

Perspectives and experience on PARTICIPATION, inclusion and AGENCY in COMMUNITY decision-making about water, sanitation and hygiene



This is the summary of key findings and detailed analysis from the Gender & Social Inclusion Baseline for the New Times, New Targets project to improve sustainable and inclusive access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and facilities with 22 schools, 8 clinics and in 60 rural communities in West Guadalcanal Province in rural Solomon Islands.

The project is an Australian aid initiative implemented by Plan International Australia in partnership with Live & Learn Environmental Education on behalf of the Australian Government.

Respondent overview

People with disabilities

Household Survey

104 Individual Interviews

59% Male and 41% Female

236 individual Interviews

60% (142) Male and 40% (94) Female

2 KEY FINDINGS:

- ▶ Just under 50% of men and women felt that their communities did not do enough to meet the needs of women.
- ▶ Approximately 75% of both men and women (with and without disabilities) considered that single mothers and widows are almost equally the most marginalised in the community, followed by people with disabilities.
- ▶ At community level only 13.5% of people with disabilities speak up to share their ideas, with men having higher levels of confidence and participation
- ▶ At community level approximately 50% of women have some kind of active participation, 30% listen and watch only, and only 5.3% of women help organise or facilitate.
- ▶ 38% of women identified as also being “comfortable speaking up in the community”. There was a correlation between those “comfortable speaking up” and whether they felt their opinions were respected in the community and/or the household.
- ▶ Over 50% of women said that they didn’t participate in WASH decision-making because it wasn’t the role of women (or men did not permit it).
- ▶ Both men and women said that busyness was one of the main reasons for not attending community meetings, followed by inconvenient location, unaware or not being invited, and lack of confidence.

Perceptions around disability

Perceptions of disabilities and people with disabilities in the Solomon Islands are varied and complicated. With varying disabilities and degrees of disability, the NTNT baseline survey has only been able to provide general observations but there is evidence of prejudices and marginalisation. The project has adopted the shortlist of Washington Group questions to identify people with a disability as anyone having difficulty either seeing, hearing, walking, concentrating, remembering, communicating or with self-care.

Over 80% of people with disability surveyed responded that they were not asked for their input in decision making

Around 20% of respondents think that marginalised/disabled members can help the community, indicating low expectations of how people with disability can contribute to society. But when asked about whether people with disability should be involved in community decision making, around 50% said 'yes.' There is the perception that people with disability have the right to be heard, but disability renders them unable to meaningfully help others. **Over 80% of people with disability surveyed responded that they were not asked for their input in decision making.**

Of the 3629 boys and girls surveyed in 19 schools, 90% said discrimination against people with disability is a 'big problem' or 'sometimes' a problem in their communities. Most girls and boys (97%) indicated they know little or nothing about the rights of children.

Over 60% of people with disability surveyed said they are not informed about rights and think that communities don't do enough for disabled people. Only around 20% said that discrimination is not a problem. Although some respondents noted increased participation of people with disability in community activities, partly through the activism of church and other groups, over 80% said there had been no recent changes, meaning there is great opportunity for improvement.



