

# SKILLS FOR TOURISM

Narrative Report: January - June 2022



Figure 1: Vanuatu Tourism Office Facebook Page

## INTRODUCTION

The information provided in this progress report is an update on the Skills for Tourism (SfT) workstream activities that have been implemented over the six months period from January to June 2022. The initial planning and implementation were undertaken in collaboration with the Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO) and the Department of Tourism (DoT), and the provincial Skills Centres.

Linked to the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Strategy and the Domestic Tourism Marketing Strategy, the focus of the SfT workstream in the first half of 2022 has been the delivery of Safe Business Operation activities to support tourism businesses meet the COVID-19 readiness requirements, including refresher skills development activities. However, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, the country confirmed its first case of COVID-19 community transmission and the Government of Vanuatu, through the Ministry of Health (MoH), imposed strict travel restrictions both domestically and internationally to control the spread of the virus. This has had an adverse impact on the implementation of planned SfT activities in the first half of 2022.

## CONTEXT

While the country was in lockdown, the Government announced on 8<sup>th</sup> April that Vanuatu would reopen its border to international trades and services including tourism on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2022.

The DoT and the VTO activated their Vanuatu Tourism Roadmap towards safe border reopening. The roadmap consists of four stages including Tourism Ready, Market Ready, Market Opening and Sustainable Demand and Market Diversification.

As a key partner for DoT and VTO, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) has been supporting the implementation of stage one 'Tourism Ready'. Under the guidance of DoT and VTO and in consultation with the MoH, Shefa and Sanma province were targeted to start the implementation of the Tourism Ready stage given they are the main entry points for international trades and services.

Activities implemented in the last six months under this stage include:

- **Product Readiness**

Identifying and addressing specific areas of immediate support required from local tourism operators in Sanma with regards to product improvements and business operations to ensure they meet the DoT compliance and health requirements to operate when the border reopens.

- **Workforce Readiness**

The industry workforce has declined during the border closure, hence there is a need to address this gap in preparation for border reopening. The SfT workstream supported DoT and VTO with recruitment of two Tourism Labour Desk Officers to facilitate and coordinate registrations of interested individuals to work in the industry, linking them with training providers to provide preparatory courses and 'on the job' training.

- **Business Readiness**

Data on immediate support needs in terms of start-up capital was collected during an on-the-ground assessment and provided to DoT for potential assistance through survival grants to enable tourism business to operate and provide good customer service when the border reopens.

- **Community Readiness**

Community COVID stigmatization awareness is essential to prepare communities to start welcoming international visitors again. The Partnership, through the SfT workstream and the Inclusion team, has supported the DoT and VTO in producing collaterals with an inclusive lens to build community awareness and promote fact-based information dissemination – this includes posters and video. The awareness-raising was conducted in Shefa, Sanma, Tafea and soon in Torba.

Some challenges have been experienced, such as the limited time from when the announcement was made to the border reopening date, access to available data from DoT, and limited funding available within DoT and VTO which would otherwise support the implementation of activities to meet the border reopening date.

However, despite these challenges, through strong partnerships and collaboration the majority of the planned activities and priorities were achieved. On 1<sup>st</sup> of July the international border reopened with 3 flights arriving from New Caledonia, Brisbane and Auckland, of which a third of passengers were tourists. It has been two long years of waiting for the industry and it is good to

see tourism businesses resuming operations and again providing employment opportunities to contribute to the country's economy.

One week before the border reopening date, VTO launched the *Nabanga* pledge. It is a promise from communities, visitors and local tourism operators to keep Vanuatu safe while enabling tourists to experience everything the country has to offer.



Figure 2: Industry partners at the airport days leading up to border re-opening date (Source - Air Vanuatu Facebook page)

## PARTNERSHIP STATUS & CO-CONTRIBUTIONS

### Agreements

- On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022, a Partnership Implementation Agreement Framework (PIAF) was signed between DoT and VTO that will guide and guard the integrity of our ongoing collaboration and working relationship over the next 4 years.



