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WATER & SANITATION

World Toilet Day 2019: Leaving no one behind

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Established by the World Toilet Organisation in 2001, World Toilet Day was made an official UN day in 2013. UN-Water leads a taskforce of international agencies to campaign around a common theme.

The theme of World Toilet Day 2019 is “Leaving no one behind”, which is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This year, the aim is to show that a toilet is not just a toilet; it’s a lifesaver, dignity-protector and opportunity-maker.

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In 2017, non-government organisation Wantaim PNG joined forces with the Rotary Club of Manly, NSW, and the Rotary Club of Boroko, PNG, to address poor sanitation on Bundrou Island in the Manus Province of northern PNG.

Armed with a global grant, and with the help of two Australian volunteers, Richard Vaughan and Des Wirges, work began on a community-led pilot to teach teams of elders to install Clivus Multrum CM40 composting toilet units.

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.

“This is culturally appropriate training, it’s the way young men in PNG have typically learnt; working alongside the older men who pass down traditional skills and knowledge,” Wantaim PNG is now seeking funding to prove this model is scalable to the local level government. Let’s wish them well.

Another unexpected benefit was the positive impact on social harmony. Mothers in particular expressed relief that night-time nature calls no longer take young girls on unlit walks to the edge of the village. Meanwhile, the elderly and less abled members of the community are enjoying the amenity of sensor solar lights in the toilet blocks and the comforts of the pedestal. These days, a visit to the toilet on Bundrou Island has become a time for relaxation and contemplation.

The main concern at the outset of the project – that the toilets would smell – has long since been overcome. "With proper training in how to use these toilets, and with the solar fan and wind-operated whirly bird providing to communities themselves. “This demonstrates how powerful communities can be when they work together. This pilot is about grassroots governance in action and it’s delivering in a major way.”

For more information about this project and funding opportunities, contact Lynne via lynne.shori@outlook.com.au.