old in Fulisango, Solomon Islands, placed greater trust in the traditional system to stop violence against children; however, a few disagreed (saying the modern system was better) and one mentioned the importance of the CRC. When asked for an example of when *kastom* had protected a child from violence, children related that it had encouraged respect through the paying of compensation. A number mentioned that *kastom* protected girls as they stayed in at night. (This is somewhat contradictory, however, as the only reasons girls need to stay in is due to the threat of violence or sexual abuse, or the risk of becoming involved with a boy and early pregnancy. Staying in does offer protection from all these eventualities, however it does not really address the underlying cause of vulnerability that relates to a lack of safety when going out at night.)

**Adoption:** *Kastom* is open to abuse, particularly in the case of children. For example, it is not uncommon for children to have to work to repay their *wantok* debts or to be forced into early marriage. "Adoption" has been a traditional means through which the community cares

for children who, for various reasons, might be living away from home or who no longer can live in their own homes due to death of a parent or other reasons. Adoption practices and *wantok* are very much intertwined and each country in the study has its own variations on how the system works. Again, whilst in many cases this form of care for children has been effective, it is open to abuse through exploiting the labour of adopted children or in their sexual abuse.

Traditional adoption is becoming a questionable practice as the cash economy changes the nature of work and the need for cheap labour. Children, particularly in PNG, are becoming seen as economic necessities and families are beginning to adopt not as a result of *wantok* or communal responsibility but in order to add to their economic capacity. As stated in PNG's *Initial Report of State Parties to the Committee on the Rights of the Child*, "the fact is that thousands of children in Papua New Guinea, through a range of loose, ad hoc, accidental and obligatory circumstances, are living for years in families where no one is their real parent or willing to assume the full responsibilities of a 'legal' guardian".<sup>9</sup>

In the past, adoption was quite closely monitored through traditional payments but now the traditional ceremonies that accompanied the adoption ritual are diminishing and children can be moved far from their parents and communities with no official record or legal obligation of the adoptive parents. Whilst there are laws in each country that protect adopted children, the reality is that they are not enforced or do not recognise informal adoptions which form the majority.

Nearly 40% of urban respondents mentioned that they adopted children so that they could love and care for them and a small number so that they could help them with work and family duties. Similar numbers were found amongst rural parents, though the benefit of bride price for an adopted daughter was mentioned as a key motivation for adoption. In addition, many rural respondents believed in adopting children to assist in the family work.

Adoption might once have been a means of supporting children in a variety of circumstances, yet the dangers of informal adoptions are increasingly concerning. Adopted children are at risk from violence of all kinds and, according to the study, were less likely to attend school, were discriminated against in the home environment, exploited for their labour and more likely to suffer from physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Whilst it is often boys that are adopted, most respondents from Meiwok and

Ulingan mentioned that when it comes to bride price payment, the more females one has in the family, the more extended families and clan lineages will benefit. One of the interviewers for the study noted in her diary:

*"A boy is left to fend for himself because of a broken home and the relatives did not adopt him as a foster child. The boy is currently in the village and has left school because of the problem."*

Within the Solomon Islands, there is a high rate of informal adoption through extended family or the *wantok* system. These adopted children often have less status than other children and are at risk of being neglected, exploited or used for cheap labour. Due to their reduced status these children often have reduced access to education and other services.

**Bride price:** The payment of a bride price is still a widespread practice throughout the three countries. In the Solomon Islands, parents responded that a bride price is paid in some provinces and that parents often choose a husband for their daughter. They also stated that girls are frequently married at a very young age, often to a husband who is a lot older. Bride price can be a significant causal factor for the occurrence of young marriage. The way in which it is currently practiced may lead to conflict with modern definitions of child protection such as those enshrined in the CRC.

More and more the traditional emphasis of cementing familial relationships is fading and girls are becoming seen as a means of economic gain and are being exposed to sexual intimacy at an early age (often well under 18). In PNG, with its HIV epidemic, this must be regarded as a major risk.

*"Bride price affects girls and boys in the community by making them hungry. Hungry because once they give the bride price their family will not have enough money."*  
– male youth, 13–18 years old

However, in Vanuatu the issue of the practice of bride price becoming more about economic gain has been addressed by the National Council of Chiefs who declared in 2005 the need to return to the original practice of gift exchange rather than relying on a cash economy.

Traditionally, the practice of bride price is a means of cementing social relationships between clans. The groom's family demonstrates their appreciation of the bride's family

giving away their daughter by offering gifts. However, with the introduction of a cash economy, the bride has become more of a commodity than a symbol of positive social relations as she is exchanged for money rather than culturally and socially significant items. Whilst bride price is still practiced in communities throughout Vanuatu, youth in some rural and urban communities are able to choose their own husband or wife.

The issue of the age of the bride for the practice of bride price is also of concern amongst many civil society organisations (CSOs) due to traditional definitions of “childhood”. Traditional ideas about when a girl is ready to marry do not always conform to Western legal ideas about the age of consent.<sup>10</sup> For instance, it may be culturally acceptable in some areas of Vanuatu for a girl to marry and have sexual relations at the age of 14.

*Kastom* provides justification for a family in claiming custody over a particular area of land. Disputes over land tenure have become a serious issue for Ni-Vanuatu peoples, potentially intensifying in the future due to the combination of a relatively high population growth rate and foreign interest in land for commercial development. This issue affects children where there is conflict over land rights between different sections of their community, as it divides communities and prevents the sustainable implementation of development initiatives such as the maintenance of water supply systems. In the majority of communities, land is transferred through the patrimonial line, thus excluding girls from inheriting land. It is only in Pentecost where land is transferred through the matrimonial line, which in turn prevents boys from inheriting land. A male may acquire new land by marrying into another clan if his bride does not have any brothers.

**Compensation:** A common method of dealing with problems through *kastom* practices is through the payment of compensation. One example would be addressing the conflict in the Solomon Islands. There is a strong belief that compensation should play a major part in resolving cases of child violence.

In the Solomon Islands, parents thought when a child is abused or violated, in cases such as rape or sexual harassment, the adults will seek compensation from the offenders' family and avoid going to the police or the legal system, as well as avoid retaliation. This may mean that many child violence cases are not reaching the police or modern judicial system.

Many respondents in the selected communities in PNG said that the compensation system helps to protect chil-

dren from violence, particularly in rural communities. It is not clear how the respondents believe compensation helps protect children against violence. It is likely that compensation serves to prevent retaliation after an initial crime and therefore protects a child from retaliation-related violence. It is also possible that for individuals for whom money is limited, the thought of having to pay compensation is a deterrent to violence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that compensation often benefits the victim's family rather than the victim. Additionally, that compensation assists to resolve cases of child violence where the victim and offender are from different families. If a father was the perpetrator of the violence against his own child, then compensation is unlikely to assist with protection.

Seeking compensation from an offender's family and avoiding going to the police or referring the issue to the legal system conflicts with state legal systems and the CRC; in this practice, the victim of the abuse generally receives little or no support (either psychologically or of any other sort) and compensation implies the matter is finished. The significant response of compensation as a protective measure for child violence highlights the fact that the traditional system, not the modern legal system, is relied upon to a far greater extent to settle violence-related crimes.

**Discipline:** Traditional disciplinary practices in all countries are at times severe and contradict standards delineated by the CRC.<sup>11</sup> A number of children and adults made reference to punishment that could cause serious physical and psychological harm to children. Whilst the research did not ascertain the extent to which children suffered such forms of punishment, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that it was not unusual and that, on the whole, such punishment was sanctioned or, at the very least, ignored by many within the adult community. The majority of respondents (both children and adults) saw the benefits of *kastom* and acknowledged the importance of the chief in protecting children; yet, this system relies very much on the individual leader and elders within a community and, for that reason, is open to compromise. There does seem to be a growing understanding and acceptance of the role of the law, judicial system and even recognition of the CRC, and respondents were keen to know more as a result of the researchers entering the community. (This is not to imply that the modern legal system is without its own problems.)

The way in which children are disciplined is often an area of contention and not only in more traditional societies. The ongoing debates about corporal punishment in many countries are illustrative of this.<sup>12</sup> It is in the area of discipline that the most obvious manifestations of violence against children were seen. Discipline cannot be treated

simplistically, as certain practices that are clearly harmful to children are often an expression of *kastom* and, therefore, will not easily be stopped.

The primary responsibility for disciplining children is seen as the prerogative of the parent though, to varying degrees and often dependent on the infringement committed by the child, other adults in the community also take some responsibility:

*“Discipline of a child must be done at home by the parents of a child. It begins from 0–18 years old. If the child is not listening and continues to disobey his/her own parents, the chief and extended family can help to discipline a child.”*

– Presbyterian pastor, Malekula, Vanuatu

*“Parents should decide what is best for children and youth because they are the first teacher in the home before they [the children] go to school.”*

– teacher, Rowhani School, Vanuatu

Certain traditional discipline practices known as “hard teaching” have been used in some communities for many generations and there is some obvious conflict with modern law; accepted traditional punishment of children can involve being hung outside on a tree, not being fed by the family or being beaten with a stick. In cases of children involved in criminal activity, punishment can be more severe entailing being placed in heavy smoke, tied overnight outside the house, or being deprived of a place to sleep.<sup>13</sup>

*“Discipline with stick is good to realise mistakes.”*

– female youth 13–18 years old, Solomon Islands

*“The way we receive discipline as a child is our father will put us in a place where insects stay.”*

– female youth 13–18 years old, Solomon Islands

*“If any child do anything wrong against traditional law they will give them a hard punishment by giving them no food to eat.”*

– male youth, 13–18 years old, Solomon Islands

Whilst many of the adult respondents understood the nature of modern laws relating to discipline, a significant number felt that they were ineffective. For example, in PNG (Mahuru/Keisi rural community) more than half of the adult participants spoke of the benefit of using “modern” means of discipline. By this they meant punishment that was understood as less severe such as “light smacking”

or “grounding” a child. However, around a quarter of the participants said that they still preferred what they saw as traditional means of disciplining children involving beating a child severely with a piece of cane. These parents commented that the modern forms of discipline were too relaxed and contributed to children showing less respect for their elders.

Discussion about discipline indicated that the majority of children and youth felt they were disciplined fairly through both non-violent and violent means, and that *kastom* was important. Most also felt that it was right for people to discipline other people’s children. However, it is not unusual for people to become accepting of the conditions in which they live, even if they are extreme. During an informal interview with one NGO worker (engaged on a child rights consultancy for Save the Children Australia), it was noted that children in PNG live in a constant state of violence and that violence was simply the norm for most.

The manner in which parents bring up their children, including the way in which they discipline them, is an extremely sensitive and personal issue. Discipline practices are often rooted deeply within *kastom* as well as with the personal experience of the parent. Whilst most parents interviewed as part of this study overwhelmingly had the best interests of their children at heart, many could not see the long-term repercussions of using harsh (and violent) disciplinary measures as a means of socialising their children.

***Kastom and change:*** In all three countries, *kastom* plays a significant part in the lives of children. It provides them with a strong cultural identity, and a set of values and practices to live by. Obeying *kastom* is seen as the way to ensure harmony in the community. However, with increasing urbanisation and the influence of modernity, children are increasingly losing their connections to their indigenous identities and the influence of *kastom* is becoming weaker. Whilst in some cases this may be a positive development (for example, where *kastom* sanctions the harsh treatment of children), in others the erosion of *kastom* practices that provide children with support can be quite damaging.

Various factors have an impact on *kastom*. The need for people to migrate in search for work was seen by some to have a negative impact on *kastom*, respect and the way in which children are being brought up. This was taking place in a number of ways: firstly, with the arrival of people

with different cultural practices challenging existing ones but, more importantly, with migration to urban centres. This migration has resulted in overcrowding and a lack of space for important *kastom* activities and events, such as sitting together to tell stories, an important part of passing on *kastom* from adult to child. A chief (from Malekula in Vanuatu) noted that children learn from the examples of their leaders but that children living life in a village would value *kastom* more than a child that lives in an urban area.

A number of respondents felt that modern education and legal systems conflicted with *kastom*. This was by no means a majority perspective, but such differences of opinion can lead to opposition to new ways of thinking about children, childhood, and rights and responsibilities.

