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Chiemi Osada

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Date

Women's participation in WASH decision-making  
in rural communities in the Solomon Islands

By

Chiemi Osada

MPH

Global Health

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Joanne A. McGriff

Committee Chair

---

Kelly Alexander

Committee Member

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By

Chiemi Osada

Master of Engineering

Graduate School of Engineering, Kyoto University, Japan

2015

Thesis Committee Chair: Joanne A. McGriff, MD, MPH, JM

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## Abstract

Women's participation in WASH decision-making in rural communities in the Solomon Islands

By Chiemi Osada

**Background:** For women and girls, a lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) affects their economic productivity, educational attainment, physical health, and exposure to violence. However, women are often marginalized in WASH decision-making processes at the community level. In the Solomon Islands, the governments have developed policies and programs to address gender equality in WASH in rural communities, but the implementation of these policies have not been effective. To investigate this issue, a research team led by CARE, an international non-profit organization, conducted a qualitative study among six rural villages in Malaita and Isabel provinces in the Solomon Islands. The research team sought to understand gender disparity in rural WASH in the Solomon Islands, with the goal of providing an analysis of, and recommendations for, improving gender and social inclusion in rural WASH programming in the country.

**Methods:** This study is a secondary data analysis of the original research project that included 16 focus groups among four different populations: 1) adult males; 2) adult females; 3) male community leaders; and 4) female community leaders. This study examines differences in perceptions between men and women regarding women's participation in WASH, and impediments to women's involvement in WASH management in rural communities in the Solomon Islands.

**Results:** The analysis revealed six themes: 1) responsibility and roles of WASH-related activities; 2) decision making in WASH-related issues; 3) women's perceptions regarding other women's participation in WASH committees; 4) men's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committees; 5) challenges of involving women in the committee; and 6) safety concerns. The qualitative data revealed that while women used more water than men due to women's responsibility for WASH-related household chores (such as collecting water and laundry), decision-making regarding WASH was dominated by males. Further, the study identified four significant barriers to women's participation in decision-making regarding WASH management: time poverty; conflicts with husbands; gossip and criticism from other women; and lack of education.

**Conclusion:** From the findings, we concluded that WASH interventions must address power dynamics at the community and household levels for effective and sustainable implementation.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are essential for human life. Globally, 2.1 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water, defined as having water from an “improved source located on premises, available when needed, and free from microbiological and priority chemical contamination” (JMP, 2017a, Drinking water ladder section, para. 1) (Organization & United Nations Children’s Fund, 2017). Similarly, 4.4 billion people have no access to safely managed sanitation services, defined as “use of improved facilities which are not shared with other households and where excreta are safely disposed in situ or transported and treated off-site” (JMP, 2017b, Sanitation ladder section, para. 1) (Organization & United Nations Children’s Fund, 2017). To improve WASH coverage across the world, international society set the goals under the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030). While MDGs mainly focused on the development issues such as poverty, education, and health in developing countries, SDGs have a global agenda targeting a range of issues across the world including economy, environment, and energy. (General Assembly resolution 55/2, 2000; United Nations, 2015).

Lack of access to a water source and adequate sanitation matters especially to women and girls. In many parts of the world including the Solomon Islands, water-related domestic work such as management of water in household, washing, and cooking have been considered as a women’s responsibility (Fentiman & Warrington, 2011; Geere, Hunter, & Jagals, 2010; Geleta, Elabor-Idemudia, Henry, & Reggassa, 2017; Graham, Hirai, & Kim, 2016; Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2014). Thus, women and

female children who lack access to water sources spend more time collecting water compared to men and boys (UNIFEM, 2009; Wodon & Bardasi, 2009; Wodon & Beegle, 2006; Wodon & Ying, 2010; World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund, 2017) .

The burden shouldered by women and girls due to a lack of access to WASH facilities adversely affects their health and education in a variety of ways. For example, Geere et al. (2010) found that the most common negative health outcome among women in South Africa from fetching water was spinal pain. In addition, many studies identified women and girls are exposed to risks of physical attack and rapes during collection of water ,and using of shared latrines and open defecation (Amnesty International, 2010; Pommells, Schuster-Wallace, Watt, & Mulawa, 2018; WaterAid, 2012). Traveling long distances for water and the use of shared latrines also increase the risk of acquiring infectious diseases such as diarrhea and trachoma (Pickering & Davis, 2012; Schmidlin et al., 2013; Wang & Hunter, 2010). Also, lack of access to appropriate WASH facilities in households and schools have profound impact on girl's education and school attendance (Dreibelbis et al., 2013; Hemson, 2007; International Centre for Diarrheal Diseases Research, WaterAid, & the Ministry of Local Government, 2014; WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation., 2012). Hemson (2007) identified that collecting water for longer hours than average led children to be late to school, unable to concentrate in class, exhibiting poor morale, and needing to leave school as early as possible to collect water. A recent survey of more than 2,000 adolescent girls in Bangladesh revealed that 40% of them reported missing school during menstruation due to inadequate sanitation facilities, and 55% reported that they were excluded from religious

activities at school during menstruation (International Centre for Diarrheal Diseases Research et al., 2014).

Dealing with poor WASH access has a considerable impact on women's lives and health. However, men often dominate the decision-making process when it comes to WASH access and management of WASH at the household and community level (The Water and Sanitation Program & World Bank, 2010; United Nations, 2009). Many studies have shown that women's active participation in the decision-making process for WASH contributes to the effectiveness and sustainability of the interventions (The Inter-agency Task Force on Gender and Water, 2006; The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2015; Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998).

In the Solomon Islands, access to water and sanitation in rural areas is poorer compared to urban areas (JMP database, n.d.). A study showed that 90% of people of the Solomon Islands living in urban areas had access to at least basic drinking water service, defined as "drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a roundtrip including queuing" (JMP, 2017a, Drinking water ladder section, para. 1). In contrast, 56% of rural people had access to basic service (JMP database, n.d.). For open defecation, the rate is 9% among urban residents compared to 50% for rural residents (JMP database, n.d.).

As discussed earlier, people traditionally see many domestic tasks (such as collecting water, cooking and washing) as the responsibility of women in the Solomon Islands (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2014). However, women are excluded from WASH decision-making processes or management activities (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2014). This norm illustrates existing of men's dominance and gender

inequality in the decision-making process in the Solomon Islands (Asian Development Bank, 2015). To fill in the gap, the Solomon Islands government have been making continuous efforts towards improving WASH in rural areas through the program called Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (RWASH). RWASH programming includes principles to promote gender equality and clearly states that every sector must ensure that gender is a key component of every WASH project and program (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2014, 2015). However, even though the importance of gender mainstreaming in the WASH sector has been recognized at the policy level, gender inequality in WASH remains as one of the major challenges on the ground level (WaterAid, 2016). Thus, there is a need for a deeper understanding of challenges and barriers preventing women from participating in the decision-making process and management activities in WASH at the local level in rural communities in the Solomon Islands.

The following aims and research questions guide the development of this thesis.

#### *Purposes of the study*

1. To understand the difference in perceptions between men and women regarding the participation of adult women in WASH management in rural communities (Malaita and Isabel provinces) in Solomon Islands;
2. To identify barriers that prevent adult women in Malaita and Isabel provinces from participating in committees for WASH management.

#### *Research questions:*

1. What are the differences in perceptions between men and women regarding roles and responsibilities in WASH?

2. What are the differences in perceptions between men and women regarding women's participation in WASH management?
3. What challenges and obstacles of involving women in committees do community leaders recognize?
4. What challenges and obstacles of involving women in committees do community residents recognize?

*The significance of the study*

This study is significant for the development of Solomon Islands because addressing gender issues in WASH is critical for effectiveness and sustainability of WASH-related programs. In addition, addressing these gender issues is necessary to achieve the SDGs and to reduce gender disparities in WASH, which is connected to improving gender equality in society.

## **Chapter 2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Overview of global water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)**

Improving access to safe water and adequate sanitation is critical for sustainable development including socio-economic development, food production, energy, and health. Worldwide, at the time of 2015, 29% of people (2.1 billion people) lacked safely managed drinking water services, defined as having water from an “improved source located on premises, available when needed, and free from microbiological and priority chemical contamination” (JMP, 2017a, Drinking water ladder section, para. 1) (Organization & United Nations Children’s Fund, 2017). In addition, 61% of the global population (4.5 billion people) have no access to safely managed sanitation services, defined as “use of improved facilities which are not shared with other households and where excreta are safely disposed in situ or transported and treated off-site” (JMP, 2017b, Sanitation ladder section, para. 1) (Organization & United Nations Children’s Fund, 2017).

Inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, specifically in low- and middle-income countries, increase the risk of transmitting diseases such as diarrhea, typhoid fever, cholera, and trachoma (Garn et al., 2018; Komarulzaman, Smits, & de Jong, 2017; Mogasale, Ramani, Mogasale, Park, & Wierzba, 2018; Taylor, Kahawita, Cairncross, & Ensink, 2015). According to the WHO, 1.5 million death from diarrheal disease each year are attributed to unsafe water, poor sanitation or insufficient hygiene, and most of the cases are the death of children below the age of five (Prüss-Üstün A., Bos R., Gore F., & Bartram J., 2008).

Given the situation, all United Nation member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015

(United Nations, 2015). One of these goals (SDG 6) focuses on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all with eight specific targets and 11 indicators (Figure 2-1) (United Nations, 2018).

