



SKILLS FOR AGRIBUSINESS

6-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

Image 1: the Vanuatu Skills Partnership (the Partnership) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) signing a new Partnership Implementation Framework on 14 August 2024



July - December 2024

INTRODUCTION

- This report highlights progress made by the Skills for Agribusiness (SfA) workstream in the second half of 2024.
- SfA continued to work in collaboration with the provincial Skills Centres, the national and provincial DARD and the Office of the Registrar of Cooperatives and Business Development Services (ORCBDS) to progress joint priorities.
- Our priorities for the second half of the year included:

Vanilla

- Curing workshops for Isla Farmers on Tanna and Port Patrick farmers on Aneityum.
- Construction of the new vanilla building in Port Patrick, Aneityum.
- Strengthening access to markets for farmers from Tanna and Aneityum.

Pepper

- Facilitating workshops focused on improving quality for pepper farmers in Malekula and Ambrym.
- Supporting pepper farmers on Malo to market their products and improve sales.



Image 2: New packaging and labelling from pepper produced by farmers on Malo

INTRODUCTION



Image 3: Mike Jimmy, DARD officer from Aneityum, facilitating a curing workshop for vanilla farmers on Tanna

Seed Bank Development

- Facilitating additional workshops for seed farmers from Malekula.

Beekeeping development

- Continuing coaching support to honey producers in Santo in addition to governance support for their associations.

‘Farm to...’ (market access)

- Facilitating a partner meeting for the Farm to Hospital initiative at Northern Provincial Hospital in Santo.
- Facilitating partner meetings for Farm to School initiatives at Whitesands Bilingual School (Tanna), Baldwin Lonsdale Memorial School (Sola) and Ambaebulu Junior Secondary School (Ambae).
- Facilitating skills training for school chefs and handover of new kitchen equipment for schools in Penama that are implementing F2S initiatives.

Small livestock

- Exploring options to support professional development for staff from the Department of Livestock (DoL).

CONTEXT

The delivery of SfA's planned activities in the second half of 2024 was influenced by several external factors, including:

Political Instability and Government Budget Constraints:

- Vanuatu's ongoing political instability has created an uncertain environment, affecting the timely implementation of government programs and initiatives. Government-imposed travel restrictions on public servants hindered the provision of support and collaboration with partners. For example, because of budget constraints and restrictions on travel, a spices specialist from DARD was unable to attend a vanilla workshop delivered on Epi as planned.

Inflation:

- The rising cost of goods and services, including airfares, shipping, and land transportation, has increased the overall cost of activity implementation. This inflationary pressure has forced us and our partners to make difficult decisions regarding resource allocation and activity prioritisation.

Limited Coach Availability:

- A limited number of coaches, coupled with a wide geographical coverage area, has posed challenges in delivering our activities as planned. For example, a workshop planned with bee farmers in West Coast Santo was postponed due to the unavailability of the coach.



Image 4: A DARD officer grades and weighs cured vanilla beans for Port Patrick farmers. The Partnership provided support to vanilla farmers on both Tanna and Aneityum in 2024.

PARTNERSHIP STATUS AND CO-CONTRIBUTIONS

- The Partnership has an overarching agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB) and has a healthy and longstanding relationship with the DARD.
- A new Partnership Implementation Framework (PIF) was signed between the Partnership and DARD on 14 August 2024, which extends through until 31 December 2025. Under this agreement, DARD has agreed to contribute VUV 7,500,000 for initiatives such as human resource development and the National Seed Bank skills development program. Funds are expected to be received in March 2025.
- In June 2023, the Partnership formalised a PIF with the DoL for the first time, which included a commitment of VUV 7,500,000 from DoL towards joint priorities. However, no funds were received from DoL, and no activities were delivered due to competing priorities and a shortage of available human resources.

