

Strengthening decentralised service delivery through the establishment of the Penama Skills Centre

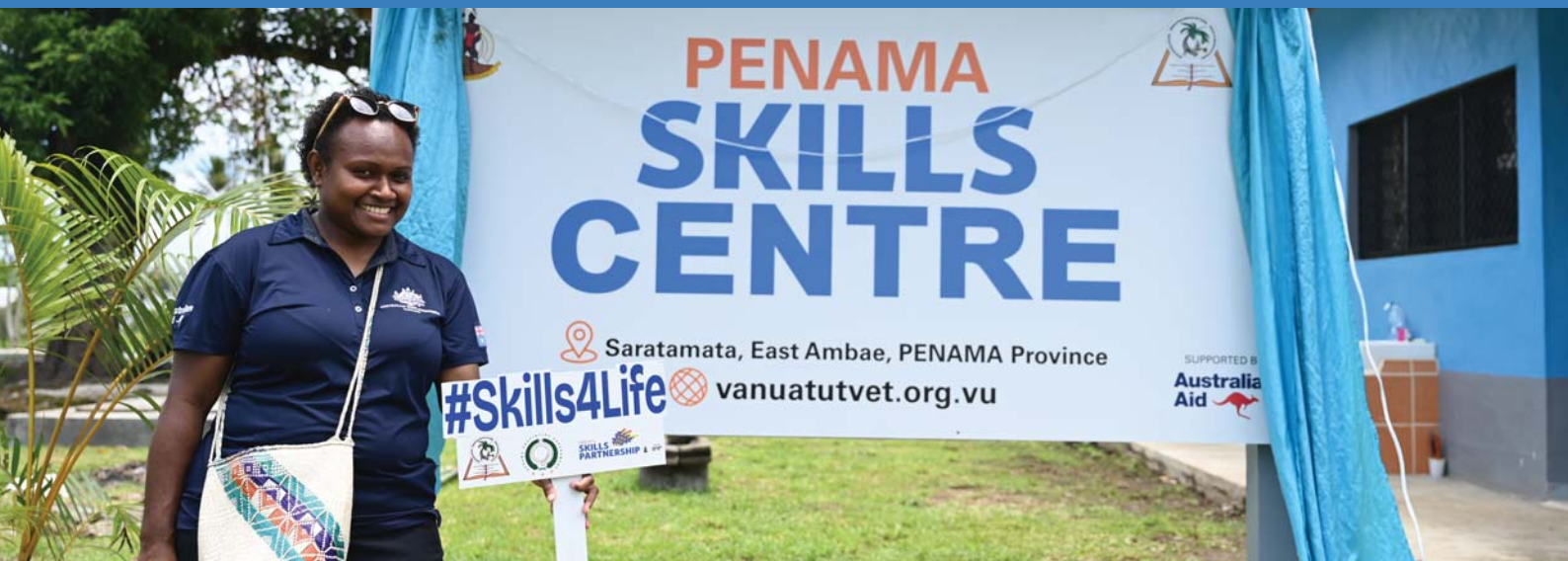


Image 1: The Australian High Commission Vanuatu's Program Manager – Skills and Scholarship, Gina Dehivanua, at the opening of the Penama Skills Centre on 31 October 2024.

A key challenge for effective local-level service delivery in Vanuatu has been the difficulties faced by the government in reaching communities in rural and remote locations. This challenge reflects the physical and resource constraints for service provision to geographically dispersed communities across Vanuatu's six provinces.

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership (the Partnership), a co-investment between the governments of Vanuatu and Australia, is a nationwide initiative that works to address this challenge by improving human resource development for service delivery across Vanuatu. Since 2005, the Partnership has focused on improving access to skills and markets that lead to economic prosperity for ni-Vanuatu. It has specifically targeted provincial and outer island communities through strategies that prioritise the inclusion of women, people with disabilities and people with low language, literacy and numeracy skills. Prior to the Partnership, access to formal skills training was limited to urban centres and through institutionally-based courses.

Beginning in Sanma in 2009, followed by Malampa (2010), Torba (2014) and Tafea (2016), the Partnership has established a network of provincial Skills Centres that function as a 'broker' of both accredited and non-formal skills training and business development services in the provinces. The Skills Centres connect local training providers and industry coaches with individuals and small businesses across key sectors such as construction, agribusiness, creative industries, and tourism, facilitating skills training and market access and employment opportunities for people in rural and remote communities.

Based on their success and through the advocacy of the Partnership, the Skills Centres have since been absorbed into the formal structure of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). They now function as the MoET's decentralised service delivery arms in the provinces for vocational skills, with Centre staff salaries progressively being transitioned under the Public Service Commission. The development of an effective, nationally integrated, decentralised skills

system in Vanuatu serves as a practical example of decentralisation that other parts of the government could learn from and potentially adopt.

In 2019, the Partnership began working in Penama province for the first time, through the Ambae Recovery Office in partnership with the Penama Provincial Government. The Recovery Office was created as a flexible response to the devastating impacts of Manaro volcano eruption, which forced the full evacuation of Ambae island. The Recovery Office coordinated recovery efforts, supported the return and resettlement of displaced communities, and facilitated skills training and small business support – all resulting in improved livelihoods, higher incomes and strengthened resilience to future disasters.

When VSP established the Recovery Project in 2019 after the volcano mass evacuation, we saw a big impact from their work and how it assisted the people of Ambae to rebuild back their lives...’.

Penama Provincial Government President, Hon. Hilson Boe, at the official opening of the new Penama Skills Centre.



Image 2: Dignitaries at the opening of the Penama Skills Centre on 31 October 2024.

Building on the work undertaken by the Ambae Recovery Office, the establishment of a Penama Skills Centre was proposed, in line with the revised MoET organisational structure. Like the other provincial Skills Centres, the Penama Skills Centre would have the remit to facilitate skills development and training across all three islands of Penama. The idea was endorsed in 2023 by the Penama Provincial Government Council (PPGC), which recognised the value the Penama Skills Centre would bring to the people of Penama through access to skills and strengthened service delivery. The PPGC made a significant contribution to the building renovations and also agreed to provide the office space ‘rent free’. This

was the trigger for agreement to the establishment of the new Skills Centre, as the approach of the Partnership is to invest only where there is tangible government partner co-investment. Construction of the new office building began in late 2023.

Located in Saratamata, Ambae, the Penama Skills Centre was officially opened on 31 October 2024 by the Penama Provincial Government and the MoET. Key government dignitaries attended the opening including the Penama Provincial Government President, the Minister of Education and Training, the Minister of Health, and Australia’s High Commissioner to Vanuatu.



Image 3: Fr. Henry Butu dedicating the new Penama Skills Centre

“My Council and the administration are proud to show our commitment to this vision by offering the building and space that we are opening today to fulfil the Vanuatu Government’s vision to decentralise services and skills training and bring the government closer to all people.”

Penama Provincial Government President, Hon. Hilson Boe, at the official opening of the new Penama Skills Centre.

The opening of the Penama Skills Centre is a major achievement for the Partnership and another important contribution to decentralisation and service delivery reform in Vanuatu, paving the way for the Partnership to work holistically across the province rather than focusing solely on Ambae for post-emergency recovery. With Skills Centres now operating in five of Vanuatu’s six provinces, discussions are underway between the Partnership, Shefa Provincial Government and MoET about establishing the final Skills Centre in Shefa province.