**Figure 2-1 Targets and Indicators of SDG 6**

| TARGETS    |  | INDICATORS   |   |
|------------|--|--------------|---|
| <b>6.1</b> | By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all  | <b>6.1.1</b> | Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services   |
| <b>6.2</b> | By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations  | <b>6.2.1</b> | Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water  |
| <b>6.3</b> | By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally                           | <b>6.3.1</b> | Proportion of wastewater safely treated   |
|            |  | <b>6.3.2</b> | Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality   |
| <b>6.4</b> | By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity                                      | <b>6.4.1</b> | Change in water-use efficiency over time  |
|            |  | <b>6.4.2</b> | Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources  |
| <b>6.5</b> | By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate   | <b>6.5.1</b> | Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (0-100)  |
|            |  | <b>6.5.2</b> | Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation  |
| <b>6.6</b> | By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes  | <b>6.6.1</b> | Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time  |
| <b>6.A</b> | By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies | <b>6.A.1</b> | Amount of water- and sanitation-related official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan  |
| <b>6.B</b> | Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management   | <b>6.B.1</b> | Proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management |

## 2.2 Gender and WASH

As SDG 6.2 aims “by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women



and girls and those in vulnerable situations” (United Nations, 2018), the international society has acknowledged the importance of gender mainstreaming in WASH. Addressing issues of gender and WASH is a key component to achieve both SDG 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (United Nations, 2015), and SDG 6.2.

### 2.2.1 Roles and responsibilities in WASH

In most low-income countries, women and girls are considered the primary users, providers, and managers of water, but the decision-making process in WASH is traditionally dominated by men (The Water and Sanitation Program & World Bank, 2010; United Nations, 2009). Graham et al. (2016) found that among 24 countries in sub-Saharan African, adult women were the primary person in charge of water collection; ranging from 46% in Liberia to 90% in Cote d’Ivoire. In the same study, the researchers highlighted that female children were more likely to be responsible for fetching water compared to male children (62% vs. 38% respectively) (Graham et al., 2016). In addition, throughout communities in East African countries, women were considered to be responsible for all domestic-related tasks such as sweeping, cooking, carrying water and fetching water, and they were consistently reminded that their place was “in the home” and that these responsibilities were important to make them more desirable for marriage (Fentiman & Warrington, 2011).

A qualitative study in Southern Ethiopia showed that while men had some leisure time to socialize, women were mostly busy with household chores such as fetching water, caring for family members and preparing food (Geleta et al., 2017). In the same study, the researchers also identified that the women’s limitation to working mostly with domestic

tasks was a significant cause for disempowerment and the marginalization of women, whereas men's mobility and networking allowed them to have power (Geleta et al., 2017).

A qualitative study in six rural villages in South Africa also revealed that water carrying was usually women's task, and men only performed this task only when there were no women or children available to collect water (Geere et al., 2010). Similarly, a report from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services of the Solomon Islands stated that collecting water was traditionally considered as the role of women and girls in the Solomon Islands. (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2014).

Time spent on water collection is a significant factor in understanding burdens women face in WASH related activities. According to an analysis of data from 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that women at least spend 16 million hours each day per round trip to collect water, for the 25 countries combined (United Nations, 2012). In Guinea, women collect water 5.7 hours per week on average in comparison with 2.3 hours for men (Wodon & Bardasi, 2009); women in Malawi spend 9.1 hours per week on average compared to 1.1 hours for men (Wodon & Beegle, 2006); and in Sierra Leone, this figure was 7.3 hours compared to 4.5 hours (Wodon & Ying, 2010).

### 2.2.2 Adverse health outcomes from lack of water access

In Africa and Asia, women walk an average of 6 kilometers to collect water, carrying 20 to 25 liters of water (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010; The Secretariat of the 3rd World Water Forum, 2003). The burden of water collection can contribute to adverse health outcomes. Geere et al. (2010) found in their mixed method study in South Africa that the most common adverse health effect from

carrying water was spinal pain, at 69%, defined in the study as “pain reported or indicated through gesture by participants to be in the head, neck, thoracic or lumbosacral region during qualitative interview” (Geere et al., 2010, p. 7). Similarly, while collecting water women have increased risk for infection from transmitted fecal diseases including ascariasis, trachoma, and diarrhea (Schmidlin et al., 2013).

A systematic review and meta-analysis of six studies examining the association between the incidence of diarrhea and water collection indicated that distance from water is a risk factor for diarrheal disease in children (Wang & Hunter, 2010). Pickering and Davis (2012) also showed a 5-minute reduction in walking time to collect water contributed to an average 14% decrease in diarrhea for children under five years old.

Lack of access to safe water and sanitation also has an adverse impact on pregnancy. Strunz et al. (2014) found that women with inadequate sanitation are more likely to have hookworm infestation leading to maternal anemia, which is directly contributing to adverse pregnancy outcomes such as lower birth weight and risk for small-for-gestation (Bora, Sable, Wolfson, Boro, & Rao, 2014). Similarly, a study in rural India identified that open defecation was significantly associated with increased risk of preterm birth (Padhi et al., 2015).

### 2.2.3 Safety and Privacy

Poor access to water and sanitation mostly affect women and girls because of physical and biological differences from men (OHCHR, 2011). Traveling long distances to collect water matters for women in terms of safety.

Pommells et al. (2018) argued that rape and sexual assaults during fetching water were the most frequently mentioned issue during focus group discussions and key

informant interviews from both male and female participants from a variety of East African countries including Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda. They also identified animal attacks by hyenas, lions, baboons, crocodiles, and snakes were another problem faced by women and girls while they were collecting water (Pommells et al., 2018).

Inadequate sanitation also makes women and girls vulnerable to the risk of harassment and sexual violence, physical attack and psychological stress (WaterAid, 2012). Many women living in the slum in Nairobi, Kenya expressed that they suffered sexual violence and rape when they had no latrine in their house and were required to walk to a toilet at some distance from their home (Amnesty International, 2010). Another study in Solomon Islands slums revealed that some women who experienced physical or sexual abuse by men outside their households were too afraid to make complaints to the police for fear of revenge by attackers (Amnesty International, 2011b).

A systematic review examining health and social impact of open defecation on women in low- and middle- income countries identified threat to women's privacy and dignity, and psychological stressors linked to open defecation (Saleem, Burdett, & Heaslip, 2019). Similarly, Caruso et al. (2017) found that 97% of women in India who participated in the study, were worried about privacy and filth when they urinated and defecated. The same study also found that women coped with the open defecation environment that lacked privacy or was dirty with feces, urine or mud by walking far to alternative places to defecate or by waiting for opportunities for privacy (Caruso et al., 2017).

#### 2.2.4 Girl's education

Water and sanitation access matter to children's education. A cross-sectional study in western Kenya identified water, and sanitation access in the household as strong

predictors of school absences among children (Dreibelbis et al., 2013). The same study also found the quality of the WASH facilities in school is more associated with absence compared to the quantity of WASH facilities (Dreibelbis et al., 2013). Further, a study in rural South Africa revealed that two-third of the time children devoted to household chores was spent on water collection (Hemson, 2007). In the same study, the author identified that collecting water for longer hours than average led children to be late to school, unable to concentrate in class, exhibiting poor morale, and needing to leave school as early as possible to collect water (Hemson, 2007).

The absence of sanitation in schools also affects menstrual hygiene management (MHM) among adolescent girls (WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation., 2012). A recent survey of more than 2,000 adolescent girls in Bangladesh revealed that 40% of them reported missing school during menstruation due to inadequate sanitation facilities, and 55% answered that they were excluded from religious activities at school during menstruation (International Centre for Diarrheal Diseases Research et al., 2014).

## 2.3 Participation and equity in decision making in WASH

### 2.3.1 Men's dominance in decision-making

A study in India identified that 80% of household decisions regarding the building of household sanitation facilities were made by only men, whereas women made the decision in only 9% of households (Routray, Torondel, Clasen, & Schmidt, 2017). Interestingly, female participation in latrine installation decision-making was relatively

high (30%) in the households that had income less than 5,000 Indian rupees per month (approximately \$75) (Routray et al., 2017).

Similarly, in Ethiopia, men are considered as managers and decision-makers regarding agricultural activities, even though women provide the majority of labor in agriculture. (Geleta et al., 2017)

### 2.3.2 Advantages of women's active participation in WASH

People usually regard women and girls as “the guardians” of household hygiene and call for their active participation in WASH-related programs (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2015).

Previous studies have shown that there was a strong association between the effectiveness of water and sanitation programs and women's participation in the decision-making process about water supplies and management (The Inter-agency Task Force on Gender and Water, 2006; The Water and Sanitation Program & World Bank, 2010; Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998). A study in Vanuatu found involvement of women in key roles such as committee chair, secretary and treasurer improved water system performance and revenue collection (Mommen, Humphries-Waa, & Gwavuya, 2017). The study of community water services in Africa, Asia, and Latin America revealed that water committees with more than 40% female membership had better budgeting and accounting functions as well as water systems with less leakage (Wijk-Sijbesma, 2001). A study conducted in Vanuatu and Fiji on gender in rural WASH showed that water and sanitation committees with a participatory planning process and advocacy of gender equity led to increased trust between men and women regarding women's involvement in decision making (Halcrow G., Rowland C., Willetts J., Crawford J., & Carrard N., 2010).

Moreover, several studies showed that women's involvement in water management helped develop their confidence, self-reliance, and leadership skills and enabled them to obtain power and respect in the community (Aladuwaka & Momsen, 2010; Carrard, Crawford, Halcrow, Rowland, & Willetts, 2013; Fisher, 2006; Kilsby, 2012; United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005). Therefore, many WASH programs acknowledged the need for women's involvement for their success, and gender mainstreaming in water and sanitation sector was highly emphasized for effectiveness and sustenance (UNICEF, 2017; Wakeman, Davis, Wijk, & Naithani, 1996).

### 2.3.3 Barriers and challenges of involving women in the decision-making process

Although many studies show the effectiveness of women's participation in WASH management, women's involvement in WASH programs are rarely encouraged by workers at the community level (Dankelman, 2009). A study in India revealed that socio-cultural practices, socio-economic status and power hierarchies among household members discourage women from obtaining autonomy regarding decision-making power on installation and management of water and sanitation facilities (Routray et al., 2017). Other factors such as less education, less exposure to the world beyond their home and villages and having little financial control, also made women less confident of making a decision by themselves (Routray et al., 2017). Likewise, Maphosa (2010) identified that possible factors preventing women from participating in the decision-making process equally to men in the water sector included lack of education, nature of work and the lack of a female role model.

