



# SKILLS FOR TOURISM

## 6-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

*Image 1: Industry expert, Knox Taleo, coaching participants during a Hospitality Workshop in Santo.*

## INTRODUCTION

- The information provided in this progress report is an update on the Skills for Tourism (SfT) workstream activities that have been implemented over the six-month period from January to June 2025. Initial planning and implementation was undertaken in collaboration with the Department of Tourism (DoT), the Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO), provincial industry partners, and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) provincial Skills Centres.
- The key objective of the workstream is to continue to strengthen the capacity of the tourism sector to meet quality standards and increase business growth for local tourism operators.
- The first half of the year's priorities were focused on:
  - **Tourism Human Resource Development:** To improve the quality and relevance of skills and training for tourism business staff, ensuring they meet industry needs.
  - **Product Readiness program in Santo and Tanna:** To contribute to the overall development and competitiveness of the local tourism industry through the delivery of targeted skills development activities as outlined in the detailed assessments conducted in 2024.
  - **Market Readiness program in Santo, Tanna, and emerging markets in Malekula:** To ensure that tourism businesses are equipped to meet market demand.
- These activities are in line with current DoT & VTO work priorities, and with overall alignment to the National Sustainable Development Plan 2030 under the Economic, Social and Environmental Pillars.



*Image 2: Government & development partners inside the newly opened Vanuatu Travel Information Centre – Malekula Branch in May 2025.*

## CONTEXT

- The sector continues to recover from recent crises, including the 7.3 magnitude earthquake that struck Port Vila on 17 December 2024.
- The earthquake led to the closure of the central business district forcing several businesses to relocate, while several buildings had to be demolished. Cruise tourism is yet to resume in Port Vila pending repair works at the main wharf, while Mystery Island and Luganville Ports of Call remain operational.



*Image 3: Planes from four separate international airlines parked at the international airport terminal in Port Vila in 2025.*

- Despite these challenges, the sector has seen an increase in the number of visitor arrivals by air in the first half of this year compared to 2024 (source VBoS and VTO). This is due to the improved reliability of international flights, with more than six international airlines now operating regular flights to Port Vila since the collapse of Air Vanuatu in May 2024.
- However, the distribution of visitors beyond Efate remains a challenge as there are only semi-regular flights to Tanna and Santo, while charter flights are expensive and the ferry is not preferred. Outer-island tourism businesses have been significantly dependent on the local tourism market. This has increased financial strain and pressure on provincial operators who, in turn, are frustrated with a perceived lack of market access support from the government.
- Given the impact of the earthquake and the focus on response and recovery, several activities in our priority areas have been delayed, such as the planned hand-over of product readiness tools and resources to DoT.

## PARTNERSHIP STATUS AND CO-CONTRIBUTIONS

- A four-year Partnership Implementation Agreement (PIA) is currently in place with both the DoT and the VTO. This agreement will lapse on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Over the past years, these partnerships have strengthened through a mutual understanding of priorities and resource sharing. In 2024, quarterly meetings were conducted between DoT, VTO and VSP management teams to reflect on progress of shared priorities and discuss challenges to better plan and coordinate for the next quarter. However, there have been competing priorities when arranging meetings this year. The Partnership is planning to organise at least one more meeting to discuss 'ways of working' in preparation for the new phase (from February 2026).
- The Partnership Implementation Framework (PIF) with VTO for 2025 is pending and has been with the VTO for review since March. This means it is likely there may still be some changes to the workplan as the Partnership is nearing the completion of its current phase. There is also a credit from VTO of VUV 500,000 remaining in the Skills Development Fund. The VTO has requested this funding is used for digital marketing training for tourism operators on Efate who will be participating in Market Ready Assessments to be completed by VTO on Efate in Quarter 3.
- Similarly, the PIF with DoT for 2025 is pending. There are no direct co-contributions from DoT currently sitting with the Partnership. It is recommended that given the end of phase of the Partnership is approaching, the co-contributions and sharing of resources relating to specific activities will be agreed on a case-by-case basis.

