



Gender Assessment

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VANUATU COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY 2010-2014
VANUATU GENDER ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY

I. Social and Gender Situation and Key Issues

1. Vanuatu's Human Development Index ranking is 120 out of 177 countries and it is still classified as a 'least developed country' (LDC), according to the UNDP *2007/2008 Human Development Report*. Approximately 80% of the population lives in rural areas with livelihoods based on subsistence agriculture and fishing where absolute poverty and severe hunger is rare. The formal economy is built on tourism, construction, property investment, and agriculture. There is a growing problem of urban drift, with large numbers of the unskilled poor being concentrated in informal and squatter settlements of urban and peri-urban areas. In 2006, 16% of the total population was living below the basic needs poverty line and 7% were experiencing food poverty. In Port Vila, the capital city of Vanuatu, however, the poverty rate (33%) was twice as high as the national average.¹

2. The population in Vanuatu is characterized by different tribal affiliations and social structures that include matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance systems. The degree of women's empowerment varies across cultural groups; women from matrilineal areas often have more traditional decision-making power, mostly exercised at the household level. Across all groups, men have more access to and control of key political, economic, and knowledge resources than women. There is a strong traditional obligation system that functions as a basic safety net, but that also restricts individual control of land and exacerbates women's lack of access to economic resources. The following provides analyses of key gender indicators.

A. Gender Gaps and Opportunities for Females at the Secondary Level

3. School attendance in Vanuatu is neither compulsory nor universal yet; the government recently announced its plan to phase out school fees for primary education up to Grade 8 in order to achieve universal primary education. The net enrollment rate in primary education exceeds 80% for both males and females with little gender gap.² Yet, net enrollment in secondary education is substantially lower for males and females alike, at below 35%, which is one of the lowest in the Pacific. For females, drop out rates at Grades 10 and 13 are particularly higher than those for males, indicating disadvantages for females in advancing to higher levels of schooling. The high cost of school fees for secondary education, combined with a shortage of school facilities, pushes many young people, especially females, out of the education system.³ There are also limited numbers of female teachers at the secondary level who can serve as role models.⁴ There are a number of technical and vocational institutes in Vanuatu, but given the geographic constraints and the shortage of boarding facilities, these are not equally accessible to females. The low rate of enrollment in secondary education and its poor quality have important consequences for skills development and human resource capacities of the population which are essential for sustainable economic development.

¹ Vanuatu National Statistical Office, Asian Development Bank, and UNDP. 2008. *Vanuatu: Analysis of the 2006 Household Income and Expenditure Survey*.

² Ministry of Education, Youth Development and Training. Republic of Vanuatu. 2007. *Digest of Education Statistics*.

³ There are only 81 secondary schools in total, compared with 435 primary schools (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 2007).

⁴ At the secondary level, there are only 272 female teachers compared with 461 male teachers (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 2007).

B. Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health

4. Women's reproductive work is unaccounted for in national accounting systems and their role in ensuring sustainability of social and cultural values is largely unacknowledged in financing for development. While there is a lack of qualified health staff in Vanuatu, women generally receive assistance from skilled birth attendants in 88% of deliveries. The total fertility rate is estimated to be 4.2 births per woman, maternal mortality 68 per 100,000 live births, and infant mortality 31 per 1,000 live births.⁵ The adolescent fertility rate is high at 92 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 and there is a need to ensure girls are not expelled from school when pregnant.⁶ The rate of using contraceptive methods among married women is 28% and the figure is much lower for younger women. Better family life, sex education in schools, and better access to health services are needed to improve these figures. While the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS remains close to zero, high rates of sexually transmitted disease in neighboring countries and a sizeable number of ni-Vanuatu seafarers (a high risk factor) make Vanuatu vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

C. Infrastructure that Supports Reduction in Women's Time Poverty

5. Women in Vanuatu perform multiple roles as household managers, subsistence and cash crop farmers, income earners, and active members of churches and community groups. In all these roles, basic infrastructure services are important determinants of women's opportunities. Like the other Melanesian countries, Vanuatu has limited road and maritime transport services which constrain the delivery of basic social services and access to economic opportunities. Rural communities, especially in outlying islands, are isolated from markets, inhibiting women's self-employment or micro-finance initiatives. Infrastructure services are also poor in these areas: only 52% of the rural population has access to clean water and 42% have access to improved sanitation systems.⁷ In rural areas and peri-urban settlements, women spend disproportionate amounts of their time collecting water, fuel, and providing health care for preventable diseases caused by inadequate sanitation and lack of clean water. It is important to involve women in the design and delivery of targeted infrastructure services to reduce their time burden and to increase opportunities for other productive activities such as developing alternative livelihoods and marketing surplus produce.

