

New market for Torba opens

Compiled by Anita Roberts

ONE OF THE REASON PEOPLE in the northern Torba province cannot improve their standards of living is because they lack access to agricultural market opportunities.

In the past, people from nearby islands of Vanualava would use canoes or travel on boats with their produces to Sola, headquarter of the province, where they find appropriate space along the shore to sell.

They struggle to earn money for school fees and family needs.

But today, these people have been given a proper market house where they sell without without fear.

It was recently opened by the Australian High Commissioner, Jenny Da Rin and witnessed by the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Forestry and Bio Security (MALFFB), Matai Seremaiah. Funded by the Direct Aid Program (DAP), through the Australian High Commission, the multi-purpose structure was designed to house the sale of agricultural produces, handicrafts and livestock across Torba.

This market might be the first one in Vanuatu which has a permanent built-in disability access ramp, giving people with disability the opportunity to make a living.

Before the construction of the market house, producers would sell their produce in front of retail shops. This was



The newly opened multi-purpose market house for Torba at Sola on Vanualava

unhygienic and there were no quality control measures in place for packaging and pricing.

This urgent need was identified by the Australian Government funded Torba Skills Centre (TVET Centre) which aims to upskill farmers and improve production quality.

Torba Provincial Government Council (TPGC) also planned for the establishment of a market house. This did not happen due to insufficient resources.

In collaboration with the TPGC training board, the Torba

Skills Centre facilitated the development of a collaborative proposal to the DAP. This involved the Skills Centre using the construction of a new market house as an 'on-the-job' training opportunity for local builders.

Provincial government stakeholders agreed to contribute to the costs of freight and materials.

Once DAP funds were approved, the Skills Centre engaged Vanuatu's national training provider, the Vanuatu Institute of Technology, to deliver on-site the new, nationally accredited

Certificate II in Building Construction course.

18 locals participated in the training, with the practical component focused on the construction of the Sola Market House. They were the very cohort of graduates to successfully complete the new Building and Construction training package course under the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority.

During the opening of the market, Minister Seremaiah pledged the support of his ministry in the funding of a fish market which will cater for the sale of the vast marine

resources of Torba Province.

The fish market will be located at the back of the market house. There will be purpose-fit tables for vendors, a hygienic environment to ensure safe food handling processes, and a pricing and packing mechanism which will be monitored by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

All vendors will become clients of DARD, providing them access to information and workshops, as well as ongoing skills development support through the Torba Skills Centre.

The market vendor's representative, Helen Milroy, said: "We depend on market to earn income.

"We usually sell in front of shops, under the trees, or along the beaches. We get wet in the rain, cold, hungry and sometimes scared. We also lack the knowledge to produce and provide quality products and services for market.

"The new market house will provide a better place for us mothers to sell our produce and also change our attitudes and methods related to farming for market. Through the market house project, I believe we mothers and farmers will gain more knowledge and techniques. It will be a very big change for us."

In her speech, Commissioner Rin said the government of Australia is pleased to support.

"We know about the farmer's, especially women condition and want to help. We believe that this new market house will greatly change the lives of those who produce agricultural products and small business operators in Vanualava and throughout Torba Province", she said.

The market will be managed by a team appointed by TPGC Secretary General. The Management team will be responsible for developing policies, guidelines, and regulations of the market house.

TPGC will be responsible for providing other necessary infrastructure for the market house.