

Accessible and Inclusive Tourism: **Promoting Social and Economic Change**



VANUATU
**SKILLS
PARTNERSHIP**



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VANUATU 2030
THE PEOPLE'S PLAN

Economic Change

Social Change

Environmental Change

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU
NATIONAL DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICY
2018-2025

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL & COMMUNITY SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership works to strengthen the national skills system. The Partnership is locally-led with a deep respect for Melanesian leadership, culture and values. It recognises that the skills sector can, and should, contribute not only to economic results, but also to beneficial social and environmental outcomes. Inclusion and equity are central to the approach of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, which works towards enhancing the status of women and people with disabilities.

Tourism is critical to Vanuatu's economic prosperity. The Vanuatu Skills Partnership has worked closely with tourism authorities, including the Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO) and Department of Tourism (DoT), and Training Providers to strengthen the supply of skills that enable the growth of quality local tourism businesses and services. These include accommodation, tours, island massage and beauty spas and restaurants.

Internationally, the market for tourists with disabilities is swelling. A global rise in non-communicable diseases is resulting in a growing number of people who use wheelchairs, have low vision, or have difficulty walking. In addition, there is an increasingly large cohort of older travellers, who may experience mobility, hearing, vision and other difficulties. Vanuatu is a popular destination for this group, who visit Vanuatu via cruise ships or arrive by plane.

The tourism sector can offer economic and social benefits for ni-Vanuatu with disabilities. If provided with the opportunity, people with disabilities can work for tourism operators in a range of roles. Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Training's (MoET) Skills Centres are supporting a significant number of people with disabilities to improve their skills in agribusiness and handicrafts and to run small businesses themselves which support or enable tourism.

With support from the Vanuatu Skills Partnership's Disability Inclusion and Skills for Tourism teams, the VTO and DoT have taken important steps towards a more inclusive tourism industry through the provision of targeted skills development. This includes facilitating access for people with disabilities as employees and consumers within the tourism sector.

By sharing the experiences of tourism operators, tourism coaches, the VTO and the DoT, this case story demonstrates how inclusive and accessible tourism supports achievement of Vanuatu's policy agenda, including Vanuatu 2030 – the National Sustainable Development Plan, the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy and the National Disability Inclusive Development Policy.

In 2016, training in disability inclusion awareness was offered through the Vanuatu Skills Partnership to coaches working to support and strengthen tourism operators. This led to the inclusion of a small number of people with disabilities in skills development and work associated the tourism value-chain: gardening, housekeeping and cooking.

In 2017, recognising the lack of accessible accommodation and tour options in Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership engaged Freda Willie as an Accessible Tourism Industry Coach. Freda, a ni-Vanuatu wheelchair-user, visited accommodation and tour operators in Efate and Santo. She conducted accessibility audits and provided advice regarding improvements to support accessibility for tourists and workers with disabilities.

In 2018, the VTO and DoT worked with the Vanuatu Skills Partnership to develop and implement an Accessible Tourism Action Plan to support product development and marketing. This included the establishment of an **Accessible Vanuatu** webpage on the VTO website, further coaching for tourism operators regarding inclusive and accessible tourism, and leadership of a National Tourism Forum in November, which, for the first time, focussed on accessible tourism.

To further work in this area, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership brokered collaboration between the tourism sector (the VTO and DoT) and Vanuatu's two major disability organisations: the national Disabled People's Organisation (Vanuatu Disability Promotion Advocacy Association - VDPA) and Service Provider (Vanuatu Society for People with Disabilities - VSPD). These organisations are now called upon by the VTO and DoT to advise on disability inclusion matters. Representatives were invited to the Forum, and as guest speakers and participants they highlighted the importance and benefits of disability inclusive tourism and provided strategies on how these can be achieved. The Vanuatu Skills Partnership's Accessible Tourism Industry Coach also made a keynote speech which focussed on the barriers to inclusion, and strategies for overcoming these.

Vanuatu Skills Partnership Intermediate Outcomes

Skills development support activities during 2018 have contributed to social, environmental and economic changes. Progress towards achievement of several of the Partnership's intermediate outcome areas is described as follows.



Intermediate Outcome 3 Increased flexible delivery of skills development activities

Three on-site coaching sessions in accessible tourism were provided to 15 tourism operators in Port Vila and rural and remote locations in Santo.



