



BETTER BALANCE

6-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

Image 1: Construction graduate and business owner, Mary, completes tender documentation for the first time with support of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and a construction coach, May 2025.



JANUARY - JUNE 2025

INTRODUCTION



Image 2: Female Certificate II in Plumbing trainees attending theory session, Tanna

- The Vanuatu Skills Partnership's commitment to gender equality is guided by its Better Balance Strategy, the National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) and the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2030.
- The Partnership's goal is to ensure our clients – both men and women - have access to equal opportunities and are supported to improve their social and economic status regardless of their gender.
- The key government partner for our Better Balance work is the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA). Key training provider partners include Vanuatu Institute of Technology (VIT), Pacific Vocational Training Centre (PVTC), and Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC).
- Important implementing partners in women in leadership are Wilkins Family Foundation (WFF), Balance of Power (BoP) and the Diocese of Banks and Torres (DoBT).
- In line with our Better Balance Strategy, our focus areas for 2025 include:
 - **Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)** – support to DWA and WFF to promote engagement of women in economic empowerment, and support to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)'s provincial Skills Centres to enable equitable engagement of women in skills development and entrepreneurship.
 - **Women in Leadership (WIL)** – partnership with BOP , DoBT and DWA to influence social norms and promote women's leadership; support professional development for women in skills.
 - **Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW)** – support to develop a new Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy for the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, and improve understanding of EVAW amongst staff and partners.

CONTEXT

Over the last 6 months, the operating environment has been impacted by a range of different factors. These include:

- Air Vanuatu flights have increased in frequency and reliability, improving inclusion team access to some islands.
- Competing DWA commitments, particularly relating to the response to the December 2024 earthquake, has limited the progress of planned joint activities, such as capacity building for DWA provincial officers, and provision of support to DWA in value addition training in Penama.
- Development of the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy has required a slow and collaborative approach in order to navigate and mitigate sensitivities.



Image 3: DWA Communications Officer interviews Serah, restaurateur and food producer in Tanna, April



PARTNERSHIP STATUS AND CO-CONTRIBUTIONS

- The Partnership had an agreement with DWA from August 2022 to June 2025. A key objective of our agreement with DWA was to support DWA's national and provincial efforts aimed at empowering women economically and as leaders. Joint activities focused on developing a documentary regarding women in entrepreneurship. As the Partnership is transitioning to a new phase in January 2026 this agreement will not be renewed at this time however the Partnership will continue to work with DWA on shared priorities as they emerge.
- A key partnership with the Department of Industry (DoI) guides the Partnership's work in the Skills for Creative Industries (SfCI) sector – a key area of growth for women entrepreneurs.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Wilkins Family Foundation (current until December 2025) enables collaboration towards greater education opportunities for women and girls.
- Within this reporting period, the Partnership signed a tripartite 'partnering' agreement with BOP and DoBT to progress women's leadership efforts by influencing social norms in Torba province. Joint activities will be implemented in the second half of 2025. The agreement is an ongoing collaboration document with no formal end date.
- Given the current levels of resourcing, partners are unable to make contributions to the Skills Development Fund, however, all partners co-contribute direct activity funding and in-kind support towards any jointly planned activities.

WORKSTREAM 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
Women's Economic Empowerment	Adequate progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DWA has established a WEE thematic working group. The Partnership is a member but has not been called upon to support its establishment as originally agreed, as DWA located funding elsewhere. ▪ Support provided to DWA to make a documentary of women's economic empowerment in Tafea and Malampa. Tafea filming is complete, Malampa filming is still underway. ▪ Malampa Skills Centres supported transport and accommodation for female construction clients to participate in an International Women's Day activity led by the provincial DWA officer. ▪ Refresher training held for all Skills Centres and Port Vila office staff - Torba, Tafea, and Penama provincial DWA Officers attended. ▪ Following the construction of the Chiefs' Nakamal, support was provided to construction trainees, including 3 women, to establish Satomafea Construction Company in Port Vila, which has 3 women on the company's executive committee. ▪ 3 companies established by female graduates with male colleagues in Port Vila, Malekula and Tafea have been further supported to strengthen access to contracts and employment opportunities. See slide 10 for more details of Serel's story.

WORKSTREAM 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
Women in Leadership	Adequate progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agreement with BoP and DoBT signed, outlining joint activities to progress women’s leadership through influencing social norms. ▪ Survey regarding professional development needs for female staff developed and shared with Support Hub for incorporation into a broader professional development survey for staff. ▪ Promotion or increased responsibilities of four female staff in key positions over this period demonstrates a commitment to supporting career pathways for women within the Partnership’s structure. ▪ The Partnership is a member of the Ministry of Justice, Youth and Community Services (MoJYCS) Leadership Taskforce. ▪ Refresher training held for all Skills Centres and Port Vila office staff in all areas of the better balance strategy, including women in leadership. ▪ Two female staff graduated from the Certificate IV in Leadership and Management offered by APTC. One of these staff has since moved into a leadership role at the Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration and Management (VIPAM).

WORKSTREAM 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
Ending Violence against Women	Adequate progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness raising regarding Family Life Education was provided for vanilla farmers in Port Patrick as part of good governance training. ▪ Development of the Partnership’s new Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy continued and is in its final stages, led by the PSEAH Working Group, and included incorporation of PSEAH risk assessment and mitigation in the Partnership’s activity planning processes. ▪ Refresher training held for all Skills Centres and Port Vila office personnel, including EVAW principles and approaches.