PARTNER	AMOUNT COMMITTED FOR 2024-2025 (VUV)	AMOUNT RECEIVED BY 31 DEC 2024 (VUV)	EXPENDITURE IN 2024
DARD	7,500,000	4,500,000	4,500,000

QUANTITATIVE DATA (JUL-DEC 2024)

SKILLS PROVIDERS ENGAGED	PARTICIPATION IN PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTED SKILLS TRAINING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Six individual skills providers:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ all men	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 254 participants including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 82 women▪ 172 men▪ Five people with disabilities (four women and one man)

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Supporting growth of the vanilla sector in Tanna, Aneityum and Epi

Tanna and Aneityum

- The Partnership has been providing support to vanilla farmers on Aneityum and Tanna for several years, with a particular focus on quality (such as delivery of workshops on pruning and curing) and supporting the establishment of new farmer associations.
- In collaboration with Tafea DARD and local non-government organisation (NGO) Nasituan, the Partnership supported the delivery of a curing workshop for 26 members (20 men and six women) of the Isla Vanilla Farming Association on Tanna. The workshop introduced advanced curing techniques to improve bean quality to meet market standards.
- Following the workshop, farmers constructed solar drying tables which is expected to drive improvements in quality of vanilla beans produced in the future.

Epi

- In collaboration with DARD, the Partnership successfully conducted an introductory vanilla farming and processing workshop for 30 participants (24 men and six women), in South Epi.
- Two follow-up visits are scheduled for 2025 to further enhance participants' skills and address emerging needs.



Image 5: SfA coach, Mike Jimmy, demonstrating how to pollinate vanilla flowers to vanilla farmers on South Epi

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Improved quality of vanilla production on Tanna and Aneityum

- In November, 32 farmers (19 male and 13 female) in Aneityum and 20 farmers (18 male and two female) on Tanna participated in a vanilla grading and weighing activity. The grading and weighing of the vanilla was conducted by Mr. George Lava, Agriculture Development Officer (DARD) for West Tanna, and Mr. Mike Jimmy, Agriculture Development Officer (DARD) for Aneityum.
- It was the first time the exercise had been completed since late 2022, given that the 2023 crop was destroyed by TC Judy and TC Kevin.
- Results from the vanilla grading and weighing for 2024 were as follows:

ANEITYUM	TANNA
Grade A: 91.11kg	Grade A: 33.0kg
Grade B: 50.89kg	Grades B & C: 82.43kg
Grade C: 27.63kg	
Total: 169.63kg	Total: 115.43kg

