

DFAT MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE VANUATU SKILLS PARTNERSHIP (2021)

Purpose:

The Government of Australia, through DFAT, commissioned an independent evaluation of the Australian-funded Vanuatu Skills Partnership Phase Four (VSP 2017 to 2026) in late 2020 for the primary purpose of **investment improvement** to maximise **effectiveness** and **sustainability**. The secondary purposes are accountability and knowledge generation.

The design stipulates that an evaluation is to be conducted in 2021 to inform DFAT decisions to continue, or not, with the modality, the leadership team and the support contractor (engaged September 2017 to January 2022, approx. \$20 million, with an option to extend for four years).

Key findings:

The evaluation finds that VSP is strongly aligned with the Government of Australia's policy directions and the Government of Vanuatu's national reform agenda. VSP is directly contributing to Vanuatu's National Sustainable Development Plan 2030 and the National Human Resource Development Plan. It rates the VSP as highly effective, achieving a wide range of positive results. VSP has delivered outcomes in line with the needs and priorities of key stakeholders and is commended for its commitment to adaptive learning and continuous improvement.

The evaluation finds that the VSP end-of-program outcomes and delivery modality remain relevant noting that the emphasis on building genuine partnerships has enabled VSP to become initiative with strong local ownership. It suggests that VSP could be improved by ensuring that the Program Logic and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework better reflect the impacts of TC Harold, COVID-19

Overall response to the evaluation:

DFAT agrees with 12 of the 14 recommendations and partly agrees with the other two. These findings will inform and guide DFAT's future support to Vanuatu's skills and employment sector, and to the Vanuatu Government's decentralisation agenda. More detailed responses to each recommendation are included in the table below.

Detailed Management response to the recommendations

	Recommendation from the evaluation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
1	VSP, with the support of DFAT/Australian High Commission (AHC) Port Vila, should continue to evolve and align itself with interested Government Ministries and departments working at the provincial and national level to support economic recovery and deliver on human resource development for Vanuatu's 2030 National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP). This includes VSP establishing the necessary relationships (formal and informal), particularly with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO, DSPPAC) and also the Department of Local Authorities (DLA, within the Ministry of Internal Affairs) and providing ongoing whole of government coordination and strengthening of vertical and horizontal linkages.	Agree	<p>VSP works at both the national and provincial levels and with a range of different Ministries. All VSP activities align with <i>Vanuatu's Recovery Strategy 2020 – 2023, NSDP and Australia's Vanuatu COVID-19 Development Response Plan (2020)</i>.</p> <p>Subsequent to the independent evaluation, the Director General of PMO wrote to DFAT to request formalisation of the relationship between VSP and PMO (March 2021).</p> <p>VSP is supporting the strengthening of the national coordination for service delivery reform and human resource development.</p> <p>As skills development is elevated and acknowledged within the GoV as a cross-sector driver of nation's recovery and future prosperity, VSP needs to be positioned at this level – not only as an initiative with the MoET.</p>	<p>AHC Port Vila will facilitate the formalisation of the relationship between VSP, MoET and PMO , likely through a Subsidiary Arrangement for 2022-2026.</p> <p>AHC Port Vila will support VSP to continue its relationship with DLA and decentralised work while aligning activities with relevant parts of government and adapting to support to evolving needs.</p> <p>AHC Port Vila will encourage VSP to strengthen its coordination role in the Post School Education and Training (PSET) sector against the <i>National Human Resource Development Plan (NHRDP)</i> priorities and actively work with the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority (VQA) on the implementation plan and the costing of the PSET sector.</p>	<p>Early 2022</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