D. Access to Productive and Economic Resources

6. Traditional attitudes regarding male dominance and customary familial roles hamper women's equal participation in economic and political life. Women have less access to productive and economic resources than men. While a growing number of women are participating in the formal sector, women are considerably less represented than men in the formal sector. According to recent data, about one quarter of Vanuatu workers are employed in the formal sector, mostly in urban areas, but women make up only one-third of these formal sector employees.⁸ Women's participation in the formal sector is concentrated in the civil service, tourism, and other services industries. Women in rural areas are mostly engaged in cash crop production, subsistence agriculture, and small-scale marketing. Many women in both urban and rural areas are engaged in the informal sector, especially as open-air vendors,

⁵ UNDP. 2007/2008. *Human Development Report*. New York.

http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_VUT.html

⁶ UNFPA. 2005. *Vanuatu at a Glance*. Suva. <http://pacific.unfpa.org/Countries/vu.htm>.

⁷ UNDP. 2008. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report*. New York.

⁸ Vanuatu National Statistics Office. 2009. *Main Report on the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2006*. Formal sector employees here represent those working for wages and salary.

handicraft makers and sellers, and running stalls at the markets. Vanuatu has labor laws providing minimum wages, annual leave, maternity leave, and protection from discrimination against women on the basis of pregnancy. While these legislations protect women in the formal sector, many women in the informal sector face disadvantaged working conditions without any of these protections.

7. Women's access to credit is constrained by their lack of control over land, the vast majority of which is still held under customary tenure, and this issue has been recognized in the 2006 National Land Summit. Despite the recognition of women's important role and the need to include women in decision making over land, the resolution from the National Land Summit has not yet been effectively implemented. The newly enacted Personal Property Securities Act (supported by ADB), which allows moveable assets such as livestock and crops as collateral for borrowing, has an important potential to increase women's access to credit. A microfinance scheme started by the Department of Women's Affairs in 1996, the Vanuatu Women in Development Scheme (VANWODS), has been a major source of obtaining credit for women but mostly for women in urban areas. The National Bank of Vanuatu has recently begun delivering a microfinance scheme, supported by ADB, to rural and outer islands with the aim of reaching the population who does not have easy access to credit or opportunities for saving. While there are significant ongoing efforts to increase women's access to credit through a variety of microfinance schemes, lessons from women's experience with micro credit indicate many barriers to their developing successful business opportunities, mainly due to lack of basic education and business skills. In order for women's access to expanded financial services to result in successful income generating businesses, the ongoing efforts need to be accompanied by basic business skills training such as financial literacy, marketing, and understanding of business opportunities.

E. Women's Representation in Political Bodies

8. Women's representation in parliament is very low despite efforts of the National Council of Women, UNIFEM, and other donors: currently, there is only one female member in parliament. There is lack of support for women candidates from the main parties, and women running as independents find it difficult to muster requisite funds and logistical support from their families and communities. There is also lack of capacity to analyze issues and build constituencies that address issues in multiple sectors. While men also face these constraints, there is a higher level of distrust in women candidates. The National Council of Chiefs has considerable influences during elections, and it is a heavily conservative group that has not endorsed female candidates.

F. Violence against Women and Girls

9. Violence against women and girls violates their human rights, contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDs, negatively impacts mental health, and undermines women's social freedoms and productive capacities for development. One thousand cases of violence against women and children are reported annually to the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC), which are likely to be underestimates of the actual extent of the problem.⁹ Many women do not report due to family and community pressures. The VWC has committees on violence against women that work in communities for education and advocacy. A Family Protection Act addressing domestic violence was finally passed in June 2008, after repeatedly failing to pass parliament due to opposition from conservative leaders. An international standard survey on domestic violence is

⁹ Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. 2005. <http://www.fijiwomen.com/index.php?id=1507>.

currently being conducted in Vanuatu for the first time, and its results are expected at the end of 2009.