Parents in Shapi also noted that modern education was resulting in the breaking down of traditional respect, citing as an example that children were now learning about reproductive health. Whilst acknowledging the ideal of education as inherently positive, they felt that it should not be at the expense of *kastom*; both should be balanced:

*“For example, an educated person uses education as a gain for himself. The benefit is having a job and earning an income from the knowledge gained from an education. At the same time, it can also use the influence of outside (Western ways) to attract others, for example the opposite sex.”*

– parent in Shapi focus group

A church leader in Vanuatu highlighted the conflict between *kastom* and the impact of modernity:

*“Respect is honourable. In order to have respect in the community, people must respect God first. Respect is declining in Vanuatu societies because of the influence of education. For example, in school the student learns to answer a teacher but in Vanuatu *kastom*, children cannot answer community leaders.”*

As demonstrated by the above comment, the distinction is often made between *kastom* and modernity rather than *kastom* and religion, which are inseparable for many Christian believers.

The parent/caregivers group in Shapi, Vanuatu, noted that *kasto* and religion played an important role in strengthening family bonds. They suggested that people living in rural

areas may have greater respect due to the strong practice of *kastom*. In Jarailan, a similar group emphasised the importance of respect, noting that it was a form of security for each person and without it the home, church, *kastom* and culture would be damaged. They stressed the fact that a lack of respect could cause the “loss of *kastom*”. When asked how they would teach respect to their children, parents responded that they would talk about discipline and obedience, and instruct children how to deal with outside influences such as Westernisation. They felt that if people were lazy, it might result in being disrespectful and that the media was also contributing to the breaking down of respect (such as being exposed to pornography).

Adult perspectives on *kastom* were reinforced by comments from children and youth, though they were perhaps more insightful about the impact of *kastom* (particularly on them) and the inherent conflict with some aspects of *kastom* with modern ideas and influences. During a focus group discussion with girls (youth) in Jarailan, the impact of *kastom* practices in relation to gender was very clearly discussed:

*“Girls are not allowed to wear trousers.”*

*“Being a girl may affect your future. For example, parents do not consider spending much on girls' education because they think she might be a waste of time and effort in educating ... [girls marry out from the family]. And to most times, they end up having no jobs. Also, sometimes girls come back from school pregnant [having a child with no father], usually called "pikinini b'long rod". Another main reason is because birthrights are being passed on to males only [as part of *kastom* practices being practiced in the olden days].”*

*“The good point about having a bride price; is like a bond that seals both the bride and groom. And the bad side of having a bride price is that some churches do not practice bride price and girls feel like they are being sold.”*

Younger girls from Jarailan noted that *kastom* “would tell girls how to respect boys and tells boys how to respect girls. It tells about respecting people coming into the community.”

Youth from the same area felt it was the role of parents to teach children about the *kastom* values that they needed in life. They also said that parents did not always listen to

what children wanted, perhaps reflecting the notion in *kastom* that children should listen to their elders and not the other way around (nor should there be a reciprocal relationship of listening to each other). They also felt that a strong community was one in which members practice the *kastom* laws in the community and that these laws provided a guide on how people should be respectful towards each other.

Youth felt that *kastom* had some specific positives and negatives:

*“Good kastom practices help to protect family, showing respect within the community.*

*Polygamy is an example of a bad kastom practice, the practice of having more than one wife.*

*Education can influence our kastom practices....”*

– young girl, Vanuatu

*“The bad sides of kastom affecting the community, is when people practice black magic – by killing people.”*

– male youth, Vanuatu

*“Arranged marriages may not be a good thing about kastom because partners may disagree on marrying each other. Arranged marriages may also be a good thing about kastom because it may serve a good purpose such as the inheritance of land being passed to the next generation, yet still within the family ties.”*

– female youth, Vanuatu

There is currently much discussion amongst various sections of Vanuatu society on how *kastom* can co-exist with Western systems. A very significant challenge for children is how they are able to decide for themselves how to incorporate the values and rules of *kastom* along with the Western legal and education systems, as well as determine the positive and negative influences associated with change such as tourism, Western-based civil society organisations, the mass media and imported goods.

Youth from Jarailan said that to have a balanced life in the village the two ways, Western and *kastom*, have to be balanced. However, they often implied that when returning to the village, one way would have to be given up for the other rather than looking at ways in which the two could co-exist (or would one way be given up for the other depending on the particular situation – is that how the two could co-exist?).

*Kastom* (or tradition – the way things have been done in the past) is a powerful force for the maintenance of social values and respect. In times of change and transition however, accepted traditions are challenged and come into conflict with new thoughts and ideas. How communities and societies deal with such change can have a dramatic impact on children and the manner in which they are socialised, disciplined, and brought into the adult world. Each of the three countries of this study are having to deal with the turbulence of transition and government; communities and individuals alike must be prepared to discuss the impact of this on society and on children. In particular, this change demands that forums for dialogue and discussion are accessible to all, particularly women, youth and children. This suggestion itself may challenge the way things have been done in the past but it is vital that those whose lives are most impacted by change have an avenue through which to voice their opinions.

## The importance of government

Government plays a vital role in ensuring the safety and well-being of children. This happens in a number of ways:

- through the establishment of a legal and judicial system that is accessible to children and families and that is based on the *Convention of the Rights of the Child*
- through the resourcing of services aimed at improving the quality of life of children and young people, such as education, health and social services (including services for children who have survived, or continue to live in, abusive situations)
- through the development of mechanisms that allow for children to participate in democratic processes that will enable them, according to their maturity and abilities, to be active contributors to society

All countries were found to be lacking. Despite certain progress (all have signed and ratified the CRC), there was a lack of serious commitment to ensuring that the rights of children and issues such as violence were being dealt with appropriately. Most importantly, governments have not established clear structures or positions of authority relating to children's rights or the well-being of children, as is made extremely clear in the PNG report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the CRC:

*“No new national body, commission or institution has been created to coordinate*

*implementation of the Convention or to take responsibility for monitoring and reporting... there has been confusion about who has the responsibility to coordinate, monitor and report on implementation of the Convention. The task has moved through three different government departments... Currently, all responsibility to monitor and report on the Convention rests with a loose Working Committee on the Rights of the Child convened by the Office of National Planning and Implementation... The Working Committee has had no political mandate, status or resources to fulfil an official coordinating, monitoring or reporting role on the Convention... Meanwhile there is no coordinating body, no policy, no programme of implementation, no priorities and no dedicated budget.”*

A similar situation can be found in Vanuatu despite the establishment of a National Children's Committee (NCC) to ensure adherence to the CRC. This committee is dependent on the goodwill and commitment to children's

issues of professionals who already have full-time jobs in a range of sectors. In the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu's Comprehensive Reform Program Matrix, it is stated that a full-time officer will be designated to ensure government compliance to the CRC by the end of 2005. However, this officer will also be responsible for government adherence to all UN commitments and it is acknowledged that this position is pending further funds. The position is also designated as the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, which adds confusion for how this officer is to coordinate cross-cutting activities beyond the realm of health.

The research found a divide between rural and urban communities in terms of access to government services and this has the potential to increase children's vulnerability to violence. Partly, this is due to the lack of direct services available to children suffering from violence in rural areas. And partly, this results from a lack of services (for example, schools) which forces children to travel to urban areas (many “adoptions” occur as a result of this), leaving the protection of their families. In addition, the lack of employment and training opportunities for youth increase their likelihood of becoming involved in abusive behaviours. In



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*By maintaining peace, governments will help to protect children, such as these from the Solomon Islands, from conflict, land disputes and civil unrest.*

Jarailan, for example, when asked about the impact of government services, community members mentioned only that they had benefited from a road link but that most significant services relating to children had come from the NGO sector. In urban areas of PNG, greater trust (twice that of rural respondents) was placed in traditional systems of governance for resolving issues of children and violence:

*“This is due to the poor government services and accessibility in the urban settlement areas and thus people lean more towards their form of traditional system to address this issue (child violence).”*

– community member, PNG

In any dispute relating to children and violence, it was common across all countries that people would rely on the system of traditional governance and refer matters to the chief. Urban respondents in all countries were less trusting of the traditional mechanisms than their rural counterparts, however that is not to imply that they had any greater trust in the modern legal system. Traditional leaders, though, are vital and need to be consulted more around issues of child protection. As a part of the preparation process for the project in Vanuatu, World Vision staff wrote to the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs (VNCC)<sup>14</sup> explaining the purpose of the study. In response the Council wrote:

*“... [we] can say very little on the Convention because the government did not consult the Council before signing the Convention. Whether Vanuatu is a signatory of the Convention or not, children are always precious in the Vanuatu Communities. The Council is also aware that traditional values placed on children may differ and at times be at odds with the modern values of children. If there is a case of child abuse, it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that: the case is reported to the chief first before any other authorities; and measures are taken to stop the abuse. If parents are the abusers, other family clan members including the clan chief shall take responsibility over the child.”*

In response to a further question, “in what way can *kastom* assist in dealing with this issue [of child abuse]?”, the council responded that this issue can be addressed through the clan relationships where other clan members keep a child away from the abuser. The council stated that it should work closely with the National Children's

Committee (NCC) and NGOs who focus on children to deal with the issue because “the issue is not the child. The issue is the home. If the homes are of love, respect and right virtues then abuse is minimal in society. To address any social issues, the home and family life is the common denominator by which focus must be directed.”

Finally, government has a responsibility to maintain peace. In the Solomon Islands, both rural and urban communities felt very strongly that the civil unrest that troubled the country from 1998 to 2002 has a serious effect on children, both in terms of affecting their education as well as through leaving ongoing psychological trauma. The unrest caused substantial division within homes, particularly in Fulisango/Feraladoa. Though it was not spoken of directly, it was understood that sexual abuse of women and children took place in the course of the conflict and that this has had a lasting psychological impact on communities. It was also learned that during the conflict members of the Veuru community were forced by Harold Keke's armed militants to burn down neighbouring Marasa village. Respondents spoke of the underlying unrest that remains in the village and the fact that many families were forced to leave communities because of their allegiances during the conflict.

Whilst such conflict has not taken place in Vanuatu, structural violence does take place. Land disputes were often cited as reasons for conflict to erupt. (Indeed, this is the case in all three countries.) All urban adult respondents in PNG said that they had faced conflict in their homes or community relating to ethnic issues or land dispute. A majority reported that children's education was affected and that there were ongoing related emotional and psychological problems. A large majority of rural respondents reported that conflict in their community had an impact on children's education, though only a small percentage felt that there had been ongoing emotional and psychological effects.

## The role of civil society

Civil society can be seen as “an intermediate realm situated between state and household, populated by organised groups or associations that are separate from the state, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests, values or identities”.<sup>15</sup> In all the three study countries, civil society is dominated by the church, though there is a growing NGO movement and independent media. For the purpose of this study, we chose to focus on civil society groups that could have an

impact on addressing the situation of violence and children, specifically the church and the NGO community.

In Vanuatu, both communities had some previous contact with NGOs, though it was interesting to note that Jarailan, the rural community, was suffering from “NGO fatigue”, i.e. contact with a number of NGOs and research organisations but with limited impact on the community. A number of NGO programmes do contribute to reducing violence (outlined in detail in the appendices), particularly Wan Smol Bag, a local organisation that has had a substantial impact on child rights issues in Vanuatu and the region as a whole. In PNG, HELP Resources, a local NGO, has developed introductory training on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the CRC.

Church leaders play a key leadership role. In the Veuru community (Solomon Islands) church groups in the area have initiated some trauma counselling and continue to play a major role in the lives of families in the community. This is not the case in the urban community. The majority of both urban and rural adult respondents acknowledged the importance of the presence of the church and NGOs in their community and that the church's presence had helped them change the way they perceive violence against children in their community (though in rural communities, people were more likely to place their trust in traditional ways, including sometimes severe corporal punishment).

In Vanuatu, researchers organised drama activities within Shapi, the urban community. The purpose was for youth to act out three key issues facing their community, leaving it up to the children and youth in the audience to state how to resolve the issues. These solutions were written in private by participants and submitted to researchers in confidence (to overcome the shyness of participants). One of the scenarios acted out depicted an outsider approaching the various community leaders, with funds available for a special Children's Day. The issue raised: was it a good idea for different groups to work together for a common goal that benefited children? Or were individual groups already doing a good job looking after children's interests, and so did not need to cooperate with others? Twenty children and youth between eight and 20 years of age were asked to provide a response and they unanimously answered that the different groups should work together.

Civil society is not a single entity but, with respect to reducing children's vulnerability to violence, it must be seen to play a coordinated role. NGOs and church groups need to work in far closer harmony and collaboration focusing on the well-being of children and youth.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> According to a round-table discussion on PNG chaired by Elizabeth Cox and hosted by World Vision Australia, 19 August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The study targeted 300 adults in three islands of Vanuatu: Efate, Santo and Tanna. Physical abuse was the most common form mentioned (58% of respondents), followed by sexual abuse (46% respondents), and emotional abuse/neglect (33% respondents). Emotional abuse was understood by many respondents as verbal abuse. Pacific Children's Program (PCP), *Child Protection in Vanuatu. A report of a baseline study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices*, Suva, Fiji, June 2003, pp iv–vii.

