



Innovative Use of Social Media Taking WASH in Schools to Scale in Vanuatu

SUMMARY

Social media has become a surprisingly useful and effective tool in advancing Vanuatu's national WASH in Schools (WinS) program. In late 2019, Vanuatu's Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) created the *WASH in Schools Vanuatu - WOSH insaet long ol Skul Vanuatu* Facebook group as a tool for schools to showcase their WASH activities. With increasing access to low-cost or free Facebook data and internet coverage in Vanuatu, the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group has since evolved into a tool of diverse applications including contractor monitoring, announcements, knowledge sharing, program feedback, reporting, emergency response assessments, program monitoring and general WinS related communications. It has been transformational in scaling-up WASH in schools in Vanuatu where a pilot project in Penama province with 78 schools and 120 ECCE centres resulted in a 104% increase in average three-star indicator¹ ratings from 2019 to 2020.

Background

Vanuatu, the most at-risk country in the world to natural disasters², is a lower-middle income country located 2,500 kilometers east of Australia in the Pacific Ocean. The 280,000 residents and 590 schools are spread over 66 inhabited volcanic and raised coral islands.

While data on school WASH performance in Vanuatu is limited, a 2015 nationwide assessment of primary school facilities revealed that 0% of toilets were disability accessible, 41% of toilets were shared by boys and girls, and only 28% of toilets were in an acceptable condition. A 2017 baseline study of Penama province's 78 schools

found that 63% had access to basic water, 26% had basic sanitation, and 27% with basic hygiene facilities, as per the UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Project (JMP) indicators for WASH in Schools³.

In response to a WASH in Schools Call to Action in 2016⁴, Vanuatu's National WASH in Schools (WinS) Program officially commenced in mid-2017. Predominantly funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) the program is being implemented by Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) with technical support from UNICEF in partnership with other affiliated government departments. The program was initiated with the intent to generate national-

¹ UNICEF and GIZ, 2013

² The World Risk Report, 2020

³ WHO and UNICEF, 2020

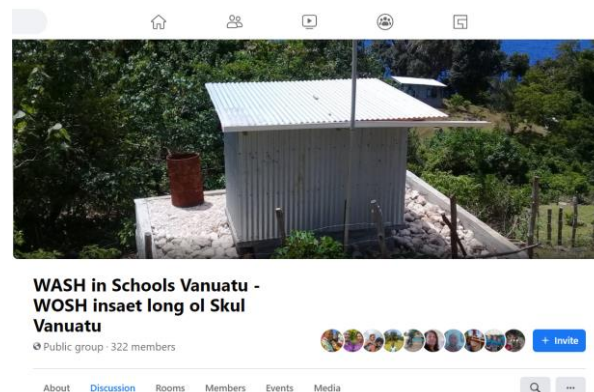
⁴ Ministry of Education and Training, Government of Vanuatu, 2016

level political prioritization for WinS, while developing an appropriate WinS improvement framework with an initial pilot in Penama province. The 2019 – 2029 National WinS Strategy builds on and adapts a global “three-star approach”⁵ to the Vanuatu context. The strategy aims to support at least 80% of all Vanuatu schools to reach and retain a minimum two-star performance rating⁶, as measured using the MoET-defined and contextualized three-star indicators.

Given the geographic remoteness of Vanuatu’s islands, communication among national, provincial and school level actors was identified early in the program as a major bottleneck in progressing the desired deliverables. Field visits, even just from a provincial capital to a large school in the same province can require use of multiple modes of travel (plane, truck, boat and hike), making routine visits very expensive and time consuming.

Vanuatu, like many other countries, continues to see an increase in mobile phone access and social media use (see Table 1). Using this as an innovative opportunity to address major communication challenges, in October 2019, the UNICEF funded MoET National WinS Coordinator created a WASH in Schools Vanuatu Facebook group as a means for schools to showcase their Global Handwashing Day (GHWD) celebrations.

Figure 1: WinS Vanuatu Facebook group homepage



Source: WASH in Schools Vanuatu – WOSH insaet long ol Skul Vanuatu, 2020

Table 1: Rapid increase in social media use in Vanuatu

Indicator	2017 ⁷	2020 ⁸
Number of active social media users (and % of total population)	44,000 (16%)	95,000 (31%)
Number of active Facebook users (and % of total population)	44,000 (16%)	92,000 (30%)
% social media users accessing via mobile phone	No data	98%
Number of mobile phone subscriptions	236,000	349,900

A WinS Events Guide was distributed in advance, coupled with other WinS programming and awareness Information, education and communication (IEC) materials and activities, to encourage schools to perform WASH promotion

province of Penama which saw an increase in average three-star scores from 0.9 in 2019 to 1.83 in 2020.

⁷ Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2017

⁸ Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020

⁵ UNICEF and GIZ, 2013

⁶ While routine national-wide three-star WinS data collection is being arranged, the only available data is from the pilot

activities at their schools and share through the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group. Schools were encouraged to run activities on any day, though particularly on globally recognized WASH days, such as:

- World Water Day (22 March)
- Menstrual Hygiene Day (28 May)
- Global Handwashing Day (15 October) and
- World Toilet Day (19 November).