II. Government Gender Policy and Planning Framework

10. Vanuatu ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. The recent UNDP and UNIFEM stocktake on CEDAW status identifies that Vanuatu, like other Pacific countries, needs legislative and policy reform in support of gender equality. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the National Gender Equity Policy have been incorporated into strategic planning, there has been little demonstrated progress. Government policy documents including the Medium Term Strategic Framework (2006 – 2015) emphasize the reallocation of budgets toward social sectors and human resource development, but there continue to be low levels of political will for gender analysis across sectors and for the establishment of sex/age disaggregated data, gender responsive targets and indicators. Within the government as well as among donors, there needs to be greater emphasis on gender mainstreaming as a key strategy in achieving gender equity.

III. Government Institutional Arrangements and Capacity for Gender

11. The Department of Women's Affairs is the national women's machinery responsible for implementing the Gender Equity Policy introduced in 1997. An evaluation of the policy in 2006 identified 21 barriers that prevented effective implementation of the policy. These include i) traditional discriminatory attitudes; ii) lack of government commitment and low allocation of resources; iii) the idea that women's rights are contrary to Christian beliefs; and iv) the endemic nature of violence against women. Based on the evaluation and guidance from stakeholders, the Department of Women's Affairs is developing a revised strategic plan of action for women. The Department, however, currently face many constraints in coordinating and working effectively for the promotion of gender equality, as it lacks the institutional authority, adequate human and financial resources, and technical capacity for gender analysis.

IV. Future Indicative Areas for Intervention and Strategy

12. There is considerable scope for ADB to assist the Government of Vanuatu promote gender equity, by incorporating gender responsive features into ADB assisted projects and by emphasizing gender mainstreaming efforts in policy dialogue across sectors and at all levels. For the key areas of ADB's assistance in 2010-2014—transport, urban development, and energy sectors—it will be crucial to incorporate inputs from women stakeholders into all stages of project developments. This can be done through a participatory approach, in close consultation with women user groups, community members, local and national NGOs, other civil society groups, and development partners. Across the sectors, ADB's assistance needs to focus on reducing constraints to women's participation in the economy and improving women's access to essential social and infrastructure services. For instance, ADB's support for transport infrastructure needs to consider different patterns of using transport networks and services between women and men, in order to design an optimal system that reduces women's time burden and facilitate their access to markets and other income generating opportunities. ADB's support for urban development needs to address health risks of women and their family, as well as women's constraints in time and opportunity, which arise from poor housing and environmental conditions and from lack of basic infrastructure services such as clean water and sanitation systems. The assistance for urban planning should also explore ways to develop

community-based infrastructure management systems that can generate employment opportunities to urban residents, especially to those in informal and squatter settlements.

13. For ADB's assistance in the area of microfinance and private sector development, it will be important to include project-specific gender action plans and encourage the development of government policies ensuring gender equity. ADB's support for expanding financial services by the National Bank of Vanuatu needs to ensure that these services are targeted at women as well as other disadvantaged populations in rural and remote areas through active outreach services. Given that even with access to credit, many women (as well as men) face difficulties in establishing successful micro or small businesses due to lack of basic education and skills, ADB assistance needs to emphasize that increases in microfinance schemes are accompanied by business skills building components, through close coordination with existing adult education and vocational training programs. As increasing numbers of micro schemes and savings opportunities are offered to women through diverse institutions, it will be critical for ADB to assist the government improve its legal and regulatory frameworks in order to protect women's assets in these financial institutions.

14. Given a large number of women engaged in the informal sector, it will be important for ADB's assistance for private sector development to assess disadvantaged labor conditions and distinct institutional constraints faced by women and men in the informal sector. Lessons drawn from this assessment can be applied to the development of strategies that support private sector growth for informal and formal small businesses, develop appropriate social protection mechanisms, and promote gender equity.