

The National Weekender

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SAFE LATRINES FOR MANUS VILLAGES

The first double toilet built in Bundrou Village.

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45 Kg
45 Kg
45 Kg
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Safe latrines change Manus villages

June 29 is the UN Day of the Tropics, celebrating the extraordinary diversity of the tropics while highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities faced by nations of the Tropics.

SANITATION remains one of the greatest challenges in PNG today.

In a country where an estimated 85 per cent of people live remote and rurally improving access to safe toilets remains a major challenge.

This poor track record is reflected in increasing incidents of water-borne diseases (cholera, typhoid), high diarrhoeal rates (the second largest cause of death in under five-year-olds in PNG) and the fourth worst rates of malnutrition rates in the world.

Despite there being much to be gained from improving sanitation, the sad truth is the proportion of PNG people with access to safe toilets has gone backwards over the last two decades.



How villages in Rambuto are responding

In 2012 a conversation between Lynne Shori, founder of INGO Wantaim PNG (formerly known as Friends of Rambuto) and community leaders across Rambuto in Manus identified water and sanitation as two priority concerns.

Of the decision to focus on sanitation Lynne says: "Clearly both are desperate needs in rural communities across PNG. Talking with community leaders in Rambuto helped us understand that fixing sanitation first would safeguard in-the-ground water resources – 'last resort' water supplies – which communities across Manus are increasingly dependent upon in the face of more frequent and extended dry periods."

And so began the search for options. "We were drawn to composting toilets because many of our partner communities are in low-lying areas where common pit toilets are not an option.

Being on the equator means large parts of PNG are actually ideally suited to composting toilets. And being low tech is also attractive: it means in theory a train-the-trainer approach could be used to mobilise large numbers of disengaged young men – a target group for Wantaim PNG – in building toilets across the country. And thus the idea for the pilot was borne.

The pilot/achievements

In 2017 INGO Wantaim PNG joined forces with Rotary Manly (NSW) and Rotary Boroko and two Australian volunteers, Richard Vaughan, and Des Wirges to kick off a community-led pilot to teach teams of elders to install the Clivus Multrum CM40

dry composting toilet unit, a community-sized option with capacity to handle 50 users per day.

Using natural materials to minimise maintenance costs and showcase traditional skills and crafts, the first double block for women took five days to complete.

A train-the-trainer approach then brought in the involvement of young men who worked under teams led by village elders.

Over a three-week period three double community-sized toilets were built by these teams delivering safe hygienic sanitation to the 150 women and girls on the three villages of Bundrou Island and giving young men the chance to learn valuable skills which could be used to generate incomes and improve their livelihoods.

Lynne says this first phase delivered invaluable learning which is now being



A completed double toilet block at Popeu Village, all bilas-ed!

Above left: Manus SDA Pastor Timothy Sandau (right) presenting a letter of support for the sanitation pilot from Governor Charlie Benjamin to Lynne Shori, founder of Wantaim PNG.

put into practice in building the men's toilet blocks, putting Bundrou Island on track to be the first in Manus to be 100 per cent open defecation free.

But she sees the benefits being far broader than health impacts alone.

"We're seeing young men reconnect with elders over the transferral of new skills and re-learning near-lost crafts like bamboo weaving. If the GoPNG goal of increased self-reliance is to be achieved, opportunities like this that help re-unite communities are critical."

Mothers are happy now that night time nature calls no longer take young girls on unlit walks to the edge of the village and older women are enjoying the amenity of sensor solar lights in the toilet blocks and the comforts of the pedestal. On Bundrou Island these days a visit to the toilet has become a time for relaxation and contemplation.

The main concern at the outset – that the toilets would smell – has long since been overcome.

Lynne observes: "With proper training in how to use these toilets and with the solar fan and wind operated whirly bird accelerating the drying process, dry composting toilets don't smell. Our pilot communities have seen this and as a result we saw adaptation quickly reach 60 to 90 per cent and continue to rise."

With the support of the two MPs and the CEO of the Manus Provincial Health Authority, Wantaim PNG is now seeking funding to scale up its train-the-trainer approach to the LLG level.

"If this next phase is successful, our three pilot villages of Popeu, Loamat and Bundrou will have made a major contribution to closing PNG's

sanitation gap and improving health outcomes. They will also have improved law and order, helped keep young girls in school, protected the environment, delivered a nutrient-rich material to support climate adaptation plantings and food security and inspired young men to step into leadership roles."

Lynne observes that all are major challenges for communities across PNG and this pilot addresses each one. But what excites her most of all is the tangible demonstration this pilot provides to communities themselves.

"This demonstrates how powerful they are when they work together; this is grassroots governance in action and it's delivering big.

Ecoflo

And it seems this pilot just keeps on giving with news this week that Australian managing director of Ecoflo Water Waste Management, Peter Vollert, is in PNG to scope market demand and the feasibility of local manufacturing and distribution of his composting toilets.

A positive outcome would create much needed jobs and support the deepening of PNG's nascent private sector. Were that to transpire community leaders in Popeu, Loamat and Bundrou and across the Rapatona LLG will indeed have something to celebrate: they will have successfully delivered urgently needed services to remote, rural communities proving the real power of grassroots engagement and inspiring us all.

● Story and pictures courtesy of Lynne Shori of INGO Wantaim PNG



Toilets for Bundrou village: The composting tank comes in two halves, making transporting easier.