After receiving impressive activity posts from target schools (see Figure 2, as an example), MoET realized the potential of Facebook to be used as a tool for school performance updates, contractor monitoring, event planning, announcements, knowledge sharing, emergency response, and general WASH-related communications. By November 2020 the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group had grown to have over 300 members, most being school principals (including nearly all 78 Penama province school principals), teachers and provincial MoET staff.

The WASH in Schools Vanuatu Facebook Group

Expansion

Without any prompting from UNICEF or MoET national officers the Facebook group naturally expanded to share information on school WASH performance, supplies movements (both WinS and general education related), impact of natural disasters and contractor deliverables. It also became a key portal for connecting donors to funded activities and beneficiaries.

KEY POINTS

Access to smartphones and social media has increased significantly in recent years in Vanuatu

Facebook provides an open platform to promote and monitor real-time school WASH activities

Public access enables transparency and triangulation of monitoring information

Schools take ownership and pride in showcasing their WASH improvements

Figure 2: World Water Day celebrations



Source: WASH in Schools Vanuatu – WOSH insaet long ol Skul Vanuatu, 2020

Monitoring WinS supplies

To support school WinS performance improvements the National WinS Program has involved distribution of handwashing buckets, soap, water filters, water bottles and menstrual

hygiene materials to target schools. The WinS Vanuatu Facebook group proved a valuable tool in tracking WinS supply distributions and confirmation of receipt, especially in remote, hard to reach locations. This monitoring approach is becoming particularly useful given the scale-up of WinS activities in Vanuatu, the limited capacity available to monitor distributions and related WinS activities, and COVID-19 related travel restrictions. Photos showing when supplies arrived on an island even helped alert schools to prepare to pick them up.

Figure 3: Supplies monitoring



Source: WASH in Schools Vanuatu – WOSH insaet long ol Skul Vanuatu, 2020

Emergency response

Category 5 TC Harold swept through Sanma, Malampa and Penama provinces in early April 2020 causing widespread destruction to the provinces of Sanma, Malampa and Penama provinces. Forty three percent (43%) of schools

and 47% of ECCE (early childhood care and education) centres in these three provinces were severely damaged. Phone and internet coverage was one of the first services restored in most locations, providing an opportunity for affected schools to report on WASH and other damages via the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group and prior to the arrival of rapid assessment teams (school rapid assessment teams arrived over 1 month later as schools were already closed at the time of the cyclone due to COVID-19 preparations). MoET was then able to expedite support to schools in affected areas using Facebook and Facebook Messenger to gather, verify and confirm information while attending to school needs.

Figure 4: Emergency response assessments



Source: WASH in Schools Vanuatu – WOSH insaet long ol Skul Vanuatu, 2020

Contractor monitoring

MoET have begun using the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group as a monitoring tool for contractors performing WinS-related activities.

Contractors are mandated to post specific activities or outputs on the Facebook group page as part of their contractually required deliverables. The approach enables triangulation of monitoring activities, whereby stakeholders of all levels are informed real-time of ongoing activities.

This approach enables schools to play a key role in holding contractors accountable to deliver their mandated scope of work. Rather than contractor reports going directly to only MoET at national level, this way all Facebook group members are enabled to see, verify and learn from what's happening – a far more transparent system inherently aimed at knowledge sharing and capacity building.

Figure 5: Monitoring infrastructure installations



Source: *WASH in Schools Vanuatu – WOSH insaet long ol Skul Vanuatu, 2020*

Announcements and knowledge sharing

The WinS Vanuatu Facebook group has significantly strengthened ties between school, provincial and national level in the education and

broader WinS sub-sector. Now key WinS information can be shared easily and widely with target stakeholders by any participating stakeholder. The tool has been used to update school stakeholders on:

- COVID-19 key messages, plans and protocol
- Upcoming events, such as WinS workshops or global WASH days
- Shipments of WinS supplies and materials
- WinS 3-star performance progress
- Winners of WinS competitions, such as world WASH day activity competitions

WinS performance monitoring and advocacy

Schools have taken the lead in showcasing progress in improving their WinS performance, as measured using MoET's WinS 3-star indicators. Whilst school Facebook posts can be used to verify 3-star data for respective schools, it also serves as a motivator for social change and basis for comparison with other schools. All information is made public, rather than being directed solely to provincial officers in the form of a progress report, or not shared at all due to a lack of incentive and enabling environment. This way a healthy competition is developed whereby schools are enabled to "show off" what they are doing, and other schools can learn, compare and be inspired to improve their own situation. As the Penama Provincial ECCE Coordinator stated, *"while seeing developments in different ECCE, others learn and grow also...pictures talk louder than words!"*

Figure 6: WinS performance announcement



Source: WASH in Schools Vanuatu – WOSH insaet long ol Skul Vanuatu, 2020

The WinS Vanuatu Facebook group post excerpt in Figure 6, for example, displays the progressive three-star WinS performance of Penama’s three islands, Pentecost, Maewo and Ambae. The post celebrates and recognizes the first four schools in Penama (on Ambae) that reached two stars in early 2020 (shown in green).

