

Empowering Communities: Flexible Skills Training Delivering Results for Local Trade Entrepreneurs



Figure 1: Provincial partners, VIT staff and Certificate I in Automotive Engineering (Small Engine Servicing) at the graduation ceremony on Tanna in 2023.

What we did:

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership (the Partnership), through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)'s Provincial Skills Centres continues to transform lives of people in provincial Vanuatu through flexible and responsive skills training. By aligning training with local needs and industry demand, the Skills Centres are helping to equip ni-Vanuatu entrepreneurs with practical skills that enhance their employment prospects, increase business growth, and foster resilience in their communities. This story of change highlights outcomes for recent graduates of accredited training in the trade sector from Sanma, Malama, Penama and Tafea.¹

What we found:

Entrepreneurship and employment outcomes

The tracer survey found that training facilitated by the Provincial Skills Centres, in partnership with training providers, is significantly improving employment outcomes for graduates. Before the training, 63% of respondents (52 individuals) were employed. Following the training, this figure increased to 89% (74 individuals), **marking a 42% increase**. The number of respondents working voluntarily dropped from 7% prior to training to 2% after training completion as more trainees found paid work. In addition, graduates secured more work, with 55% working full-time after training compared to 48% before.

¹ Through 'storian' (face-to-face discussions), the Partnership conducted a graduate tracer survey from September to November in 2024. There were 82 respondents (9 women and 73 men including four men with disabilities) representing 56% of all trainees who completed one of six accredited training courses in the trades sector facilitated by the MoET Provincial Skills Centres in 2022 and 2023. These included Certificate I in Automotive Engineering (Small Engine Servicing), Certificate II in Building and Construction and Certificate II in Plumbing.

Many graduates have now established small businesses or collectives and associations, leveraging their skills to create income opportunities and contribute to their communities.

Examples include: Nok Construction and MCJB Plumbing Services in Santo and M.N.C.S in Malekula. The Skills Centres have played an important role in supporting the incubation of these businesses and associations through the provision of good governance skills training, business registration support and brokering pathways to work experience and attending further study with the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC).

All four trainees with disabilities reported being employed after completing the training, compared to only two beforehand. Of the 73 male trainees, 70 (96%) were employed after the training compared to only 48 prior. However, among the nine women trainees, the number of employed graduates remained the same post training, though two have now secured full-time roles rather than part time roles. Of the women who were not employed post training, the majority cited 'family' or 'personal reasons' for not working. The outcome indicates that there is more work to be done by the Skills Centres to support female graduates to access employment opportunities post training and to continue to work 'within the grain' of social norms to advocate for women in non-traditional trade sectors.

The story of NOK Construction

A group of trainees who completed the Certificate II in Building and Construction in 2023 in Northwest Santo (four women, 22 men including two men with disabilities) have since established their own company, 'Nok Construction', to provide quality construction services to the people of Santo.

After facilitating the training, the Sanma Skills Centre supported the company to gain formal business registration through the Vanuatu Financial Service Commission and the contracted company to construct the new Area Council building in West Santo in 2024. To further assist the graduates to refine their skills, the Skills Centre supported several members of the company to access higher-level skills training in Port Vila, including a short course on tiling and a Certificate III in Carpentry delivered by APTC.

Nok Construction has now completed several contracts in Luganville in addition to working with communities in remote Northern Santo to construct a new church and a school classroom.

The company also regularly meets small requests from community members like bread ovens, and concrete slabs for private houses.



Figure 2 Nok Construction's new uniform and business motto 'we build your dream'.

James Niko – Building an inclusive future in Tanna

In Tanna, builder James Niko, who is deaf, has worked hard to give back to his community since completing a Certificate II in Building and Construction training through the Tafea Skills Centre in 2022. In 2023 James was engaged by the Skills Centre to construct a number of houses and shelter for community members with disabilities in the wake of twin Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin. Upon completing this work, in partnership with fellow graduate, Johnson Natuman, James then constructed a new café building at local NGO, Nasi Tuan, near Whitesands, Tanna.

James is thankful for the skills and knowledge gained through the Certificate II and their practical application in his day-to-day work: *“I can now use a calculator and use my mobile phone to draw house plans”*.



Figure 3: Nasi Tuan Café built by James Niko with fellow graduate, Johnson Natuman

Skills application

Graduates reported using new skills and knowledge to transform their communities both in and outside of work. 94% percent of respondents said they ‘always’ or ‘often’ use the skills learned through training in their work, while 80% said they ‘always’ or ‘often’ use these skills outside of work, benefiting their families and communities.

- Automotive graduates are repairing chainsaws, generators, boat engines and grass cutters
- Construction graduates have built or restored community infrastructure, such as churches, aid posts, a café and private homes.
- Plumbing graduates have upgraded community water systems, fixed leaks, and prepared quotations for repairs.

Graduates from all trainings noted that they have intentionally tried to pass on skills and knowledge to their families and other community members, demonstrating the powerful flow-on impact of skills training.

Education pathways

The provincial Skills Centres are creating pathways for graduates by facilitating links to higher-level training delivered by APTC. In 2024, 18 graduates (3 women and 15 men) in Certificate I and II in Building and Construction delivered through the Skills Centres successfully graduated with Certificate III in Carpentry from APTC. In addition, six trainees from Sanma completed a resilient roofing short course delivered in Santo by APTC and one male trainee with a disability on Malekula has now gone on to complete a Certificate II in Plumbing through the Pacific Vocational Training Centre.

Training quality

The Partnership’s commitment to fostering high-quality training is evident from graduate feedback: 77% percent of respondents were ‘very satisfied’ with the training, while 23% were ‘satisfied’. In addition, graduates noted improved foundational skills because of attending the training. **Over 95% of respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that the training improved their motivation, punctuality, reliability, and self-confidence.** Half of the respondents said the training improved their understanding of gender equality, and 47% believed it enhanced their understanding of disability inclusion. 19% of respondents stated that the training has improved their understanding of climate resilience.

Mary's story – the pathway to becoming Tanna's first female construction trainer

After completing her Certificate II in Building and Construction qualification through the Tafea Skills Centre in 2022, Mary Iaulia started a small company with two other Tanna-based female trainees. In 2023, again through the support of the Skills Centre, Mary successfully applied for further studies at APTC in Port Vila where she completed a Certificate III in Carpentry. During this time, she was identified by trainers from VIT as a potential future construction trainer. Mary was then invited to attend on-site professional development with VIT in 2024. VIT is now in the process of affiliating Mary as a trainer so that she can deliver training on behalf of VIT in Tafea province in the future.

What next?

During the *storians*, respondents suggested areas for improvement to help strengthen the delivery of similar trainings in the future. These included offering longer practical sessions and ensuring materials are on-site before training begins. Trainees from Tanna noted how beneficial it was having a trainer/assistant trainer who could also explain technical concepts in local language as well as Bislama and English.

Several lessons were also highlighted regarding support for female trainees. This included the need for more meetings with community leaders and the families of trainees. Explaining the requirements of practical activities during consultations and participant identification, as well as the reasonable accommodations that are available for women trainees, could help to increase participation rates of women in the first instance. The introduction of female 'trade pathways' coaches or champions from the industry could assist female graduates access employment opportunities post training. Opportunities to bring climate resilience to the forefront were also noted.



Figure 4: Construction trainee, Patricia Iautu, working on the Tafea Creative Industry and Market Hub in November 2022.

Tankyu tumas long olgeta graduates we oli bin sarem ol stori mo testimoni blo olgeta wetem mifala.