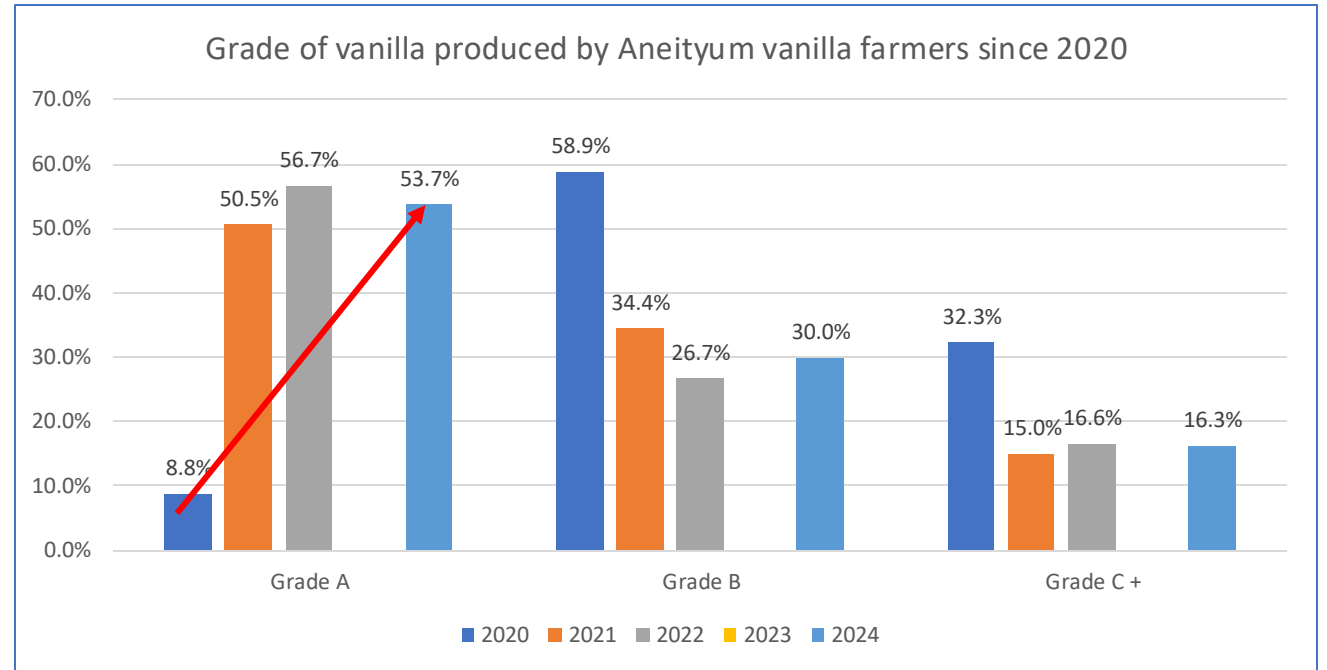


Image 6: Mr. Rexford, a new vanilla farmer, successfully cured 60kg of high-quality vanilla this year in Aneityum, Port Patrick

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Improved quality of vanilla production in Tanna and Aneityum (continued)

- For vanilla farmers from Aneityum, while the total volume of production was well below 2022 levels (169.6 kg in 2024 compared to 314 kg in 2022), the overall quality was comparable to previous years, with 53.7% of the crop considered to be 'Grade A' compared to 56.7% in 2022.
- For vanilla farmers from Tanna, the results show an improvement in quality compared to previous years. In 2022, almost all vanilla produced on Tanna was 'Grade C', whereas the results for 2024 show that 28.5% of the crop was 'Grade A'.
- The Partnership has been leading the design and delivery of a new Vanilla Building in Port Patrick, with construction commencing in October. The building is a critical piece of infrastructure needed to support the continued growth of the vanilla sector in Aneityum. Once completed, it will provide vanilla farmers with a facility to cure and securely store their beans, ensuring their quality is maintained prior to grading and maximizing sales at the highest possible prices.



KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Supporting growth of the pepper sector in Malo, Ambrym, and Malekula

Malo

- In October 2024, six members of two new pepper associations recently established on Malo (all men) were invited to the Sanma Skills Centre for a 5-day coaching activity focused on packaging, labelling and marketing pepper. The coaching was delivered by Partnership coach, Patick Joe, and continues the support provided to Malo pepper farmers since April 2024.
- During the activity, pepper producers finalized the labelling of their products to prepare them for sale and contributed to the development of a brochure describing the health benefits of pepper which was then distributed to food stalls and restaurants around Luganville.
- As a result of the labelling activities and brochure distributions, Malo pepper farmers sold approximately VUV 60,000 worth of stock in November and December.
- The Partnership then facilitated a visit to local communities on Malo to confirm the number of people involved in pepper farming to assist with plans for further support in 2025. During the visit, the lack of proper storage and processing facilities for pepper was identified as a key issue that needs to be resolved in order for pepper producers to continue expanding their enterprise.



Image 7: Pepper farmers from Malo busy packaging and labelling their pepper products



Image 8: A pepper farmer from Nanuku, Malo, who has received support from the Partnership

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Supporting growth of the pepper sector in Malo, Ambrym, and Malekula (cont.)

Ambrym

- Three years after an initial pepper workshop in North Ambrym, a follow up 12-day coaching and workshop activity was held with 34 farmers (five women and 29 men) in partnership with DARD. Pepper coach, Mr. Joe, had recommended a three year wait between visits to ensure that the pepper plants had reached maturity prior to commencing monitoring and pruning activities.
- During the workshop, participants learnt about applying natural fertilizers to their pepper plants, methods of pest control, how to identify different soil types, and critically, techniques for effective pruning. Basic pruning tools and equipment were shared with the farmers to improve the quality of their production.
- The Ambrym-based DARD officer will now take the lead in working closely with the pepper farmers with their pruning activities and will provide more updates on the farmers pepper plantation prior to the next follow up, planned for Quarter 4, 2025.