<sup>3</sup> See for example A James and A Prout, (eds.) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood, Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, London, Falmer Press, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> I Scales, *Youth in Solomon Islands: A participatory study of issues, needs and priorities*, Hassall and Associates International, Canberra, Australia, 2003, p22.

<sup>5</sup> See S Keane, *Kastom and change. Perspectives on child protection in urban Vanuatu*, University of Canberra, Australia, 2004, which explores conflicting ideas.

<sup>6</sup> NCC, *Vanuatu country end of decade report*, presented to United Nations General Assembly Special Session December 2000, Port Vila, Vanuatu, p3.

<sup>7</sup> C Kick, *The changing Pacific Island family and children's welfare*, paper given at the International Community Development Conference, Rotorua, New Zealand, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p7.

<sup>9</sup> Papua New Guinea, *Initial report of State Parties to the Committee on the Rights of the Child*, p46. <sup>10</sup> Pacific Children's Program, *Child protection in Vanuatu. A report of a baseline study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices*, June 2003, p vi.

<sup>11</sup> As articulated in Article 19.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Save the Children Sweden, *Ending legalised violence against children*, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> The community reported these cases of traditional punishment as anecdotal and that they were practised in the past. They gave no examples of the practice occurring within the communities today – only rumours.

<sup>14</sup> When Vanuatu became independent in 1980, the Malvatumauri Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs (VNCC) was established as a constitutional body to act as an advisory group and provide recommendations to the Government of Vanuatu only on matters relating to the preservation and promotion of Ni-Vanuatu customary beliefs and practices, and traditional languages.

<sup>15</sup> J Manor, M Robinson, et al., *civil society and governance. A concept paper*, Sussex, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 1999, p4.

## Moving forward (aspirations)

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As with most children, those spoken to in the course of the research had dreams and aspirations for the future. They also had ideas about how to improve the situations of those who lived in fear of violence. They dreamt of becoming chiefs, teachers, pastors and carpenters, of having children and families of their own. Many children, particularly in PNG, wanted to become professionals. They felt that the way for them to fulfil their aspirations was to work hard and to live in an environment where they were supported and nurtured by those around them. Such support would come from their own communities as well as by systems and structures that would enable them to gain their independence – specifically, education and work opportunities. Young people from the Solomon Islands, particularly, some of whom had already experienced the ramifications of violence during the conflict, felt that they could help address situations of violence.

Adults in communities had aspirations for their children as well, though were arguably more pragmatic in their understanding of the way that limited access to education and economic opportunity was becoming an increasingly important factor impacting on the well-being of their children.

Whilst the courage, vision and enthusiasm of the children who took part in this study was obvious, children on their own cannot be expected to make the necessary changes for them to achieve their full potential. Parents, communities, civil society and governments must all play a role.

### Engaged individuals

Children need to be able to engage with the adult world in positive ways. For many children in these three countries, their perceptions of adults are coloured by fear and violence. That must change. Children need champions within families, communities and at a national level. Adults, who

will set good examples, interact with the young and champion their cause. They do not need to be celebrities, simply parents, teachers, religious leaders, businessmen and women who have compassion and a desire to see the best interests of children become a priority. There also needs to be strong role models for boys – how can men show good leadership, fairness? In Vanuatu, the VNCC designed a set of guidelines in 1992 called “Role of the Father Towards the Child”, which addressed the need for individual role models in communities.

### Supportive communities

Children and young people identified the need for strong communities in which there was support and communication across generational lines:

*“...there is a strong and good cooperation between the community leaders – like the chief, pastors, youths and community members.”*

– a youth, Vanuatu

This is a major challenge for all countries where it is not customary to allow children, youth or women a voice in community affairs. But there is both a legal and developmental imperative for this custom to change. With the exposure of communities, including children, to new ideas around rights and participation, and the increasing pressures brought to bear on the young through modernisation (including youth unemployment and limited opportunity), continuing to deny children and youth a voice will only widen the growing gap between generations. Supportive communities must allow space for all people to voice opinions, including the young and particularly marginalised groups such as adopted children and unemployed youth. Supportive communities must seek ways to engage “inter-generationally” as was done with great success during the collection of data in Vanuatu. This was achieved by holding Activity Days whereby there were specific activities for



PHOTO - FRIEDA KANA / WORLD VISION

Supportive communities, like this group in PNG, can address issues of abuse.

youth, children, women, men and various community leaders organised in a single area to generate a deep sense of community spirit.

Supportive communities must collectively address issues that have, until now, been difficult to discuss. Issues such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse must be treated with wisdom and maturity. Often the perpetrators of abuse are parents or family members, perhaps loved and respected by the child. Overcoming violence against children within close-knit communities demands much more than the imposition of legalistic solutions and jail terms; it requires forums where people can discuss and solve problems together. In the past, *kastom* has been a key factor in keeping order and stability within the community. However, *kastom* is not static and new *kastom* must be developed that has the best interest of children at its core and allows children and young people the opportunity to participate.

government and civil society in the well-being of children and a joint responsibility shown for the realisation of their rights. Practical steps can be taken that include:

- each country resourcing key positions in government that focus on the rights of the child
- translating the CRC into national law and practice
- programming to assist out-of-school youth by developing skills for life and increasing their employment potential
- increasing access to basic services of health and education
- developing services, including counselling, for abused children
- supporting further research into the needs of children

## Supportive policy and programmes

Finally, for children to be able to fulfil their aspirations for a brighter future, there needs to be a greater investment by

The above is not an exhaustive list, neither is it a guaranteed recipe for success. What is most important though is that people begin to discuss and to solve problems together. This means changing the way in which things have been

traditionally done and for all members of communities – children, youth and adults – to take responsibility for moving forward. The specific recommendations listed in this report provide further practical suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

## A note on the commercial sexual exploitation of children

The issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is beyond the scope of this report, but as it can so often be connected to abuse and violence in the family, it is important to mention. In a Vanuatu study that followed the UNICEF Pacific Regional Workshop on Combating Poverty and Commercial Exploitation of Children and Youth (held in Fiji, 2005), it was found that CSEC was of serious concern and that girls younger than 18 worked as prostitutes in nightclubs and kava bars.<sup>1</sup> The report noted that children used sex as a means of obtaining cash, to pay for school fees and material goods, and that increasing levels of urban poverty were a significant contributing factor. Foreign and local fishing vessels, navy boats and private boats were found to be visited by under-age girls. A few cases of prostituted boys were also reported.

In the Solomon Islands, a UNICEF study found that children have become more vulnerable to CSEC and child sexual abuse (CSA) with the recent conflict and tensions. This report contained testimonies of children who were sexually abused and exploited; few of these testimonies have resulted in prosecutions. UNICEF found that whilst there was an awareness of CSA within surveyed communities, with some people even claiming that it was not uncommon, the level of knowledge specifically about CSEC terminology was low. Officials and young people interviewed confirmed the involvement of under-age children in prostitution, pornography and child sex tourism, especially in urban areas. Among the underlying causes of these trends are increasing poverty, inadequacy of the school system, rural-to-urban drift and scarcity of employment and wage-earning opportunities for young people.

Recently a similar study conducted in PNG had even more concerning findings, noting that thousands of children were being drawn into organised sex work, as well as becoming “wives” for transient labour (both national and expatriate):

*“Trafficking of PNG children occurs across provinces and the border with PNG.*

*It is often disguised by pervasive, generalised and distorted traditions of arranged marriages, child brides, polygamy and compensation. Babies [are] being sold and bought and are likely to suffer sexual and other kinds of abuse and exploitation as they grow up. Young girls are bought and sold as child brides and excused as custom. Polygamy and money permit men with multiple partners and money to prey on ever younger girls... especially where parents [are] poor... Compensation is widely used to cover up many sexual offences against children and to corrupt or frustrate police and court processes.”<sup>2</sup>*

It takes little for children at risk to be pushed into extremely vulnerable situations. This report shows very clearly how customary practices such as the bride price and adoption have been commodified as they have become intertwined with economic activity and the monetising of the economy.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Wan Smol Bag and The Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT), *Commercial exploitation of children and child sexual abuse in Vanuatu: A situation analysis*, UNICEF Pacific, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 2004, p2.

<sup>2</sup> Help Resources & UNICEF PNG, *A situational analysis of child sexual abuse & the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Papua New Guinea*, 2005, p iv.

## Recommendations

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### I. Strengthen government, NGOs and civil society organisations to:

- **better coordinate activities;**
- **increase the focus on child rights and respond to children and violence issues; and**
- **maximise effectiveness of child-focused programmes.**

Addressing violence against children needs a **coordinated response**. Too often, NGOs or civil society groups choose to “go it alone”. As violence against children becomes increasingly normalised (and even an active part of the informal economy as could be the case in PNG) there is an imperative for increased cooperation. Church leaders and groups must be an integral part of this. Church groups, regardless of denominations, need to develop formal structures in order to work together on child protection issues. All NGOs (not only those that are child-focused) can become involved in programmes that support the well-being of children and seek to reduce their vulnerability to violence.

The impact of any community development or infrastructure programme on children should be considered. Committees established for other community development activities should include children and young people's participation to ensure that the potential for violence is diminished. Programmes should seek not simply to do things for children and youth but to actively engage them in finding solutions. The CRC is an excellent starting point for this but should not be used as a threat. Education around the principles of the CRC should be interactive, promoting debate, discussion and problem solving rather than absolutes and enforcement of what can easily be dismissed as an imposition from outside and contradictory to *kastom* and tradition.

**Government is key to this:** The enactment of the CRC into domestic legislation must be finalised and necessary resources to support this must be ensured. This should include a sustained political commitment and considerable resourcing for a mechanism that will be solely focused on children (such as a children's ombudsperson, children's minister or even a “children's chief” in Vanuatu who could represent children on the Council of Chiefs). Such resources can champion children's issues and best interests and provide a platform for the realisation of the CRC into domestic law and practice. Domestic legislation in all sectors should be brought into harmony with the CRC and domestic children's laws. This mechanism should be accessible to children. It should also take into account the importance of ensuring communities in isolated rural areas have access to and involvement in processes and services as they are developed. Access to centralised documentation about child rights (e.g. clearing house, where information from a variety of sources is contained and easily accessible) is key and all stakeholders should be obliged to submit/share information.

**National plans of action:** Utilising the framework of the CRC, national plans of action should be finalised to provide comprehensive protection to children from all forms of violence. In addition to the immediate development of services that respond to the needs of children affected by violence, these plans should seek to address the underlying causes of violence against children which are often related.

### 2. Focus on donors

International donors need to be more aware of the situation of violence against children that is increasingly threatening the region. Donor responses, though, should be well considered and not simply “knee jerk” reactions, as the determinants of violence against children are complex and defy simplistic solutions. Any response needs to have a

long-term capacity-building approach but also should seek to address immediate priorities such as the commercial sexual exploitation of children and out-of-school and unemployed youth. All donor engagement, at a programmatic level, should seek to have an impact statement on children in much the same way as some now have impact statements on the environment or gender.

### 3. Focus on families

Families are vital in the protection of children from violence but also, arguably, the prime instigators of violence. Therefore, they should be a primary point of intervention. There is a need to better understand the situation of families in times of economic change, shifting values and the increasing presence of violence in everyday life. Public forums with wide representation need to be held around issues of violence. Such forums need not be formal meetings but could be modelled on the “activity days” held as a part of this research in which discussion, research, problem solving and play were combined, and yielded great results. Discussing violence and related sensitive issues, such as HIV and gender inequity, is not easy and will require the presence of trained facilitators.

Opportunities for positive engagement and role modelling between parent/caregiver and child need to be encouraged and should include opportunity to play and pass on tradition/*kastom* practices. Individual men (fathers, brothers, etc.) need to see themselves as role models for the young. Men, in particular, need to be engaged in both programmatic and policy responses that address the rights of children. Parents must have access to services and information about parenting and child protection.

National Action Plans, and other initiatives organised by government and civil society, need to address ways in which families can be encouraged and supported.

