

# AMBAE RECOVERY | BUILDING BACK LIVELIHOODS BETTER

Narrative Report: January - June 2022

## INTRODUCTION

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership (the Partnership) works in collaboration with Government of Vanuatu (GOV) to implement the Ambae Response & Recovery Project with a core focus on Building Back Livelihoods Better in line with the Vanuatu Government's Ambae and Affected Islands Recovery Plan 2019 – 2022.

The Ambae Response & Recovery Project (Ambae Recovery) is committed to supporting the implementation of the Government's National Recovery Strategy, Yumi Evriwan Tugeta – and the longer-term goals of the National Sustainable Development Plan 2030.

Ambae Recovery completed its annual plan of activities for the year ahead in discussions with partners in February 2022. However, following community transmission of COVID-19 in early March, the government implemented a country-wide lockdown including the closure of schools and training institutes. As a result, Ambae Recovery pivoted from its planned pipeline of activities and provided direct support to the government to assist with implementation of its emergency response plans under the Penama Emergency Operation Centre and activated its sector working groupings.

This report provides a summary of the key activities delivered and results achieved by the Ambae Recovery team during the first six months of 2022, which have taken place under emergency setting for the most part. Approximately 90% of Ambae's planned activities had to be postponed due to the emergency response, including the establishment of TVET in Ambaebulu School, a small livestock farmers program on poultry husbandry and management and additional workshops to support agribusiness clients to improve their access to markets on Ambae.

## CONTEXT

In early March 2022, the Vanuatu Ministry of Health COVID-19 Taskforce confirmed the first cases of community transmission of the virus in Vanuatu and announced a nationwide lockdown and restrictions on domestic travel. This caused major disruptions to the majority of activities planned by the Ambae Recovery team for the first half of 2022. However, the team was still able to progress a small number of planned activities with our provincial partners, including supporting the development of the National Handicraft Policy with the Penama Provincial Government, Department of Industry (DOI) and other provincial stakeholders, a cocoa production workshop with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and a sawmilling workshop with the Department of Forestry (DOF).

In response to requests from the government, most of the activities delivered in the first half of 2022 have contributed to the emergency response, including the provision of support to key sector working groups under the Penama Emergency Operation Centre.

## PARTNERSHIP STATUS & CO-CONTRIBUTIONS

While a partnership agreement with the Penama Provincial Government is yet to be formalized in 2022, Ambae Recovery is currently supported by the following partners:

- Penama Provincial Government Council (PPGC)
- Penama Provincial Education Office (PPEO)
- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)
- Department of Livestock (DoL)
- Department of Forestry (DoF)
- Department of Industry (DoI)
- Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA)

### Co-investment support to Penama Emergency COVID-19 response

Name of Activity	Partner Co-investment (VT)
Cocoa farming – DARD co-contribution	590,000
Saw milling workshop - Department of Forestry co-contribution	200,000
<b>Total Partner Co-contributions</b>	<b>790,000</b>

*“Vanuatu Skills Partnership has contributed a lot to support the DARD COVID 19 Response and has been a helpful partner during the pandemic crisis period. It has made it possible for DARD to achieve its objectives and goals within the 2022 business plan.” Andrew Butu – PAO Penama*

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

The Ambae Recovery team provided wide range of support to the emergency response by working with partners to build awareness and collective actions before and after the outbreak of COVID-19 in local communities in East Ambae, North Ambae and South Ambae.

Ambae Recovery was part of important discussions to develop contextualized standard operating procedures (SOPs) and to establish an area council and ward/community taskforce with local communities, including the identification and resourcing of suitable community isolation treatment centres. The Ambae Recovery team made important contributions to these efforts, including through the provision of vehicles and the printing of information regarding COVID-19 for distribution amongst local communities.

Support was also provided to the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) through the printing of key messages and the distribution of vegetable seedlings to households. For the Education Cluster, the team facilitated discussions on the home school package between parents and the education team and was also responsible for printing and distributing home school materials. Additionally, the Ambae Recovery team also participated in regular Provincial Technical Advisory Committee / Emergency Operation Centre meetings.



Figure 1. Distribution of seeds to local farms

- 1. Strong stakeholder collaboration and improved coordination from the provincial to the community level.** The announcement of the community outbreak of COVID-19 led to the activation of the Penama Provincial Emergency Operation Centre (PEOC). The PEOC's sector working groups mobilized their existing technical and human resourcing to coordinate response operations between provincial and national government, and from provincial to community levels. This provides a good example of strengthened coordination in planning and management across different levels of government, achieved through strengthening lines of communication and monitoring using existing provincial area/ward councils, and community governance structures. This led to the development of trusted and responsive information sharing channels for COVID-safe hygiene practices and prevention measures and an improved provincial health emergency response. This complemented non-health sector working group response efforts on food security, WASH, shelter, and gender protection, including the creation of port of entry screening, community isolation treatment centres and support for area council/ward COVID-19 taskforce operations.
- 2. Ambae Forestry Saw Milling Workshop to support improved livelihoods and post-disaster rebuilding.** With support from the Skills for Construction workstream, the Ambae Recovery team facilitated a five-day sawmill operator workshop with the Penama Forestry Department on Ambae with 28 participants (25 men, 3 women). The course provided skills training to local sawmill operators to produce timber locally, avoiding the need to transport timber from Santo and thereby reducing the cost of rebuilding homes on Ambae.
- 3. Ambae Recovery will continue to help the trainees establish a sawmillers' association to undertake further sawmill training,** thus opening a pathway from informal to formal skills training and improved opportunities for income generation. The Skills Centre is also negotiating with the Penama Forestry Department to set up a timber treatment facility for timber produced on Ambae. These skills development activities are in line with the corporate plan of the Department of Forestry.



