

THE EVOLUTION OF A TRADITIONAL HAT WEAVING STYLE TO A CONTEMPORARY PRODUCT

Entering international markets

Vanuatu Skills Partnership | Skills for Creative Industries | Impact Story

Weaving hats for the international market

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership, through the Sanma Skills Centre, has worked in collaboration with the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), the Department of Industry (DOI), and the Sanma Provincial Government to support 18 women to strengthen their pandanus hat weaving skills to meet international market standards.

Since 2018, the Partnership has engaged an international milliner as a headwear industry coach, with the aim of building the technical weaving skills of two women's associations in Luganville and on the island of Malo in Sanma province.

In 2020, the weavers felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold. The majority of women lost their homes in the cyclone, the aftermath of which continues to affect them socially, mentally, and economically.

Immediately after the cyclone, the Partnership redesigned its workplan to ensure it was able to assist these female entrepreneurs in their recovery, and adapt to the evolving operating context. The industry coach continued to provide remote support to ensure the high momentum and levels of motivation of the women continued.

From a traditional practice to a formal company

In collaboration with core partners, the women were supported to establish a legal business, the Sanma Creative Industries Community Company (SCICC). This was the first community company to be registered in Sanma province. The company was legally registered under the Vanuatu Financial Services Commission in September 2020. Two senior-level positions, the Board of Directors Chairperson and Business Manager, are both held by women.

The company is owned by shareholders who are prominent, locally-based government institutions. These include DWA, DOI, the Office of the Registrar of Cooperatives and Business Development Service (ORCBDS), Luganville Municipal Council and the Sanma Provincial Government. With the support of the weavers, a Board of Directors and Business Manager run the company on a day to day basis.

The Partnership has supported the Board, Manager and weavers by facilitating a series of additional business development activities, including shareholder meetings, governance workshops, management and adaptive leadership training, and supply chain networking events.



First international hat export to a buyer in New Zealand

As a result of the market access brokering support provided by the Partnership's industry coach, SCICC formalised a deal to export 300 hats to Hills Hats, a company in New Zealand. The first shipment of 150 hats was exported in November 2020. The second shipment is planned for 2021.

A total of VUV 394,260 was paid to the company and subsequently paid into the 18 weavers' bank accounts. Each weaver received an average of 20,000VT for this first order.

The income from these sales was used to support the weavers and their families during the festive season, and to purchase materials to rebuild their homes which were damaged during TC Harold.

"This project really warms my heart, and I am so excited to start getting our bit underway."

Simon Smuts Kennedy, Owner
- Hills Hats, New Zealand

Being supported by the Vanuatu Skills Partnership to work with the women in headwear, I am now blessed with money, with knowing how to solve issues in the group, and leading women to enter the formal economy. I am being empowered!

Janet Sine, Manager SCICC

