

Impact Evaluation of Project Talitha – Phase 2

(Implemented in Central, West & North Districts, Fiji)

Assessing the overall effectiveness and impact of the project model for Project Talitha to provide specific and actionable recommendations for Phase III.

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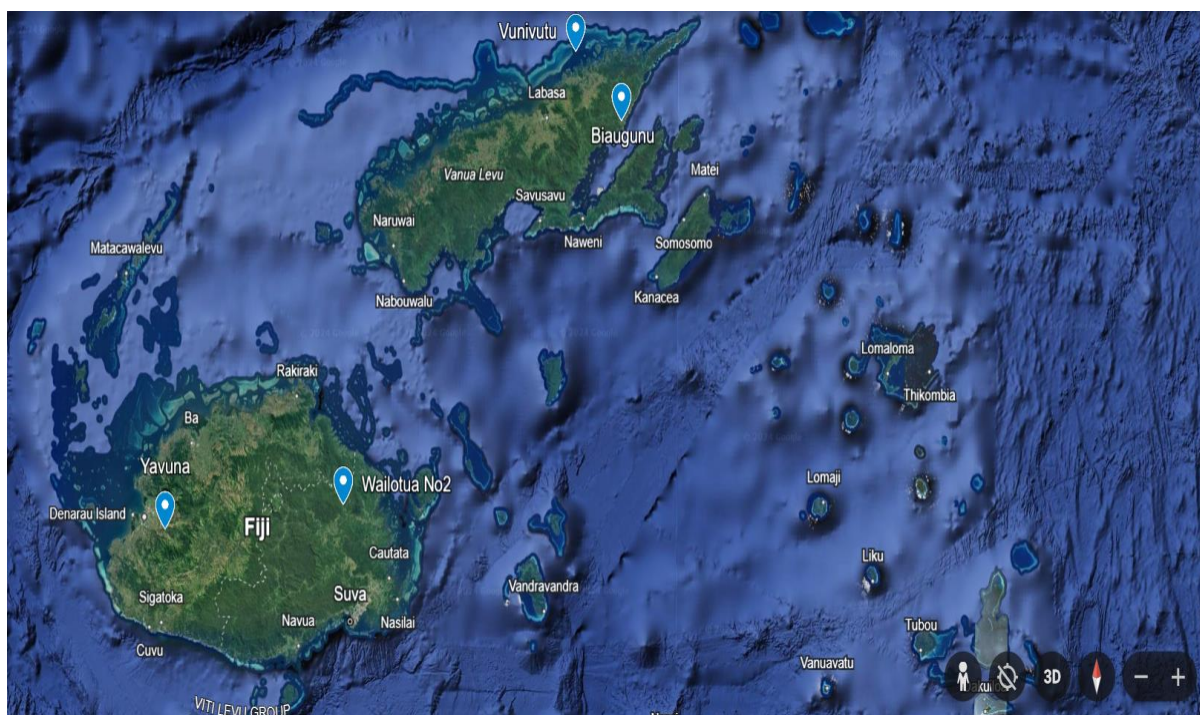
Project Partner: Ola Fou Fiji

Evaluation Year: 2024

Executive Summary

Phase two of Project Talitha, funded by Mary MacKillop Today, was delivered in four remote rural communities in Fiji. Two of these communities are located in Viti Levu and two in Vanua Levu. The project is the only intervention delivering long term empowerment training and awareness programs to remote rural communities with the aim to uplift the well-being of young women and girls. The project was implemented between 01 June 2021 and 31 June 2024.

Map of Project Communities



The purpose of this evaluation was to assess project impact and whether it had delivered the intended outputs and achieved its expected outcomes considering relevance, coherence, efficiency, sustainability, and its effectiveness and impact on target groups, taking into consideration cross-cutting issues such as gender equity, disability inclusion, safeguarding and disaster risk reduction. The final evaluation also identifies lessons learnt from the project implementation process and provides a basis for decisions by the project management team and the donor on the design and plan of phase three of Project Talitha.

The report covered the whole project implementation period and assessed progress made against the four project objectives:

- Objective 1: 48 young women are empowered through various awareness, capacity building and skills development training in the 4 project communities in Fiji (2 from the North, 1 from the Central and 1 from the Western Division) (New Target: 12 young women per project community);
- Objective 2: 4 clubs (safe space) are created, and support services provided to develop, train and build capacity for 48 young women;
- Objective 3: Young women are able to actively contribute to the development of their communities and the promotion of the project initiatives; and
- Objective 4: Increase community and official stakeholders' awareness.

The evaluation adopted a consultative approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the process and the findings were used to validate and support the analysis on which the conclusions and recommendations are based.

Main Findings

Relevance

The project is considered to be highly relevant, being the only intervention identified by official stakeholders in the project communities to support and empower young vulnerable women and girls in rural communities. The intervention is also filling in the gap for the government of Fiji by delivering empowerment programmes for women and girls in the remotest rural communities.

