



Vanuatu Voluntary National Review 2024

KEY MESSAGES

The theme of Vanuatu's second Voluntary National Review is Building Resilience and Accelerating Progress Through Local Empowerment.

Our 2019 review presented a positive message of progress despite extreme vulnerability to climate-related disasters. We have long faced the force of weather, but now the path to recovery is harder to navigate. Since 2020 we have endured three severe cyclones, including unprecedented back-to-back events. The Covid pandemic was not a separate problem to be dealt with. It meant facing a compound disaster, unique in the way it unravelled, with no clear trajectory or end in sight. Ever looming is the prospect of future disasters. The government and people of Vanuatu have had to continuously adapt and strengthen resilience mechanisms to mitigate the impacts of these persistent threats and disruptions.

In 2023, a national 'Summit of the People and their Government' provided an opportunity to test and reset our approach to sustainable development. *Vanuatu 2030 - The People's Plan* charts our path for achieving a stable, sustainable and prosperous future, localising *Agenda 2030* and the Sustainable Development Goals. To this, we remain fully committed. The summit identified the importance of empowering local communities to accelerate progress and enhance resilience.

Decentralisation reforms have focused on devolving more authority to local areas and making our public institutions more accessible, accountable, and responsive. Strengthening our six provincial and 71 area councils is helping to better deal with the compounding impacts of disasters and improve service delivery.

By aligning formal and traditional governance arrangements we are developing local capacity and harnessing our rich trove of traditional knowledge. Building stronger local authorities this way means our national policy frameworks are increasingly informed through localised assessments, planning and action. These reforms have led to key parts of the national Budget administered at the area level, facilitating quicker, more transparent responses, better tailored to local needs.

Covid led to the first contraction of the economy in nearly 20 years. The disruption to people's lives and livelihoods was profound and required the most extensive ever package of government support. Alongside wage subsidies and tax breaks were substantial investments in the productive sectors to address immediate needs and build longer-term resilience.

Social protection in Vanuatu is anchored in our community networks and cultural traditions. Reciprocity, fairness, trust, safety and adherence to custom is what holds our communities together. We continue to draw on traditional values, which align with modern language around human rights, equality, and inclusion. Social protection policies also need to accommodate shifting social norms, new urban lifestyles and the pressures associated with increased labour migration.

Stresses associated with recent disasters highlighted stubborn social issues. In response we renewed commitments to achieve gender equality, the protection of women, girls and young people, and the full inclusion of people with disabilities. Actioning these policies and engaging in the new conversations that are emerging will help ensure no-one is left behind.

Vanuatu proudly spearheaded the coalition of 132 nations adopting by consensus the resolution for a non-binding advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on climate change.

At home we have been mainstreaming climate-related disaster preparedness and recovery by integrating them into national, provincial and local planning, budgeting and activity programming. We can no longer sustain what were previously parallel processes. The change has led to improved outcomes with significant investments made in essential infrastructure, connectivity, and enhanced agriculture practices. These are aimed at stimulating economic growth, improving livelihoods and ensuring food security. We are also focusing on improving sustainable land and marine resource management, coupling science and technology with traditional practices.

Education is pivotal for our people achieving their development aspirations. We expanded our school-fee subsidy to improve access and now strive to improve quality. This includes providing appropriate infrastructure and boosting skills training for early school leavers.

Our second VNR presents a cautiously optimistic outlook. It showcases a country determined to prosper despite living amidst the stark realities of climate change. We have leveraged our commitment to democratic processes and citizen empowerment to accelerate our progress on the SDGs. Achieving more requires enhanced financial access, including direct access to climate finance, improved resource allocation, stronger data systems, and deeper partnerships and stakeholder engagement.

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