## 2.4 Overview of WASH status in Pacific Island countries

Pacific Islands are islands in the Pacific Ocean with three major groups; Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia (Figure 2-2). Melanesia includes four independent countries of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, as well as the French special collectivity of New Caledonia (Figure2-3). Approximately 10 million people are living in Melanesia, and the United Nations predict the Melanesian population will grow to nearly 13 million people by 2030 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Divison, 2017).

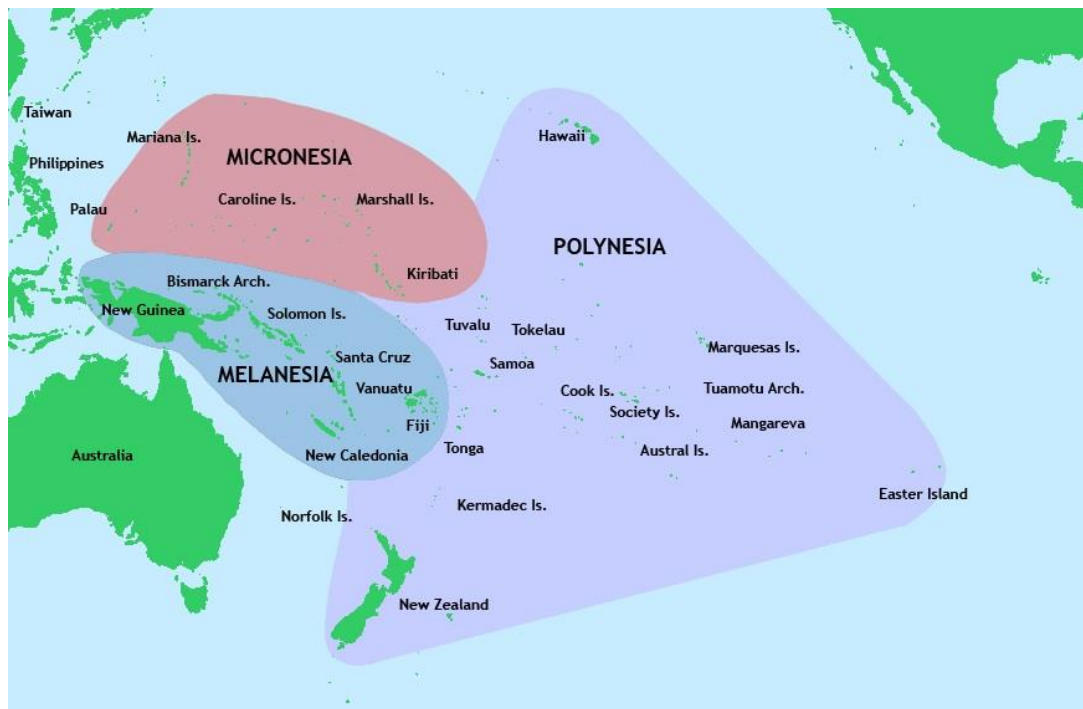


Figure2-2 Map of Pacific Island Countries



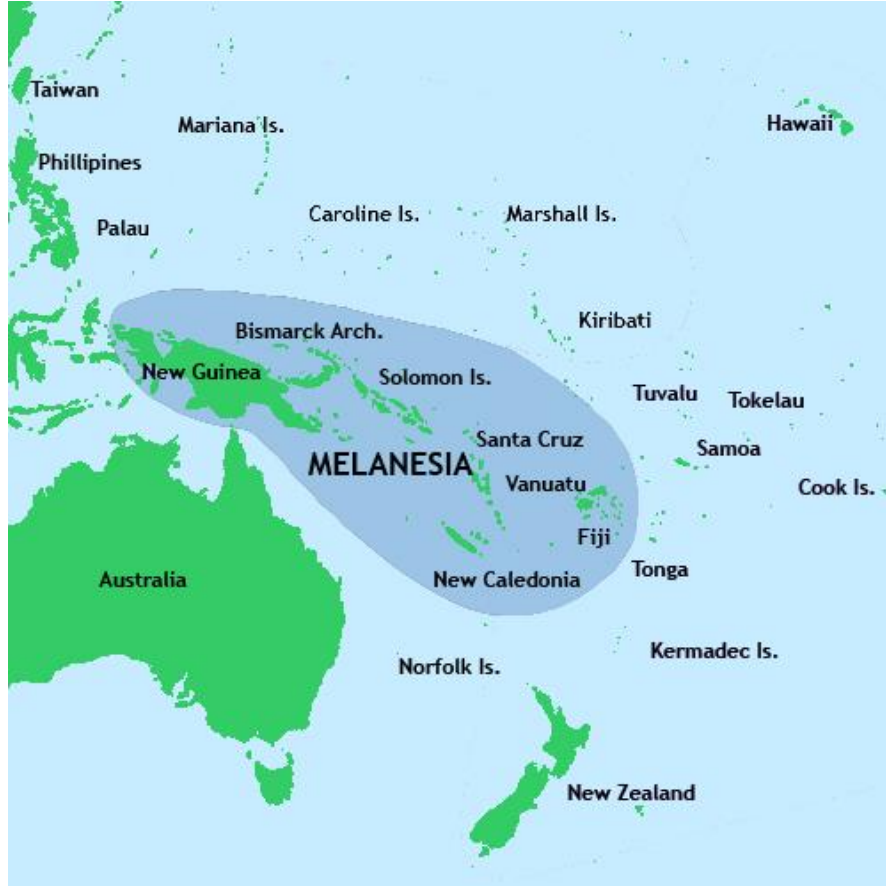


Figure 2-3 Map of Melanesian Countries

Water sanitation and hygiene remain one of the challenges across Pacific Island countries, especially within rural communities. WHO reported that the Pacific region had made little progress on achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water and sanitation (World Health Organization. Regional Office for the Western Pacific, 2016). The report also noted there was a huge disparity between urban and rural coverages for drinking water and sanitation; only 2% of the urban population in the Pacific region took drinking-water directly from rivers, streams, and lakes whereas 41% of rural residents still used these types of water sources. Similarly, while 71% of urban residents enjoyed

improved sanitation, only 21% of people in rural communities had access to sanitation. Furthermore, these gaps between urban and rural communities were greater in 2015 than in 1990 (World Health Organization. Regional Office for the Western Pacific, 2016).

## 2.5 Solomon Islands

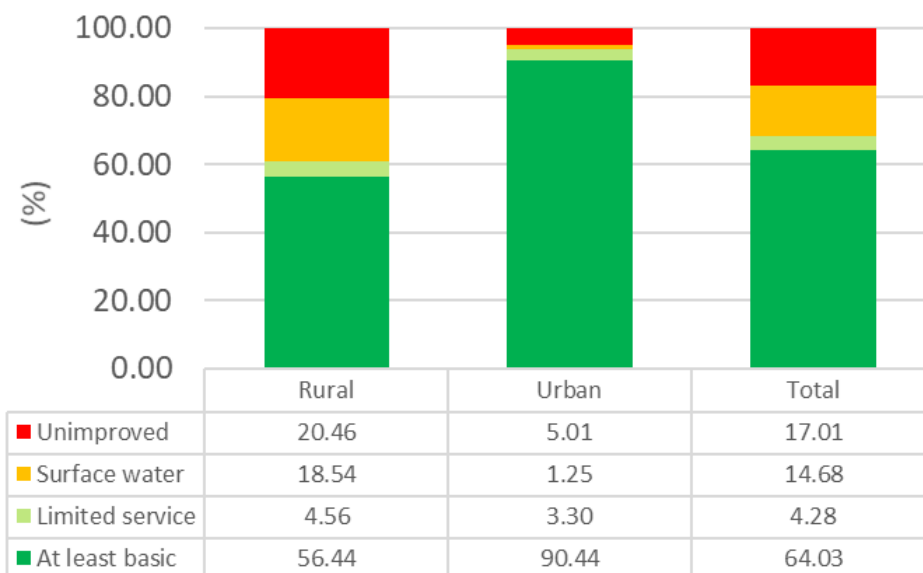
The Solomon Islands (SIs) is a sovereign country in Melanesia, consisting of six major islands and more than 900 small islands. Its capital is Honiara. The population of the SIs was 611,343 in 2017 and annual population growth rate was 1.97% (The World Bank Group, 2019). Its economy relies on agriculture, forestry and fishery, which account for 40% of GDP. Development challenges facing the Solomon Islands include geographic barriers, complex cultures, fast population growth, land tenure issues, lack of economic development, poor transport infrastructure, inadequate delivery of education and health services, and lingering post-conflict tensions between island groups. More than 80% of Solomon Islands' population lives in rural areas, many on remote islands or in mountainous terrain. Because of the difficulty of travel to remote areas, it is a challenge to attract and keep civil servants as staff in health posts, schools, and government offices across isolated communities. These factors entrench rural disparities and motivate rural to urban migration (Asian Development Bank, 2015)

### 2.5.1 WASH in the Solomon Islands

While SIs has been addressing how to improve access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), there is still a gap between the urban area and rural area in the country regarding coverage of access to WASH services. Data collected by the WHO/UNESCO Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) showed that

in 2015, 90% of people living in urban had access to at least basic drinking water service, whereas 56% of rural people had access to the service (Figure 2-4) (JMP database, n.d.). Similarly, open defecation rate is 9% in urban areas compared to 50% in rural area (Figure 2-5) (JMP database, n.d.). Approximately 80% of the population live in the rural area (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019), and most people living in rural communities lack access to clean water and adequate sanitation.