### 4. Find creative ways to resolve the growing clash between *kastom* and modernisation

*Kastom* is constantly changing and there are certain elements in *kastom* practices that have become influenced by economic change and that are greatly increasing children's vulnerability to violence. Developing “new *kastom*” to assist people to make sense of their changing social and cultural environment and world around them is an urgent priority. Traditional systems of government (such as the National Council of Chiefs in Vanuatu) must be:

- made aware of the CRC and the ramifications for ratification for domestic law; and
- supportive of the enactment of laws and the development of “new *kastom*” that reduce the likelihood of all forms of violence towards children.

Supporting government legislation and political programmes that strengthen traditional methods for protecting children in a positive way should be developed.

Gender issues relating to *kastom* contribute to violence against children and also need to be addressed. For example, women's groups might need to focus on including men in child-focused activities, e.g. in Vanuatu, drawing on the VNCC guidelines on the role of the father so children and women are not segmented from men in terms of decision making around children's issues. Women, as well as children and youth, need to be given a greater voice in public affairs.

### 5. Encourage forums where the voices of children and youth can be heard and respected

There must be space made in society for the voices of children and young people to be heard and for opportunities for their active citizenship and participation. This could include having child representatives on the National Children's Committee of National Council of Chiefs in Vanuatu, for example. NGOs and government departments need to creatively design projects and programmes (whether child-focused or not) that ensure the participation of children and incorporate approaches that actively respect children's rights and decrease all forms of violence against children. Policies and programmes developed on children's issues should be guided by the principle of children as agents of change, not simply victims. And finally, education should be utilised as a means for training children and youth in issues of citizenship (participatory democracy, peace, violence prevention) giving youth and children skills as participants and contributors to society now, not just in the future.

# Appendix I

## Additional country information:

### Overview of initiatives to address violence against children

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#### Vanuatu

On 30 July 2005 the Republic of Vanuatu celebrated its 25th anniversary of independence. Achievements of the peoples of Vanuatu include: the development of a unifying national language, Bislama; relative peace and security; and a strong, active civil society composed of church groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), women's groups, youth groups and other community groups.

Religion also contributes to children's sense of identity and a set of values and practices. Vanuatu society is predominantly Christian (90%) but there is a wide variety of Christian denominations, including Presbyterian (31.7%), Anglican (13.6%), Catholic (13.3%), Seventh-Day Adventist (10.9%), and others (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is etc. 9.7%).<sup>1</sup>

Civil society support of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) during the early 1990s came primarily from Community Action for Health (CAFH), a local NGO. In 1994, this inter-sectoral government/NGO committee worked towards the publication of a National Plan of Action (NPA) document entitled "Children, Our Future", which was viewed by the government of the time as a national working document for protecting Ni-Vanuatu children's rights. Since then, there have been a number of initiatives carried out by governmental organisations (GOs) and NGOs to reduce the incidence of violence against children. These are outlined below.

#### National government

The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu has contributed significantly towards improving children's access to basic services since independence. An important initiative after the country ratified the CRC was that a National Children's Committee (NCC), chaired by the Sector Analyst, DESP, Ministry of Finance, was formed. In

December 2000, *Vanuatu Country End of Decade Report for Port Vila Vanuatu* was submitted to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children.

In the area of education, the government has made the following commitments:

- early childhood development (care and education) is now officially recognised as a key area
- the Vanuatu Pre-School Association (founded in 1983) has developed a model pre-school kindergarten, and developed standard curriculum and training packages for provincial coordinators and key teachers
- a National Pre-School Coordinator facilitation package has been created on early childhood development (ECD) (in Efate, Ambae, Tanna, and Banks islands)
- in 1999 the government funded (for the first time) the development of pre-schools (girls 51% enrolment)
- basic education – teaching in mother tongue has been introduced
- the Department of Education became the Government Counterpart Agency for the Pacific Children's Program (PCP) in Vanuatu in 2003
- in 2004, a child protection officer was recruited to the Department of Education
- phasing in of a national plan to include Years 7 and 8 at the primary school level to address the high drop-out rate after Year 6

In the area of health, there have been many initiatives over the past decade that have focused on primary health care (PHC) through prevention and strengthening the manage-

ment of the health services. These initiatives have improved life expectancy at birth, as well as decreased infant and under-five mortality rates, and maternal mortality rates. The PHC approach to health has been perceived by government as the “best way to build awareness amongst communities about their own ability to prevent and control communicable diseases...[as well as to] focus on measures that will bring the greatest improvements in the health status of the population...includ[ing] simple improvements in hygiene, nutrition and water supply”.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, the Ministry and Department of Health, in conjunction with other relevant government departments and NGOs, have implemented the following health programmes:

- health education (developed and disseminated information and visual aid materials and a weekly radio programme, 1989)
- a social mobilisation project that was later transformed into Community Action for Health
- inter-sectoral government/NGO committee to improve relationships between community and health workers by coordinating resources to overcome difficulties of isolation and limited health services
- family health (family planning, midwifery services, mother and child’s health, infant and pre-school screening, acute respiratory infection, diarrhoeal diseases, school health)
- food and nutrition (community-based urban nutrition demonstration programme in Port Vila and Luganville; breastfeeding policy)
- immunisation (Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) control of spread of immunisable diseases targeting children and women of child-bearing age)
- tuberculosis and leprosy (1984 control of micro-bacteria)
- environmental health (water supply and sanitation initiatives have contributed to a drop in the number of cases and deaths from diarrhoeal diseases; malaria and vector-borne control)

However, despite some improvements in children’s health and education, there is evidence that these improvements are not being adequately sustained. For instance, there have been reports of health infrastructure in rural areas built a number of years ago now being left to ruin as

there is no commitment to maintenance. Another significant issue that has yet to be addressed is that of food insecurity, a problem due to factors such as: dependency on relatively expensive imported food, especially in urban areas; decreasing access to land for cultivation; natural disasters; and unsustainable agricultural practices that deplete the quality of land. Under-nutrition is a serious problem amongst children, which is caused by a high dependency on imported nutrient-deficient foods, a lack of awareness about the importance of protein in children’s diets, and mothers who do not breastfeed their babies or who stop breastfeeding their babies too early.

#### **State justice system and the Vanuatu Police Force**

Two justice systems co-exist in Vanuatu: the customary justice system, operated by chiefs applying traditional customs of individual communities, and the state justice system operated by State courts and police. The state justice system applies written legislation and subsidiary legislation enacted or authorised by the Parliament of Vanuatu and is based on the principles of common law and equity introduced by the British.<sup>5</sup>

In 1998, the Ombudsman Act No. 27 was proclaimed, which provides a mechanism for handling complaints of children whose rights have been violated. An overview of legislation affecting Ni-Vanuatu children was written in 2001 by the State Office.<sup>4</sup> This includes legislation that protects children under the age of 15 years from any employment other than according to Vanuatu legislation, children under 12 years of age (who may assist their families with “light work suitable to his [or her] capacity in an agricultural undertaking owned and managed by the family of which he [or she] is a member”).<sup>5</sup> Children aged 12 and 13 years may only undertake light agricultural or domestic work if members of their family are also employed or if the work is collectively being carried out by their community.<sup>6</sup>

In 1995 the Sexual and Child Abuse Unit was established and located within the Uniform Investigation Branch (UIB) of the Vanuatu Police Force, Port Vila, with one female officer assigned to that unit. Complaints of sexual and physical assaults gradually increased from one to five (or more) cases reported per month.<sup>7</sup> Due to the nature of the issues, the unit was transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in 1998 and another female officer was recruited. As the unit found that nine out of every 10 offenders were male and there were male victims as well as female victims, a male officer was also recruited. During May 2003, the Police Commissioner changed the name of the unit to the Family Protection Unit

(FPU) to incorporate physical as well as sexual assaults, as well as family and child maintenance. Another officer has been recruited due to an increase in the number of reported cases since 2000. According to the FPU, attitudes of police and judges towards women and children have greatly changed over the past few years as they are more supportive. In regard to child deaths, the Serious Crime Squad in conjunction with the FPU is responsible for investigations. In the provinces, this responsibility would be handled by the local command, with the exception of serious cases when a CID team would be sent from Port Vila. Reports are collated concerning violent crime including homicide, with statistics produced every six months. In Port Vila alone there have been three deaths of babies in the last 12 months, with all three cases dealt with by charging offenders with intentional homicide. Statistics on children are available according to age and gender but do not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the situation.

#### **Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs**

When Vanuatu became independent in 1980, the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs (VNCC) was established as a constitutional body to act as an advisory group and provide recommendations to the Government of Vanuatu only on matters relating to the preservation and promotion of Ni-Vanuatu customary beliefs and practices, and traditional languages.<sup>8</sup> In 1993, the VNCC compiled a set of guidelines entitled "Role of the Father Towards the Child", which are based on *kastom* values and practices. The aim of these guidelines is to increase parents' understanding of their important role in bringing up their children. The focus was on how fathers should act as role models of leadership and fairness for their children, recognising the importance of parents being their child's first teacher.<sup>9</sup> (WVV has been unsuccessful in locating these guidelines and VNCC staff, consulted by WVV, did not know about these guidelines.)

In recent times, a strong move has developed towards customary beliefs, languages and practices being included in the school curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. Policies outlined under the VNCC's first corporate plan address the need for activities that further children's knowledge of their indigenous culture, with an activity planned to specifically target urban youth in Port Vila.

Staff management for the VNCC is currently overseen by the Public Service Commission (PSC), which is a structure that the VNCC intends to reform over the next few years. The VNCC plans to become an independent organisation from the executive government with clear roles for staff, as

well as strengthen the customary justice system to enable chiefs to effectively exert their duties beyond land dispute resolution.<sup>10</sup> The reasoning behind these proposed changes is to address the issues and weaknesses of the VNCC that disable the council in effectively guiding and supporting Ni-Vanuatu people in a time of rapid social change. The system of chiefs is relatively strong throughout most of the country. The chief's role includes the responsibilities of justice of the peace, delegate for his or her village, and the resolution of disputes through meetings in the chief's *nakamal* (meeting place). To date, this system has not encouraged the participation of children in the resolution of any disputes relating to them.

#### **Civil Society**

##### ***Vanuatu Cultural Centre***

With more than 100 local languages, two official languages (English and French) and one national language (Bislama), there is much cultural diversity throughout the country. Ni-Vanuatu children who attend either Francophone or Anglophone schools are multilingual as they are already fluent in their vernacular and Bislama. Through the settlement of migrants and the influence of other foreigners, Ni-Vanuatu children may be exposed to or even have a connection with other ethnic groups such as Chinese, Vietnamese, French, English, Australian, American, Canadian, Japanese and Polynesian cultures. Again, this contributes to the challenge for children in deciding how to interpret new influences and identities within the realm of their indigenous cultural beliefs and practices, something that also varies from island to island and is particularly challenging for urban children who are arguably more exposed to foreign influence.

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre promotes and preserves Ni-Vanuatu indigenous cultural beliefs, practices and artifacts, and supports research projects on the history of Vanuatu as well as the dynamics of contemporary social change. An example of the centre's support of research projects is the *Vanuatu Young People's Project* (VYPP), which conducted a study from April 1997 to June 1998 on the social and cultural changes experienced by young people living in settlements around Port Vila.<sup>11</sup> Since then, VYPP has become an ongoing project at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. Under the PCP, young people from VYPP have been involved in conducting research and have been trained to use the PCP's Facilitation Package.

Following this study came the 2003 Rousseau report on juvenile justice and *kastom* law in Vanuatu.<sup>12</sup> People in Tanna, Efate (Port Vila), Santo (Luganville), Ambrym, Ambae and Malakula were interviewed for this report. The

project also involved holding a National Summit on Juvenile Justice.

#### **Pacific Children's Program**

The Pacific Children's Program (PCP) is an AusAID-funded regional programme targeting Vanuatu, Samoa and Fiji, which is currently being managed by UNICEF. The PCP's goal is to contribute to the reduction of child abuse and neglect in Pacific countries and its purpose is to increase family, community and government responsibility for child protection in these three countries. Beginning in April 2001, programme activities have a community-based, primary prevention approach to development. Components of the final phase for the PCP, which will be completed in 2006, are: strategies for preventing child abuse; information systems; family and community preventive action programmes; regional coordination and management; and national and local advocacy. To date, achievements of the PCP in Vanuatu include:

- conducted research on the extent and nature of violence against children, and child protection issues<sup>13</sup>
- designed and produced information, education and communication (IEC) materials (e.g. pamphlets, newsletters, posters, calendars)
- developed and pre-tested a regional Facilitation Package
- facilitated skills training for zonal leaders, NGOs and government
- developed small grants scheme for preventive action programmes
- four participants from Vanuatu attended a Child Abuse and Neglect Conference, Australia, in 2004
- developed of a School Awareness Kit
- two national advocates recruited to visit communities and schools
- achieved coverage of Samna, Tafea, Shefa and Malampa Provinces

The University of the South Pacific (USP), Vanuatu, provided Bislama translations for the *Qualitative Study on Child Protection Practices: Vanuatu Draft Report* (2001) under the PCP.