Intermediate Outcome 4 Increased diversity of training providers operating within the system

The Accessible Tourism Industry Coach is herself a woman with disabilities. With formal qualifications in the tourism sector, this coach brings a unique combination of tourism knowledge, understanding of accessibility standards, and lived experience of disability, which has enabled important attitudinal shifts and behaviour change amongst several tourism operators.



Intermediate Outcome 5 Increased representation of women, people with disabilities and their interests in the skills system

13 people with disabilities are currently working for the Vanuatu Skills Partnership's tourism business clients and are benefitting from skills development activities offered to their employer. This constitutes 3.4% of all tourism business client employees.

National Sustainable Development Plan: The People's Plan

Efforts to strengthen the tourism sector so that it is inclusive of people with disabilities as consumers as well as employees have contributed towards achievement of the National Sustainable Development Plan as outlined overleaf.

ECONOMIC CHANGE

Improved accessibility of tourism products results in an increase in the number of visitors with disabilities, which contributes to business income. Following a visit by the Accessible Tourism Industry Coach, the Flower Garden & Water Music attraction in Santo levelled and smoothed the ground and entrances to bathrooms. As a result, they reported that during the next cruise ship visit, they received some older visitors who use walking frames, and were able to access the attraction due to the changes. Similarly, following a visit from the Accessible Tourism Industry Coach, the Leweton Water Music attraction installed ramps and subsequently received eight tourists who use wheelchairs, and several people who use walking frames to move around. Increasing their appeal to visitors with mobility impairments on cruise ship days has made these businesses more competitive and attractive to this core market of cruise visitors.

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With the significant improvements in accessibility, I can see that clients are motivated and see the importance of having an increase in tourists with a disability when they continue to improve their businesses to create a friendly environment for all. Both Leweton and Flower Garden have experienced receiving tourists with wheelchairs and the way they expressed their feeling when they met these tourists and saw them moving freely around, this helps them to think strategically on how and where to work more on making their products friendlier and more accessible.”

Freda Willie,
Accessible Tourism Industry Coach



The Accessible Tourism Industry Coach talks about disability inclusion with a tour operator.

SOCIETY (SOCIAL & CULTURAL) CHANGE

The promotion of accessible and inclusive tourism by the VTO and DoT, and their collaboration with disability organisations, is raising awareness of the important role people with disabilities can play as employees and customers of tourism products and services. This encourages a view of people with disabilities as active contributors to their communities, rather than passive recipients of charity. Public promotion of these messages by the VTO and DoT and their partners VSPD and VDPA at the National Tourism Forum reinforced the importance and value of people with disabilities, and the need for society to work to remove barriers to participation, including attitudinal barriers, and those in the built environment. This is in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Vanuatu ratified in 2008.

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The tourism sector in Vanuatu has moved from focussing on just accessible tourism products to a holistic focus as a sector that offers inclusive work opportunities, too. Thus the theme of the forum is: 'Accessible Tourism through Social Inclusion, Infrastructure, Transport and E-Marketing'. This huge shift in mentality has resulted from the brokering work that Sherol George and I did with disability organisations and the tourism sector. The decision makers behind the scenes see the importance of this 'niche' market and want to tap into it as a first in the Pacific region.”

Warren Gama, Skills for Tourism Manager,
Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

Working with the Department of Tourism's Provincial Tourism Officers, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership has supported and actively encouraged increased participation of people with disabilities within employment in the tourism sector in Vanuatu. By providing regular disability inclusive skills training and workshops to training providers and industry coaches, business owners engaged in skills training are being actively reminded of the importance to include all members of the community in tourism activities. There are currently 13 people with disabilities working for tourism businesses supported by Skills Centre activities in roles such as cleaner, chef, junior tour guide and handyman.

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It is important to promote accessible tourism, as this will not only benefit the tourists but will also benefit everybody, particularly local older people, pregnant women, parents with prams, as well as wheelchair users. This will be an eyeopener to some in the private sector, who have not yet been convinced by advocacy. Let's not forget that this work is in line with Articles 9,18,20 in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

Nelly Caleb, Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association.

