

# Study of Community-Level Access to Justice

Vanuatu Ending Violence Against Women

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Project name: Research on improved access to justice for women and children

Outcome area: Ending violence against women

Project partner: Policing and Justice Support Program (Vanuatu)

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A Pacific Women-funded study into the management of community-level justice issues on the island of Malekula suggests pathways for improving access to justice for women in the future.



Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific, at the launch at Lakatoro, Malekula of the research into Conflict Management & Access to Justice in Rural Vanuatu. More than 800 women, men, community leaders, police, and state justice representatives were interviewed across the island of Malekula during the research. Photo: Ministry of Justice and Community Services, Vanuatu.

The Conflict Management and Access to Justice in Rural Vanuatu report was prepared as part of the Australian Government's Policing and Justice Support Program (Vanuatu). It identified the kinds of conflicts that are prevalent in communities; examined how conflicts are managed and resolved by individuals, institutions and processes; and explored peoples' experiences of those broader justice processes and institutions.

'There has been little research to date that has practically mapped how community-level justice through chiefs mainly, but also religious leaders and family members and state justice (including courts and police) actually function in Vanuatu, both on their own and as part of a broader system,' explained Hon Ronald Warsal, Vanuatu's Minister for Justice and Community Services.

'Understanding this broader system and some of the assumptions upon which it is based is crucial for Vanuatu to be empowered to navigate its own path towards access to justice for all its citizens. This research supports us to do this.'

The findings and recommendations have particular importance for gender equality programming because conflict relating to violence against women, particularly by an intimate partner, is most commonly dealt with within a community setting. More often than not, state justice processes will not be involved. The research therefore looked specifically at women's experiences of conflict and their access to justice.

It is the first time this type of research has been undertaken in Vanuatu. Researchers were drawn from a number of organisations including the Vanuatu Women's Centre, CARE and the Vanuatu Law Commission. They interviewed more than 800 women, men, community leaders, police and state justice representatives across Malekula.

The research showed that men, women and leaders at the community level who are involved in managing conflict have limited understanding of the state laws that govern them and their human rights. They expressed a clear interest in acquiring greater knowledge of state institutions and processes.

Additionally, leaders at community level who are responsible for managing conflict would like greater support from the state for conflict management and implementation of justice measures.

The findings will be used as a solid evidence base to develop future program support at government and community level to strengthen access to justice, including women's access to justice, in rural areas on Malekula.

*\*This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2015-2016](#). All values are consisted with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).*