

## Vanuatu, Nauru and Tonga share success stories of health and sports working together to fight NCDs

By Online Editor

5:53 pm GMT+12, 22/03/2012, Australia

*By PACNEWS Editor, Makereta Komai in Brisbane*



The small island of Aniwa with a population of 400 in Vanuatu's Tafea Province has been hailed as the region's first success story in a partnership between sport and health in the fight against non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Its sports development programme titled "Nabanga", which means a community meeting place in the local dialect, is funded through the Australian development aid program, AusAID.

The program targets remote island communities with the aim of building the capacity young people to plan and run quality sport activities. It's also designed to address key issues like abuse of alcohol, kava, marijuana and violence.

Sharing Vanuatu's story at the first ever Forum on Healthy Islands through Sports in Brisbane this week, Joe Iuatim, the deputy director youth and sports attributed success to community involvement and ownership of the program.

"For us the involvement of the chiefs of the four villages on the island helped to bring the community together through sport. They used the gathering to resolve conflicts and disputes.

"We have seen a drop in the use of tobacco and kava drinking since the programme started.

The program has helped promote the importance of community and conflict resolution through this program, said Iuatim.

Two years after the program was implemented, one of the key findings of an evaluation found a 50 percent reduction in obesity and an increase in the healthy weight range for 150 people from 80.

Dr Temo Waqanivalu of the World Health Organisation said Vanuatu's experience is a good example of sports taking the lead in partnership with health to find solutions to improving the health of its citizens.

“This is an example of real progress and two sectors working in partnership for a common goal – to reduce non communicable diseases, said Dr Temo.

The island of Aniwa was also declared the healthy island award by the World Health Organisation last year.

A similar success story was shared by Nauru. The Epon Keramen Sports Program is a sport for development initiative between the governments of Australia and Nauru.

Epon Keramen is a Nauruan term that translates to 'people gather to play games'.

Under the program, both the sport and health ministries organized aerobics fitness workout three times a week for government workers, elders in the communities and young people. The activity is in line with the island nation's NCD plan for 2007-2012 which was to avoid premature death and reduce NCD death burden for the island nation of just over 10,000 people.

“Our 30 mins aerobic exercises three days a week has proved very effective because we can see some changes in the people that come for the sessions, said Rio Peo, one of the co-ordinators of the physical activity program.

“It's fun and it's the 'in thing' in Nauru right now, so the response has been very good – from the young to the elders in the community.

Dr Viliami Puloka of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) said it was amazing to see the incredible changes in the lives of Nauruans as a result of this national physical activity.

“This is a good example of having locals take ownership of the programme to run with it, said Dr Puloka.

A similar program is running in Tonga, using netball to improve women's health. This is in recognition of the fact that 75 percent of the women in the island kingdom are obese and only 22 percent are engaged in any form of physical activity.

“In our Sport and Health Partnership Programme, our target groups are women because of the statistics that most women are not involved in any physical activity, said Viliami Liava'a.

The program is supported by AusAID and the Australian Sports Commission.

SOURCE: PACNEWS