#### **Save the Children Australia (Vanuatu)**

Since 1992, Save the Children Australia (SCA) has been implementing child rights' projects in Vanuatu. Currently,

SCA is implementing the *Child Rights Awareness and Capacity Building Project*, which builds on the principle of the "Best Interest of the Child" that is covered under the CRC. The project addresses the issue of capacity building amongst partner organisations, as well as public awareness raising on CRC. Achievements under this project include:

- published quarterly Child's Rights Newsletters
- increased number of communities requesting CRC awareness training
- developed a Training Guide on the Convention of the Rights of the Child: *A Practical Guide for Children's Rights Trainers and Users in Vanuatu* (The process of developing this training guide involved conducting a training needs assessment, training needs analysis workshop, consultation workshop to review the training guide and final draft, and finally pre-testing the training guide manual. Various CSOs, government authorities, NGOs and educational institutions participated in this process.)
- conducted training of trainer (TOT) workshops on CRC and the Training Guide for partner organisations
- country programme director attended annual Child Rights meeting in Papua New Guinea in 2004

In addition, SCA coordinates PCP activities in Vanuatu, for example, facilitating a stakeholder meeting in April 2005 to plan the last phase of the PCP in Vanuatu to raise awareness amongst partner organisations. SCA has recently completed the AusAID-funded *Village Health Workers Project*, which has assisted in improving children's access to health services.

#### **UNICEF (Vanuatu Office)**

Using the Child Friendly Schools approach, UNICEF is currently implementing a project aimed at developing 12 primary schools in Tanna into model schools that also have the concept of "Best Interest of the Child" as the project's core reference point. The project aims to provide a safe, welcoming and participatory learning environment for children. Other initiatives by UNICEF include the production of resources that provide an analysis of the situation of children and youth in Vanuatu.<sup>14</sup>

#### **World Vision Vanuatu**

World Vision Vanuatu (WVV) has been implementing projects over the past 20 years that have assisted in improving the lives of children. Areas in which WVV proj-

ects have made significant improvements include: adult and youth literacy rates; income-generating opportunities; water supply systems and sanitation; health infrastructure such as dispensaries; school infrastructure such as pre-school construction; training of pre-school teachers; and disaster preparedness. These projects strengthen relationships within targeted communities due to their success heavily relying on unified community support. Children benefit as their access to basic services is increased and they live in a supportive community environment. The following are examples of current and new projects that have improved or aim to improve lives of children in targeted communities:

*Functional Literacy Projects (Tanna, Santo and Pentecost)* In Tanna and Santo, 10% of the total number of students who attend the classes are children. These children have had to drop out of school because they either failed Year 6 or cannot attend school as their community is too far away. Youth (aged 15–25 years) who attend classes may have gone to school but due to the poor quality of their education, still cannot adequately read or write Bislama.

In Tanna, 90% of female students are mothers. These women did not have an education partly due to their parents not valuing the importance of girls attending school. As a result of their successful participation in the literacy classes, these mothers, especially young mothers, can now see for themselves the importance of being literate, which in turn enables them to see the importance of sending their girls to school. Another benefit is that the mothers can assist their children with homework and read health awareness materials.

*Children's Education Begins at Home Project (Efate)* This new project provides an example of child protection programmes complimenting and reinforcing each other. Its focus is to increase parent, caregiver and community responsibility for early childhood development (ECD) in both rural and urban communities around Efate. Project components include: researching key issues facing young parents in target communities; and facilitating discussion groups on ECD issues and how they can be overcome. Information, education, communication and facilitation materials produced by SCA and the PCP will be utilised to reinforce the same approach to child protection. It is anticipated that the discussion groups will evolve into child-focused committees that

can serve to be a coordinating and reporting body for CRC initiatives implemented by CSOs and government. This initiative will provide a follow-up to the awareness-raising activities conducted by the Pre-School Coordinator and SCA. The intended outcome will be that meaningful plans of action will be developed by the communities themselves.

WVV also contributed towards SCA's *Village Health Workers Project* by raising awareness of primary health care in the targeted communities.

WVV has laid the foundation for people of targeted communities to enable themselves to identify accountable local leaders and organise themselves to achieve sustainable community development. People have become motivated in improving their facilities, such as developing aid posts or pre-schools, as well as in developing further skills to increase their income-generating opportunities.

#### ***Vanuatu Society for Disabled People***

Disabled children, about 1.5% of the total population in 1998, are amongst the most "at risk" children in Vanuatu. Whilst there is no specific national policy to provide directives towards the development, protection and monitoring of disabled children, the Vanuatu Society for Disabled People (VSDP) currently undertakes this role. The VSDP established a community-based rehabilitation programme in 1992. However, there is still much room for support from government and child-focused NGOs.

#### ***Wan Smol Bag***

Using local theatre, videos and radio programmes on contemporary social issues, Wan Smol Bag (WSB) communicates to and encourages discussion amongst youth. Such issues include domestic violence, and child abuse and neglect. This form of communication builds on the oral traditions of Vanuatu and has proven to be popular in both rural and urban areas.

In 2004, a radio programme called *Family B'long Sarah*, a story exploring the position of children within families, was aired for six to eight weeks as part of the Pacific Children's Program (PCP). WSB has also designed comic books for the PCP, which are currently being distributed. *Father's Dream* is a story about a father who does not take an interest in his child's education until he finds that his child is being beaten at school. *Solid Sistas*, an energetic and emotive drama about the stories of Ni-Vanuatu females who want to start up their own band, has been so popular that it was shown for a second year in 2005 both in Port Vila, Efate, and Luganville, Santo. A booklet and

educational video entitled *Vot Long Pati Ia! (Your Vote, Our Party)* have also been produced. These media encourage discussion on CRC by providing an activity on the treatment of children at school by teachers.

WSB has recently established a youth drop-in centre in Port Vila to assist in addressing the increasing problem of unemployed youth. The facility comprises a multi-purpose sports centre and a nutritional centre that enable youth to develop their skills and build their self-confidence.

In response to HIV/AIDS/STIs becoming a vital issue in the Pacific, a number of projects are being implemented by various NGOs in Vanuatu. WSB's role under the AusAID-funded Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS programme is to effectively coordinate the projects to maximise their positive impact.

**Vanuatu Association for Sport and National Olympic Committee**

A *Pikinini Plei Plei* programme has been developed by the Vanuatu Association for Sport and National Olympic Committee (VASANOC) and was launched for Children's Day 2005 (24 July). The idea behind this programme is to encourage children to become more active and build their skills.

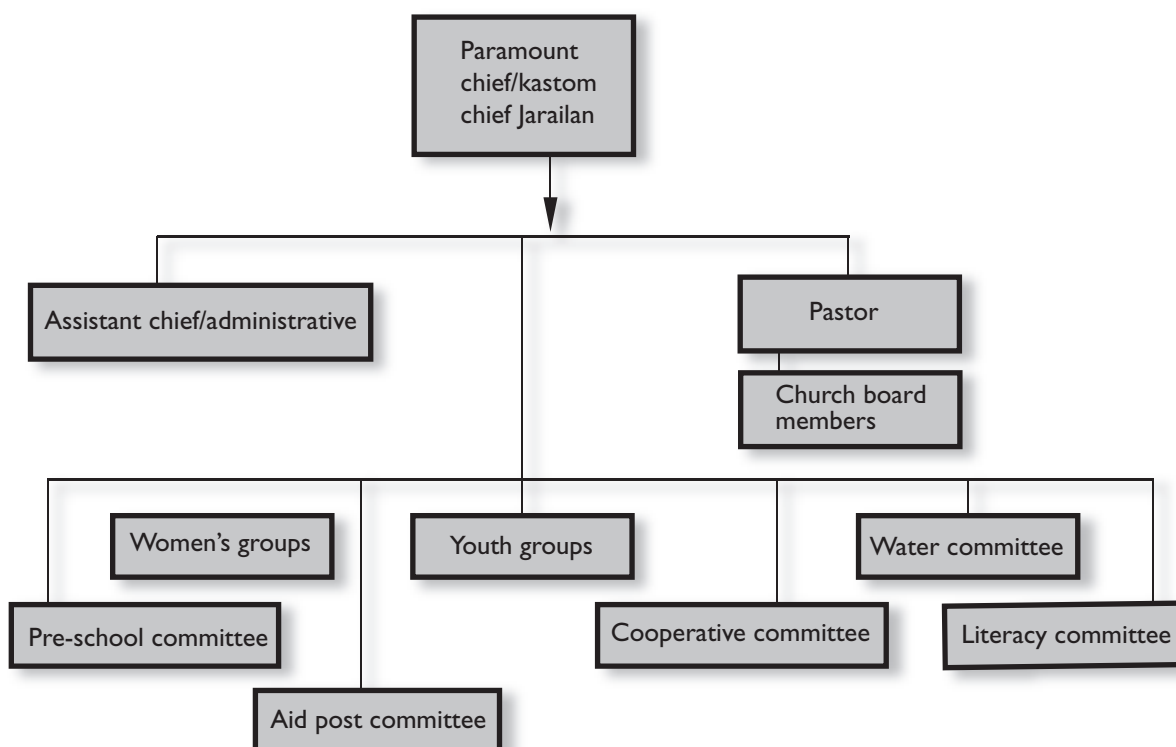
**Youth Challenge International**

Ni-Vanuatu youth are provided with the opportunity to develop fundraising, research, leadership and life skills through the Youth Challenge International (YCI) Vanuatu programme. Participants may be involved in a youth summit that provides a forum for discussion on issues important for youth. Other projects include construction of schools, eye testing, administrative reform and research. One of the key strengths of the programme is that Ni-Vanuatu youth work as a team alongside volunteers from Australia and Canada, which encourages team-building skills and positive cross-cultural experiences.

**Vanuatu Women's Centre**

Based in Port Vila, the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) has provided counselling services for women suffering from domestic violence over the past decade. It also produces quarterly newsletters that address domestic violence and sexual abuse, and provides legal advice. The VWC firmly supports the Bill for the Family Protection Act, which serves to protect any member of the family who is a victim of domestic violence.<sup>15</sup> An earlier version focused on only women as being victims, which has caused the VNCC and other groups to oppose the bill on the grounds that it will divide families. The latest version was introduced to Parliament in 2005 but was not tabled. The

**Village leadership structure of Jarailan**



VNCC wish to have the Bill for the Family Protection Act considered at the same time as the Chief's Legislation Bill later in 2005 in order to prevent duplication of legislation.

#### ***SRIA/Vanuatu Association of Women Graduates***

These CSOs managed the AusAID-funded *Human Rights Project*, which was further assisted by the University of the South Pacific (USP) Law School, UNICEF and the British High Commission. This project conducted a workshop to develop a Domestic Violence Protection Order in 2002.

## **Solomon Islands**

Although the Solomon Islands Government ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1995, public awareness about this new law and what it entails is limited. This is of particular significance as there is a disconnect between the CRC and traditional *kastom* law in the Solomon Islands. In many instances, acts that are considered a violation of child rights under the CRC are considered acceptable, such as in cases of discipline under traditional *kastom* law.

As a result of the civil unrest from 1998 to 2002, many children had their lives and development disrupted. During this time most children were not able to move around freely and were confined to their home preventing them attending school and normal daily activities. Many children still experience fearful memories of the unrest, things they saw or were told or from things that happened to them and the way their family was affected.

#### **Civil Society**

##### ***Save the Children Australia (Solomon Islands)***

###### *Child Advocacy Project*

Save the Children Australia works to improve the situation of children in the Solomon Islands by promoting and supporting their rights through advocacy, awareness raising, information and discussion. By maintaining links with various groups in order to develop attitudes and behaviours conducive to each child's survival, development and protection, child participation is encouraged as well as the participation of their families, communities, government and NGOs at all levels.

Save the Children Australia works closely with the National Advisory Council of Children (NACC) and has assisted in supporting a child rights desk within the Government Ministry of Youth, Sport and Women, to ensure child rights issues are taken up at policy level. Project activities include training workshops for community members, students and youth educators to raise the levels of awareness regarding child rights and protection; and

building institutional capacity to monitor the children's situation in Solomon Islands.