Figure 3: Signing of the PIAF on 01<sup>st</sup> of June 2022- (Source; VSP). From left to right, Deputy Australian High Commissioner, Ms. Clemency Oliphant; Director VSP, Mr. Fremden Yanhambath; Acting Director DoT, Mrs. Geraldine Tari; CEO VTO, Mrs. Adela Issachar Aru, Executive Officer, Mr. Alick Berry MTTCNVB.

- A co-funding agreement is current between the Partnership and the Sanma Provincial Government to support the readiness of 41 local tourism businesses in Sanma in preparation for border reopening. This agreement will lapse on 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2022.
- A Secondment Agreement is current with VTO for the Partnership’s Productive Sector Advisor. Through this arrangement, strong organisational strengthening support was provided to both DoT and VTO.

## Co-Contributions

Under these priority areas, in-kind contributions and cost-sharing arrangements were identified and agreed on to support logistics and travel costs. These include contributions to:

- **Tourism Readiness**

Sanma Product Readiness - Immediate support (facility improvement & equipment) and Safe Business Operations

- Sanma Provincial Govt: VUV 2,164,998
- Sanma Local Tourism Operators: VUV 714,376
- *In-kind contributions from local tourism operators - labour and provision of raw materials*
- VSP: VUV 3,718, 784

Workforce Readiness - Recruitment of 2 Tourism Labour Desk Officers, office space and equipment

- VTO: VUV 40,000
- DoT: VUV 22,000
- APTC: VUV 493, 585
- VSP: VUV 417,510

Business Readiness - Restart Capital for Tourism Businesses

- DoT: VUV 16,810,000

Community Readiness – Sanma, COVID-19 Community Stigmatization Awareness

- DoT: VUV 194,000
- VSP: VUV 580,875

- Outline in the PIAF, DoT will contribute VUV 2,000,000 to the Partnership Skills Development Fund (SDF) and VTO will contribute VUV 500,000 towards branding and marketing activities. These contributions are expected to hit the SDF account in the next quarter to support the implementation of SfT activities in the second half of the year.

*“VSP has been a long-time supporter of the tourism industry and we are fortunate to continuously receive such support to the development of this sector - ‘olsem wan faea, hemi nidim fulap stick faea blong mekem se faea hemi save laet gud we save givim wan gudfala result’ - through this partnership a lot has been achieved and we look forward to continuing to strengthen this collaboration as we ready for border reopening on 1<sup>st</sup> July.”*

**Mrs. Geraldine Tari, Acting Director – DoT, during the signing of the partnership agreement.**

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SKILLS FOR TOURISM WORKSTREAM JAN-JUN 2022

### Activity Outputs

#### Participation in Partnership supported skills training and market access activities

Participation	Business Clients supported	Skills Providers Engaged
38 women	14 women owned businesses	4 women
22 men	22 men owned businesses	
	2 couple owned businesses	

## SUMMARY OF KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2022

### Provincial Travel Information Centre (TIC) Network incorporated into VTO's structure

- From 2012 - 2017, the Partnership, through the SFT workstream, supported the DoT and VTO with the establishment, governance and management of the provincial TIC Network in Malampa, Sanma and Tanna. The role of the network is to operate online booking and reservations services for tourism operators in the island provinces; and, ultimately, to boost destination visibility and market access for rural tourism businesses both domestically and internationally.
- A review conducted in 2018 showed there was poor management and a lack of leadership skills from the board of directors of each of the TICs which resulted in low cash flows and staff not getting paid. This demonstrated a need for stronger governance to ensure sustainability. The VTO recognised the vital role of this TIC Network and in 2020 they agreed to take on some of the operational costs from the network into their budget.
- At the end of 2021, VTO officially incorporated the TIC Network into its structure and agreed to find ways to improve its services, something the Partnership has been advocating for since 2015. Despite COVID-19, the TIC Network remained operational in supporting the domestic tourism market as well as taking part in VTO's initiatives and campaigns to the international market in preparation for the reopening of the international border.
- The SFT workstream supported VTO with the engagement of an industry coach who conducted a second review in April 2022 to provide insights on how to strengthen this network further by having in place a central booking system that meets the needs of its customers and contributes to its sustainability. Target markets to consider are domestic corporate travel as well as niche market segments that suit Vanuatu's context such as Experience Collectors, Adventure Seekers and accessible tourism.

