



**SPREP**  
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional  
Environment Programme



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## Case study

# “Bae Yumi Winim Kompetesen Ia!” Using Community Theatre to Drive Waste Awareness in Vanuatu



## Problem being Solved

In many communities across Vanuatu, effective waste collection remains a significant challenge. Limited infrastructure, irregular collection schedules, and a lack of public awareness contribute to the communities having little choice to disposal of household waste by dumping and burning. This results in environmental degradation, health risks, and the pollution of land and marine ecosystems.

## Project Overview

To raise public awareness about waste management and, the Vanuatu Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) commissioned a theatrical production to promote positive behaviour change.

The play highlights the dangers of plastic pollution, emphasising that plastic does not break down like organic material and can persist in the environment for hundreds of years, and educates on the harmful effects of burning plastic.

The performance underscores the importance of proper waste segregation: with organic materials like food scraps and grass clippings able to be composted, and materials such as plastic should be disposed of separately and recycled where possible to reduce environmental harm.

The result was “Bae Yumi Winim Kompetesen Ia!” (“We Will Win this Competition!”), a comedy play performed in 40 communities in Port Vila and Luganville, with the aim of sparking dialogue and sharing practical solutions for waste management.



# Implementation Approach

The script was developed by local Non-Governmental Agency, Wan Smolbag, based in Port Vila and who are familiar with reality and challenges of waste management in Vanuatu communities. It was deemed important that the messages were highly relevant to communities and the “call to action” message was achievable across Vanuatu, even in communities without regular waste collection. DEPC and PacWastePlus provided input to the script. A preview performance was attended by environmental officials to provide feedback and approve final content.

A comedy was selected as the genre, consistent with nature of Ni-Vanuatu people and understanding that the message would be received by more of the audience if it was engaging and humorous.

The play was developed and preformed in Bislama. However, while Bislama is widely spoken, some audience members may prefer English or other local languages, so the play was simple, visual, and universally understandable.

## Play Content

The play begins on a messy stage filled with scattered rubbish. Meriam enters and breaks down in tears, overwhelmed by the mess. Three other actors arrive and try to guess what’s wrong, joking that maybe someone died or her dog Dafty is missing. Eventually, they learn she’s upset about the community’s litter problem, especially with the upcoming “Cleanest Community” competition.

Meriam urges the group to help clean up, explaining that plastic pollution is serious—it doesn’t break down like organic material and harms the environment for years. She sings a song about how plastic affects future generations. But the others quickly grow tired, complain, and give up.

Things get worse when Dafty, Meriam’s dog appears carrying a dirty diaper and spreading more trash. The others blame Meriam and Dafty, saying they’ll ruin the community’s chances of winning. They mock Meriam’s leadership. Feeling discouraged, Meriam says she’s not strong enough. But the village Chief (Jif) encourages her. Meriam feels hopeful but unsure.

Meanwhile, Dafty turns to the children in the audience, asking them not to litter and to speak up when they see others doing it. He teaches them to say:

*“Don’t throw rubbish! Don’t spoil the place!”*

Later, more actors return, continuing to litter and insult Dafty. But the children shout the slogan they learned, surprising the adults. Dafty runs off after being hit with garbage.

Meriam and the Chief return to announce a waste management workshop. A new character, Robin, teaches the community about the dangers of burning plastic (which can cause asthma and cancer), how to compost organic material, and how plastic ends up in the ocean—and inside fish, and eventually people. The group sings and learns how to sort waste properly.

Despite making progress, Meriam breaks down again, feeling like she can’t stop the community from littering. While some







continue to mock her, the children and Dafty encourage her to keep going. Regaining her strength, Meriam begins cleaning up, and the children join her. Together, they sort waste and transform the area.

When the Chief and others return, they're shocked by the clean surroundings. Though some still doubt Meriam, the Chief stands by her, saying true change only happens when the whole community works together.

The play ends with a powerful song about plastic pollution, warning that if we don't stop littering, we might end up eating plastic ourselves. The final message is clear:

*Don't throw rubbish. Protect your community, your health, and your future.*

## Key Messages

### Environmental Awareness

- » Plastic harms the environment and health
- » Don't burn plastic, it is toxic
- » Separate rubbish: compost organics, recycle plastics where possible

### Community Responsibility

- » Cleaning up is a job for everyone
- » Working together is the only way to succeed

### Empowerment

- » Women and children can lead and inspire change
- » Support and encouragement are better than criticism
- » Kids can influence adults and help stop littering.