#### ***Women and Youth Peace Initiative***

##### *Helping develop a community-based approach to peace building*

In the year 2000, violent conflict erupted between two groups in Solomon Islands leading to a massive exodus of families from the capital Honiara and the formation of militia by the opposing groups. Large numbers of youth became involved in the militia.

This project, funded by AusAID's Humanitarian and Emergency programme, was set up to support those most affected by civil conflict, including youth, women and children, to foster peace and the reconciliation process. Together with government, various church bodies and local NGOs, the project encourages community groups to develop peacebuilding activities and acknowledge their rights to peace, equality and development. This is done by working with youth through an outreach project, all the while providing an essential community framework for peace through a women's programme.

The project aims to reach more than 7,500 youths through workshops and activities, including training a core group of peer educators in areas such as life skills, reproductive health awareness, group work facilitation, mediation and conflict resolution. The youth programme is providing one of the main means for young people to direct their own development activities.

The project also targets women and children in more than 300 communities, helping them develop a community-based approach to peacebuilding with such activities as strengthening skill sets for counsellors and church facilitators to provide basic counselling skills.

#### ***UNICEF Pacific***

The UNICEF Pacific Office is based in Suva with Field Offices in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati.<sup>16</sup> In the Pacific, UNICEF focuses on:

- child protection and advocacy for children's rights;
- integrated child health and development, including Early Child Development and Child Friendly Schools, children's immunisation and nutrition; and
- adolescent development, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

#### ***UNICEF New Zealand***

UNICEF New Zealand has undertaken the funding of a three-year pilot project to set up Child Friendly Schools in

Isabel Province, Solomon Islands, at the invitation of the Solomon Islands' Ministry of Education. Child Friendly Schools are schools centred around activity-based learning, colourful classes, encouraging the equal participation of girls, in-service training for teachers, resources for use in teaching and the participation of the local community and its leaders.

Educating children in the Solomon Islands is a challenge due to the geographic isolation of some communities, the recent conflict situation, the poor condition of schools (i.e. few toilets, rough buildings), poor working conditions for staff (i.e. little or no pay, shortage of materials, bad living conditions), and rapid population growth.

The pilot project will establish a firm institutional base for the progressive development of Child Friendly Schools. It will be based on the model used in Tafea Province in Vanuatu, where children who used to not want to go to school are now refusing to leave at the end of the day. In the first year, seven model schools will be developed with another 21 being added in the following two years. Teachers will be provided with intensive teacher and administration training. They will be visited by support workers who will evaluate their teaching and provide assistance with any difficulties they are having. The curriculum will be adapted to include local knowledge. Up to date resources for use in the classroom and professional development will be made available through a central resource centre and library.

A peace education model will also be taught to teachers to help with their conflict resolution and help children leave behind historical prejudices. Community awareness workshops will be held to discuss the importance of education to a community and how they can support their local school and teacher. Measures to govern the success of the project include: an increase in school enrolments, reduced drop-outs, improved learning achievements, an increase in the number of children progressing from grade to grade, better results for girls, and the degree of parent and community involvement. The ideal will be that the structures set in place become self-supporting with the help of the local government, parents and communities.<sup>17</sup>

## Papua New Guinea

### National government

The government has realised the importance of nurturing children and recently amended laws on child protection issues, such as child abuse, and has tougher penalties for law breakers compared to previous years. The PNG gov-

ernment became a signatory to the CRC in 1991 and has committed itself to the global effort that sets international standards for the survival, protection and development of children. The commitment is to implement the provisions of the Convention through domestic legislation.

There are PNG domestic laws that provide for the rights of children and are administered by various agencies. The domestic laws include:

- The Constitution
- Child Welfare Act
- Adoption Act
- Criminal Code
- Custom Recognition Act
- Adoption of Children Act
- Summary Offences Act
- Deserted Wives and Children Act
- Infant Act
- Maintenance Order Enforcement Act
- Juvenile Courts Act
- Reciprocal Enforcement of Custody Orders
- Civil Registration Act
- Defamation Act
- Employment Act
- Information Act
- Marriage Act
- Matrimonial Act
- Evidence Act

However, despite such legislation there is no effective body established and responsible for the welfare and development of children. The Child Rights Monitoring Committee, established in 2000, still lacks a clear mandate and struggles for the resources and technical capacity to have any impact on the well-being of children in the country.<sup>18</sup>

### Civil Society

#### *Save the Children Australia (PNG)*

Save the Children Australia (SCA) has been instrumental in promoting awareness and implementation of the CRC. Since 1996, SCA has worked to explain the CRC, its history and significance to all of its partner organisations in PNG. UNICEF has worked with Save the Children to establish the inter-sectoral social mobilisation group to promote key development issues related to the welfare of the child. UNICEF has published a pamphlet on the CRC and it is disseminated widely to all sectors of the community. The pamphlet is also translated into Tok Pisin.

**UNICEF Australia**

Research has been recently conducted by a number of NGOs alongside UNICEF Australia and Save the Children Australia. HELP Resources, a local NGO, was assigned to collect data with the assistance of PNG National Research Institute (NRI) on violence against children in 2005. The report will be published as an official PNG report in 2006. Also, HELP Resources has developed introductory training on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the CRC.

The Red Cross community-based rehabilitation programmes have also incorporated the CRC into their teacher training and community awareness programmes.

Churches in PNG have just started to undertake advocacy and have begun some work on HIV/AIDS, but not specifically on child protection issues.

*protection practices: Vanuatu draft report*, University of South Pacific, Pacific Children's Program, Fiji, 2001; C Salamone, *Discussion paper on primary prevention approaches relating to children's protection*, Pacific Children's Program, Australia, August 2001; C Cheveliar, *Child protection in Vanuatu. A report of a baseline study on knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices*, Pacific Children's Program, Fiji, June 2003; J Lamont, *Towards a sustainable, child abuse prevention strategy in Vanuatu. A discussion paper*, Pacific Children's Program, Australia, January 2005.

<sup>14</sup> *The state of health behaviour and lifestyle of Pacific youth, Vanuatu report 2001* (involved: WHO, Australian Centre for Health Promotion, Vanuatu Provincial Youth Council, Peace Corps Vanuatu); The Government of Vanuatu and UNICEF, *A situation analysis of children and women in Vanuatu 1998*, UNICEF Pacific, Fiji - whilst this is outdated, a new situational analysis is to be conducted during 2005 for distribution in 2006; and *CRC update*, UNICEF Pacific Office, Suva, Fiji, December 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Republic of Vanuatu, *Revised draft – Bill for the Family Protection Act of 2004*.

<sup>16</sup> Information taken directly from UNICEF websites. See <http://www.unicef.org.nz/about/nzers/gillian-mellsop.html> (accessed 28 September 2005)

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention, January 2004.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> National Statistics Office, *The 1999 Vanuatu national population and housing census. Main report*, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 2000, p20.

<sup>2</sup> E Tari, *A situation analysis of children and women in Vanuatu 1998*, UNICEF Pacific, Fiji and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 1998, p21.

<sup>3</sup> Professor DE Paterson, *Customary law research project*, Vanuatu Legal Sector Strengthening Project, Port Vila, Vanuatu, March – June 2004, p4.

<sup>4</sup> A Saul, *Brief overview of the laws affecting children in Vanuatu*, State Office, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Section 38, Employment Act.

<sup>6</sup> Section 39, Employment Act.

<sup>7</sup> Response provided by the Family Protection Unit upon WVV's request, June 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Malvatumaruri Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs (VNCC), *Corporate plan year 2004 – year 2008*, 24 May 2004, p5.

<sup>9</sup> National Children's Committee, *Vanuatu country end of decade report*, presented to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session, Port Vila, Vanuatu, December 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Malvatumaruri Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs (VNCC), *op. cit.*, p6. The VNCC has drafted a Chief's Legislation Bill to be introduced to Parliament in 2005.

<sup>11</sup> J Mitchell, *Young people speak...A report on the Vanuatu Young People's Project*, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Vanuatu, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> B Rousseau, *The report of the juvenile justice project: A resource on juvenile justice and kastom law in Vanuatu*, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Research conducted: D Hughes, *Qualitative study on child*

## Appendix 2 Survey tools

### Data collection methods/guidelines

- Focus group discussions: music/drama
- Key informant interviews
- Diaries for researchers (record observations)
- Mapping
- Day in the life of....
- Seasonal Calendars
- Historical timelines....
- Drawing
- Video on child rights/violence

### Possible children's activities

- Use stories to start conversations
- Research (vignettes)
- Music, drama, skits
- Mapping
- Day in the life of....
- Seasonal Calendars
- Historical timelines
- Drawing
- Video on child rights/violence

#### Guidelines

- look at training of community volunteers/project staff to carry out research

Overarching question	Themes/ Research	Key questions	Respondents	Prompt questions
How can children and their communities be supported to reach/ develop the child's full potential?	clash of cultures	Is there greater trust in the traditional/ <i>kastom</i> system or in non-traditional/ modern systems in addressing violence against children?  Why?	community leaders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is there greater trust in the traditional/ <i>kastom</i> system or in non-traditional/modern systems in addressing violence against children? Why?</li> <li>2. Can you give some examples of when <i>kastom</i> has protected a child in your community? What about with the modern system?</li> <li>3. Can you give some examples of when <i>kastom</i> made children vulnerable to violence? What about with the modern system?</li> <li>4. Are there any <i>kastom</i> practices that cause harm to children?</li> <li>5. How does the bride price affect children in your community? Girls and boys?</li> <li>6. What are the good points about adoption of children? Are there any concerns about adoption?(examples about access to education, work, value in family)</li> <li>7. How do you discipline your children? What is acceptable and what is not?</li> </ol>

Overarching question	Themes/ Research	Key questions	Respondents	Prompt questions
				<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. How does traditional practice influence the way in which you discipline your children?</li> <li>9. Has modern law affected the way in which you discipline your children?</li> <li>10. Is it appropriate to discipline other people's children and for others to discipline yours?</li> </ol>
			parents/caregivers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is there greater trust in the traditional/<i>kastom</i> system or in non-traditional/modern systems in addressing violence against children? Why?</li> <li>2. Can you give some examples of when <i>kastom</i> has protected a child in your community? What about with the modern system?</li> <li>3. Can you give some examples of when <i>kastom</i> has made children vulnerable to violence? What about with the modern system?</li> <li>4. Are there any <i>kastom</i> practices that cause harm to children?</li> <li>5. How does the bride price affect children in your community? Girls and boys?</li> <li>6. What are the good points about adoption of children? Are there any concerns about adoption?</li> <li>7. How does <i>kastom</i> affect the way in which you discipline your children?</li> <li>8. Has modern law affected the way in which you discipline your children?</li> <li>9. How do you discipline your children? What is acceptable and what is not?</li> <li>10. Is it appropriate to discipline other people's children and for others to discipline yours?</li> </ol>
			<i>pikinini</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does <i>kastom</i> mean to you?</li> <li>2. How does it affect you? Can you give some examples?</li> <li>3. Is it different to the modern system? How?</li> <li>4. Are there any <i>kastom</i> practices that cause harm to children in your community?</li> <li>5. How does the bride price affect children in your community? Girls and boys?</li> <li>6. What are the good points about adoption of children? Are there any concerns about adoption?</li> <li>7. How does <i>kastom</i> affect the way in which you treat each other?</li> <li>8. How should parents and the community discipline their children?</li> </ol>

Overarching question	Themes/ Research	Key questions	Respondents	Prompt questions
			youth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does <i>kastom</i> mean to you?</li> <li>2. How does it affect you? Can you give some examples?</li> <li>3. Is it different to the modern system? How?</li> <li>4. Are there any <i>kastom</i> practices that cause harm to children and youth in your community?</li> <li>5. How does the bride price affect children and youth in your community? Girls and boys?</li> <li>6. What are the good points about adoption of children? Are there any concerns about adoption?</li> <li>7. How does <i>kastom</i> affect the way in which you treat each other?</li> <li>8. How should parents and the community discipline their children and youth?</li> </ol>
	traditional practices/ responsibilities (sexuality, initiation, role of girls/women in family/society – work, bride price, adoption)	What role does tradition play in children and young people's lives?	all	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What role does tradition play in children and young people's lives?</li> </ol>
	gender	How does gender affect a child?	all	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What kind of activities do girls/boys do in the home/community?</li> <li>2. Do you think this is fair? Why?</li> <li>3. What do you think girls/boys should contribute to the family/community?</li> <li>4. Do you think education is more important for boys or girls? Why?</li> <li>5. Do you think it is important for children to have opportunities to play? Why?</li> <li>6. How are girls/boys disciplined differently in the home/community?</li> </ol>
	government infrastructure/ service provision (education, health, judicial system/legal framework, welfare system) Are you affected by the legal system? How?	What government services are available to you?	all	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you know about the modern legal system and how does it affect you? Can you give some examples?</li> <li>2. Do you think the modern legal system helps protect children? How? Why not?</li> <li>3. How can it be improved?</li> <li>4. What government services are available to you?</li> <li>5. How effective are they?</li> <li>6. Can both girls and boys access them? Do they use them? Give examples.</li> <li>7. If a child in your community were a victim of violence, are there systems in your community to support them? What? How?</li> <li>8. Is school a safe place for children?</li> </ol>