# SKILLS FOR TOURISM WORK PLAN STATUS

WORK PLAN PRIORITY AREAS &/OR GREEN SHOOTS	MID YEAR STATUS UPDATE (no progress, limited progress, adequate progress, good progress, excellent progress)	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism Product Readiness</li> </ul>	Adequate Progress	<p>Followed on from the DoT Audit in 2024. Hospitality workshops were conducted in Sanma and Tanna with Malekula scheduled for July. One follow up coaching is planned for each location in the coming months including Training of Trainer (TOT) assessment tools for DoT Officers in Malampa and Sanma.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism Market Readiness</li> </ul>	Adequate Progress	<p>VTIC Malekula Branch was launched in May and is currently operational, functioning as a market access mechanism to tourism operators in Malampa.</p> <p>Market readiness baseline assessments were undertaken in Sanma, Malampa and Tanna. Data sense making is upcoming, and skills gaps identified will be addressed on a phased approach in the coming months - one combined marketing workshop and coaching per location.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism Human Resource Development Support</li> </ul>	<p>Good Progress</p>	<p>Professional Development workshops delivered to VTIC staff in market package development. Two sessions planned for the VTIC National Coordinator, but it is unclear if this will be implemented. Coaching delivered to the Local Organising Committee of Yasur Run, a community led event which will have sustainable benefits to local tourism operators on Tanna, communities and trade entrepreneurs. A series of continuous coaching is forthcoming leading to the event in October. TOT for tourism local coaches was conducted in June, and they will be engaged to support the implementation of upcoming Hospitality skills activities.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VTO Systems &amp; Strategic support</li> </ul>	<p>Limited Progress</p>	<p>VSP's Quality Systems team are supporting the VTO Business Intelligence team on data entries to Power BI. Progress has paused while VTO confirms the data sets they wish to display. The support around VTO's program logic is on hold as they have received some support from MFAT through an M&amp;E consultant who is undertaking a similar task. Next steps will be confirmed once VTO is clear on what our support should be.</p>

## QUANTITATIVE DATA (JANUARY - JUNE 2025)

SKILLS PROVIDERS ENGAGED	PARTICIPATION IN PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTED SKILLS TRAINING	BUSINESS CLIENTS SUPPORTED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 5 skills providers engaged (3 women and 2 men)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 46 participants (39 women and 7 men)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 61 tourism businesses completed Market Readiness surveys in Malekula , Santo and Tanna:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 12 owned by women</li> <li>▪ 35 owned by men</li> <li>▪ 12 owned by couples</li> <li>▪ 2 owned by communities</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ 22 tourism business clients (11 in Santo, 11 in Tanna):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 7 owned by women</li> <li>▪ 11 owned by men</li> <li>▪ 3 owned by couples</li> <li>▪ 1 owned by a community</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Priority Area: Tourism Market Readiness

### Market Ready Baseline Survey: Santo, Malekula and Tanna

- The Partnership supported VTO to conduct baseline market readiness surveys in Sanma, Malekula and Tanna with owners of 61 tourism businesses. The collaboration involved two staff members from VSP and VTO, demonstrating effective resource sharing and a coordinated approach.
- The survey was conducted only with 'Industry Champions' - those identified by DoT Product Ready Assessments conducted in 2024 as operating at an advanced level.
- The objective of the survey is for VTO to have a better understanding of the domestic market segment, international market readiness and marketing skill gaps of tourism operators.
- The survey also helps VTO to identify further 'champions' that could be mentored to ensure businesses are truly market-ready.
- The Partnership will work with the VTO team to map out skills activities and implement first round of marketing skills development activities in the coming months.



*Image 4: Florence Willy (VTO) and Julie Ierongen (VSP) conducting market ready survey with two local tourism business owners on Tanna, Thomas Noel from Yasur View Lodge and Richard Tasi from Volcanic Village Vista.*

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Priority Area: Tourism Market Readiness

### Vanuatu Travel Information Centre (VTIC) – Malekula Branch Official Opening

- On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025, the VTIC Malekula Branch was officially opened. The ceremony was officiated by representatives of the Vanuatu Government and development partners, including Australia's Deputy High Commissioner to Vanuatu.
- The VTIC will operate as a market access facilitator for local tourism businesses across Malampa. Building on the successful model of the Sanma and Tafea VTICs, the Centre will ensure that visitors from across the globe can access information and make online bookings for all registered Malampa tourism products.
- The Partnership played an important role supporting the construction of the new building, establishing the ICT infrastructure, and providing coaching to the new staff. The building company contracted to construct the building, Malekula North Central South (MNCS), was formed by trainees who completed a Certificate II in Building and Construction at Rensarie in 2023 through the Malampa Skills Centre, including three women and two men with disabilities.
- This project was only successful through strong collaboration with partners including the VTO, the Malampa Provincial Government, the DoT, the Malampa Tourism Association and the Malampa Skills Centre.
- Since its opening VTIC - Malekula has facilitated 6 corporate flights and bookings for 30 visitors across four accommodation businesses.