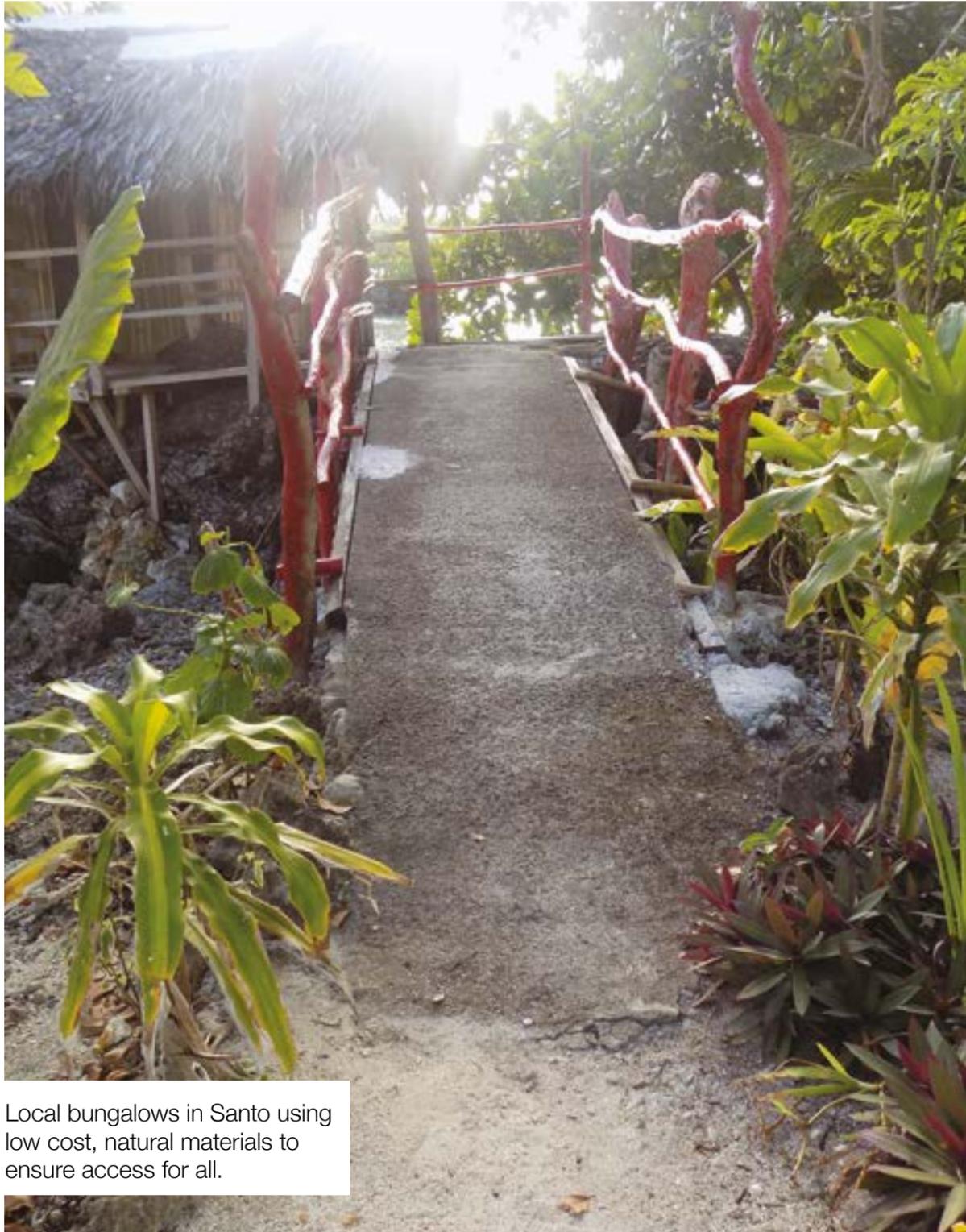


Disability inclusion stakeholders participate in the National Tourism Forum.



ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

While initiatives to support accessible and inclusive tourism do not explicitly result in environmental change, efforts seek to minimise negative effects on the environment. Advice to tourism businesses regarding necessary accessibility improvements promotes the use of local materials to create solutions. For example: using soil, packed sand or dried coral for pathways is encouraged as a low cost and environmentally friendly option for island bungalows.