Overarching question	Themes/ Research	Key questions	Respondents	Prompt questions
	basic needs	How well are your basic needs being met?	all	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think people need to survive?</li> <li>2. What is your greatest basic need?</li> <li>3. What are the basic needs of children? Which are the most important?</li> <li>4. What is your favourite food? How often do you eat?</li> <li>5. Do girls and boys get the same food? Adults/children?</li> <li>6. Do you get sick very often? From what?</li> <li>7. What happens when you are sick? Who cares for you?</li> <li>8. Where do you live?</li> <li>9. What is your home like?</li> <li>10. How many people live in your home?</li> <li>11. How far do you have to walk to get clean water? Who collects the water? How often?</li> <li>12. Are your children immunised? Against what?</li> </ol>
	non-government actors	Has the church or any NGO changed the way you think about/understand children?	all	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How important is the church in your community?</li> <li>2. Do you know what an NGO is? Can you name some?</li> <li>3. Has the church/NGO changed the way you think about/understand children?</li> <li>4. How? Give examples.</li> <li>5. Have you heard of the <i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>? Where? Has it made any difference to you?</li> </ol>
	natural disasters	How does the community protect children in natural disasters?	all	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does the community protect children in natural disasters?</li> </ol>
	conflict/inter-tribal (Solomon Islands, Bougainville)	What affect did/ does the conflict have/has on children?	all	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has conflict affected children's education?</li> <li>2. Has conflict affected children's health?</li> <li>3. Has conflict affected children emotionally/ psychologically?</li> <li>4. What changes has the conflict created in your home?</li> <li>5. Have children played a role in the resolution of the conflict? How? Give examples?</li> <li>6. Were boys and girls affected differently by the conflict? How?</li> </ol>

Overarching question	Themes/ Research	Key questions	Respondents	Prompt questions
	land disputes	What are the impacts of land disputes on children?	all	1. What are the impacts of land disputes on children? Give examples.
	tourism	What is the impact of tourism on children and their communities?	all	1. Do children play a role in tourism? Give examples. 2. Is tourism negative/positive for the community and for children? Why?
	economic reform/justice (trade, aid)	What changes have you seen in the economy of your community over the past 10 years?  What is the impact of this on children in the community?	all	1. Tell us about the role of children in the community's economy? 2. When is it important for children to begin contributing to the family's economic needs? 3. Should adopted children contribute differently? 4. What is the impact of children's contribution in the community?
	HIV/AIDS	How well are you and children protected from the affects of HIV/AIDS?	all	1. How well are you and children protected from the affects of HIV/AIDS? Give examples.
	aspirations	How can the aspirations of children be met?	all	1. What are your aspirations for children? For yourself? 2. What are the major opportunities facing children? 3. What are the major challenges facing children today? 4. How can we address these challenges? What role can children play? 5. Who is responsible for helping children fulfil their aspirations?
	understanding of childhood and role of children in society	What values and practices do you see as important for children?	all	1. What kinds of activities do parents do with children? How often? 2. Who is a child? How do you define them? What are the characteristics of a child? 3. Who decides what is best for a child/youth? 4. Where are children able to participate in family/ community activities and decision making? 5. Has childhood changed over time? Since European culture introduced? What's good/bad? 6. What are the most important events for children? Why?

## Vanuatu: Thematic guideline for interview and focus group questions

(Outcome of brainstorming exercise conducted by WVV research team, March 2005.)

**Research question:** “How can children and their family and community be supported to reach/ develop the child’s full potential?”

*Preliminary questions and answers:*

Who will be our key informant interviewees?

Chiefs, church leaders, local project staff, village health worker (aid post), women’s groups, primary school teachers, youth leaders.

Who will participate in focus groups?

Have separate focus groups for each of the following: church leaders and chiefs; parents/caregivers; youth (aged 13–18 years); and children (aged 8–12 years).

What is the focus for our interview?

The focus should be the key informant’s relationship with children, their observations about the situation of children and how they think children should be supported in reaching their “full potential”. Specific questions will be asked of each informant to give a clear picture of a child’s life in the village.

The following is the suggested order of questions for focus groups. Broader themes or questions are provided first to structure the discussions and more detailed questions follow to serve as “prompts” by providing specific examples.

### I. Structure for focus groups

Note: We need to make sure that in the children’s group, there is a variety of ages and have some of the older children (11–12 years) able to speak Bislama and interpret for younger children into their local language. In this way, these older children help in conducting the focus group.

Suggested order of questions for focus group (keeping the broader questions simple to help us keep our focus but will have more detailed questions as “prompts” to encourage discussion):

#### Part A: Definitions

(i) What is a “child”?

- What does it mean to be a child?  
What is it like to be a child?

- What is childhood?  
What’s the difference between a child and an adult?
- What responsibilities does/should a child have?

(ii) What is a “family”?

- Who makes up a family?  
Why do these people make a family?  
When does a family begin? e.g. exploring adoption, consent to marriage, links with other islands.
- Where is the family located?  
Are they all in the community?
- Is there a special bond within the family?  
If so, what makes that bond special?

(iii) What is a “community”?

- Who makes up the community? Why?
- What makes a community a good one?  
A bad one? Why do you think this?
- What are the kinds of relationships in the community?  
How does the child relate to community members and leaders? How does the family relate with the community?
- What role does *kastom* play in the community?

*Suggested activities to assist with discussions:*

(i) Provide a drawing of the village as a circle within a square, with the square representing the framework of the wider Vanuatu society. The square will be made up of symbols of the government (provincial and national), health system, education system, legal system, police, civil society, etc. Then encourage participants to show what links, if any, there are between their community and the rest of Vanuatu society, including links with other communities.

(ii) Ask participants to draw their family, community, themselves – identity. Through drawings we can see how people interpret things, allowing self-expression.

(iii) Ask participants to provide “happy” and “not happy” stories about their family, their childhood (for adults/older youth), their experience now as a child, community – roles, responsibilities, relationship with child. If there is a happy story, why is it happy? And if unhappy, why is it so?

From this section, we hope to gather more information about our participants and how they create their identity. For example, age, gender, *kastom*, role in family and community, work/school, being Ni-Vanuatu, religion, village, coming from a particular island. It is ideal that our participants represent a good cross-section of the community.

**Part B: Discussion on “respect”**

As respect is fundamental to having human/child rights (without respect for yourself and others, you cannot appreciate the idea of having rights) and as it is a big part of *kastom* (village law, way-of-life and set of beliefs), which the community will understand, this session will explore the idea of “respect” by examining:

- What factors contribute towards the *weakening of respect* in the family and community (bearing in mind that external factors within the wider Vanuatu society may be also contributing)?  
(Looking for negative factors.)
- What factors contribute towards the *strengthening of respect* in the family and community (bearing in mind that external factors within the wider Vanuatu society may also be contributing)?  
(Looking for positive factors.)

Types of respect:

- Self-respect
- Between children (older, younger)
- Between parent and child; between other family members (respect within the family)
- Between community and child (school, *kastom*, religion, aid post)
- Between community and wider society

Note: By starting first with the negative factors, it is easier to define “respect” by first saying what it is not. Also, we can link Part A (Definitions) with this by encouraging discussion on what makes an unhappy child/family/community? Is it because there is a lack of respect? (If participants list something else other than respect it will be great to look at that too and build on our notion of “rights”.)

Questions:

- (i) What is respect?
- (ii) Who must respect who and why? (stories can help – link with authority). Are there different levels of respect for different people?
- (iii) When to show respect? Different levels of respect for different situations?
- (iv) How to demonstrate respect?

The following are specific scenarios that are a reality for some people in the selected communities. The aim of this exercise is to encourage participants to think about how they would deal with the situation. We could suggest a negative way of handling the situation (negative in terms of it not being a “win-win” situation for everyone involved as someone still is unhappy) and let people debate about whether this is the best solution (including what makes the “best solution”). Note: the following scenarios are only suggestions – you can make your own to talk about respect issues.

- Scenario 1: A 12-year-old child is unhappy as she can't go to school any more because her father can't afford to pay the school fees. The father feels bad as he knows his child should go to school.  
(Respect issue: extended family respects the importance of the child needing to go to school and provides support.)
- Scenario 2: Mother and father argue and fight quite a lot at home, which makes the child very unhappy. (Respect issue: mother and father do not respect the child's need for a home without fighting; as this emotionally damages the child.)
- Scenario 3: A 15-year-old pregnant girl is very upset as her family is asking her to leave the home as she hasn't shown respect for her family. (Respect issue: Teenage girl does not respect her family's standards of behaviour but family does not respect the girl's need for support during a difficult time. Also, do you think that the father of the unborn child has shown any respect to the girl and her family?)
- Scenario 4: A child, whose mother had him when she was a teenager and does not know who the father is, has grown up being treated differently by the community and he is very unhappy. (Respect issue: the way in which the community treats the illegitimate child, the lack of respect on behalf of the father who disappeared when he found out his girlfriend was pregnant; birth rights.)

**Part C: Possible solutions**

Discussions about the above scenarios should lead to talking about what makes a “good solution” to a problem. Is it when there is respect for all parties concerned?

Link to “child protection” in the family, community and wider society – what is it? How can we protect children so that they are respected within all settings?

## 2. Observation diaries

Keep a diary when you are in the community, noting anything you observe that is relevant to our research and also of informal talks to adults/youth/children.

But of course, do not write the person's name or other defining details about that person to protect their privacy – we are only interested in attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices of the community, which can be recorded without identifying individuals. Example, “a youth aged 17 years was observed to be listening carefully to what the chief had to say on teenage pregnancy and later told me he highly respected the chief” or “I found a 10-year-old girl having to look after her two brothers aged two and six years...I asked her how she felt about having this responsibility”.

## 3. Questions

(i) Understanding of childhood and role of children in Vanuatu

- Who is a child? How do you define them?  
What are the characteristics of a child?
- What values and practices do you see as important for children?
- What kinds of activities do parents do with children? How often?
- Who decides what is best for a child/youth?
- Where are children able to participate in family/community activities and decision making?
- Has childhood changed over time? Since European culture was introduced? What's good/bad?
- Do you think it is important for children to have opportunities to play? Why?
- How are girls/boys disciplined differently in the homes/communities?
- What are the most important events for children? Why?

(ii) Basic needs

- What are the basic (main/important) needs that people will need to be able to survive? To live?
- Which is the greatest need of them all?

- What are the basic (main/important) needs for children? Which are the most important?
- How well are your basic needs being met?
- Food – What is your favourite food? How often do you eat? Do you girls and boys get the same food? (Choice of food) And do children get the same choice of food as adults?
- Health – Do you get sick very often? From what disease? What happens to you when you are sick? Who cares for you? Are your children immunised? And against what?
- Shelter – Where do you live? What is your home like? How many people live in your home?
- Water – How far do you have to walk to get clean water? Who collects the water? How often?
- Emotional health – Would you say the feeling of being loved and listened to is a basic need? Is respect a basic need?
- Specific reference to CRC – Have you heard of the “*Convention on the Rights of the Child?*” Where? Has it made any difference to you, in the way children should be taught, disciplined, etc.?

(iii) Aspirations

- How can the dreams/aspirations of children be met? (what the child hopes to become in the future?)
- What are your dreams/hopes/aspirations for children in the future? And what are your dreams for yourself? (What do you want your children/yourself to have/become?)
- What are the major opportunities facing children? (In what ways do you assist children to reach their dreams? How do you help your children to make achievements?)
- What are the major challenges facing children today? (What are the negative forces that children face today?)
- How can we address these challenges? What role can children play? (In what role can children play to address these challenges? Or how can they help to address these challenges?)
- Who is responsible for helping children fulfil their aspirations?