### Access to Drinking Water in the Solomon Islands (2015)



Data source: JMP database

Figure 2-4 Coverage of drinking water services in the Solomon Islands in 2015

### Access to Sanitation in the Solomon Islands (2015)



Data source: JMP database

Figure 2-5 Coverage of sanitation services in the Solomon Islands in 2015

To address the urgent needs for basic water supply and sanitation service in the rural areas, the SIs Government (SIG) adapted and implemented a National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Capital Development Program (National RWSS Program) during the 1990s (Mattson, 2017). In 2008, SIG re-established RWSS program as the Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (RWASH) program and they approved the RWASH Policy in 2014 (Mattson, 2017). The Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) is responsible for the overall regulations and management of the water resources while the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MoHMS), Environmental Health Division (EHD), Rural Water Supply, and Sanitation Unit (RWSS) is responsible for RWASH activities (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2014).

In 2015, the SIG RWASH program established a new strategic plan aiming to increase access to safe water and sanitation coverage and improving hygiene practices in rural communities in 10 years (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2015). Table 2-1 shows strategic targets for achieving the goals in five years and ten years.

**Table 2-1 Strategic targets of RWASH in 5 years and 10 years**

| Target  | 2014               | 2019 | 2024 |
|---|--------------------|------|------|
| Communities with improved drinking water supplies | 35%                | 52%  | 97%  |
| Communities Open Defecation Free (ODF)            | 1%                 | 87%  | 100% |
| People hand-washing with soap at critical times.  | 5-10% <sup>1</sup> | 75%  | 100% |

Source: Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2015

## 2.5.2 Gender and RWASH in the Solomon Islands

According to the human development report by UNDP, the Solomon Islands ranked 152 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development

Programme, 2018). In 2012, the World Bank rated SIs as the worst country in the world for domestic violence, stating 64% of women reported experiencing some form of domestic violence during their lifetime (World Bank, 2012). Sociocultural and economic factors such as ethnicity, culture, traditional land rights, and male masculinity norms are considered to be influential to gender relations in the Solomon Islands (Asian Development Bank, 2015). In addition to that, violence against women within households had been considered as a private issue and police and other officials are reluctant to intervene (Amnesty International, 2011a).

#### 2.5.2.1 The Tensions

In terms of gender relations in the Solomon Islands, it is important to note one incident. From 1998 to 2003, people in the Solomon Islands experienced armed conflict as a result of longstanding ethnic tension and interisland migration, which is usually described as the “tensions” (Amnesty International, 2000). The tensions occurred between militants from the Guadalcanal island, where the capital of Honiara is located, and residents from the nearby island of Malaita who moved to Guadalcanal for economic opportunities. Conflict between the groups left at least 200 people dead and more than 11,000 people fled from their homes (Braithwaite, Dinnen, Allen, Braithwaite, & Charlesworth, 2010; Jeffery & Mollica, 2017). As the fighting and killing escalated, violence against women also increased including forced marriage, rape, kidnapping and domestic violence (Annalise Moser, 2007). The conflicts also exacerbated male dominance as the population was subjected to violence that fueled hyper-masculine behaviors such as violence, including against women (A. Moser, 2006).

#### 2.5.2.2 Policy

Given the non-negligible situation regarding violence against women, SIG has been putting priority on addressing gender equality in setting up policies and programs, and all ministries and sectors share responsibility in achieving this goal. In 2010, the SIG adopted the Solomon Islands National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy, aimed to end gender inequalities. This policy included five priority areas: health and education, economic status, decision-making and leadership, violence against women, and gender mainstreaming (Ministry of Women, 2016). In the RWASH policy, they ensured gender mainstreaming in the water sector by stating *“the sector stakeholders must ensure that gender is a key component of every WASH project and program. Through participatory approaches, the involvement of women must be encouraged and promoted at every stage of a project and for all activities and roles, from survey & design to implementation and (financial) management and O&M. Women's participation in WASH committees should be encouraged but should be seen as more of an indicator of effective gender approaches than an objective or a criteria for assistance”* (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2014, p. 16).

However, many stakeholders are not fully aware of this national policy. For example, the evaluation report on WASH projects in Solomon Islands led by UNICEF from 2011 to 2016 mentioned that they did not particularly emphasize gender in the project design (Mattson, 2017). According to WaterAid, the RWASH Strategic Plan integrates gender and social inclusion across all strategies, including strengthening capacity to implement programs that take into account social inclusion, disability, and gender equity (WaterAid, 2016). Also, Solomon Water Development Plan has established clear strategies

for gender and equity within their plan, though the RWASH Program budget does not allocate specific funds to gender and inclusion nor is it clear how this will be implemented or monitored to ensure inclusive WASH is realized (WaterAid, 2016).

Despite many efforts SIG has been making for better gender relations, gender equality in decision making remains as one of the most challenging development issues in the Solomon Islands (Asian Development Bank, 2015). Roughly 40% of public servants are women, but the majority are in junior positions. Furthermore, only 5% of senior public servant positions were occupied by women in 2014 (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

#### 2.5.2.3 Barriers to women's participation in decision making

The studies on gender assessment in SIs pointed out there were several obstacles to women's participation in decision making: 1) bias against women, 2) aggravated by the influence of colonial administrators, 3) churches and early models of development normalized gender relations where men are decision makers and women are subordinate citizens whether in the household or on the political level, 4) existence of high level of physical violence when children and women challenge men's power or do not meet men's expectation about how they should behave prevent women from challenging power relation and participating in decision making (Asian Development Bank, 2015; the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009).

## 2.6 Summary of the literature review

The literature review revealed existing gender disparities in WASH-related activities in global. In many parts of the world, even though women are responsible for household chores including collecting water, cooking, and taking care of other family



member's health, men dominate the decision-making process in WASH. Similarly, the Solomon Islands acknowledge gender inequality in WASH sector and developed interventions at the policy level. However, on the community level, women in the Solomon Islands still face many challenges to participate in the decision-making process.

## **Chapter 3. Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study is a secondary analysis of a qualitative study conducted by CARE that examined gender disparities in WASH in the Solomon Islands. The original study was part of the Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) and UNICEF's work to understand and address gender disparities related to water, sanitation, and hygiene in the Solomon Islands. CARE as a third party, was expected to conduct an initial gender assessment of rural WASH in the Solomon Islands, with the goal of providing an analysis of, and recommendations for, improving gender and social inclusion in rural WASH programming in the country. Specific objectives of the original study were to:

1. Understand key differences in WASH access and use between males and females (and, where possible, vulnerable groups) in the rural Solomon Islands, as well as the reason for, and effects of, these differences;
2. Identify specific actions the government, UN and I/NGO actors can take to increase gender equality in WASH programming.

## 3.2 Study Setting

### 3.2.1 Geographic settings

#### 3.2.1.1 Malaita province

Malaita is one of the largest provinces of the Solomon Islands. The population of Malaita province is 117,211 (2009 census). As table 3-1 shows below, access to drinking water and hygiene in Malaita is poorer than national level.

#### 3.2.1.2 Isabel Province

Isabel has a population of 23,706 in 2009. While 90% of residents in Isabel province have access to drinking water, only 3% and 6% of people have hygiene and sanitation facilities, respectively.

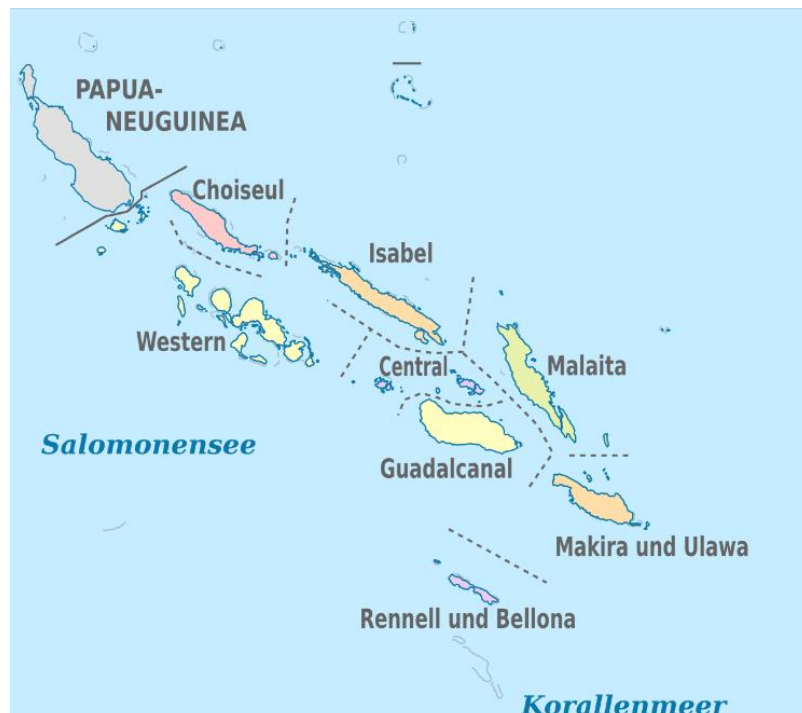


Figure 3-4 Map of the Solomon Islands

**Table 3-1 WASH status in Malaita and Isabel**

|   | Malaita | Isabel | National |
|---|---------|--------|----------|
| <b>Drinking Water</b><br>-Access to basic drinking water sources (improved source available within 30min)                                   | 48%     | 90%    | 54%      |
| <b>Hygiene</b><br>-Appropriate hand washing facilities (with water and soap)  | 11%     | 3%     | 16%      |
| <b>Sanitation</b><br>-Access to a basic sanitation facility (improved type facility not shared with other households)                       | 15%     | 6%     | 13%      |
| <b>Management</b><br>-Households reporting that their drinking water source (improved or unimproved) is managed by an active WASH committee | 18%     | 32%    | 13%      |

(Data from RWASH baseline survey in 2015)

### 3.2.2 Study Area selection

UNICEF identified the provinces for study and village selection was done by UNICEF in Malaita, and by Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE) in Isabel. Live and Learn Environmental Education is a network of nine locally NGOs in Asia and the Pacific region, aiming to support individual and community in sustaining their environment by improving practice (Live & Learn Environmental Education, 2019). Community-level data collection was completed by trained enumerators in seven villages,

four in Malaita province: Lathalu, Raubabathe, A’ama, and Afufu and three in Isabel: Kolgaru, Vavarinitu, and Titiro. According to the original study, village selection was done based on the status of sanitation coverage. They defined sanitation coverage based on where villages were in the community-led total sanitation (CLTS) process: not triggered, triggered with no progress, triggered with some progress, certified no open defecation.

