

## We're Seeing Behavioural Change

### In this issue

*The Exemplary Water Committee of Somosomo Village*

*An Upgrade For Verenaisi*

*Community Engagement To Continue In 2022*

As we get into our fifth and final year of the WASH program, we're really starting to see behaviour change in the communities we're working with. In the past our 18 project communities had very few women in their water committees, now we're seeing double the amount of women represented. We're also noticing stronger youth groups that are now more involved in decision making and project facilitation. These community groups are also addressing taboo subjects head on with the use of posters and other discussion techniques introduced during our community engagement.



*Image: Young men of the Navitilevu village youth group discuss the social torments women and girls of the village face around menstrual hygiene.*

We're also noticing communities take full ownership and responsibility of their projects which we can see will lead to the long term sustainability of it.

Habitat Fiji's WASH Programme Manager - Sakimi Alfred is excited about the behavioural change he and the team are seeing. He credits this to the last four years of capacity building, community engagement and working with existing community systems.

## The Exemplary Water Committee

In early March of 2021, the Habitat for Humanity Fiji team carried out its water committee training (CE3) in Somosomo Village of the Yasawa Islands. During the training a village water committee was established but without funds and resources to carry out the required duties. According to the Water Committee project manager it was the committee members themselves that contributed and carried out the maintenance work of the village water supply.



*Images: Water committee carrying out ongoing maintenance for village water supply.*

For months the committee continued to carry out the necessary maintenance work, repairs and day to day running of the village water system. The committee was also responsible for the ongoing operation of the solar and mechanical power supply of the village borehole. They also monitored the water supply to households during prolonged dry spells.

### Using social media

After months of impressive action the water committee created their own Facebook page. This allowed the committee to share their progress and WASH updates with our Habitat Fiji team. As their social media network grew, attention was drawn to the projects and repairs the team was committing to. Through this Facebook page and visibility, the committee was able to secure funding for some necessary repairs to one of the village borehole systems.

This has also been a learning opportunity for our Habitat Fiji team. It has allowed us to carry out effective monitoring and guidance virtually which has been critical with the restricted movements due to the COVID -19 pandemic. The moves the Somosomo Water Committee is making has also drawn the Fijian Government's attention. They are currently discussing how some of these learnings can be shared and this water committee be used as a leading model for other villages committees.

## An Upgrade For Verenaisi

In our last publication we shared how Josua and Eremasi were working on improving the pit latrines in their village of Nativi (read the full story [here](#)). We now take a look at one of the beneficiaries of these efforts - Verenaisi Nawa.

Verenaisa was quite pleased when she was told that they would be upgrading her pit latrine. Her new ventilated pit latrine has a concrete base, a much more credible structure with a solid timber frame door and a breather (toilet vent) that helps remove unpleasant odour.

The 69-year-old widow shared that she and the family feel much more comfortable and safe when using this new ventilated pit latrine. Prior to the upgrade the toilet had no flooring which meant during rain the base would get muddy and slippery, the structure was not credible, there was no proper ventilation leaving foul odour to linger, and the old structure only had a curtain covering the entrance to the toilet providing very little privacy to the occupant.



*Images (L - R): The improved ventilated pit latrine. Verenaisi with Habitat Fiji WASH officer Taraiasi Wara*

Our Habitat Fiji team and district stakeholders are quite impressed with the way the upgrades of the ventilated pit latrines are being carried out in Nativi. The examples and lessons learned from these upgrades in Nativi will be included in Knowledge products in the K and L strategy which will then be part of the training guides that is used and distributed by Habitat Fiji.

## Community Engagements To Continue In 2022

Project builds and upgrades have been progressing well with works in six of the 11 schools now completed and the construction of community projects to commence soon. At the moment the capacity building component of our community engagement is where we're focussing a lot of our efforts to make up for lost time.

The restrictions in movement due to the COVID -19 pandemic has affected our Habitat Fiji team's community engagement. For eight months in 2021 we were unable to carry out these learning and training activities. Restrictions in 2022 have eased up but there are still limitations we are working through. A total of five training and learning engagements are required for each community over the five-year project period.



We believe these engagements have played a big part in the behavioural change we're starting to see in our project communities. It is vital that the required community engagements are completed as these are key in the long-term sustainability of the work that has been carried out in the Water for Women project.

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