



PARTNERING WITH DISABLED PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS TO IMPROVE DISABILITY INCLUSIVE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN VANUATU

Summary: After successfully working together to deliver awareness raising activities regarding disability inclusive skills development opportunities in communities across Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA) established a formal relationship. Through this partnership, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) support each other towards shared goals, by providing relevant technical advice and bi-directional capacity development support. Recognising the limited funding opportunities available to Pacific DPOs, Vanuatu Skills Partnership also funds an appropriate proportion of VDPA's institutional costs. This joint work has resulted in increasing demand amongst people with disabilities for disability inclusive skills development, and improved supply of disability inclusive post-school education and training. The Vanuatu Skills Partnership is a joint investment between the Governments of Australia and Vanuatu.

Background

Working collaboratively with the Government of Vanuatu, the Australian Government, through DFAT, supports the strengthening of the Vanuatu skills development sector through the Vanuatu Skills Partnership. The Vanuatu Skills Partnership aims to catalyse reform within the post-school education and training system so that people



Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA) National Coordinator, Nelly Caleb, pictured with members and staff of VDPA ©Erin Johnson for Room3/CBM Australia

across Vanuatu experience improved access to economic opportunities, and greater quality of life.

Recognising that people with disability, comprising between 5 and 12% of Vanuatu's population, face barriers to participation in skills development and paid work, a disability situation analysis was commissioned in 2013. This led to the development and implementation of a Disability Inclusion Strategy 2014 - 16. This strategy focused on addressing barriers to participation of people with disability in mainstream skills development activities, particularly at the provincial level. Funding through the Vanuatu Skills Partnership was made available for a Disability Inclusion Advisor to guide efforts, and a volunteer from DFAT's Australian Volunteers for International Development program was recruited to support the implementation of activities.

As a result, participation of people with disability increased from 3% to 8%, and over 50% of participants with disability reported improved economic circumstances. These successes and experiences informed participatory development of a *Policy for Disability Inclusive Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Vanuatu 2016 – 2020*, which charted the way forward for disability inclusive post-school education and training.



In late 2016, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership received additional funding through DFAT's Disability Inclusive Development Fund. With this grant, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership retained its Disability Inclusion Advisor, appointed a full-time local Disability Inclusion Coordinator, and is working with key government and non-government partners to implement the *Policy for Disability Inclusive TVET in Vanuatu 2016 – 2020*, under the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET).

In line with DFAT's *Development for All* strategy, implementation occurs according to the twin track approach. Efforts utilize both mainstreaming and disability-specific approaches. Mainstreaming activities include supporting public and private training providers to improve their disability inclusion policies and practices, and improving opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in training and work in Vanuatu's three key economic sectors – agribusiness, handicraft production, and tourism. Disability specific activities seek to create demand for disability inclusive post-school education and training, by raising awareness of opportunities, creation of a fund to support reasonable accommodations such as sign language interpreters, caregiver support and transport, and working with partners to strengthen access to assistive devices which in turn enable participation.

How DPOs were engaged in the program

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership has worked in close alliance with Vanuatu's Disabled People's Organisation, Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA), over several years towards increasing demand for, and supply of, disability inclusive post-school education and training.

Originally, joint work focused on staff from both agencies working together to lead "road-show" style awareness-raising activities regarding disability inclusive skills development opportunities in communities across Vanuatu. Acting as a referral agency, VDPA connects interested people with disabilities with training opportunities through the MoET provincial Skills Centres, facilitated by the Vanuatu Skills Partnership team. VDPA members

and staff speak with families of potential clients with disabilities, to help them understand the opportunities on offer, and provide reassurance regarding safety and other concerns.

Over time, VDPA became a source of advice to the network of provincial Skills Centres and its clients, regarding a wide range of implementation issues – such as the particular reasonable accommodations for individual clients with disabilities, modifications required to ensure Skills Centres are accessible, and adjustments required to ensure Training Provider venues are accessible and inclusive. VDPA members are invited to attend professional development workshops held for trainers from the skills development sector – at which they share their stories and advocate for change. VDPA's Coordinator is now a standing member of two key skills development sector coordination committees – the Vanuatu Skills Partnership Steering Committee, and the Training Provider Inclusion Improvement Fund Steering Committee.

Recognising the increasing demand for VDPA support and advice, in 2017 the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and VDPA signed a new Partnership Agreement. This new agreement formalizes areas of mutual interest, and also commits both organisations to a deeper alliance. Recognising the limits on VDPA capacity to continue meeting requests for advice and support to strengthen demand for, and supply of, disability inclusive skills development opportunities, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership now funds a VDPA Program Officer, as well as an appropriate proportion of VDPA's institutional costs. This latter commitment is made in direct response to the challenges Pacific DPOs often face in securing funds for rent, electricity and similar costs; without which they cannot operate. Utilising the same collaborative approach, the program will also support VDPA to develop its 2018 work plan.

The relationship between the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and VDPA is bi-directional with mutual benefits: enhanced demand for skills development opportunities amongst people with disabilities, improved supply of disability inclusive post-school education and training, and a stronger national DPO.



Partnership: Benefits for the DPO

- Through this partnership, VDPA has built relationships with mainstream training providers, and now has direct access to referral mechanisms which link prospective trainees with disabilities to skills development opportunities.
- Many VDPA members have participated in skills development opportunities, which have enabled several to engage in paid work, and access markets with support from Vanuatu Skills Partnership.
- VDPA has access to funding support for administrative costs and annual work planning activities, which have proved difficult to source elsewhere.
- Vanuatu Skills Partnership works nationally with a range of stakeholders at the community, provincial and national levels. Engagement has built VDPA's profile and relationships at these levels.



Lessons and recommendations

- Partnering with Vanuatu's DPO to raise awareness about disability inclusive skills development opportunities built a solid relationship between Vanuatu Skills Partnership and VDPA, on which additional joint activities could be built.
- Awareness raising activities led by VDPA are much more successful than efforts led by Vanuatu Skills Partnership staff. VDPA staff and members can share the lived experience of disability, which motivates and shifts negative attitudes.
- The provision of funding for a dedicated Program Officer within VDPA, as well as other institutional costs and activities ensures that the DPO has the resources to provide advisory services without distracting from other organisational priorities.
- Engagement of VDPA in key sector coordination mechanisms promotes disability inclusion amongst decision makers, and can influence political change.
- The collaboration between Vanuatu Skills Partnership and VDPA provides an important bi-directional capacity development opportunity.