2	<p>In the event of future disasters, VSP should be recognised as a pivotal humanitarian response network by DFAT/Government of Vanuatu (GoV), including its capability to provide initial surge capacity to key provincial level actors, withdrawing as government resources step up.</p>	Agree	<p>VSP is currently based in five of Vanuatu's six provinces, with differing resources in each office. VSP can offer humanitarian support based on their existing capacity on the ground and surge capacity from other offices.</p> <p>VSP has been pro-active in assisting the GoV and provincial authorities to respond to, and recover from, numerous natural disasters. Following TC Harold, VSP played a critical role in the technical advisory group in Sanma and Malampa provinces providing support with planning and logistics. VSP participated in Vanuatu's humanitarian cluster groups, supported assessment of damages and established post-disaster activities including inter-island food corridors.</p>	<p>AHC will support VSP to maintain their <i>demonstrated</i> role in humanitarian response and recovery for any future disasters.</p> <p>AHC Port Vila and the VSP Director will liaise with the Department of Local Authorities (DLA) to ensure they understand VSP's capacity to assist in response and recovery following disasters.</p> <p>AHC's humanitarian response team is speaking with VSP to better understand the capabilities and potential to utilise its networks. Australia's TC Harold Recovery Program is already partnering with the VSP to utilise its network of skilled local personell.</p>	2022
3	<p>VSP should undertake a refresh of its Program Logic and MEL framework in light of the changes to the context (whole of government approach, TC Harold and COVID-19), and together with the Spheres of Change, this should be used to steer VSP's investment decisions for the remainder of VSP Phase 4.</p>	Agree	<p>While VSP's engagement is, largely, consistent with the three priority areas identified in the design, the results achieved through this engagement do not always easily align with the LTOs and the IOs as they are currently drafted. VSP's End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) were revised in 2019 and need further update due to subsequent changes to the operating context. It would be useful to have common indicators with</p>	<p>AHC Port Vila will monitor, and quality assure, VSP's review of its Program Logic and MEL framework. The MEL refresh will be a Milestone in June 2022 in the contract extension.</p>	2022

			Government departments for joint reporting. In early 2021 VSP restructured its MEL team and dedicated extra resources to its MEL framework.		
4	VSP should adopt a more flexible approach to using the Program Logic in its assessments of and reporting on progress. The balance of VSP's reporting should then shift from activity-level results to consideration of systemic change/reform in the skills system (both demand-side and supply-side) and then focus on the evidence for VSP's contribution to that change (using the IOs where it makes sense to do so).	Agree	With the refresh of the MEL structure, a more flexible approach will enable joint reporting with various departments and stakeholders. But there is a need to continue reporting at the activity level to comply with DFAT and GoV's requirements.	Systemic change will be a key theme for the AHC Port Vila will review the June 2022 MEL refresh.	Ongoing
5	VSP should continue to develop and improve monitoring tools as required and strengthen data management processes to ensure the information is being integrated into the Management Information System (MIS).	Agree	The team in country is supported by a newly appointed Short-Term Adviser to assist with the strategy and the development of the tools. The team has been using KOBO to increase efficiency in data collection.	AHC Port Vila will discuss the tools with the team and will make sure the MIS is fully accessible to MoET. The tools will have to be included in the refreshed MEL framework (due June 2022).	Ongoing
6	VSP should strengthen its approach to reflection and learning, including deepening its understanding of what has not worked and why, and ensure these processes occur more frequently through the year.	Agree	The Partnership holds internal twice-yearly week-long full-team reflection and planning workshops. It used other mechanisms for smaller group reflection,	AHC Port Vila will ensure VSP communicates its results and planning with the national and provincial governments.	From 2022

	This could also include a more formal annual review and reflection process with GoV partners.		<p>learning and adaptation. This is a priority to the team who should seek out opportunities to enhance this reflection and learning dimension.</p> <p>The Partnership has bi-annual stakeholders meeting to present results and discuss ways forwards. These meetings are an opportunity to present lessons learned and propose alternatives to implementations, they could be opened to more national and provincial stakeholders and GoV partners.</p>	<p>AHC Port Vila will discuss with VSP management team ways to include GoV partners in the reflection workshops, and the review of these workshops ToRs.</p> <p>In addition to reflection processes already in place, the new VSP MEL team will plan from 2022 regular 'deep dive' sessions with GoV partners and DFAT on targeted activities implementation.</p>	
7	A 'ways of working' document, including a risk assessment which identifies risks and agreed mitigation strategies to the current arrangements, should be developed and agreed by all key stakeholders (VSP, Scope Global, the Strategic Adviser, and DFAT/AHC Port Vila).	Agree	VSP's great strengths include the local leadership and adaptive approach. These are enabled by strong local leaders, supportive advisers, a support contractor modality and good trust between the parties involved. As an unusual mechanism, this is at risk should there be a change of personnel.	AHC Port Vila will draft a 'ways of working' document to be discussed and agreed with VSP (including contracted staff, advisers and support contractor).	Early 2022
8	DFAT/AHC Port Vila should consider a modest increase to the 'core' funding it provides VSP from its bilateral aid program budget for Vanuatu. This would provide greater certainty, strengthening the incentives for VSP to increase the capacity of its core team, including expanding the Senior Management Team	Agree	Currently VSP receives its budget from various budget lines from DFAT including different parts of the bilateral programs, as well as regional and global programs. The downside of this is the lack of yearly estimation and the risk to miss on a funding (eg. DID fund). Having one sole	AHC Port Vila will work towards ensuring one stable source of bilateral funding to VSP. Subject to allocations for bilateral program, a modest increase in 'core' funding will be progressed.	end 2021

