

## **FLOATING COCONUT STORY**

### **How has the floating coconut helped you to carry out project activities?**

The floating coconut tool kit created by IWDA has helped the Live & Learn Vanuatu team to identify the important inputs of women's paid and unpaid work into the family and society's well-being in Imaio Village in the Whitesands area of Neprainetata.

One quarter of the top visible part of the coconut floating in the sea signaled the formal economy whereby men, women, youths or disabled persons were able to access paid jobs to earn money for their families and communities. Three quarters of the coconut remained submerged in the sea and this signified the informal economy comprising of some informal jobs and unpaid work that men, women, youths and disabled persons are performing in the community.

The tool kit involved the active engagement of men, women, youths and disabled persons in various groups in brainstorming, identifying and listing all the work that each member of their groups was required to perform in the family and in the community.

The groups were given different coloured stick-on pads to list the work they were doing. When they came up to present, they would then remove each work and stick them onto their floating coconuts.

### **How is this different to usual practice (i.e. without the coconut)?**

Prior to the tool kit being used, the Imaio community did not really understand the importance of women's informal and unpaid work in the communities and how hard they worked. Men thought that they worked the hardest while women were relaxing at home because they did not really have much to do.

### **What difference have you seen?**

By using the floating coconut tool kit, the men and male youths came to realize that women worked as hard as them even harder in many instances to ensure that the family and the community flourished. After the tool kit session was over, the men continued to talk about how the exercise helped them to change their traditional mindset of thinking that women were unproductive members of their family and society. Men and male youths also realized that woman's inputs into the family and community life was an essential element of good community living.

It was no surprise to see that the women's and female youths' floating coconuts contained more coloured paper than the men and male youth's floating coconuts.

### **What has been the best thing about using the tool?**

The best thing was in engaging with all groups of the community through a participatory learning approach and dividing the group into gender groupings. Getting all group members to ask themselves the question of what they do throughout the day and listing a chore each on a piece of coloured paper. This exercise helped the Imaio community to recognize that it takes everyone's commitments (including women's inputs through informal jobs and unpaid work) to host a well-functioning family and society.

**Are you finding anything challenging about using the floating coconut?**

Finding the time to ensure that the tool kit is explained well and then getting active participation by all members of the groups. After the exercise, it was interesting to see the transformation of mindsets as men came to realize and appreciate the work that their women do in for their families and communities.

**Is there anything that has surprised you?**

The result of the exercise was not a new discovery for me as I knew that women were involved in a lot of informal jobs and unpaid work in the family and in the community. However, what surprised me was the interest that men showed in Imaio after the tool kit exercise was over. The conversations continued into the night when men were drinking kava and into the next day. The community sincerely thanked the Live & Learn Vanuatu team for helping them to appreciate their women's informal and unpaid work.

**Is there anything else that you'd like to add?**

The floating coconut is an excellent tool kit that must be used in any community setting to help men overcome their traditional mindsets of thinking that women's paid and unpaid work are inessential. The tool kit involves participatory learning approaches, as all groups within a community are engaged in brainstorming, listing their work and then make presentations back to the community.

Organizations engaging in community-based work have an excellent tool kit they can use to help change patriarchal and patrilineal mindsets in the rural communities concerning women's informal roles and unpaid work and responsibilities in their family and society.