Image 9: A pepper farmer from North Ambrym showing his pepper plants

Malekula

- A coaching workshop was also held for 19 farmers (11 men, including one man with a disability, and eight women) in Lavalsal, Atchin Area in Malekula. The workshop helped farmers see the importance of improving their farming systems and is part of the broader vision to strengthen the pepper sector to meet Malampa DARD targets and contribute to NSDP.

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Sustainable and resilient farming in Torba Province

Merelava

- In collaboration with DoL and DARD, and with support from Merelava Area Council, the Partnership conducted a follow-up visit to Merelava to provide support to small livestock farmers. This included providing materials and technical knowledge on farming practices, building on support previously provided in March and June this year.
- A key focus of the visit was to support 26 small livestock farmers (particularly poultry and piggery farmers) - 12 women, and 14 men to build secure pens and strengthen their management practices. This will help ensure a reliable supply of protein for their families, create additional income-generating opportunities, and reduce the reliance of the local community on processed foods.
- During the visit, a total of ten poultry pens and seven pig pens were constructed. Contributions for the materials were received from partners including the DoL in Sola, which supplied fencing for the pig pens, chicken wire and four bags of grower pellets for chicks, and DARD, which also provided feed.
- The support provided to farmers was inclusive of people with disabilities. For example, a farmer with a disability from Big Stone village has been supported to plant over 300 yams, as well as other root crops such as cassava and sweet potatoes.



Image 10: A proud pig farmer from Aota village, Merelava showing his fully fenced pig pen

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Sustainable and resilient farming in Torba Province (continued)

East Vanualava

- Since early 2023, the Partnership has been coaching local farmers in East Vanualava in the use of alley cropping techniques, where farmers grow multiple crops on the same plot of land and improve yields.
- In August, the Partnership organised for local coach, Charley Aswel, to conduct a follow-up visit with these farmers in Ambek, Tivitwot, Tanmat and Queso. The visit allowed the coach to discuss with the farmers the impact that alley cropping techniques are having on their harvests, and to review the outcomes of other support provided, such as the establishment of new poultry farms.
- Following the visit, the coach reflected that farmers had improved the way they were implementing alley cropping techniques and that they were very happy with the results, including higher quality produce and higher yields. The coach identified several farmers that had benefited from higher production from their land, such as Patricia, who had been able to purchase a 500L water tank with the additional income she had earned from sales of her produce in the market .



Images 11 and 12: The results of alley cropping in East Vanualava

Image 13 (right): Louis Aton, a successful poultry farmer from Queso. She has a flock of over 300 hens that have started producing eggs, which she sells to generate income



KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Consultations for new Farm to School (F2S) initiatives in Penama

- The Partnership supported two senior officers from the ORCBDS in Penama to facilitate consultations with five schools and their local communities on Maewo and Pentecost which are currently implementing, or would like to start, a F2S initiative at their school.
- For those schools already implementing F2S, the consultations were an opportunity to understand how the initiative is working and to provide guidance on the establishment of the school cooperative. The Penama Provincial Education Officer (PEO) has requested a school cooperative be established for all F2S initiatives in Penama and be responsible for coordinating the purchase of fresh food on behalf of the school from local farmers. Part of the mission involved agreeing the governance arrangements for these new cooperatives.
- For schools interested in establishing a new F2S initiative, the consultations were an opportunity to learn about the fresh food being produced by farmers in the local area, as well as to discuss the school's requirements and to provide guidance on the next steps for introducing F2S, including the establishment of the school cooperative.
- The Partnership's support for these new F2S initiatives in Penama builds on our long-term support for F2S at Ambaebulu Junior Secondary School and our excellent relationship with Penama PEO, who is keen for our continued support for F2S to be implemented in all schools across Penama.