### 3.3 Study Population

The original study conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews with male and female community members in Malaita and Isabel provinces (Table 3-2).

The in-depth interviews (IDIs) from the original study were conducted to obtain a different perspective to FGDs and they only acted as supplemental information. Based on the time allocated for the study and the limited enumerators available for data collection, the original study team conducted 30 FGDs and 24 IDIs, with a total of 251 males and females across the seven communities.

**Table 3-2 Community level participants**

| Description                   | In-depth interviews | Focus Group Discussions |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Adult Females                 | 13                  | 8                       |
| Adult Males                   | 7                   | 6                       |
| Female Community Leaders      | 1                   | 4                       |
| Male Community Leaders        | 1                   | 6                       |
| Young Women (11-18 years old) | 0                   | 6                       |
| Young Males (11-18 years old) | 2                   | 0                       |

### 3.4 Instrument Design

FGD and IDI methodologies were designed to respect the confidentiality, safety, and security of study participants – especially considering the sensitive topics that could come up in the course of conversation.

#### 3.4.1 Focus Group Discussion Guide

The focus group discussion guide was developed by the study team including CARE, UNICEF and the Solomon Island Government. Prior to arriving in the Solomon Islands in January 2018, the original research team reviewed government policy documents related to gender and WASH in the Solomon Islands. The team developed the research instrument based on this review as well as stakeholder interviews with individuals who work, or have recently worked in/with, gender, disabled persons and, or WASH in the Solomon Islands. The FGD guide from the original research included key themes such as basic access to WASH, safety, decision-making process, CLTS and challenges and needs regarding access to WASH (see Appendix A).

#### 3.4.2 Training of enumerators or study team

Enumerators were trained in a three-day session with the research team leads before starting data collection. The training focused on the interview and FGD techniques, recording, and localization/language for the tools and data collection.

### 3.5 Data Collection

The original research team approached male and female leaders in the communities in an attempt to involve a diverse group of male and female study participants. There were

no inclusion/exclusion criteria for selecting participants as the research team recruited people who desired to participate.

The research team considered carefully inter/intra community power dynamics, such as position, age, church affiliation, education, during FGDs and made concerted attempts to create safe and confidential environments for participants. This included segregating FGDs for age, sex, and position. There were separate groups for young women, male leaders, female leaders, adult men, and adult women. Input from more marginalized community members such as domestic helpers, unmarried mothers or elderly men and women was gathered through individual IDIs, either in their own homes or a location of their choosing.

Experienced enumerators from LLEE facilitated all the FGDs and IDIs in either Pidgin or the local language depending on participants' needs. FGDs at the community-level were recorded and transcribed. Transcription of FGDs was done by enumerators who did not participate in moderating or note-taking during that FGD. Rigorous notes were taken, and de-briefs were held after each interview and FGD with the research team.

All data were verified twice by two different people from the study team and clarification (from recordings) was sought when necessary.

### 3.6 Data Management

Audio recordings were stored on password protected laptops and when sent to the program manager the original files were deleted.

### 3.7 Data analysis

#### 3.7.1 Planned analysis methods

In this secondary analysis, a subset of questionnaires related to the objectives of this study was selected from the original guides to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the differences in perceptions between men and women regarding roles and responsibilities in WASH?
2. What are the differences in perceptions between men and women regarding women's participation in WASH management?
3. What challenges and obstacles of involving women in committees do community leaders recognize?
4. What challenges and obstacles of involving women in committees do residents recognize?

The question items from the original FGD guide (see Appendix A) that were used for this analysis are as follows in Table 3-3.



**Table 3-3 Questions used for this analysis**

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | How / Where do men in the community currently access water?   |
| 2  | How / Where do women in the community currently access water?   |
| 3  | During times where there is limited water available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How are men affected?</li><li>b. How are women affected?</li></ul>                        |
| 4  | How much time do you spend collecting water each day? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Is this ok or too long?</li><li>b. Does this affect the time for other things?</li></ul> |
| 5  | Do men in the community feel safe collecting water? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Why?</li><li>b. Do women</li><li>c. Why?</li><li>d. What about girls?</li></ul>            |
| 6  | Have you ever discussed [the concern related to WASH] with others? (in household or community)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. why?</li><li>b. who?</li></ul>                 |
| 7  | How are decisions made around water bodies/points in this community?  |
| 8  | How are women involved?   |
| 9  | What are problems to women being involved in committees?  |
| 10 | If there is a community project, how would you like to be involved?   |

The original data was cleaned manually in Microsoft Word for Office 365 for Windows. The cleaning process included separating the transcripts that were mixed by the group into different files and extracting data from four different groups (women, men, women community leaders, and men community leaders) for this study. In total, 16 FGDs data were used for analysis (Table 3-4).

This thesis focuses on the analysis of a subsection of the original data related to roles and responsibilities, decision making process and perceptions of women’s involvement in WASH. Data analysis was conducted with MAXQDA 2018 (ver. 18.1.0). The sixteen transcripts from four different groups were uploaded and systematic reading of each discussion was done on MAXQDA. First, all transcriptions were read briefly to capture what data was available, and then all quotes related to three codes were organized: 1) *role and responsibility*, 2) *barriers and challenges to women’s participation* and 3) *perceptions of women’s involvement*. Then the codes were analyzed by looking at where they overlapped with other codes thought to be important in the initial analysis. Any new codes that arose during the second round of coding were added to the codebook. This iterative process was used until the codebook was exhaustive, and all the transcripts were coded once. See Appendix B for the final codebook.

**Table 3-4 Availability of the FGDs data from six villages**

| Community    | Men | Women | Male Community Leader | Female Community Leader |
|--------------|-----|-------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Aama         | ✓   | ✓     |                       |                         |
| Afufu        | ✓   |       |                       | ✓                       |
| Kolgaru      | ✓   | ✓     | ✓                     | ✓                       |
| Lathalu      | ✓   | ✓     |                       |                         |
| Titiro       |     | ✓     | ✓                     |                         |
| Vavarinitu   | ✓   | ✓     | ✓                     | ✓                       |
| <b>Total</b> | 5   | 5     | 3                     | 3                       |

### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

IRB approval was waived for this project given that it is a secondary data analysis and there is no identifiable data and no intent to generalize your findings beyond the direct needs of the participants or organization.

## Chapter 4. Results

### 4.1 Inductive Analysis

The following themes emerged during inductive analysis: 1) responsibility and roles of WASH-related activities; 2) decision making in WASH-related concerns; 3) women's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee; 4) men's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee; 5) challenges of involving women in the committee meeting; and 6) safety (Table 4-1).

**Table 4-1 Main Themes and sub-Themes**

| Main Theme  | Sub-Themes   |
|---|--|
| Responsibility and roles of WASH-related activities                   | WASH as Domestic Task                                    |
|   | Maintenance of WASH facilities                           |
|   | Taking care of sanitation and hygiene for family members |
| Decision making in WASH-related concerns                              | Sharing concerns and ideas relating WASH                 |
|   | Decision making at the household level                   |
|   | Decision making at the community level                   |
| Women's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee | -  |
| Men's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee   | -  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Challenges of involving women in WASH committee | Time management                                 |
|   | Conflict with spouse                            |
|   | Complaints from neighbors and committee members |
|   | Lack of knowledge and education                 |
| Safety  | Potential interactions with animals             |
|   | Fear of attacks from men                        |
|   | No privacy for women to use the toilet          |

#### 4.2 Responsibility and roles of WASH-related activities

Throughout the discussions regarding the responsibility and roles of WASH-related activities, participants frequently talked about four issues: a) WASH as domestic task; b) maintenance of WASH facilities; c) taking care of sanitation and hygiene for family members. Across most of the villages, both male and female participants recognized domestic tasks such as washing, cooking, collecting water, and caring family members as women’s responsibility whereas men’s only tasks in WASH related to the maintenance of WASH facilities.

##### 4.2.1 WASH as domestic task

Both men and women across the study areas shared that women were more affected by water shortage than men because women were responsible for domestic tasks such as washing and collecting water. For example, a female community leader from Kolgaru, Isabel stated, “*woman they do everything in the house, look after the children, cook for the*

*family, does washing. Look after the husband, in the village woman do everything for the community, in the community woman a very important in every role.”*

The statement illustrates how women dedicate their time to household and community chores. Similarly, a man from Lathalu, Malaita also stated, *“they [women] access water also from the tap to do all the washing, cooking, bathing, house cleaning, and all things need water. Women use [more] water than men.”*

Moreover, women from Aama, Malaita discussed their extra work such as finding alternative water source and carrying laundry to further river when there was a lack of water:

*Facilitator (F): During times where there is limited water is available how do you affected?*

*Participants (P): We feel bad, but we have to go and find water somewhere else.*

*F: When there is no water how do feel?*

*P: I real feel angry because I have to carry all the dirties to the river.*

Similarly, men also identified that women had to go and find another water source when there was a water shortage. For example, a male participant stated that *“they have to go and share stand pipe with other families, or either they walk far to find water from the different tap.”* (Men FGD, Aama, Malaita). Another participant expressed *“the women have to walk a long way to do washing.”* (Men FGD, Afufu, Malaita)

These recognitions by both men and women describe that women are vulnerable when there is limited access to water.