### Embracing the 'new normal' post COVID-19

- COVID-19 has changed the way we have worked over the last six months. Many of our planned activities were postponed; however, some were able to be carried out remotely and it was an opportunity to develop resources that will be of use in future. For example, this includes the development of the Generic Standard Operating Procedures in the context of COVID-19 for tourism businesses that was approved by MoH through the Health Technical Advisory Committee (HTAG). The template has been shared by DoT to all their provincial offices to start assisting tourism operators and can be contextualized to suit their

businesses. This is a requirement for the triple 'C' certification from DoT. The lockdown has also improved the ICT skills of the SfT team, including Industry Coaches and sector partners, which has enabled successful implementation of remote work. The skills gained during this period will be useful in times of future crisis or disasters.

### Strong collaboration between stakeholders towards tourism readiness

- Since the announcement of the reopening of the international border, DoT and VTO have strengthened their relationship with their partners including in the travel, aviation and health sectors to ensure safe reopening of borders. There has been strong collaboration between VSP, local provincial tourism operators and partners at the national and provincial level to ensure tourism businesses are ready. For example;
  - The Productive Sector Advisor is currently on a secondment agreement with VTO to support the Research and Data Management System for destination marketing and to influence work in collaboration practices with VTO, DoT and VSP.
  - Support the DoT with a short-term contract of the Sanma DoT Manager (while awaiting renewal of contract with the Public Service Commission) to support the implementation of Sanma tourism readiness activities in preparation for border reopening.
- With Sanma and Shefa identified as priority provinces for tourism readiness (given they are the entry points to Vanuatu), the SfT workstream has been providing substantial support to the Sanma Tourism Office. For example, 42 local tourism businesses (28 accommodation providers and 14 tour businesses) received support through SBO workshops and coaching and provision of items to support their operations as well as some building materials to help improve the standard of their products. This support was successfully implemented through strong collaboration of the Sanma Provincial Government, Department of Tourism and Sanma Skills Centre.



Figure 4: Handing over of immediate support items to East Coast Santo local tourism operators on 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2022- (Source; VSP)

*“I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you in Sanma province, stakeholders and partners for the strong collaboration since the announcement of border reopening. Through this partnership we were able achieve some great results and one is what we are witnessing today where each of you will be receiving support to help with your business operations”.*

**Acting Director DoT, Mrs. Geraldine Tari**

*“A big thank you to VSP and partners who were involved in purchasing these materials – I received my first customers on 5<sup>th</sup> July, and I have bookings all the way through the weekend, and on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 20 tourists have booked the tour. I am so grateful that some of these items came right on time to assist enhance visitors experience”.*

**Sam Andikar, Millenium Cave Tour, Sanma**



Figure 5: Mr. Sam Andikar receiving immediate support items from Eddie Joe, Service Deliver Officer – Sanma Skills Centre

## ADDITIONAL RESULTS (CROSS CUTTING ISSUES):

### Better Balance

- There has been solid collaboration between DoT and VTO over the last two months under the leadership of two strong ni-Vanuatu women, Acting Director DoT (Mrs. Geraldine Tari) and VTO CEO (Mrs. Adela Issachar Aru). It has been a critical time for the industry and gearing up for border reopening was not easy but working under the leadership of these two women with their dedicated team has made it possible. The Partnership has actively promoted the leadership competency of these women to positively influence perceptions around the legitimacy of women's leadership.
- The Partnership's Productive Sector Coordinator, a highly competent ni-Vanuatu woman, was appointed as the Manager of Skills for Tourism and Skills for Creative Industries workstreams, working along-side other team members at VSP and the DoT and VTO team to support industry readiness in preparation for reopening of the international border.
- The new SFT Officer is settling into her new role, and she is looking forward to building and strengthening working relationships with stakeholders and partners.
- Under the workforce readiness program, the SFT workstream supported the recruitment of two (female) Tourism Labour Desk Officers to support the DoT, VTO and Department of Labour with the registration of individuals who are interested to work in the industry in preparation for border reopening.
- Four skills providers (women) were engaged in the last six months to support the implementation of the SFT workstream activities.
- From the Sanma Tourism readiness assessments, 14 (10 SFT clients) businesses were managed and owned by women, 2 couple owned, which are all committed to resuming operations when the border reopens.

