

Vanuatu Christian Council - Institutional Strengthening Strategy

1. An analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunity and challenges facing the organization.

Christianity arrived in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) as part of the British and French colonial enterprise in the late 1800s and sought to transform societies and established custom. Over time and under pressure custom has changed and Christianity has become increasingly indigenizedⁱ. Colonial authorities left virtually all indigenous schooling to missions and by the 1960s candidates for leadership were almost exclusively mission educated. At independence in 1980 both custom and Christianity were formally enshrined as bases for national identity and unity.

Strengths

The Vanuatu Christian Vanuatu Council (VCC) was established in 1966 and has five members and two observers. It is a inclusive organization with 7 member churches. Member churches of VCC are representing 70 – 80% of the total population of Vanuatu. VCC does not only serve member churches but is flexible and open to non member churches and ministries. Because of being an inclusive organization, VCC strives represent collective understanding and a united voice. VCC is a known body and has an Ecumenical Role to unite churches and take the message of the Churches to the Government. Ecumenism provides a strong values base for promoting collaboration in VCC rather than competition between churches. Members are formally committed to working together and collaborate on spiritual and development projects, through the Ministers Fraternal.

The VCC member Churches' role at the level of community governance relates to moral leadership, particularly in family life and marriage. Churches are one of the few institutions that support women's leadership at community level – often roles that women themselves see as more desirable than high political office. Each of the mainline churches has well established women's unions with committees at village level being a locus for women's decision making. There is a spectrum of church engagement on social issues, from liberal to conservative.

The VCC member churches have different structures but share similar values and beliefs. They all currently provide some services for communities.

The VCC had significant influence over core policy directions. VCC continued to be referenced and involved in political debates about issues such as HIV/AIDS, homosexuality and family violence, however close policy engagement has faded at the national level. VCC represents the collective voice of all the Christian groups in Vanuatu, e.g. Government acknowledge VCC as the representative body of all the Christian groups at official government functions, and also at NGO functions. The advocacy roles are undertaken by VCC in relation to government policy on issues such as: social justice, environment, economic development and natural resources. The VCC advocate to the Government on behalf of all Christians in Vanuatu.

VCC office location is in the main town of Vanuatu which provides easy access to all VCC church members and facilitates communication to all member Churches. Because of its Centralized location, it is able to reach out to all the Provinces in Vanuatu and also to communicate with all the stakeholders.

Weaknesses

There is poor communication and management between members and the churches. This results in hindering effective progress of the organization and contributes to the loss of confidence in VCC ability to serve the Churches.

Since the VCC was established, there has been no strategic plan in place.

There is Inadequate Administration and Accountability in the VCC, which result in:

- Poor financial reporting
- Lack of transparency
- No financial computer software
- Untrained staff in finance
- Poor activity reporting
- Untrained staff in leadership and management
- No management system in place
- Inadequate monitoring
- No sustainability

Even though Government recognizes VCC, VCC is not contributing effectively to policy development due to the organization capacity to do so resulting in:

- The VCC being unable to promote members issues
- The VCC being unable to influence Policy
- Christian principles not reflected in Government policies (National motto)
- School curriculum not reflecting Christian principles
- VCC not included in Selection Panel
- Poor policies are produced resulting in, crime gender inequality, poverty

There is lack of office equipment facilities and communication which result in:

- Ineffective and poor performance
- Little motivation
- Disorganized
- Inefficiency in time management, staffing, financial reporting and planning
- Lack of consistency

The Churches appear to want to work together but the evidence suggests this is not happening to any significant degree at this time. Churches exist side by side in communities and come together only under the Chief. There is very little done in ecumenical cooperation especially in the Islands.

The churches want a role in the social and policy development of the country. They want their voice to be heard through recognition and utilisation of the VCC and also through more deliberate partnership with National Government. At this time neither the churches nor the VCC are able to develop this relationship.

Opportunities

The Presence of Vanuatu Church Partnership Program (VCCPP) is an opportunity that will lead to improved governance, increased capacity and identity of the VCC. There are a number of opportunities to promote VCCPP and increase awareness to more stakeholder as:

- Interview over the National radio programs
- Use the existing church structures and systems
- Use papers (Daily Post)
- Advertisement
- Big sign at the front gate and the office
- Board meetings and awareness programs
- Involving more women and youth in activities
- Strengthening training of staff & Board members
- To develop VCC Strategic Plan

Challenges

Some of the challenges are as follows:

- Competition among churches: The Churches appear to want to work together but the evidence suggests this is not happening to any significant degree at this time. Churches exist side by side in communities and come together only under the Chief. There is a need for VCC ecumenical cooperation among the Churches.
- Competition among church partners: The partners need to work and accept each other and not to use VCCPP to compete with each other in service delivery.

- All the local partner Churches need to accept and understand that the funds are evenly distributed though amounts are different
- Board members of VCC need to accept the roles and responsibilities to the VCC.
- Cooperation of Staff in the office
- Ecumenically -minded Staff.
- Improve office equipment and facilities
- Qualified Staff and not 'wantok' Principle

2. A Set of Key Priorities for Strengthening will be identified in General terms

- Developed a strategic plan for VCC 2010- 2014: working with the seven member churches, the VCC will design a strategic plan for the next five years. This strategic plan will include a mission statement, goals and objectives and will thought out plan of action that identifies keys sectors of involvement and activities necessary to achieve the goals and objectives.
- Strengthened the governance of VCC: to ensure that VCC has good leadership at the board level, this program will seek to enhance the skills and experience of board members to enable them to more effectively carry out their duties.
- Improve capacity of office staffs and project managers: in its re-establishment, VCC has employed new staff and project managers. To ensure that these personnel are adequately qualified to carry out their duties, training will be provided for them which will include: financial management; leadership; administration and human resource.
- Increased public awareness of VCCPP and VCC in Vanuatu: to be better able to serve, the VCC needs to make the public more aware of its presence. To achieve public awareness, VCC will place a new sign at the front gate; it will create a new logo and will carry out program in seven member churches that will promote the work of VCC. The VCC will also approach local businesses to

encourage them to support the VCC both financially and by their volunteer service. The VCC will work with National Disaster Management (NDMO) to provide Disaster Risk Reduction to vulnerable communities.

3. A method for reviewing how changes are occurring in that organization, using internal participatory methods should be included.

Currently the VCC is in a development stage. Up until now the only form of reviewing performance has been through Board meetings which have been held on a regular basis. However, these Board meetings seldom identify areas of weakness or inefficiency. With the implementation of VCPP a more formalized system of reviewing changes and performance will be established. The main focus of this review comes under the heading of Monitoring and Evaluation and can be describe as follows:

- Monitoring and Evaluation: As the VCC continues to develop, and as various training disciplines are introduced (MYOB Financial Management, Leadership, Administration and Human Resource), VCC will need to monitor and evaluate the success of the training. To do this, VCC will implement performance reviews as follows:
 - a) Performance appraisals for all staff.
 - b) Follow-up evaluation of training material to gauge appropriateness of the material by the participants (evaluation form to be completed by each participant)
 - c) A follow- up of participant evaluation form to identify gaps in the training delivered and to possibly deliver further training to fill those gaps.
 - d) A further follow- up of the participants to see if the training materials taught, are being utilized.
 - e) Apply lessons learned where practical- possible
 - f) A VCPP Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and a VCPP Project Officer will be employed for this program. These two individuals will ensure that the goals and objectives of the program are completed in an effective and efficient manner and that full transparency and accountability are maintained throughout the life of the program.
-