A female community leader from Afufu, Malaita also expressed that men collected water only when women and children were not available.

*F. Who does the most?*

*P. women (Mothers)*

*F. How often do you go collect drinking water?*

*P. three (3) times day*

*P. morning and evening*

*F. How often did the fathers and children collect drinking water?*

*P. children go in the evening*

*F. Men (daddies)*

*P. sometimes, at times children not available*

While both men and women agreed that water shortage affected women more than men, the response of men to water shortage varied. Some men and women stated that men did nothing about the situation; others reported that men did support their wives or were responsible for fetching water when there was a limitation of water. For example, male participants from Lathalu, Malaita expressed:

*F: During times where there is limited water available: How do men and women affected?*

*P: Men have to go and find water in the bush.*

*P: My father used bamboo to bring water for the community and that was long ago.*

*F: Why women are not going to find water in the bush, because men love them very much? Or is anything that will happen?*

*P: During dry session men is responsible to find or collect water from the bush. Women can go as well but for washing clothes. But if we find new source women can help also to join bamboos so that we have water. (Men FGD, Lathalu, Malaita)*

On the other hand, a man stated from different village stated, *"the men usually stayed at home just commanding the women to do washing, collecting water."* (Men FGD, Afufu, Malaita)

A woman also had a similar perspective regarding men's reaction on WASH-related issues by stating, *"men sometimes they do well, sometimes they just sit back and watch."* (Women FGD, Aama, Malaita)

#### 4.2.2 Maintenance of WASH facilities

Both women and men from Kolgaru, Vavarinitu, Titiro, and Aama, stated that fixing WASH facilities is delegated to men. Some men generally recognized repairing water facilities as their responsibility, and others did not take it seriously.

Male participants from Kolgaru showed their responsibility for repairing facilities, for example,

*F. How are you men feel when there is water shortage?*

*P. We have to check what causes and fix if there is leakage, clean tanks if needed and check the source. We understand what faults and we make sure it fixed."* (Men, Kolgaru, Isabel)

However, interestingly, women from the same village above, Kolgaru, did not fully support the argument the male participant made.

*F. Do you think men fix water or they just worry about themselves?*



*P. Sometimes they went to fix water, but men sometimes don't seriously do their job and in one occasion we have no water for the whole day and everybody without food the whole day. (Women FGD, Kologaru, Isabel)*

Both female and male participants felt women could not fix water problems due to lack of knowledge. *"Women in this community don't have knowledge about water problem, culturally men have do the work, women can do clearing road to path ways."* (Men FGD, Kologaru, Isabel)

Though participants understood women had no skills to deal with water problems, some women showed their willingness to be trained to repair because women used water facilities every day.

*F. Does woman do maintenance of water pipes?*

*P. (giggles) no*

*F. What if there's a project that will trained[train] women to do repair? Would you like that?*

*P. Yes*

*F. Why?*

*P. Because we need water piped to our households*

*P. Women used water everyday*

*P. Men only sometimes*

*P. Important for women to do the training*

*(Female community leaders FGD, Afufu, Malaita)*

#### 4.2.3 Taking care of sanitation and hygiene for family members

Many participants including both male and female from four villages clearly stated buying soap is mothers' (women's) responsibility.

*F: Who is responsible for buying soap and other house hold items?*

*P: Mums are responsible for buying soaps and other items. (Men FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

Also, a man from Malaita showed gender disparity in taking care of children by stating, *"only the women were responsible to do cleaning when a child [finish] from defecate whereas the men just relax and do nothing they usually depend on women to take that responsible."*

A woman from Malaita also expressed about children's health:

*F: Who is responsible of taking care of children's health?*

*P: Mum is responsible. (Women FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

Other participants also expressed that *"sometimes they [husband] clean the baby, when the mom is away."* (Female community leaders FGD, Kolgaru, Isabel)

#### 4.3 Decision making in WASH-related concerns

Within the theme of decision-making in WASH, three subthemes emerged during the discussion; a) sharing concerns and ideas relating to WASH; b) decision making at the household level; c) decision making at the community level.

##### 4.3.1 Sharing concerns and ideas relating to WASH

Throughout the discussions, the difference in sharing concerns between men and women arose. While men discuss their concerns with their wives, community leaders, and

during various community committee meetings, women tend to talk to other women such as female family members, leaders of the women's union and housewives in the neighborhood.

*F: Do you share your ideas with somebody in the community?*

*P: Yes I shared with my cousin sister Susan.*

*F: Is she is the leader?*

*P: Yes she leads the Sunday school and women's group in the community. (Women FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

One of the reasons they talked to other women was because “*many women have problems with their washing every day due to shortage of water. Drunken people damaged the pipelines, land disputes, taps are not closed, water keep on flowing without control, this causes the water shortage.*” (Women FGD, Aama, Malaita) This example illustrates women cope with their struggles with WASH-related problems by talking to other women, who have the same issues.

#### 4.3.2 Decision making at the household level

Within the household level, many women have opportunities to speak about their ideas and needs in WASH with their husbands.

*F: Have you discuss this with somebody in your family?*

*P: Yes I have discussed with my husband.*

*F: Why you want to discuss this with your husband?*

*P: Because I want to build our own toilet for private use. (Women FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

Even though women may raise the issues regarding household WASH, men usually play the role of decision maker and taking action for a household. For example, when women needed a change in WASH-related activities, they talked to their husband and let the husband decide to act.

*P: Usually discussed with my husband, make a proper place for laundry and make a cloth line*

*F: Why you bring it up for discussion*

*P: So that he have mind to do this things (Women FGD, Titiro, Isabel)*

#### 4.3.3 Decision making at the community level

At the community level, participants from several communities discussed how elder men make decisions regarding WASH management, without the involvement of women.

*F: Who made decisions to improve water supply in the community, beside water committee?*

*P: Elders only,*

*F: When you talk about elders, women also include?*

*P: No women in the water committee, only men. (Men FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

One man from Vavarinitu expressed the reason why they did not have women in the committee was that men did not trust women.

*F. Does any women involve in the committee?*

*P. No*

*F. Why?*

*P. Men don't trust women taking the post (Men, Vavarinitu, Isabel)*

On the other hand, some committees had females playing a role as treasurer or secretary, because women were seen as more trustworthy.

*F. What roles do women play?*

*P. Treasurer, men not used to hold the post.*

*P. Secretary,*

*F. Why men not treasurer?*

*P. Not trusted, men only chairman and members (Male Community leaders FGD, Titiro, Isabel)*

These two examples illustrate that men do not trust women to be leaders or decision-makers, but sometimes they are allowed to be on a committee to keep notes or money.

In Lathalu, a community that has achieved No Open Defecation, men expressed community listened to women and women played an active role in the decision-making process.

*F: Do women share ideas during water issues?*

*P: Yes, during water shortage woman do a lot of talking about water because they use water more than man.*

*F: Are women involved in decision making?*

*P: Yes, they also involved in decision making, when they attend meetings, and this is not their first time to attend meetings they also do decision making concerning water or any other issues women are priority to. (Men FGD, Lathalu, Malaita)*

#### 4.4 Women's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee

During the discussions, a facilitator asked participants that if there was a community project, how would they (women) like to be involved. Most women in both provinces showed a willingness to be involved in the project and to take a committee role such as a president, treasurer, and secretary. For example,

*P. I want to be a committee president to have access to talk with the project managers, and to discuss with the need in the committee.*

*F. how about you?*

*P. I want to be a treasurer*

*F. why you want to take up this role?*

*P. because I don't want to move around but just be there when they need me.*

*F. As a treasurer, you think you will manage the project?*

*P. yes*

*F. What makes you feel that you can manage the project funds?*

*P. I can do the work with help of others. (Women FGD, Kologaru, Isabel)*

However, some women were reluctant to participate in the community project because of the burden of housework that they were responsible for. The example below describes a single mother who gave up the opportunity to participate in a water project because of household responsibilities.

*F. a project mainly for women, how do you want to involve?*

*P. I'm not going to involve*

*F. why you don't want to involve?*

*P. because I have a lot of work to do in my house and I'm a single mother (Women, Vavarinitu, Isabel)*

#### 4.5 Men's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee

Men's perceptions regarding women's involvement in committees varied, even in the same community. Several men acknowledged the importance of women's participation in WASH because women knew about the water issues better than men.

*P: Yes, it is good for women in the water committee, because they are the people who use a lot of water and they know the needs of the water.*

*F: What should be the responsibility of women in the committee?*

*P: Looking after the water in the community and how people use it. Women can handle this easily because they have a strong voice, to speak out about how to use water; even they themselves use water most of the time, and they know how to keep it clean at all time. [Therefore] women needed to be in the water committee. Men can't do that specific responsibility. (Men FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

On the other hand, some male participants expressed a lack of interest in female participation in water committees by stating, *"people will underestimate, joke at her we don't want to hear women commanding us."* (Men FGD, Aama, Malaita)

In terms of women's participation in committee meetings, several men raised their concerns about housework, such as taking care of children and preparing food.

*F. Is there problems that women experience when joining mother's union meeting?*

*P. yes, sometimes dad feel jealousy*

*P. dad's not happy taking care of babies while the mother is away*

*P. food not prepared in time at home (Men FGD, Vavarinitu, Isabel)*

At the same time, there were also male participants who showed support for their wives when women wanted to participate in committee meetings.

*P: For me I'm willing to allow her to participate in the meetings because she was there to talk about on the important issues about water.*

*F: What about if she was allowed and she spent a whole day and the children were hungry because nobody cook for them?*

*P: Because I agree for her to join the meeting it's just alright for me and I'm responsible to cook food for the children. (Men FGD, Afufu, Malaita)*

#### 4.6 Challenges of involving women in the WASH committee

Throughout the discussion of barriers to women's participation in WASH committee and committee meetings, four sub-themes were mentioned frequently: a) time management; b) conflict with husbands; c) complaints from neighbors and committee members; and d) lack of knowledge and education.