### Disability Inclusion

- In collaboration with DoT and VTO together with the VSP Inclusion team, an inclusive lens video was developed around community stigmatization on COVID-19 to prepare communities to start receiving visitors again when the border reopens.
- Accessible tourism has been identified by DoT and VTO as a niche market to target from 2023. Through the response and recovery activities over the last six months, four local tourism businesses in Sanma were interested to adjust their products to suit this market. SFT and the Inclusion team will work together to identify entry points and support implementation.
- Inclusion team has been supporting the coordination and implementation of tourism business readiness activities.
- From the Sanma Tourism readiness activities 1 man with disability who is an SFT client owns a tourism business and has participated in skills activities.

### Climate Resilience

- From the lessons learned with the COVID-19 pandemic and given Vanuatu is also prone to natural disasters, VSP and DoT, through the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy, is encouraging tourism businesses to diversify their offerings to promote resilience and sustainability.



## Challenges and/or lessons learned

- Clear communication on SBO certification requirements has been a major challenge which has impacted the delivery of SBO activities; this meant that no local tourism businesses supported through SBO workshops and coaching were certified before the border reopening. Some of the messaging from MoH around the requirements has been inconsistent and this has impacted the way local tourism operators are viewing business readiness. For the second half of the year, the aim of the SfT workstream is to collaborate more with the SBO Coordinator and DoT Accreditation Unit to identify what the independent auditor is looking for and develop a 'step by step' process of what the local tourism businesses need to do or improve to be able to meet the certification requirements.

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS TO DATE IN 2022

Progress less than expected and significant change is required	Progress less than expected but challenges are being overcome	Progress as expected (our plans are on track)	Progress is exceeding expectations
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Overall, despite the challenges experienced in the first half of 2022, the SfT is still largely on track to deliver its planned activities and anticipated results by the end of the year. Some work was able to continue remotely during the first 6 months of the year, including tourism readiness and SBO workshops, while several other priorities have been postponed to the second half of 2022. The easing of lockdown restrictions and the reopening of the international border is expected to assist with the delivery of activities in the second half of the year.

## FORWARD PLANNING: JULY- DECEMBER 2022

Priorities for the SfT workstream for implementation and action in the second half of 2022:

- Provincial Tourism Readiness support to continue in other provinces as per direction from DoT
- SBO Certification for provincial local tourism operators
- Refresher skills workshops, coaching and 'on the job' training for target clients
- Accredited trainings to support the workforce readiness program with the VIT
- Marketing and branding activities linked to the Domestic Tourism Marketing Strategy
- Support the VTO with governance and operations strengthening of the TICNs

Risks (or challenges)	Mitigation Strategies (and learning for the future)
<p>1. Second lockdown can disrupt planned activities for the remaining half of the year.</p>	<p>The SfT workstream continue to work with VTO and DOT to adapt and support businesses and the industry to ensure safety of visitors, local tourism businesses and community for response and recovery. The lessons learnt from the first wave of COVID has paved the way to implement activity differently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Together with the SfT Industry Coaches, develop an SOP that will function as a Crisis Management Plan for the Partnership to guide the implementation of SfT activities for future crises.</li> <li>- Support the DoT team on how to collect and use data more effectively to support the implementation of activities</li> <li>- SfT workstream to continue work as a broker to strengthen communication between DoT and VTO including the provincial tourism offices.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Industry workforce shortage and skill gaps</p>	<p>The SfT workstream continue to work with VTO, DOT and other training providers to support the development and training of the industry workforce and transfer of skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue collaboration with the Vanuatu Institute of Technology and APTC to address training needs for new interested industry workers as well as ‘on the job’ training for those who are already employed to transfer further skills to improve customer experience.</li> <li>- Work with DoT and VTO through the Tourism Labour Desk Offices to use the data collected to support meeting the demand of labor in the industry.</li> </ul>