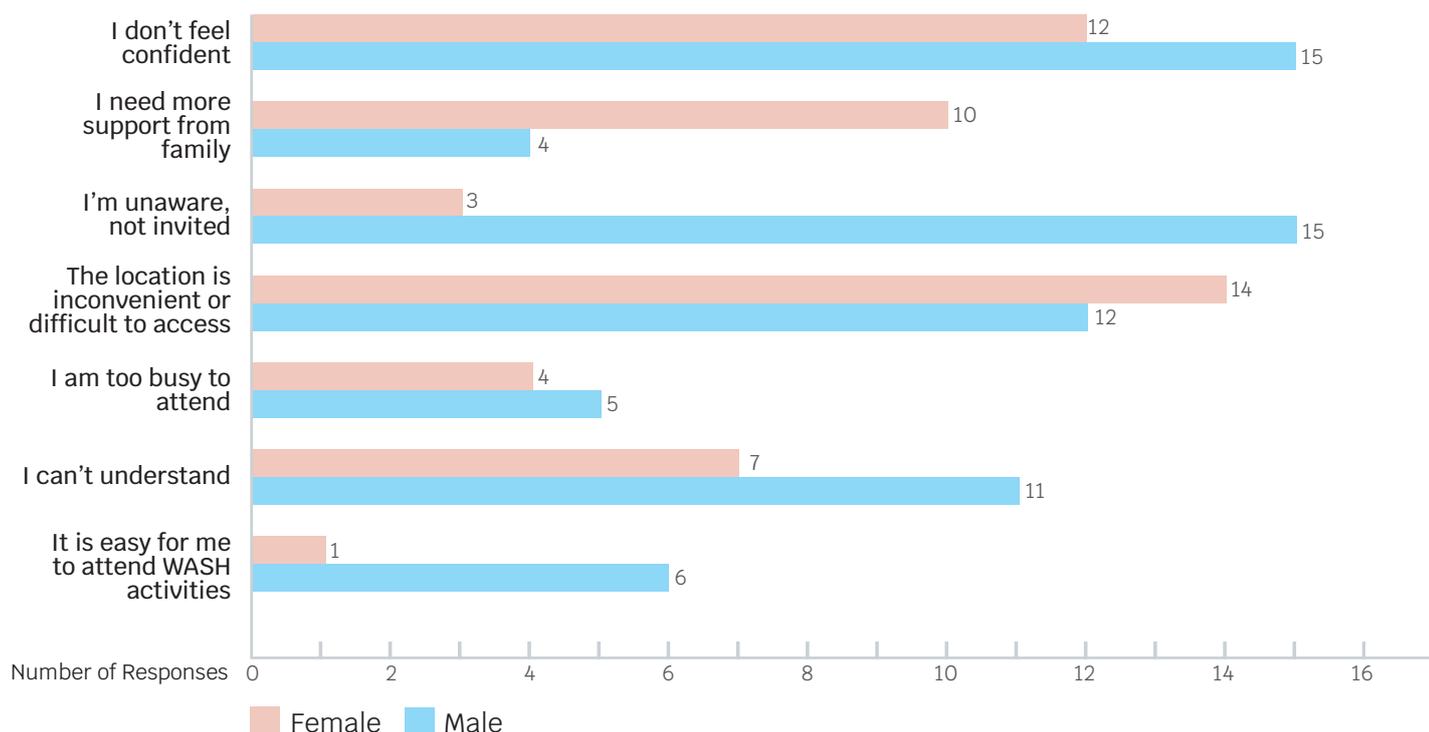
Increasing decision-making roles and power of women and marginalised groups

When using a Ladder of Participation tool to discuss participation in community decision-making, **13.4% of men and 6.6% of men with disabilities are at the top of the ladder organising and facilitating community meetings, with engagement at this level of only 5.3% of women, and 0 women with disabilities.** At the non-participation end of the ladder the same percentage of men and women with disabilities are not participating in any community meetings for a variety of reasons (mainly not feeling confident, and/or poor accessibility of location).

Community WASH Decisions - Ladder of Participation

	Male with disability %	Female with disability %	Male %	Female %
I help organise and facilitate	6.6	0	13.4	5.3
I join in and participate	4.9	0	19.7	23.4
I speak up and share my ideas	16.4	9.3	33.1	26.6
I listen and watch only	24.6	44.2	12	29.8
Allowed to join – others rules	9.8	9.3	9.9	6.4
Not invited, too busy, too difficult to access	37.7	37.2	12	8.5

“What are the main reasons you find it hard to attend meetings or activities about WASH?”



Knowledge, confidence and opportunity to engage for women and marginalised people

Twenty-one per cent (21%) of survey respondents advised that they have observed some changes in the past two years, with the inclusion of people living with disabilities in meetings and the sharing of ideas and stories, church youth programs and involvement in WASH workshops. However, when asked why they lacked confidence to participate, **54% of the women surveyed (30) said they were either too ashamed/embarrassed to participate, or believed that women can't participate because it wasn't their role, or men would not allow it.**

The survey found people with disability are not making contributions for a variety of reasons – lack of confidence, increased age, lack of time, lack of invitation. Significantly, many people with disabilities are not asked to contribute because their disabilities are seen as a barrier to meaningful contribution. **Despite this, when included in activities, people with disability felt confident and, significantly, felt that the community valued them for their input.**

Both educating the marginalised and gathering knowledge about them is important for building inclusive decision making. The survey found community members, including people with disability, identified single mothers and widows as being particularly marginalised, along with people with disability. More data is required to better understand of the marginalisation experiences of single mothers and their needs.

Marginalisation is linked to other cultural and societal problems. Alcohol abuse was not specifically mentioned in any survey questions, yet people with a disability noted that the highest percentage of discrimination was caused by people under the influence of drugs and alcohol (these were incidents of harassment rather than systematic exclusion).

Only about 23% of women said that they can't contribute to community discussions. But over 50% said men should make community decisions. **This suggests that women recognise they can contribute to leadership, but culturally they are not expected to.** There is a marked difference between women's engagement in decision-making in the household and community. 61% of women said that their opinions were always valued in the household, compared to 38% in the community.

While more than 50% of women said they are active in some way in community WASH decisions, only 5.3% said they organise/facilitate (lead discussions). When women did contribute to community decision-making, they indicated that they did so because of a desire for better community outcomes, and, significantly, **women felt more comfortable participating when other women provided leadership examples** and the community attitudes had changed towards welcoming women's participation.