*Image 5: VTIC – Malekula Branch official opening & cutting of laplap sorsor*

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Priority Area: Tourism Product Readiness

### Santo and Tanna – Hospitality Workshop

- In partnership with DoT, hospitality workshops were conducted in Santo and Tanna to 38 participants (34 women and 4 men). This is the first skills activity delivered to tourism operators following on from the Product Assessment conducted last year.
- These workshops targeted those tourism businesses in Groups B and C and focused on hands-on hospitality service training, specifically for workers who had not previously received any formal hospitality training.
- It serves as an initial refresher training post COVID-19 Safe Business Operations workshops, reinforcing essential service delivery skills and encouraging participants to revalue and enhance the quality of their services.
- These workshops provided essential, practical training for workers to meet the expectations of a growing tourism market.
- The Partnership will continue to collaborate with DoT to conduct hospitality coaching one-one with each business as a follow up from these workshops in the coming months.

*“Yumi glad blo gat training olsem I kam blo helpem yumi blo improvem service blo yumi mo providem standard service lo ol customers blo yumi”- Rachel Isso, participant from Tanna workshop*



*Image 6: Coach Knox demonstrating napkin folding with participants during a hospital workshop in Santo.*

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Priority Area: Tourism Human Resource Development

### In-house Training of Trainers for Tourism Coaches

- A three-day Training of Trainers workshop was conducted in Santo with seven industry coaches (five women and two men), followed by a week-long observation and learning exercise. During this period, the coaches supported the delivery of a Hospitality Workshop for local tourism businesses. This hands-on experience helped them apply their skills in simulated settings while building confidence and having the courage to step in during delivery of sessions.
- This workshop directly addresses key tourism human resource gaps previously identified, particularly the need for in-house coaches to support the decentralisation of human resources across the provinces. By building local coaching capacity, we are ensuring that tourism service providers are better equipped to meet industry standards and deliver on visitor expectations.
- Our long-standing partnership with DoT has been instrumental in the successful planning and delivery of this initiative. All Provincial DoT officials were part of the selection of these coaches and supported with the logistics of this activity.
- These coaches will be engaged to support the implementation of upcoming hospitality skills activities. Two (one man and one woman) have recently supported a hospitality workshop on Tanna in June.



Image 7: Industry coach Grace and Asneth presenting group work during the ToT in Santo

*“It’s great to have trained coaches on the ground. This means workshop delivery can continue smoothly. Having local facilitators ensures there are no delays, and the quality of delivery remains consistent.” — Kelvin Garae, Sanma Provincial Product Development Officer, Department of Tourism*

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Priority Area: Tourism Human Resource Development

### Vanuatu Tourism Information Centre Provincial Staff Human Resource Development

- In collaboration with the VTO, a two-day workshop conducted by Naoia Consultancy was held in Port Vila in April for the seven VTIC staff (5 women, 2 men) from Santo, Malekula, Tanna and Port Vila.
- The 2-day workshop focused on:
  - fundamental knowledge including key concepts on how to calculate pricing using cost base and market base approach
  - deepening understanding of product bundling, value creation and itinerary building.
- This workshop was a crucial step in building a shared understanding across all the provinces, helping each team better support local operators and deliver consistent, market-ready visitor experiences.

*“This training is essential because it equips our VTIC teams with the practical tools and confidence they need to act as effective inbound facilitators, ensuring that local tourism products are packaged and priced to meet international market expectations.” Adela Issachar Aru, CEO, VTO*



*Image 8 : Melissa Groundlin, National VTIC Coordinator, and Serah Ollie, Sanma VTIC Branch Officer at the pricing and packaging Workshop – Port Vila:*

# KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

## Priority Area: Tourism Human Resource Development

### Professional Development to Yasur Run Local Organizing Committee

- In 2021, the Partnership supported VTO and DoT to deliver a successful event on Tanna called the 'Yasur Run' aligned with the VTO's Domestic Tourism Strategy under sports tourism. This year the community of East Tanna has taken on the initiative to run the event again, which will take place in October as the first ever community-led international event.
- Through the Tafea Skills Centre, two coaching sessions were conducted by NAOIA Consultancy to three leaders from the Local Organising Committee (LOC) (three men who are also owners of tourism business on Tanna) to provide them the skills and knowledge to lead, plan and coordinate the upcoming event. One of the participants is a tour leader who participated in the 2024 tour leader workshop and is now enhancing his skills on trek and trail development working alongside his two other colleagues.
- Event coordination has previously been a female dominated area but has recently emerged as a part of the sector with increasing participation from men.
- With coaching support from NAOIA, the community was awarded a community grant from DFAT to support the establishment of simple infrastructure along the trek.
- The Partnership will continue to provide support through coaching sessions to the LOC as well as tour operators who are located along the trek in the coming months to prepare for the event.