Image 14: School principals, teachers and farmers who attended the Farm to School consultation at Gambule Junior Secondary School

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Partners meeting to take Market Systems Development (MSD) action plans forward

- In October, the Partnership and Asper Consulting convened a meeting with key government partners to discuss the action plans developed for vanilla, pepper and pandanus that were finalised in April 2024. This included discussing and agreeing the roles and responsibilities of government agencies, the Partnership and Asper Consulting in delivering the action plans.
- Key focal points from implementing partners including DARD, Forestry, Department of Industry and Bureau of Standards at both the national and provincial levels were identified to take the action plans forward.
- The meeting was an opportunity for partners to review the budget breakdown for the activities in the action plans and ensure that they have allocated sufficient budget to implement these activities in 2025.
- Now that initial consultations are complete and action plans have been developed, the SfA team has handed over lead responsibility for pandanus to the Partnership's Skills for Creative Industries (SfCI) workstream and the Environmental Sustainability officer given the direct link to their sector. The SfA team will oversee the implementation of action plans for vanilla and pepper.



Image 15 & 16: Participants discussing the MSD action plans for vanilla, pepper and pandanus



LESSONS LEARNED AND ACTIONS

Lesson 1: Partners on the ground are often unaware of upcoming activities, leading to coordination difficulties and delays.

Action:

It is critical there is proper coordination with partners prior to and during the delivery of activities. The Partnership will consider opportunities to formalize 'ways of working' agreements with partners prior to implementation, so that roles, responsibilities and respective contributions are clear.

Lesson 2: We have identified several examples where we could be better at following up with our clients following the delivery of our activities. This would maximize the benefits from the investment and ensure our limited time and resources are being used efficiently and productively.

Action:

We will aim to implement a follow-up with our clients as a standard practice within three months of delivering each activity. This will allow for timely monitoring, evaluation, and necessary adjustments to ensure sustainability and maximise the impact of our work.

Lesson 3: Farmers across all five provinces continue to report challenges in accessing markets for their products, particularly pepper and vanilla. This constraint is discouraging farmers from investing in these crops.

Action:

The Partnership will strengthen market access for farmers as a priority in 2025. By identifying and securing reliable market channels, we can play a crucial role in ensuring that farmers receive fair prices for their produce and are incentivized to expand their production.

ANNUAL QUANTITATIVE DATA (JAN-DEC 2024)

SKILLS PROVIDERS ENGAGED	PARTICIPATION IN PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTED SKILLS TRAINING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Six individual skills providers<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ all men	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 335 participants<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 125 women▪ 210 men▪ 20 people with disabilities (including 13 women and seven men) representing 6% of all participants

SKILLS FOR AGRIBUSINESS WORK PLAN SUMMARY FOR 2024

WORK PLAN PRIORITY AREAS &/OR GREEN SHOOTS	END OF YEAR STATUS UPDATE (no progress, limited progress, adequate progress, good progress, excellent progress)	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vanilla Development 	Good progress	Vanilla farmers in Tanna and Aneityum produced a high proportion of Grade A vanilla beans, though further improvements are possible. The new vanilla storage house at Port Patrick is currently under construction.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pepper Development 	Adequate progress	Our clients in Malo, and Malekula Northwest A & B are producing pepper and have their own packaging and labels. Further improvements in the production process are needed to ensure market standards are met.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable and resilient farming 	Good progress	Farmers in East Vanualava and Merelava who are implementing alley cropping techniques have achieved good results this year, with the quality and volume of production of fruits and vegetables both reported to have increased.