Donor liaison

The WinS Vanuatu Facebook group has become the primary location where donors and other key national level stakeholders are directed to view the status of the National WinS Program. Excerpts from the page are pasted into donor reports, such that schools are increasingly contributing to the delivery of the program and capacity to leverage funding for scaling-up WinS.

As the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group is public, other Pacific countries have been made aware of the group to learn how MoET is using this IT-based innovative approach to mobilize understanding and support to scale-up WinS in Vanuatu.

⁹ World Bank Group, 2015

Table 2: Why social media to monitor WinS?

Conventional monitoring tools	Social media as a monitoring tool
1-directional (school to provincial to national level)	Multi-directional (all stakeholders informed)
Written reports and data	Pictorial reports
Time lag	Real time
Single verification source	Triangulation from multiple sources
Internal and private	Transparent and public
Informational only	Advocacy tool stimulating competition and change
Single recipient	Multiple recipients
Narrow reach	Wide reach
One-off	Ongoing
National ownership	School level ownership

Discussions

Other WASH knowledge management tools

There are many other knowledge management tools used by WASH groups throughout the world, such as field visits, workshops, conferences, trainings, websites and email groups⁹. Global websites such as Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) and Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA) have long been online resources accessible to all with an internet connection. In remote locations where travel is expensive and locations with Coronavirus related travel restrictions, these virtual knowledge exchange options are becoming more important. In 2020, many WASH global learning events such as Stockholm World Water Week and UNC Water and Health conference moved online, enabling more people to attend. However, time zones,

language and content often still need to be translated to the local context through country-specific activities. In 2017, a Vanuatu WASH Sector Google group¹⁰ was created and is used to share contextualized global sectoral knowledge, but is more frequently used to request quotations, share emergency situation reports and announce sector meetings. DoWR and MoH also shared items via public pages managed by government communications officers. As well, DoWR have also created a Facebook messenger group for staff and technical assistance that helps with internal rapid communication. This group posts several times a day and functions in a way similar to other social media providers, such as WhatsApp.

Social Media Limitations

Whilst the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group has been greatly valuable in overcoming geographic and systemic barriers to information exchange among WinS sector stakeholders, social media is not a one-size-fits-all tool. While it can be useful for sharing information, there are drawbacks. In some cultures, there are increasing concerns about how social media negatively affects society, relationships and interactions and in some cases increases bigotry and possibly violence¹¹. It can be educational and motivating for those connected and actively using social media. However, it can exclude others. It is of limited use for those without internet connectivity, a smartphone, cash for data or knowledge of the group. In 2020, MoET established an agreement with Vanuatu's two predominant network providers, Digicel and Vodaphone, to enable schools' free online access to Vanuatu's Education Management Information System (Open VEMIS). Free access like that might help reduce some of the cost barriers to WASH in Schools monitoring.

¹⁰ WASH Sector Vanuatu, 2020

¹¹ Newport, 2019

Some of the main limitations of using social media as a tool to scale-up WinS in Vanuatu are tabulated below.

Table 3: Limitations of social media as a monitoring tool

Limitation	Description
Data cost	Some social media applications data are often marketed as free and unlimited, though only with the purchase of a data package
Smartphone cost/access	While becoming increasingly prevalent, there remains a significant proportion of the population without a computer, smartphone or tablet
Network access	While mobile data coverage has increased significantly in recent years (e.g. from 52% in 2017 to 86% in 2018 ¹²), there remains several remote rural areas without coverage
Technical competence & confidence	Many people are not familiar with social media and its uses; experience shows that time is needed to assist users with joining the group and making their 1 st post to get accustomed to the process
Student voices	While there are many students (particularly secondary) actively using social media, the WinS FB group's activity is almost entirely from staff contributions; there are both social and technological barriers to overcome to bring student voices to the group
Explicit or other unwanted content	Social media accounts are often public to maximize its reach, though as a result needs to be closely monitored to control content

Conclusions

Social media has been an unexpectedly valuable tool in raising the voices of all school WASH stakeholders in the drive to scale-up WinS in

¹² Telecommunications Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator, 2019

Vanuatu. As stated by Penama's School Improvement Coordinator, "*schools can take information and examples from other colleagues and apply them to their own schools*". With over 300 members (as of November 2020) and only 78 schools and 120 ECCE centres in the pilot province of Penama, the reach is already evident given the posts made to the group page by stakeholders from a variety of locations and levels in the WASH and education sectors.

While there are negatives to social media, the tool may be influential in expediting the nation-wide scale-up of WASH in schools in Vanuatu via the exchange of lessons and experiences, progress monitoring to ensure national standards as per three-star benchmarks are consistently applied and met, mobilization of partners (including private sector), visibility of donors and timely feedback on WinS performance and natural hazard impacts. All these aspects will assist MoET to achieve two-star WinS in over 80% of its schools by 2029, as per the National WinS Strategy. Ultimately, it is hoped that sharing information will ensure access to water, sanitation and hygiene in educational settings and improve the lives of school children in Vanuatu.

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Photo Credits

All images from the WinS Vanuatu Facebook group page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/515720685823488>

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