



Women's Island Cricket

International Cricket Council East Asia Pacific

Women in Vanuatu and Fiji are engaging in important physical activity and learning the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and diet thanks to an innovative project that has capitalised on the growing popularity of cricket in the Pacific. The Women's Island Cricket Project emerged as a result of the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and International Cricket Council (ICC) East Asia Pacific (EAP) identifying the potential for cricket to increase female participation in sport through a historic, modified form of the game, while contributing to the health of specific Pacific island populations. The Vanuatu Cricket Association and Cricket Fiji programs are supported through the ASC's partnership with the ICC EAP as part of the DFAT funded Australian Sports Outreach Program (ASOP) Pacific Sports Partnerships (PSP).



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Background

The programs have ranged from 15-20 weeks in duration. They include weekly island cricket training sessions and homework exercise tasks. A practical health component is also included each week. These are made up of information/awareness sessions delivered by NGOs and a six week practical nutrition class. Participants are tested every fortnight for weight, blood sugar level, blood pressure and waist measurement.

Innovation

The program was launched by the Vanuatu Cricket Association (VCA) in 2012 through an innovative cross-sectoral alliance to provide middle-aged women on Ifira island, near Port Vila, with regular opportunities to be involved in physical activity. The program has since expanded to three more communities in Vanuatu (Seaside, Pango, Mele) and also to Dravo Village in Fiji.

Partnerships

Government in both countries have demonstrated strong interest in the program and invested staff and resources into the programs. Ministry of Health staff has been involved in fortnightly health testings of participants and have provided all medical equipment required. They have also supported the expansion of the program to new communities in Vanuatu and been involved in planning and

identification of the new locations.

Sustainability

The VCA and Cricket Fiji has partnered with a range of development sector organisations and government departments to design, develop, implement and evaluate the project. The VCA brokered partnership arrangements with a broad range of government and non-government expertise including: WHO; Ministry of Health; Wan Smol Bag; UN Women; Department of Women's Affairs; Save the Children; Department of Youth and Sport and the Lapita Cafe. Representatives from each partner contributed to the planning and implementation of the project in an attempt to ensure the project was targeted, effective and properly evaluated. Cricket Fiji partnered with the Ministry of Health, the Consumer Council of Fiji and Empower Pacific.

Impact

Baseline data was collected for each participant for weight, waist measurements, blood sugar levels and blood pressure. The projects have all been conducted over a 15-20 week period with data collected against the same criteria at the end of the project yielding the following results across the two countries: In Vanuatu to date approx 50 per cent of participants have lost weight; 70 per cent had reduced waist measurements; 42 per cent recorded lower blood sugar levels; and 65 per cent recorded lower blood

pressure. In Fiji 40 per cent have lost weight, 30 per cent had reduced waist measurements, 44 per cent lowered their blood pressure.

In cases where participants recorded dangerously high blood pressure, the participants are immediately referred to Hospital for treatment. It was noted by the project partners specialising in health that the project provided a valuable and rare opportunity for direct access to the target participants (middle-aged women) to conduct health checks. As well as the above quantitative data, the projects evaluation included focus group discussions with project participants and interviews with representatives from the various partners, including community representatives. These discussions revealed qualitative evidence from both the project participants and other community members that the understanding of health-related behaviour amongst some participants had improved and some participants were using this new knowledge to undertake changes in their behaviour.

Women from Vanuatu project are still involved two years later. Women are participating more often in more exercise. Women are cooking affordable nutritious meals. Men are supporting women to be involved in the project.