##### 4.6.1 Time management

One of the significant challenges that women faced as it relates to participation in the water committee was time management. Women were busy doing housework, and it was hard for them to find time to participate in a meeting. In addition, some men were not happy about women choosing to participate in committee meetings over completing household tasks.

*F: Challenges is simply means problems will face by women during meetings, or other things committees are organizing, she might spend more time on different activities, forgetting the house hold cores.*



*P: It come to common understanding of the women how will she manage her time with the committee and her family.*

*P: It depend on the committee herself how she manage time. (Men FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

Male community leaders also stated that women declined the offer to be involved in the decision-making of the committees due to household tasks.

*F. Do they hold roles?*

*P. no, they just members*

*F. Why?*

*P. women declined.*

*F. Why?*

*P. household task (Male community leaders FGD, Vavarinitu, Isabel)*

However, not all men identified high burden of household chores among women. For example, one male community leader expressed “*women at home have plenty of time*” (Male community leaders FGD, Kolgaru, Isabel). This example illustrates some male community leaders do not see women as having lots of work to do in the house.

#### 4.6.2 Conflict with husband

When it comes to participation in committee meetings, women reported difficulty with responses from their husband when they attempted to leave their home to attend a meeting. Both men and women across the villages repeatedly stated that “husband was not happy” for their wives to participate in the meetings.

*P. Dad’s not happy taking care of babies while the mother is away*

*P. food not prepared in time at home (Men FGD, Vavarinitu, Isabel)*

*P. Some men are happy with their wives when in such committee but others not*

*F. Why do you think the fathers will get angry when you join a committee?*

*P. Because we are to prepare their food and worry about the housework. (Women FGD, Kologaru, Isabel)*

It was also noted that while participants from three groups (women, men and women community leaders) stated husbands' attitude was one of the factors driving women's participation in the meeting, male community leaders did not mention conflicts with husbands at all. Male community leaders appear to lack awareness of the impact of husbands' reaction on women's participation in WASH or they intentionally omitted this issue for unknown reasons.

#### 4.6.3 Complaints from neighbors and committee members

Another obstacle that prevents women from participating in WASH committee was gossip and complaining from neighbors and female committee members. One woman talked about her experience when she attempted to participate in a committee meeting,

*F. Any complain from your neighbor?*

*P. They start complaining*

*F. What was their complained?*

*P. They start talking like this women [woman] spent a lot of time doing other things and not looking after her own family. (Women FGD, Kologaru, Isabel)*

This example illustrates that women who try to participate in committee meetings can be targets of gossip in the communities.

On the other hand, women who were absent from the committee meetings were

also criticized for not attending the meetings from other women in community.

*F. What will happen when you a committee member then you not attend in any meeting?*

*P. Yes, people in the community will not happy because she didn't attend meetings*

*P. Committee members will not happy for her absent*

*F. When you say the committee will not happy, who actually will not happy? The chief or the members?*

*P. Women from the community (Women FGD, Kologaru, Isabel)*

Other women from a different village complained similar points:

*P: When the committee plan to do something, people are not attending.*

*P: [For] example, today is an important day for us to attend this meeting but only few of us attend, most people go out to do their own job. (Women FGD, Lathalu, Malaita)*

The states demonstrate women had complaints about absence of other women in committee meetings.

#### 4.6.4 Lack of knowledge and education

A female community leader in Malaita pointed out that poor education is also challenging for women's participation in WASH committee by stating “*women not well educated, women don't want to listen, don't want to follow plans.*” (*Female community leaders FGD, Afufu, Malaita*). Another male participant expressed men culturally work in WASH management because “*women in this community don't have knowledge about water problem.*” (*Men FGD, Kolgaru, Isabel*) A man from the same village also stated that

women “*need training on how to fix water taps*” (Men FGD, Kolgaru, Isabel) to participate in the water committee.

#### 4.7 Safety

Most of male and female participants in both Malaita and Isabel provinces referred to safety concerns, especially for women and children who go collect water or go to defecate at night. The concerns are mostly related to potential interactions with animals (like snakes) and attacks from men.

##### 4.7.1 Potential interactions with animals

Some participants expressed there was a risk to be bitten by insects and snakes during fetching water and excreting at public space. “*Insects, snakes, and the place is not safe to walk.*” (Men FGD, Aama, Malaita)

A woman from Isabel also mentioned, “*not safe because snakes usually come out at night, at night it is very dangerous at night other step on poisonous snake or centipede.*” (Women FGD, Titiro Isabel)

##### 4.7.2 Fear of attacks from men

During the discussions, fear of assault from men was mentioned by a few women. They revealed their worries about sexual assault by men at night. For example, a woman stated, “*for us young is not safe for us go out at night afraid of man will rape us.*” (Women FGD, Titiro, Isabel) A female participant also mentioned about possibility of sexual assault by men: “*if [a] drunken man from another village come to our village and rape can happen somehow*” (Women FGD, Titiro, Isabel)

These statements illustrate the fear of potential attack by men that women feel whenever they travel away from home to get water and places to defecate.

#### 4.7.3 No privacy for women to use the toilet

During the discussion on safety, female participants expressed their concerns about using shared toilets due to lack of privacy.

*F: Do you feel safe to use your toilet?*

*P: No because too many people use it, and there is no privacy. (Women FGD, Aama, Malaita)*

Women from a different village also mentioned privacy. They often go to a more distant place for defecation purposes due to privacy concerns.

*P: not really safe, because of the men going fishing will see us shitting*

*F: For the men do you think it's safe for the men*

*P: for the men is safe for them, because they use the another place where is more far from where the woman use to go, but otherwise it's not safe for woman and men because the road is more closer to the beach. (Female community leaders FGD, Vavarinitu, Isabel)*

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

The purposes of this study were 1) to understand the difference in perceptions between men and women regarding the participation of adult women in WASH management in rural communities (Malaita and Isabel provinces) in the Solomon Islands, and 2) to identify barriers that prevent adult women in Malaita and Isabel provinces from participating in committees for WASH management.

The study identified six themes from the sixteen focus group discussions; 1) responsibility and roles of WASH-related activities; 2) decision making in WASH-related concerns; 3) women's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee; 4) men's perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH committee; 5) challenges of involving women in the committee; and 6) safety. In general, there were several differences in perceptions between men and women in term of women's participation in committee meetings for WASH management. While women tend to express their willingness to play a role in meetings or projects, very few men felt it was important to involve women. Some men stated that they do not trust women in a decision-making position (e.g., as committee chairmen), or that they did not want women to “command them”, which I will discuss later in this section. It is also important to note that there were several comments from men and women that women had too much work related to household tasks that prevent them from attending committee meetings. The burden of household tasks is one of the main challenges to women's participation in WASH. The results also revealed that conflicts with husbands and lack of education among women were additional constraints on women's participation in WASH management.

One interesting finding was that during the discussion about women's participation in the decision-making process, some men from both Isabel and Malaita provinces expressed the deliberate exclusion of female leadership by saying that men did not want women to command men. The males also expressed that men marginalized what women say. The men were expressing a social norm that prevails in both provinces that women would not be taken seriously or be capable of taking a leadership position. Further, many of the women stated that their spouse was not happy about them participating in meetings. These findings indicate the existence of a prevailing power dynamic within households between husbands and wives. These findings are consistent with a previous study in India that identified power structure as one of the factors that curtailed women's autonomy in decision making about the installation of sanitation facilities (Routray et al., 2017). In this Indian study, some female participants expressed that the decision-making power went to men because the husband was the head of the family (Routray et al., 2017). In the same study, the men expressed that they felt superior to women by saying that a woman's role was to perform household tasks while men decided what needed to be done and could give permissions for their wives to do specific things (Routray et al., 2017).

In addition, some male and female participants explained that men got angry when women did not have time to prepare food because of attending a meeting. The gender relations in a household can be related to the finding that girls in the Solomon Islands were taught to be respectful of males in their household and community and not to be loud or disagree with their male siblings (Tavola, Billy, & Kama, 2016). This training is a possible indicator of how the power dynamics in a household have been formed. Tavola et al. (2016) concluded that for women in the Solomon Islands who grow up with the strict gender roles,

their productive and reproductive tasks in the domestic sphere prevent women from participating effectively in the public sphere.

In this study some female participants reported their experiences that when women played an active role in committees, neighbors criticized them for not taking care of family members. On the other hand, when women were absent from the meetings, committee members (including female committee members) criticized them for not attending the meeting. These double-sided challenges that the Solomon Islands women faced were not specifically mentioned together in the previous studies I reviewed. However, previous studies have pointed out that fear of hostile gossip which influenced social norms was one of the impediments to women's empowerment (Kalam, 2014; Umer, Othman, Hassan, Umer, & Ur Rehman, 2017). Interestingly, Skolnik, Lazo De La Vega, and Steigenga (2012) found that in the Guatemalan community, gossip had a greater impact on women than men. Therefore, women avoided participating in the public sphere to protect themselves from being subject to gossip (Ganesh, Kermarrec, & Massoulie, 2003). These previous findings are consistent with what we found from this study.

Another interesting finding was that women support each other by gathering and talking about their WASH concerns. Most of the women in the study, reported that when they have concerns about WASH, they talked to other women including other homemakers, women leaders, and female family member as well as husbands and community leaders. A female participant described that women in Aama, Malaita province gathered in her house and share ideas with others because women had many WASH-related problems.

On the other hand, men talk about their concerns with community leaders, committee members, and their wives. These findings indicate that women have access to



information collected from other women, whereas men tend to hear a women's perspective only from their wives. To the best of my knowledge, no study highlighted these characteristics regarding gender and WASH. The findings suggest that involving women is critical to incorporate women's voices into WASH management because women can amplify messages from other women in the community.

