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Struggling, Surviving or Thriving – A new way to manage incontinence for people with disabilities in Vanuatu

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Abstract

Background: In 2019 World Vision Vanuatu and partners conducted a study of more than 56,000 individuals which found that people with disabilities were twice as likely to experience incontinence as people without disabilities. As there is no word for incontinence in Bislama, most people experiencing incontinence do not talk to health workers or family about the challenges they face and tend to manage in silence due to shame and fear of being a burden to others. Healthcare workers reported limited understanding of disability and incontinence with restrictions to community participation and limiting consumption of food and water cited as main strategies to manage incontinence.

Methods: In order to provide support to the 33% of people with disabilities who experience incontinence more than three times each week, an innovative, locally made portable toilet chair was designed and constructed from recycled materials and trialled at homes across Shefa province. Portable toilet chairs were customized to meet the needs of people with visual and mobility impairments in both rural and urban locations. Once delivered, a key-informant interview survey was carried out to determine any improvements to overall quality of life for users and their families.

Results: The innovative portable toilet chair significantly improved the lives of users with 81% of recipients reporting increased independence, safety, privacy, and dignity with managing incontinence through the use of the commode chair inside their home at night and during periods of bad weather.

Discussion: This locally-built portable toilet chair has provided a sustainable and climate smart solution that has resulted in a significant, positive, and meaningful impact on the quality of lives of people with disability in Vanuatu and would be a useful solution to consider for people who acquire a disability through amputations as a result of rapidly increasing rates of NCD's in Vanuatu.