SKILLS FOR AGRIBUSINESS WORK PLAN SUMMARY FOR 2024

WORK PLAN PRIORITY AREAS &/OR GREEN SHOOTS	END OF YEAR STATUS UPDATE (no progress, limited progress, adequate progress, good progress, excellent progress)	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honey/Bee Development 	No Progress	A planned workshop with beekeepers in North West Santo was postponed due to the unavailability of the coach. DoL is undertaking analysis on the current situation for honey producers, which will inform our potential support in 2025.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Farm to” Initiatives 	Adequate progress	The Partnership supported the expansion of F2S initiatives in Penama, and delivered a very successful community event at Ambaebulu Junior Secondary School to promote F2S. However, partner meetings for F2S initiatives at Whitesands (Tanna) and Balwyn Lonsdale Memorial School (BLMS) (Sola) were postponed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seed Bank Development 	No progress	Planned activities were not implemented due to competing priorities at the Skills Centres.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small Livestock – Skill Gap Assessment 	No progress	Due to a lack of available human resources at DoL, this activity was postponed to 2025.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS IN 2024



- Most of our planned activities for 2023 were successfully completed, and we also implemented additional activities in response to emerging opportunities, such as the Vanilla Pollination and Curing Workshop at South Epi. We achieved results across various areas of our work program, including Vanilla Development, Pepper Development, and Pandanus Development that align with the MSD work plan. These outcomes are in alignment with the Partnership's partnership-wide objectives (Program Logic).

2025 PRIORITIES

Vanilla

- Coaching on husbandry/refresher workshop on quality, curing, and responding to market access challenges for Tanna, Aneityum and Epi farmers.
- Organise with suppliers for vanilla curing tool kits to be accessible and affordable for vanilla farmers in Epi, Tanna and Aneityum.
- Completion of vanilla storage house in Aneityum.
- FLE activities for farmers – Aneityum and Tanna.

Pepper

- Coaching for pepper farmers in Malo and Ambrym.
- Awareness/promotion/certification/marketing of pepper for local consumption in Malo and Malekula.

Seed Bank Development

- Refresher workshops for seed farmers in Malekula.
- Facilitation of workshop for Executive members of seed (Malekula) and pepper farmer associations with a focus on governance and financial literacy.

'Farm to...' (market access)

- Partner meeting for the Farm to Hospital initiative at Northern Provincial Hospital in Santo.
- Partner meetings for Farm to School initiatives at Whitesands Bilingual School (Tanna), BLMS (Sola) and Ambaebulu Junior Secondary School (Ambae), plus support for new initiatives in Maewo and Pentecost
- Skills support for chefs and handover of new equipment for schools in Penama implementing F2S.
- Establish farmer associations in local communities in Torba.
- Training for kitchen staff including at BLMS, Ambaebulu and Whitesands.
- Finalise the F2S guidebook for Penama PEO.

2025 PRIORITIES

Beekeeping

- Consultation workshop with beekeepers from Luganville, West coast and North-West Santo.
- Workshops and coaching activities for bee farmers in West Santo.
- Governance and financial literacy workshop for bee farmers in West Santo and Luganville.

Market System Development *(in addition to priorities already flagged for vanilla and pepper)*

- Develop Monitoring and Evaluation framework with Asper Consulting.
- Follow up and coordinate implementation of action plans with provincial skill centres and provincial productive sector departments.

Small livestock

- Explore options to support professional development for DoL staff.

Fisheries

- Support the opening of new fish markets in Merelava and Gaua.
- Governance setup/training/workshop/coaching visit of fish markets. Interns from the Vanuatu Institute of Technology to be engaged to support management.

Tractor Training

- Facilitate tractor driving training for DARD staff.

KEY RISKS TO CONSIDER FOR 2025

RISKS	MITIGATION STRATEGIES
<p>We spread ourselves too thinly (i.e we try to deliver too many activities in too many locations) and our potential impact is diluted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure we focus on going deeper with our existing clients and carefully consider the implications of adding new clients and/or working in new locations. ▪ Ensure a follow-up is arranged with our clients within three months of a skills activity being completed.
<p>Limited availability of coaches.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify additional local coaches so there are no delays and activities can be delivered as planned. ▪ Hold regular meetings with coaches to plan well ahead so they are available to implement planned activities.
<p>We are reliant on our colleagues in the provincial Skills Centres to provide support for SfA priorities while they are also supporting the delivery of priorities across the Partnership's other workstreams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure regular communication with Skills Centre staff to ensure activities are implemented as planned. ▪ Be proactive in engaging with provincial government partners to share the load.