PHOTO - ANTONIA KALCZ

*Playing football in Vanuatu. Some adults recognise children as a resource for the future.*

(iv) Gender

- How does gender affect a child? (Family, community, school/work, society)
- What sort of activities (responsibilities) do girls/boys do in the family/home/community? What about at school and at work? In the wider society?
- Do you think this is fair? Why?
- What do you think girls/boys should contribute to the family/community?
- Do you think education is more important for boys or girls? Why?
- What are the main roles does tradition play in the lives of girls and boys? Is it different for each gender?
- What are the main roles/responsibilities of girls in the community and family, as within traditional practices? What do boys have to do? e.g. traditional practices/responsibilities (sexuality, identity, initiation, role of girls/women in family/society, work, bride price).
- Do you know anything about bride price? What are the benefits of having a bride price? And what are the disadvantages of a bride price system? For

girls and boys? Is it compulsory for women to go through bride price in their marriages? How do you think this might affect women?

- In what ways do traditional practices protect children? (in regard to consent, sex, marriages, sexual harassments, violence against children, illegal/legal drinking, pornography?)

(v) Religion

- What kinds of things can the church teach (relating to: children and young people; families; communities) about behaviour, discipline, respect, sex, gender (girls and boys) etc..?
- What kinds of activities can children be involved in at church?
- What good things can a church bring into a child's life? What bad things can a church bring into a child's life?
- Do you go to church? If yes, how often?
- Can we ask what church you belong to?
- Where do you learn about your religion and who teaches you?
- Is there a relationship between *kastom* and religion? If so, can you describe what it is?

Does one influence the other or do people accept both as equally important? If no, can you say why?

- How can the church assist in resolving problems? Protecting children?

(vi) *Kastom* and state justice system

(Questions for community leaders, parents/caregivers)

*Kastom*

- What are some good examples of *kastom* practices that can influence the way in which you discipline your children? Does this mean those practices are acceptable in the community?
- Are there other good *kastom* practices and beliefs that benefit children? Why do they benefit them?
- Are there any *kastom* practices that can cause harm to children (give examples)? And is this not acceptable? Does this make the children often feel not safe in the communities?
- Is it appropriate to discipline other people's children and for others to discipline yours? Why?
- Are there *kastom* practices and beliefs in your community that may not benefit children? Why do they not benefit?
- (Only ask this if bride price is practiced in the community) Does the bride price affect children in your community? Do the girls feel like they being sold? And do the boys feel like they own something in return from a bride price?

*State justice system*

- Would you think that the modern law has affected the way in which you discipline your children? (e.g. going to school).
- Have the children's births been registered?
- Do children know their own ages? And do they know the age of consent and of marriages? When is a girl/boy is physically ready for marriage? Or is it also when they are mentally and emotionally ready?
- Do the children know their legal rights?

*Adoption*

- Is adoption practiced in your community? If so, how is this done – through *kastom* law or state justice system? Or just between families informally?
- What role does tradition play in adoption? (Is it because of land heritage, family values, education, and work)?

- What kinds of adoption are there (e.g. illegitimate child, between family members so it's legitimate)?
- What are the good points about adoption of children? Are there any issues with adoption? (e.g. about access to education, work, land, value in family ties)?

*Specific reference to violence and children*

- What do you understand the term “violence against children” to mean? If solving a problem on violence against children, how would you prefer it to be solved? Within the *kastom* practices or by legal system (police, court, etc.)?
- If a child in your community were a victim of violence, are there systems in your community to support them? What are they? And how do they work?
- Can you give examples of when *kastom* has protected a child in your community? Has this increased/decreased violence against children? Do the children feel safer now?

(Questions for *pikinini* and youths)

*Kastom*

- What is *kastom* like? And what does it mean to you? Is it important for you to know *kastom*?
- How does it link to your religion? Gender? Age? Role in family and community?
- How does *kastom* affect the way in which you treat each other?
- What are the factors (things) of *kastom* that might be good/bad for you? Do you think it will affect you in your future? Can you give some examples?
- Are there any *kastom* practices that can cause harm/danger to children in your community?
- Are these dangers/harmful practices increasing?
- What do you think about adopted children? Are you adopted? How do you feel about it? (Good and bad points.) Do you know how adoption is worked out (*kastom* or law courts)?

*State justice system*

- What do you know about the state justice system and how does it affect you?
- Can you mention the good/bad side of it? Can you give some examples (court, laws, police...)?
- Do you think the state justice system helps to protect children? How? (Why not?)

- (Example by law protection on the rights of children, council of chiefs, women's crisis centre...)
- How can it be improved?
- Have you had to use the legal system? If so, was it a negative or positive experience?
- What would you prefer to use to solve problems – *kastom* or legal system?

(vii) Specific reference to violence and children

- What do you understand violence to be?
- Do you feel safe in schools, communities, in the family, town or in gardens or other places?
- How would you think parents and the community should discipline their children?  
How is it done now?
- Do you see any good practices of *kastom* that can help you for your future? Is it decreasing violence against children?

(viii) Government infrastructure/service provision

- What government services are available to you (education, hospital, welfare system, legal system...)?
- Is it easy for you to access these services?
- How effective are they? Are they providing you the full service you need?
- Can both girls and boys access them?  
Do they use them? Give examples.
- Is school a safe place for children?  
Or in the family, community?
- Do children get physical punishments at school?  
Or at home?
- Have they been bullied at school? Sexual harassed?

(ix) Civil society

- How important is the church in the community?  
(Benefits of the influence of the church.)
- Do you know what an NGO is? Can you name some?
- Has the church/NGO changed the way you think about/understand children (moral values, children rights)?

(x) Economy

(Questions for adults/youth)

- What changes have you seen in the economy of your community over the past 10 years?
- Tell us about the role of children in the community economy? What do children do to help in bringing in the economy of the community?
- When is it important for children to begin contributing to the family's economic needs?  
At what age do children understand/contribute to the family's economy/income?
- Should adopted children contribute differently?  
How are adopted children viewed in the family?
- What is the impact of children's contribution in the community? In what ways do children contribute to their community? What do communities think of it?

(xi) Other issues

- Natural Disasters – How does the community protect children in natural disasters? (Disaster awareness, serving children first, valuing children's rights.)
- Tourism – What is the impact of tourism on children and their communities? Do children play a role in tourism? (Helping out family chores, selling products) Give examples.
- Is tourism negative/positive for the community and for children? Why? In what ways?
- HIV/AIDS (ask only youth these questions)  
– How well are you and children protected from the affects of HIV/AIDS? How well are you and children protected from the affects of HIV/AIDS? Give examples? How do you protect yourself from HIV/AIDS? Is it through Education awareness on HIV, protections, etc.

## Appendix 3

# World Vision Child Protection guidelines

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### Creating a child-safe organisation

#### Child Protection Policy for World Vision International (WVI)

Commitment to the well-being of children involves many people and many actions. One part of protecting children involves implementing a child protection policy, which specifies the commitment to a child-safe organisation and supports the safety of children in their communities.

The WVI policy has 11 components:

1. Awareness raising about child abuse and the protection of children.
2. Program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation focusing on the participation and protection of children.
3. Recruitment and screening of staff, volunteers, interns, consultants, and board members, plus screening of visitors.
4. Managing visitors to WV projects.
5. Behaviour protocols/codes of conduct for all those linked with WV.
6. Child Abuse: Allegation management, including the care and support of the affected child(ren).
7. Child protection in sponsorship.
8. Advocacy on child protection and child rights.
9. Communications about children.
10. Confidentiality of all child information.
11. Partner organisations and their commitments to child protection.

Each WV office is responsible for its country-specific policy, which should reflect local child protection and labour laws. Child Protection is a developing field of expertise in

relief and development work. Therefore World Vision along with all our partners continues to learn to protect children more effectively.

#### Behaviour Protocols and World Vision

We would like children and their families to feel comfortable and at ease while involved in our programmes and when welcoming visitors. We would also like visitors to have a positive experience when visiting our programmes and children. As a result, WV has very specific behaviour expectations called protocols (also called codes of conduct) for staff, visitors, and all who are associated with WV, as follows:

#### Visitors, Volunteers and Staff

These behaviour protocols are universal to WV, and all are expected to adhere to them:

- Treat all children with respect and dignity.
- Listen to children.
- All visitors and staff must have a police background clearance where it is legally permitted to obtain one.
- All visitors to WV projects must be accompanied by a designated WV staff member at all times.
- Be sensitive to the unwritten laws of personal familiarity in language, conversation, and physical intimacy, and observe them.
- Stop any interaction with a child if a child says stop, or if the child appears uncomfortable with the interaction.
- Always ask permission from a child and the child's parents/guardian if you wish to take a photograph.
- Do not touch sexual areas of the body or have sex with a child. Having sex with a child is a grave offence, and punishable by imprisonment in many countries.

- Do not expose anyone to sexual materials or abuse them through noncontact sexual activity. Be cautious in sending verbal, nonverbal, or written messages that could be misinterpreted by the child or adults.
- Dress in culturally appropriate ways. Always be in view of another adult when with a child (i.e., do not spend time alone with a child). This is for the child's protection and to protect you from possible false accusation.
- WV staff do not hire children as house help or place a child in situations of exploitative labour. Children have a right to education and play.
- Do not slap, hit or physically abuse any child. WV does not support corporal punishment, but recommends alternative methods of discipline.
- Do not psychologically and/or verbally abuse any child. Adults are always responsible for their behaviour with a child, even if a child is acting seductively.

#### REMEMBER

- WV personnel and visitors are expected and required to report any suspicions of child abuse to the national director immediately.
- WV has policy and procedures that respond to accusations, which allow for a process that respects all involved.
- Noncompliance with these requirements will be taken seriously. This will involve referral of cases to the police and/or social services if child rights laws have been broken.
- WV personnel and visitors will be expected to sign a document that signifies that they agree to abide by the behaviour protocols.
- Children are defined as any human being under the age of 18 years, as recognised by international law. While these particular behaviour protocols focus on children, we expect your interactions with adults to show similar respect for culture and human rights.

#### There are many types of abuse in our world:

- Physical abuse – Hitting, burning, or caning children, or punishing by denying food/nutrition, abduction, and kidnapping.
- Sexual abuse – Inappropriate touching to rape (contact), and noncontact sexual abuse, which is



Photo caption

- forcing a child to observe sexual acts, and showing a child pornography.
- Emotional abuse – Humiliation, uncaring attitudes, absence of praise, ridiculing, bullying, denying time to play, demoralising the child rather than focusing on behaviour changes. Stigmatising children with disabilities.
- Harmful cultural practices deny children their rights. These include female genital mutilation, female infanticide, and early marriage.
- Early marriage, which often leads to pregnancy at a young age, and being unable to finish schooling.
- Exploitative child labour involves giving a child tasks for which she or he is not developmentally ready, expecting children to do work that does not allow time for their education, rest, and play. Examples include bonded or forced labour, persuading children

to sell drugs, recruiting children into fighting forces, domestic workers, and trafficking.

#### **Who abuses children and where does abuse take place?**

Child abusers cannot be easily identified. Abusers can be male or female members of any social, cultural, or economic group and of any age.

- Abuse in the family – Most abuse of children occurs within the home by other family members.
- Within the community – In most cases, children are abused by people known to them, and the abuse takes place in the local area.. In institutions – in schools, daycare centers, refugee camps, and correctional rehabilitation and children's homes.
- By visitors to communities – By outsiders who take advantage of a child's vulnerability, for example, drug dealers, sex tourists, paedophiles, debt collectors, the military, and recruiters for brothels.

itarian efforts are community-based, child-focused and available to those in need, regardless of race, gender, ethnic background or religious belief. World Vision is committed to the holistic development of all children and the realisation of their rights. Children have a right to survival, development, protection, and participation as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

#### **Child Protection**

*WV offices around the world are actively involved in protecting children in the communities in which they work.*

**WV partners with communities** to provide clean drinking water, nutrition, and primary health services that protect children from preventable diseases, and provide early treatment for illness.

**WV partners with children as an essential part of empowering children.** Promoting and encouraging children's ability to engage in all decisions that affect them is an important part of child protection.

**WV partners with the most vulnerable children and their families:** Children in need of special protection such as girls and boys involved in exploitative child labour, who survive war and conflict, who are survivors of abuse and neglect, and who suffer from the effects of harmful traditional practices.

**WV partners with other NGOs,** UN agencies and other organisations to have a united voice on issues that affect children and to learn from one another.

**WV advocates with governments and opinion leaders** for policies, laws, and practices that strengthen the protection of children.

#### **World Vision and Children**

World Vision is a Christian relief and development partnership with a mission to end suffering, poverty and injustice so that children and poor communities can realise their God-given potential. World Vision's human-

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