



“A Vanuatu without violence would see everyone, including women, girls, people with disabilities, widows, single mothers and people with diverse gender identity and sexual orientation enjoying their human rights, accessing services and exercising their leadership to end hardship in our community and nation”

**CEDRIC PANIEL**  
OXFAM IN VANUATU

## Inspiring profile

### Cedric Paniel

by Cedric Paniel and Sangeeta Mangubhai

Cedric Paniel was born and grew up in Port Vila in Vanuatu. Cedric joined Oxfam Vanuatu in 2016 as an intern, and then as a full-time staff in 2017. He is currently the Oxfam Gender Justice Youth and Livelihood Network Coordinator. The network aims to encourage collaboration between civil society partners, government, churches and educational institutions, sharing lessons in gender justice and livelihoods. He is a dynamic trainer who helps partners to strategise and effectively participate and engage at the national level. He also brings a strong gender justice perspective to participation in the Vanuatu Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, as well as the Vanuatu Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee (CDCCC). Cedric explains:

*The CDCCC team needs to be made out of different group of people so that everyone's needs are captured and plans made do not leave anyone behind. This is important so that after a disaster it is much quicker for the community to recover, because they all participated in the different stages of preparation, response and recovery.*

Over the last three years, Oxfam has been developing and testing a social economic empowerment and development (SEED) framework to help better design gender-just programmes to support productive economic activity. Cedric has been working closely with other Oxfam staff

*I want to create meaningful, purposeful, fulfilling life for myself. I want to make an impact and a difference in the lives of others - that would be my definition of true success.*

to test and apply the SEED framework in communities, and with other organisations. He has done a wide diversity of training on gender and social inclusion, climate justice, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. SEED can be used and adapted to local contexts. He recently partnered with WorldFish, James Cook University and the Wildlife Conservation Society to deliver gender training to the Vanuatu Department of Fisheries (see article page 49).

#### **Why are you so passionate about working on gender equality?**

Working with Oxfam, I have grown to understand the influence and impact of gender in society. As I unpack all the issues faced by the people in Vanuatu, I always find links to gender. People who do not conform to society's expectations are often voiceless and marginalised in the society for being different of what is society defines as "normal". Many of these people become vulnerable and their human rights become restricted because of the system does not favour them. In a patriarchal society, men are privileged – this is not fair because we are all contributing to society. This means both men and women should be involved and better represented at all levels of decision-making. So, I decided to break the gender stereotype and speak for the voiceless because I believe that the only way to end injustice is to accept and embrace people's differences.

**What are some of the challenges you face as a male working on gender?**

Some of the challenges I faced growing up in a patriarchal society which upholds Christian and culture was the social norms that tend to keep us in boxes and not allow us to easily share our feelings and emotions of being human. As a man working in gender, it is hard at times because people question my values as a man in society. They question why as a man I want to change things, since as a man I am entitled to the privilege of owning resources, decision-making, and being a leader.

**What are some of the challenges of promoting or applying gender equality or gender integration in Vanuatu?**

Some of the challenge are cultural and social norms, Christianity, lack of gender awareness, not having women in parliament, lack of women in leadership position, lack of inclusion, no recognition of marginalised groups, no gender responsive budgeting, and no social accountability after Vanuatu has ratified the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

**What advice do you have for women working on gender to better engage and men?**

People need to understand that gender is not a women's issue but a human issue. We are all affected when one part of the society is not active. We become victims of the system that tend to make us trying to fit but that should be the way around is to come up with a system that fits us with all our imperfections. Imagine if everyone becomes economically independent, empowered to voice their concerns, take up leadership role, and especially the voiceless who have been denied of their human rights.

**What advice would you give men who are thinking about working on gender?**

For me personally, it's like setting myself free from all the oppression of society. I realise that I may not have all the characteristics society defines as being a "man" but I embrace all the imperfections that make me feel enough of a human being. For me gender equality is about treating the entire humankind fairly with proper love, care and respect, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, class group, and colour. I now see things through a gender lens - this means I am now always questioning, reflecting, analysing things before I take action. Understanding and accepting everyone's differences so that we can make this a better world.

*Change takes time but start with yourself first.*