## 5.1 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the findings from this study are not generalizable since we conducted a qualitative study. The study areas were limited to seven villages in two provinces in the Solomon Islands and the data from the discussions was based on participants' experiences and perceptions. Thus, the findings cannot be applied to the larger population. However, what we found in this study can contribute to developing tools for future qualitative research about gender in WASH in the Solomon Islands.

Second, since the study was secondary data analysis, this researcher was not involved in collecting the original data set. It is impossible to know exactly how the original research team conducted data collection and how well it was carried out. Missing this information may have affected data analysis and the interpretation of the results.

Third, there was limited access to the demographic data of participants. Access to demographic information about participants such as age, level of education, occupation, and marital status would further illuminate the research questions including perceptions regarding women's participation in WASH management.

Finally, the data did not probe enough to answer the research questions for this study because the original study had its own purposes. Since the original research was designed to assess community-led total sanitation (CLTS) approach and understand gender

disparities related to water, sanitation, and hygiene in the Solomon Islands, the data covered a wide range of topics related to gender disparities in WASH from a place to bathe and to defecate, to decision-making in WASH. On the other hand, my focus was on women's involvement in the decision-making process in WASH such as people's perceptions about women's participation and barriers to women's participation. The original data contained some information that could be used to grasp what was going on regarding women's involvement in WASH management. However, when exploring possible factors driving perceptions and obstacles, there was a gap because there were few probing questions by interviewers that would have clarified how participants ended up saying what they said and why they thought the way they thought. In future research, there is a need to examine the root causes of challenges to women's participation in WASH management.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The findings from the study highlighted that men dominated the WASH decision-making process even though women were the primary users of WASH facilities. The study also revealed that socio-cultural factors and power dynamics at the community and household levels constrained women's participation in the decision-making process regarding WASH management in rural communities in the Solomon Islands, even though the Solomon Islands governments have emphasized women's involvement in WASH programs. To fill in this gap, future interventions for WASH improvement need to include components that address power dynamics related to women's participation in decision making at the community and household levels.

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## APPENDIX A Focus Group Discussion Guide

### FGD

Date:

Community Name:

FGD Group: Women /  
Girls

Facilitator Name:

Recorder Name:

Number of Participants:

**REMEMBER!! PROBE and PROMPT!!!**

**Probe/Prompt MORE** when you hear the words:

- **Safe, Better, Different** – What does that mean to them? What does that look like?
- **Everyone** – Specifically, who? Who does what in **your** family?
- **Community/Family** – Specifically, who? What does that

### INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the session, the facilitator should tell everyone in the FGD:

- The **facilitator's name** and the **recorder's name**
- That we are **here to do a study with UNICEF** and Live and Learn
- The purpose of study is **to learn about water and sanitation from men and women** in the community
- That we will **use the Information to help communities improve** water and sanitation
- But that **they will not receive anything for their participation** in the FGD
- During the **discussion, we will use the proper words for things**, even if they might not be different than kastom (ex: shit)
- **All information will be kept confidential** (private – only the researchers will have it)
- **Participation is voluntary**
- Do they **consent to be there? (yes / no)**
- Do they give **permission to record? (yes / no)** (will be destroyed later)
- **Thank them** for agreeing
- **Start recording**
- Ask **participants to introduce themselves** – their names, marital status and number of children
- Ask **participants** if they have any **questions**
- Play an **icebreaker** (coconut, sing your favourite song, what adjective goes with your name, make a gesture with your name.....)

- **It is important we hear from everyone**, so we might stop some people from talking and ask others to talk
- **Start** the FGD

### FGD QUESTIONS

| Water   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. What is the main water source in your community? (prompt: Where do you get water? Most often?)   |  |
| 2. Is there anything that affects the reliability of the water source?<br><br><i>(Prompt: Does water come every day? Does water come and go?)</i> |  |
| 3a. How / Where do men in the community currently access water?   |  |

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| <p><b>(Prompt:</b> For washing? Cooking?<br/>Cleaning the house? Cleaning<br/>children? Washing hands?)</p>  |  |
| <p>3b. How / Where do women in the<br/>community currently access water?</p> <p><b>(Prompt:</b> For washing? Cooking?<br/>Cleaning the house? Cleaning<br/>children? Washing hands?)</p> |  |
| <p>3. During times where there is limited<br/>water available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How are men affected?</li> <li>b. How are women affected?</li> </ul>        |  |
| <p>4. How much time do you spend<br/>collecting water each day?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Is this ok or too long?</li> </ul>   |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>b. Does this affect the time for other things?</p>  |  |
| <p>5. Do men in the community feel safe collecting water?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Why?</li><li>b. Do women</li><li>c. Why?</li><li>d. What about girls?</li></ul> |  |
| <p>6. Is there something <b>you</b> would like to be different in the way you collect or access water? (Is there something that needs to change?) (Probe: Improvements)</p>            |  |

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|   |  |
| <p>7. Have you ever discussed [this] with others? (in household or community)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. why?</li><li>b. who?</li></ul>  |  |
| <p>8. How are decisions made around water bodies/points in this community?</p> <p><b>(Prompt: If they don't know, ask "So when something happens to the water, who decides how to fix it?")</b></p> |  |
| <p>9. How are women involved?</p>   |  |

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| <p><b>(Probe:</b> Ask them to <b>share a story</b> of telling/showing how women are involved or about a time/project where women were involved)</p>  |  |
| <p>10. What are problems to women being involved in committees? (time commitment)</p>  |  |
| <p>11. If there is a community project, how would you like to be involved? (give examples)</p> <p><b>(Prompt:</b> Coming to committee meetings? Discussing at church? At your children's school? Interviews at home? Having a role on a committee? What role? Etc)</p> |  |

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| <b>Sanitation</b>  |  |
| 12. Where do men shit?<br>a. Alone, or with others?<br>b. Feel comfortable?<br>c. Feel safe?   |  |
| 13. Where do women shit?<br>a. Alone, or with others?<br>b. Feel comfortable?<br>c. Feel safe? |  |

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| <p>14. Where do children shit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Who is responsible for taking care of children's health (who cleans them, disposes of shit, washes them)?</li><li>b. How much time each day is spent on taking care of children's health?</li><li>c. Is there something you would like to change (improve) about that?</li></ul> |  |
| <p>15. Is there something you would like to change (improve) about <b>your</b> own shitting practice?</p> <p><b>(Prompts:</b> Shitting practice – place, bush/toilet, privacy, hand washing)</p>   |  |



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| <p>16. Is there something you would like to be different about the shitting practices of others in your community?</p> <p><b>(Prompts:</b> Shitting practice – place, bush/toilet, privacy, hand washing)</p>                      |  |
| <p>17. Have you ever discussed this with somebody in your family/household? In the community?</p> <p><b>(Probe: If YES,</b> Who? Why?)</p> <p><b>(Probe: If NO,</b> Why? Who in your family/community would you talk to? Why?)</p> |  |

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| <p>18. What do you like about the approach and methods used in CLTS in your community?</p> <p><b>(Prompts: Do you know about CLTS?)</b></p> <p>If <b>YES</b>, ask question 18</p> <p>If <b>NO</b>, Tell them about CLTS, then ask question 18)</p> |  |
| <p>19. What is something you do not like?</p>  |  |
| <p>20. What is your opinion about the CLTS approach?</p>   |  |

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| Hygiene  |  |
| <p>21. What are the problems (challenges) for doing hand washing?</p> <p><b>(Probe:</b> For you? For your children/families)</p> <p><b>(Prompts:</b> What items do you use? What do you do if you don't have those items; ex: lemon, ash, sand....)</p>            |  |
| <p>22. What are the other most important things to do to look after health in your home (hygiene)?</p> <p><b>(Probes:</b> for yourself? Your children? Your family? What about the community?)</p> <p><b>(Prompts:</b> cleaning, washing, food, clothing, etc)</p> |  |

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| 23. Is there anything you want to change?  |  |
| 24. Who is responsible for buying soap and other household items?  |  |
| 25. How do you/they get the money for those items?<br><br><b>(Probe:</b> What do you do if you/they don't have the money?) |  |

| If there is time:  |  |
|--|--|
| 26. Are there any traditional beliefs about when, where or how you can wash hands or face?                                   |  |
| 27. When girls or women are menstruating: Are there specific norms, customs or traditions that they should or should not do? |  |
| 28. Other observations, comments or opinions on hygiene practices in your community?   |  |

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## CLOSING

At the end of the session, the facilitator should tell everyone in the FGD:

- **Thank you** for their time and participation
- Tell them we **appreciate they shared their story**
- A **reminder of the purpose of the study** (to learn about water and sanitation from men and women in the community)
- A **reminder that everything is confidential** and that they should keep everything confidential
- Ask if they have **any questions?**
- **Culturally appropriate closing** (thought, prayer, thank you, game, etc.)

## APPENDIX B Code Book

| Code                                       | Definition   |
|--|--|
| <b>Barriers to participation</b>           | Possible factors that prevent women from participating in project, management, committee and decision-making process in WASH management.   |
| <b>Community WASH decisions</b>            | Any mention about the decision-making about WASH related issues at community level   |
| <b>Consultation about WASH concerns</b>    | Any expression about talking, discussing and consulting about WASH related concerns  |
| <b>Existing village committee</b>          | Any mention about existing committee or any form of groups including water committee, women's group, village committee etc.  |
| <b>Impact of water shortage</b>            | Any statement about how men and women are affected or how they feel about the water shortage   |
| <b>Roles and responsibilities for WASH</b> | Roles and responsibilities at the household, and committee level in WASH management.   |
| <b>Safety issues about WASH</b>            | Description about safety or privacy in WASH-related activities   |
| <b>Women's involvement in WASH</b>         | Any expression about women's involvement into committee or decision-making process to address WASH related issues. The expressions include both men's and women's perception, and women's willingness to be involved or to take a role in project. |