Coherence

The project had the opportunity to be showcased at a Joint Partner Workshop which included all programs funded by Mary MacKillop Today (MMT) in Fiji, Peru and Timor-Leste. The project also collaborated with UNDP in coordination with the Macuata Provincial Office to deliver trainings on running cooperatives in rural communities and worked in coordination with Save the Children's Funds to support site visit programmes from its Australian counterparts to Fiji.

Aside Project Talitha, there are also interventions that work in the same space. Solo Mum is a project carrying out similar interventions to Project Talitha but focusing more on empowerment of vulnerable women in informal communities that are located in urban areas. Solo Mum project features most of its deliverables and/or success stories in the local newspapers.

Other than project-based interventions such as Project Talitha and Solo Mum – there are also established women’s association in rural communities that look after the interest of women and girls specific to their own communities – two of these established women’s groups are Taveuni Empowerment Women Support Group (TEWSG), and the Cicia Women’s Network (CWN) are located in different provinces in Fiji. These two women’s groups, similar to Project Talitha, look after the interest of women in their communities.

Effectiveness

Project Talitha delivered its activities exceptionally well during the three-year implementation period for Phase II. A review of the project six-monthly and annual reports together with interviews undertaken with project actors, staff and stakeholders provided information on the delivery of project activities on the ground.

A review of the projects planned objectives revealed the following:

Objective 1: 48 young women are empowered through various awareness, capacity building and skills development training in the 4 project communities in Fiji.

- The project was able to successfully deliver 14 trainings across all four project communities and an estimated 1,017 participants attending these trainings and women making 80 percent of that number.

Objective 2 – 4 clubs (safe space) are created and support services provided to develop, train and build capacity for 48 young women

- Four clubs were successfully set up and participants across all four communities shared their appreciation and the benefits it has had on their lives;
- Coaches recruited were primary participants from the previous project communities in phase one. Interviews with them shed light on the challenges they have had to encounter during their journey under the project.

Objective 3 – Young women are able to actively contribute to the development of their communities and the promotion of the project initiatives.

- Business ventures for primary participants were set up successfully. The project targeted a total of 48 participants with 12 per community however at the end of the project only 35 completed and were issued with a startup kit;

- Businesses for these primary participants varied from canteen, farming, screen printing, baking and sewing to name a few. Some were able to roll out their business successfully whilst others faced challenges along the way;
- The project official stakeholders continued to support the project by promoting the businesses set up by these primary participants in the communities; and
- Participants engaged well with the community and some were able to join community led committees and/or were tasked to manage community businesses such as being a store keeper for the community store.

Objective 4 – Increase community and official stakeholders’ awareness

- Various trainings and awareness sessions on human rights, reproductive health awareness training, money minded training, leadership training, youth development training, community connection and storytelling, Disaster Risk Reduction and disability awareness training were delivered and targeting the communities as a whole; and
- The project ensured a balance between interventions delivered specifically for primary participants and interventions to raise the community’s knowledge on important issues that affect them in one way or another.

Efficiency

- The project as planned was able to deliver all its planned activities. The desk review exercise revealed reporting by business implementers showed a major improvement and confirms that implementers have been able to utilise what they have been learning from all the training they have attended to improving their report writing and submission;
- The review of coaches and business mentors reporting structure needed improvement and focus from the team. Reports submitted did not have a structured approach in terms of issues and matters reported;
- Properly resourcing project implementers have enabled them to improve their performance and reporting significantly;
- The delays in the disbursement of project funds to implement project activities is still a challenge for the project and an issue that is constantly raised by the implementers in the community; and
- The timeline of the delivery of skills training for primary participants was raised as an issue that affected their ability to successfully roll out their business. Recommendations was put

forward by skills trainers, primary participants, coaches and business mentors to increase the number of days in delivering skills training.

Impact

The project played a key role in raising the importance of gender equity and empowerment in its target communities. At the end of the project:

- The communities were disaster ready – the project covered a total of 7 communities from phase one and two. As part of the trainings provided to the community – DRR was part of this in which communities were encouraged to set up DRR committees;
- Business set up by primary participants created a rippling effect for income generation for the community. The business set up was became a channel in supporting the generation of income for other families in the communities;
- The trainings offered to primary participants enabled and taught them many lessons and skills, it also gave them the confidence to join established women’s group in the community;
- Primary participants appreciated the projects aim to build back their confidence, empower them through knowledge training on human rights, the wounded healer, the person within and so on;
- Collaboration and building relationship with existing women’s group was essential to the existence and sustainability of the project. Two of the project communities worked well with the established women’s group in their community; and
- Disability and child safety was an important cross cutting issue that was not well integrated into the structure of activities for the project. The team on the ground faced challenges when it came to managing participants with special needs and similarly, primary participants struggled with managing their children during the delivery of project activities. Those that did not have a strong support system from their family suffered as they could not attend project activities intended for them.