Figure 2. Practical skills session on setting up of log and sawmill for safe operation

4. **Delivery of a cocoa workshop to support cocoa producers and strengthen their skills across the different aspects of the value chain** (production, bean fermentation, drying and chocolate processing). In collaboration with DARD in Penama, the Ambae Recovery team jointly coordinated the delivery of a three-day workshop on cocoa production and processing with 20 participants (17 men, 3 women) on Ambae Island.
  - The course provided skills to participants in improved cocoa husbandry and grafting practices for high yield production in the following areas:
    - revisiting plot setting up and maintenance
    - post-harvest bean fermentation
    - drying using solar dryer units
    - processing and packaging of chocolate products.
5. In liaison between Penama DARD and the Ambae Recovery team, key cocoa farmers have identified a cocoa seed bank demonstration plot site on East Ambae to establish in the next quarter. A total of 2,000 poly bags were also distributed to participants for cocoa replanting back in their communities.



Figure 3: Cocoa workshop participants visit solar drier



Figure 4: Cocoa workshop participants learn to make chocolate

6. **Ambae skilled plumbers were contracted by the Department of Water Resources to upgrade three community water systems.** The Department of Water Resources contracted three skilled plumbers through the Hexagon Plumbing Company to upgrade the gravity water system of Vusibulu Ward council, North Ambae. This water system's upgrade has helped to service more than three communities in North Ambae with an estimated population of 500 people. The Skills plumbers were trained by ACOMVETS and APTC with the support of Ambae Recovery funding.

## **ADDITIONAL RESULTS (CROSS CUTTING ISSUES):**

### **Better Balance**

Ambae Recovery team provided support to the Penama COVID-19 taskforce/emergency operations through participation in cluster meetings, planning, coordination, and implementation of emergency response activities. The Ambae Recovery team was able to ensure that gender protection priorities were mainstreamed across all clusters and that assistance was targeted to vulnerable people and their families.

### **Disability Inclusion**

With support from the Ambae Recovery Program through the Penama PEOC-Gender Protection and Food security clusters, 210 dignity and hygiene kits and 40 packets of seeds were distributed to people with disabilities in 6 Ward Councils on Ambae Island.

### **Climate Resilience**

The Sawmill Operation workshop on East Ambae has supported Penama Department of Forestry priorities with an emphasis on replanting of trees as part of their reforestation program.

## **CHALLENGES AND / OR LESSONS LEARNED**

- The lockdown and subsequent travel restrictions resulted in some of our planned activities being delayed, with the Ambae Recovery team unable to fly in trainers/coaches to deliver activities as planned.
- There is insufficient office space to accommodate the current additional staffing on Ambae and this need to be urgently addressed. The existing office space allocated by the Penama Provincial Government is also shared with Department of Youth & Sports, as well as the Penama Officer, and is only big enough to accommodate workstations for two members of the Ambae Recovery team. As there are three team members, it is challenging to rotate sharing of the office space (desk and docket stations); other staff are required to use the tree sheds outside or other MALFB offices to do their day-to-day work.
- There is a need to actively engage the Provincial teams (VSP provincial team, Provincial SGs and relevant Government line agency managers) and ensure they are thoroughly briefed on the signed "Partnership Implementation Agreement Framework" and how it relates to each partner in terms of priority areas, duties (including who will be engaged in joint implementation of activities) and resourcing (co-funding and in-kind contributions).

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS TO DATE 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, considering the joint plans agreed upon with our provincial government sector partners in February 2022, the progress we have made so far this year has been less than expected. Several of our planned activities could not be delivered because of restrictions on travel and gatherings due to community transmissions of COVID-19.

Despite the challenges, the Ambae Recovery team has continued to pivot its focus towards new emerging government sector priorities in response to the COVID-19 emergency. Including in education, food security and gender protection, while also rebuilding back better livelihoods through supporting cocoa production and value addition and assisting local communities to rebuild their homes using locally milled timbers from Ambae.

With restrictions on travel lifted in the second half of 2022, the Partnership will be working hard to progress several of the activities that were delayed earlier in the year. Despite the slow start, we are confident that we will still be able to deliver most of our planned activities by the end of 2022.

### FORWARD PLANNING: JULY – DECEMBER 2022

- Set up and strengthen good governance of Handicraft associations supported through the Department of Cooperatives and Department of Industry
- Negotiate more office space with key provincial government partners to accommodate existing Ambae Recovery staff.
- Collaborate with ACOMVETS and TED to set up the Ambaebulu TVET in School ready for delivery in 2023.
- Support Farm to School initiatives (Ambaebulu School and Apco Memorial College), including through the training of chief cooks and set-up of school kitchens.
- Work with the education office to support health promotion initiatives in schools.
- Support completion of the plumbing training conducted by ACOMVETS.
- Strengthen continued collaboration with Penama Tourism office to support accommodation providers and Grand Manaro Trek initiative as an Agri–Tourism destination in 2022.
- Work with the Department of Forestry to establish a treatment shed for local timber producers and support the department replanting program implementation on Ambae.
- Collaboratively work with Penama DARD to support cocoa farmers/Producer Cooperative Societies in proper processing and packaging of cocoa chocolate and identify key domestic niche markets in Santo and Vila. This includes setting up a cocoa seed bank in East Ambae and to provide support for cocoa farmers for a replanting program and value addition activities.