Local bungalows in Santo using low cost, natural materials to ensure access for all.



National Disability Inclusive Development Policy

Accessible and inclusive tourism initiatives also contribute towards achievement of Strategic Priority Area One of Vanuatu's **National Disability Inclusive Development Policy**. This focusses on mainstreaming the rights of people with disabilities. Mainstreaming efforts seek to identify and overcome barriers to participation by people with disabilities and build access and inclusion across these. At the tourism business level, this has occurred through the engagement of an Accessible Tourism Industry Coach who assists tourism operators to assess their products, and advises them on strategies to adapt their buildings and processes to mainstream, or enable engagement of, customers and employees with disabilities. At the national level, the DoT and VTO work to mainstream the rights of people with disabilities, by promoting inclusive product development and accessible infrastructure through national events such as November's Tourism Forum.

KEY CONTRIBUTORS

The core people and groups driving this initiative and supporting positive change include:

The Vanuatu Tourism Office and Department of Tourism

These two government entities have worked hand-in-hand to promote inclusive and accessible tourism, through the National Tourism Forum, which focussed on accessible tourism, and through the **Accessible Tourism** page on the VTO's website. This shared commitment to and leadership in inclusive and accessible tourism propels momentum in this area.

The Accessible Tourism Industry Coach

The engagement of an Accessible Tourism Industry Coach with both qualifications in tourism, and lived experience of disability, has proven to be a critical combination which results in the provision of advice which is grounded, trusted and respected. At the same time, just by being seen to undertake her work, this coach, a wheelchair user, challenges community attitudes and assumptions about the roles that people with disabilities can play in their communities.

VSPD and VDPA

Vanuatu's premier disability organisations provide advice to the VTO and DoT on key disability inclusion issues. For example, the availability of local, contextualised advice has led to the VTO ensuring its process for taking photos of tourists with disabilities is respectful and rights-based. In addition, representatives of both organisations presented at the National Tourism Forum to help all stakeholders understand the situation and rights of people with disabilities in Vanuatu.

Skills for Tourism and Disability Inclusion Teams

The Skills for Tourism and Disability Inclusion teams at the Vanuatu Skills Partnership have played an important role in brokering relationships between Vanuatu's disability organisations and the VTO and DoT, engaging an Accessible Tourism Industry Coach to role model and demonstrate the value and outcomes of disability inclusion advice, and investing in the development and implementation of a Disability Inclusion Action Plan for the tourism sector.

Financial and Technical Resources

The Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) made specific funding support for disability inclusion available through the Disability Inclusion Development Fund (DIDFund). These additional resources enabled the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and its disability and tourism collaborators to scale-up investment in activities and technical assistance that enabled outcomes. For example, the DIDFund resourced implementation of part of the Tourism Disability Inclusion Action Plan, including contributions towards the costs of the National Tourism Forum, and additional targeted technical assistance.

KEY STRATEGIES USED

The core components needed to achieve these positive outcomes are as follows:

- Commitment, cooperation and motivation from all key stakeholders.
- Background support by the Vanuatu Skills Partnership to broker relationships between tourism and disability stakeholders, support the development and implementation of key strategies, and fund key activities.
- Advocacy and advice from disability stakeholders, including Disabled People's Organisations.
- National-level vision and leadership.
- Local-level activities which are documented and disseminated to build momentum for change.
- The engagement of people with disabilities as active and professional contributors.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Starting with small-scale efforts, reflecting on these and adapting approaches can test ideas and assumptions in a low-risk way. Successful efforts can then be scaled-up and promoted for broader engagement.
- The engagement of people with disabilities, and disability organisations, brings contextual and technical credibility to efforts at both the local and national levels, and challenges assumptions about the possibilities for the participation of people with disabilities in their communities.
- To effect national level wholesale change, active leadership from key national agencies is required.
- Accessible tourism benefits both consumers and employees in the tourism sector. Both must be considered in accessible tourism efforts, and investment must occur in both promotion and strengthening of accessible tourism products and services.
- The Vanuatu Skills Partnership can play a brokering role, catalysing change by bringing organisations together, and providing **technical and financial support where required**.

Data collection and analysis:

Drawing on outcome harvest methodology, data sources for this case story included coaching completion reports, activity reports, interviews, observations and anecdotal evidence.