Sustainability

- The sustainability of the outcome/impact of the project intervention was reviewed and it was noted that there was no clear indication on how well the project, community and stakeholders would sustain the outcome and what has been achieved for the communities;
- There was no review of phase one any time after it was delivered and it was noted that almost all businesses set up by participants in phase one are no longer in operation. Similarly, the DRR committees that were set up for the communities have died down; and

- Club set up were no longer operational as most of the primary participant in phase 1 have left the community. For those businesses that still remain operational, they belonged to participants that are now coaches in phase two.
- Building a meaningful and active partnership is key to sustaining the impact of the project. This is an area that the project still needs to work through and establish if it is to develop an effective sustainability approach to support the continuity of the project achievements.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A. Scoping of new project sites to be undertaken through a collaborative process with relevant stakeholders

Recommendations

1. The project will need to undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise followed on by the development of a stakeholder committee to include its existing stakeholders in the community and those that are not yet represented; and
2. The stakeholder's contribution will help the project make informed decisions on the key areas that it would like to cover in phase three.

B. There is a need to strengthen existing partnerships and building new ones

Recommendations

1. The project needs to build and strengthen its relationship first and foremost with key stakeholders such as the Ministry Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, UN Women, National Disaster Management Office. These organisations play a lead role in the management of key issues covered under the project i.e. gender, disaster risk resilience, disability and children's rights;
2. A stakeholder management plan was developed in phase one for the project, and this should be revisited, updated and reviewed regularly; and
3. The project should mobilise resources and build networks for the project.

C. A review should be undertaken on the timelines of the project and planning of its activities

Recommendations

1. The spread of activities across the project implementation period is to be reviewed, taking into account the need of project recipients;

2. In reviewing the timeline of the project, consideration must also be given to the timeline in which the business startup kit is released to primary participants taking into account that sufficient time needs to be given to participants to roll out their business and be monitored at the same time;
3. Skills training should be re-aligned to suit the needs and demands existing within the project community and surrounding villages. This issue should be included in the scoping exercise and should be discussed widely with relevant stakeholders who are experts in these fields; and
4. Timeliness of project funding to be reviewed and challenges addressed ahead of Phase 3 implementation to avoid delays in project activities.

D. There is a need to realign skills training content and business support

Recommendations

1. The project team whilst in the process of developing its plans for Phase 3 may need to seek professional guidance from training development experts who can develop and/or review their training plans and provide recommendations on the best approach to use moving into Phase 3; and
2. The quality of business mentoring services that the project will use to support primary participants needs to be strengthened. This process should be included as part of the scoping exercise – the Ministry of Industry and Trade can provide guidance on how best the project can identify business mentoring services.

E. Review the recruitment process of support team (Coaches, Business Mentors)

Recommendations

1. The project should consider the upskilling of the current pool of coaches who may be interested to continue with the coaching services for Phase 3. Upskilling to include basic training on report writing, data collection, coaching training which could be delivered to them by professional counsellors, and other relevant training; and
2. The project could seek guidance from Business Assistance Fiji on business advisory services and the Ministry of Trade and Industry on the best way forward to identify potential business mentors that are willing to work with the project in guiding and providing business advisory role to primary participants in Phase 3.

F. Strengthen community ownership for sustainability

Recommendations

1. The project will need to assess the status of all business set up for each and every participant that were issued a start-up kit in Phase 1 and 2 during the scoping exercise. The outcome should help inform the project whether it is sustainable to proceed with the same initiative or consider setting up a cooperative approach or other options of resourcing the primary participants at the end of the project;
2. The project should establish a network with the National Disaster Management Office, Provisional Development Office and Fiji Water Foundation in the set up and maintenance of Disaster Risk Reduction committees in communities that will be supported in Phase 3; and
3. The project should consider building a link and collaboration effort with existing women's association in project communities who could then continue to use women's clubs set up under the project together with primary participants.

G. Strengthening of coaches and business mentors reporting structure

Recommendations

1. The project could develop reporting templates and timelines for coaches and business mentors and train them on the use of these reporting templates; and
2. Coaches and Business Mentors to undergo basic report writing skills training with project implementers also in attendance to understand the requirements and expectations in the reports that will be delivered by coaches and business mentors; and

H. Strengthen the mainstreaming of disability and child safeguarding into the structure of project activities

Recommendations

1. The Pacific Disability Forum (PDP) to be invited by the project to provide relevant training and assist the team in developing a plan on working with people with disability in the community;
2. Project Implementers and Coaches are to receive specific training on how to identify and manage the needs of participants and community members with special needs; and
3. The project, in consultation with the donor and the project team on the ground – implementers, coaches, business mentors, to discuss and develop a robust plan that the team could use or refer to when they see situations where child safeguarding is at stake.