			DFAT budget line will ease planning and reporting.	This is subject to budget allocations to VU1.	
9	VSP's reporting requirements to DFAT/AHC Port Vila should be jointly reviewed and streamlined where possible.	Agree	The streamlining of reporting will come with the budget strengthening.	AHC Port Vila will work closely with the support coordinator and the M&E team to define the reporting needs to be included in the MEL framework and plan refresh.	Early 2022
10	DFAT/AHC Port Vila should identify opportunities for collaboration between VSP and other Australian-funded bilateral and regional programs in Vanuatu.	Agree	Collaboration is already occurring between VSP and other bilateral and regional DFAT programs (Balance of Power, APTC, VHP and VESP).	AHC Port Vila will continue to facilitate Team leaders' meetings and promote further coloration. VSP Director will have bi-monthly sessions with the management teams from other DFAT-funded bilateral program. (Schedule to be drafted and agreed upon between Director and DFAT).	Ongoing
11	VSP should continue to support the Government of Vanuatu with the establishment of a national decentralised skills system architecture including Skills Centres in the two remaining provinces (Shefa and Penama). This support should, however, remain contingent on adequate co-contributions from MoET and also consider contributions from other Government ministries benefitting from the expansion.	Agree in part	In Penama, a recovery centre is underway with two officers working on activities. The Partnership continues to advocate for MoET to increase the GoV's contribution in increasing the number of staff in the GOV's payroll. For Penama and Shefa, there might be alternative or transition approaches that could be adopted given the different contextual realities.	Any expansion to the two remaining provinces is subject to GoV absorption of the existing provincially-based VSP employees on GoV's payroll, and available budget. AHC Port Vila will continue to discuss this with MoET. AHC will continue to manage GoV's expectations and discuss alternative approaches to support implementation of activities in the two remaining provinces.	Ongoing

12	DFAT/AHC Port Vila should increase the elevation of VSP within the AHC and support the framing of VSP under a broader system reform agenda that prioritises the strengthening of a national skills system but also acknowledges its central role in Vanuatu's economic recovery and longer-term development. This would involve DFAT/AHC Port Vila drawing on and learning from VSP's ways of working, particularly the team's understanding of the local political economy and recognising VSP as a key interlocutor with national government.	Agree	Lessons learned from adaptive program to be discussed with all sectors. The team will continue to participate and present in national, regional and international conferences.	AHC Port Vila will continue to involve VSP Director in planning discussion with Education sector (VETSS, VESP MTR, APTC review). AHC Port Vila will continue to organise issue-specific working sessions between Governance for Growth (GfG) and VSP on specific issues such as economic recovery, agriculture, tourism, decentralisation, etc. AHC will facilitate discussions between VSP and PMO to formalise the relationship (see recommendation 1) and VSP's key coordination role in national economic recovery efforts.	Ongoing
13	Through further analysis, DFAT/AHC Port Vila should explore the establishment a Direct Funding Arrangement with a second GoV partner (beyond MoET) in the short term to provide additional flexibility for VSP to respond to different opportunities, including for emergency/disaster response and recovery and longer term facilitate the transfer of the Skills Development Fund, currently managed by VSP over to GoV.	Agree in part	The establishment of a Direct Funding Arrangement (DFA) with a GoV department requires a Fiduciary Risks Assessment from AHC.	AHC is considering an Assessment of Vanuatu's Department of Local Authorities (within the Ministry of Internal Affairs) to assess the possibility of establishing a DFA.	Ongoing
14	DFAT/AHC Port Vila should continue to ensure the necessary authorising environment remains in place to enable VSP to continue to be flexible, responsive and adaptive to contextual priorities.	Agree	The mandate and trust granted to VSP by DFAT over many years has been a key factor in enabling not just VSP but also other DFAT programs such as Governance for Growth in Vanuatu to	AHC Port Vila will continue to provide an enabling environment for VSP to remain adaptive and flexible.	Ongoing

			think and working politically, align to Vanuatu's interests, and build its 'trusted partner' credibility.	AHC Port Vila will continue to work with DFAT Canberra to promote the strong development outcomes and lessons from the VSP adaptive initiative (including through presentations) to promote greater use of flexible and adaptive programming.	
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