### Incentives Matter

- » Rewards and competitions can motivate action.
- » Small steps lead to big change.

## Community Rollout

**40** communities reached across Efate and Luganville

**2,629** individuals attended performances

**1,480** women, **1,149** men, and **23** people living with disabilities participated

Each session included a post-play workshop to reinforce key messages and invite conversation about waste management.

**150** people attended workshops

# Monitoring & Feedback: Post-Play Survey Results

## After Play Survey

A total of 150 people were interviewed after watching the play to find out what they learned and also to collect feedback on waste management for the DEPC.

Key findings:

### Knowledge Gain

91% of surveyed attendees learned new information about waste:

- » Waste separation and composting
- » Dangers of burning waste
- » Plastics' long lifespan (over 500 years)
- » Environmental and health impacts of pollution

## Challenges of Waste

### Management

Community provided feedback to the DEPC on challenges of waste management in their communities:

- » Lack of consistent waste collection services
- » High cost of municipal waste bags
- » Animals spreading waste
- » Limited public awareness and care
- » Increasing dependency on store-bought goods

## Feedback on the Proposed Product Stewardship Scheme for Beverage Containers

The DEPC sought feedback on a proposed Product Stewardship Scheme for Vanuatu to manage beverage container waste. One part of the scheme would involve a 10VT deposit added to cost of each beverage container which will be refunded when communities to return item to a collection depot.

DEPC wanted to gauge community opinion on the scheme, but did not want to raise expectations for a scheme to start or encourage "stockpiling" of items which would exasperate issue of legacy waste management.

The question was therefore carefully worded: "the government is thinking of implementing a "rubbish buy back scheme" for 10 VT per drink container, do you think it could work in your community?"

### Results:

- ▶ 77% support the proposed initiative
- ▶ 23% raised concerns, including:
  - » 10VT is too low – many suggested 20–30VT to ensure participation.
  - » Transport to return points may be a barrier.
  - » Informal systems (e.g., nakamals) already pay more for containers.

### Recommendations from the Public for the scheme included:

- ▶ Improve accessibility to collection points
- ▶ Raise refund value
- ▶ Strengthen enforcement on littering
- ▶ Limit importation of plastic



Community-led initiatives were seen as a result of the play, including:

- ▶ After the play, community Environment Officers and performers organised a beach and area cleanup, indicating immediate action inspired by the performance.
- ▶ Findings of waste audit indicated significant amount of rubbish was small plastic ice block bags. As a result, community shops have now switched packaging to paper cups instead of plastic bags to reduce plastic litter.
- ▶ Communities asked for free yellow waste bags (one-time distribution) to encourage people to start using them for proper waste separation and collection.



From the play, some community Environment Officers have:

- ▶ proposed a new initiative to involve chiefs to undertake a one-day workshop on waste, including watching the play, participating in a beach cleanup, and creating local rules to ban specific plastics (e.g., ice pop plastics)
- ▶ suggested a yearly “Cleanest Community Challenge” with a shield and cash prize, and funds to be used on cleaning and waste management improvements
- ▶ A grant proposal was submitted to fund the community’s Cleanest Community Challenge - directly responding to their ideas.

In post play survey, 98% of respondents stated they planned to change how they manage waste at home though the following:

- » Start composting
- » Separate waste and recycle where possible
- » Stop burning rubbish
- » Raise awareness among family members



# Evidence of Behaviour Change





# Lessons Learned

## What Worked Well:

What worked well from the roll out of the play:

- » Theatre was an engaging, culturally relevant tool
- » Strong gender and inclusion representation
- » Enabled two-way communication (education + feedback loop)
- » Leveraged community leaders and local venues

## Challenges:

Challenges were experienced for the play to reach as many people as possible:

- » Many communities in Vanuatu are remote or spread across multiple islands, with limited infrastructure
- » Transportation difficulties – Reaching outer islands or rural villages often requires boat travel or long journeys on poor roads, which can be weather-dependent
- » Lack of venues – Some communities may not have a proper stage or space for a performance, requiring some communities to be transported to other venues

## Impact Highlights

**40**  
communities  
reached

**2,629**  
people engaged

**91%**  
learning  
something new

**98%**  
intending to  
change behavior

**77%**  
Support for  
Buy-Back Scheme

## Conclusion

The “Bae Yumi Winim Kompetesen Ia!” play successfully combined entertainment and education, reaching a wide demographic and building awareness for improved waste management. By embedding environmental messages in storytelling, the initiative fostered informed communities, promoted behavioral change, and provided actionable insights for policymakers.



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