*Image 9 : Tanna- Coaching With East Local Organising Communities*

## ADDITIONAL RESULTS

### ■ **Better Balance: Women in Leadership:**

- Five female industry experts undertook Training of Trainers in hospitality to enhance their skills and knowledge to assist with the future implementation of hospitality workshops and coaching in the coming months.
- In quarter two of this year, the Skills for Tourism (SfT) Manager was promoted to the position of Deputy Director Programs as a recognition of her leadership qualities and skills including her dedication and significant contributions to the growth and development of the tourism skills sector. The SfT Officer was also promoted to a Coordinator position following significant progress and demonstration of the ability to lead. This opportunity will provide room to further enhance her leadership skills. These promotions demonstrates the Partnership's continuous commitment to Women in Leadership.

- **Disability Inclusion-** While no participants to date were people with disabilities, SfT will work closely with the disability inclusion team on ways to further integrate the participation of people with disabilities into the sector

- **Environmental Sustainability** – The professional development of the Yasur Run LOC includes an emphasis on sustainability principles, including environmental protection and cultural preservation. The aim is to ensure that development of the trail aligns with long-term environmental and community interests. This approach will help safeguard natural and cultural assets for future generations while fostering responsible tourism practices.



*Image 10: Industry Coaches participation in a training of trainer sessions with coach Knox in Santo.*

## LESSONS LEARNED IN 2025

**Lesson 1:** It has been difficult to identify provincially-based specialists with relevant industry and technical experience to be engaged as coaches to deliver the required skills coaching to address skills gaps identified from the Product Readiness assessment.

**Action:**

- Building on from the recent Training of Trainers in Santo, the SfT workstream will continue to prioritise similar trainings, and opportunities to observe skills training in action, to increase the pool of local coaches in key locations.
- These coaches will be able to adopt a blended delivery model using workshops and follow up coaching to help build capacity of local provincial tourism businesses.

**Lesson 2:** The recent environmental and political situation (earthquake and new government) has caused a break down in regular communications with partners which has contributed to the delay implementing our agreed workplans.

**Actions:**

- Revive the quarterly catch-up meetings with DoT, VTO and VSP management team to support stronger collaboration in the remaining months of the year.
- This will also provide opportunities to discuss 'ways of working' leading into the new phase of the Partnership.

**Lesson 3:** The provincial Skills Centers seem to be prioritising other sector activities over SfT, contributing to delays in activity implementation.

**Actions:**

- Organise regular catch-up meetings with the Skills Centre teams to ensure mutual priorities are understood.

# PRIORITIES FOR THE SECOND HALF OF 2025

## **Tourism Product Readiness**

- Continue to facilitate skills training (coaching sessions) through the Skills Centres in hospitality for targeted tourism clients in Sanma, Malekula and Tanna.
- Facilitate coaching sessions for tour clients on East Tanna in preparation for Yasur Run International community-led event.
- Facilitate one or two targeted workshops in Penama (for example, housekeeping workshop and coaching).
- Facilitate governance and coordination workshops for Eastern Tanna tourism associations in preparation for Yasur Run

## **Tourism Market Readiness**

- Facilitate Market Ready workshop and coaching sessions (Tanna, Sanma, Malekula).
- Facilitate digital training sessions to tourism operators specifically targeting Market Ready champions on Efate.

## **Tourism Human Resource Development**

- Provincial human resource development, including development of industry coaches (housekeeping in Torba) as well as the local organising committee of the Yasur Run international community-led event.

# KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

RISKS	MITIGATION STRATEGIES
<p>Due to the Partnership's current phase coming to an end in January 2026, there are only 4 possible months of implementation (July – October), and therefore SfT needs to be careful it does not over-commit in terms of planned activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ SfT team to strategically plan and priorities only key activities that will assist in maximising impact when implemented. This will be done at the staff's mid-year planning with the rest of the Partnership Centre and technical teams.</li></ul>
<p>Lack of clarity from DoT and VTO on their priorities and requirements for Partnership support this year. The recent earthquake in Port Vila, in addition to a new government, have added further complexity. For example, the new government has reduced budget allocations for Ministries and put restrictions on travel for Civil Servants. There is a risk they will not be able to co-invest in joint-activities or that there will be increased pressure on SfT to cover all costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The Partnership facilitated one meeting with both partners in quarter one and will be holding one additional meeting to understand progress, share results and finalise priorities for the rest of the year. A final meeting will be held in Q4 to recap and look at opportunities for 2026.</li></ul>