QUANTITATIVE DATA (JANUARY - JUNE 2025)

SKILLS PROVIDERS ENGAGED	PARTICIPATION IN PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTED SKILLS TRAINING	BUSINESS CLIENTS SUPPORTED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 32 industry skills providers (including 16 women representing 50% of all providers engaged) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 462 participants including 267 women, representing 58% of all participants 38 people with disabilities (15 men, 23 women), representing 8% of all participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 provincial handicraft hubs (all managers and coordinators are women) 11 Hub Board of Directors members are women (44%)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills for Agribusiness- 50% women Skills for Tourism- 85% women Skills for Creative Industries- 98% women Skills for Infrastructure – 15% women 	

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED: WOMENS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

WOMEN IN TRADES: CHALLENGING SOCIAL NORMS

- Women’s participation in trade-based courses over the period from January-June 2025 included:
 - 7 women participated in Certificate II Plumbing training in Tanna.
 - 2 women, graduated with Certificate II in Plumbing in Melsisi.
 - 3 women graduated with Certificate II in Building Construction at VIT and were part of the trainees who re-built the Chiefs’ Nakamal. They are now members of the newly established Satomafea Construction Company.
 - 5 women who participated in construction training in Santo in 2024 are now part of the newly established Nojovan Construction Company. This year, with support from the Sanma Skills Centre, they won a contract to build the new Tasmate Health Centre.
- These results demonstrate that, with the support of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, women are slowly moving into the trades sector, one that has been traditionally considered a masculine area of work. This is now becoming a more accepted practice amongst training providers and within communities, including in geographically remote areas, gently influencing social norms which have previously prevented women from being part of trades-based training and work.

“The participation of women in our plumbing training programs is not just a milestone—it’s a movement. It challenges outdated perceptions, opens doors to economic independence, and strengthens communities. Vanuatu Skills Partnership has been instrumental in supporting this transformation”. Lisa Toa, Training Manager, Pacific Vocational Training Centre



Image 4: Female trainees, Certificate II in Plumbing, Tanna Island

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

FAMILIES SUPPORTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CONSTRUCTION

- After completing a Certificate II in Building and Construction at Rensarie College, Serel joined her family-owned construction business, the Yomal Construction Company, alongside her husband and son. Together, they renovated the Malampa Child and Children's Desk Office, which was opened in April this year. This family business has now won another contract, to build the new Malekula Consumer Hardware Shop in Lakatoro.
- This story shows a woman taking the lead, with the support of her husband, in a sector which is not traditionally considered an area in which women participate let alone lead. This shows that women can perform just as effectively as men in sectors in which women do not commonly participate, due to assumptions about their skills and roles. With support from families, including husbands, women can achieve and lead. Serel's husband, Guytou, said he is a proud husband knowing that the business is in safe hands with his wife at the helm.

"I take charge of the work here on the construction site whenever my husband is busy with other tasks. The good thing is whenever he returns, he knows that the work is done." – Serel Julun.



Image 5: Serel and her husband, Guytou at work together on site.

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED: WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

WOMEN LEADING IN NON-TRADITIONAL SECTORS

- Mary, a single mother from Tanna, completed a Certificate II in Building and Construction with the support of the Tafea Skills Centre in 2022. Along with fellow trainees (including another woman), and with continued support from the Tafea Skills Centre, they set up the Youngster Bargain Construction Company. Mary then completed a Certificate III with APTC. She returned to Tanna and helped her family with small construction jobs as the company struggled to land contracts. With support from our construction coach in Tanna, Dennis, Youngster successfully bid for and was awarded a contract to build the Central Tanna Area Council House with Mary taking on the lead role as Supervisor.
- In Tanna (and Vanuatu as a whole) where kastom is strong and expectations regarding the roles of women are limited, this is an important milestone for Mary. Mary is a role model for women and girls in Tanna and across Vanuatu, celebrated on social media, and is the subject of a forthcoming documentary being made by DWA with Partnership support.
- This result also demonstrates the important role and value of male champions – Support from Mary’s coach, Dennis who is originally from Efate, and the Tafea Skills Centre Manager was critical in supporting her and Youngster to successfully win and lead a construction contract. This success can partially be attributed to VSP’s beliefs and efforts to advocate for better balance in all we do, including our collaborations with our partners.



Image 6: Mary overseeing workers on site at the construction of the Central Tanna Area Council House

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED: ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (EVAW)

CONTEXTUALISING UNDERSTANDINGS OF EVAW

- Refresher training in Better Balance was held for staff of all Skills Centres, including a focus on ending violence against women. Staff broadly understood Better Balance as focusing on improving women's participation in skills development but had a less clear understanding of EVAW approaches.
- Refresher training provided opportunities to discuss EVAW and challenges in addressing this when violence against women is often widely practiced. Staff identified EVAW as the most difficult element of the Better Balance strategy to understand and address, because it challenges views and beliefs about the roles of men and women that can be difficult to discuss.
- Discussions helped staff develop a shared understanding of EVAW objectives and approaches. Discussions also reinforced the importance of talking to and engaging both women and men, and identified a need to reframe EVAW as 'promoting safer communities.'
- DWA officers were invited to join discussions in all provinces; the Torba DWA officer attended and participated.



Image 7: Inclusion Refresher, Sanma Skills Centre Team

LESSONS LEARNED IN 2025

Lesson 1: DWA's multiple partners, commitments, and their finance processes which can be slow, have delayed joint activity implementation, including a value addition / financial literacy workshop in Penama which has not occurred.

Actions:

- Engage Partnership leadership in discussions with government partners.
- Seek advice from other partners which also collaborate with DWA, including BOP.

Lesson 2: "EVAW" language, based on international conceptualisations of gender equality, can reduce engagement and even result in resistance to Better Balance work, as it is viewed as inappropriate in the Vanuatu context.

Actions:

- Reframe EVAW as 'promoting safer communities' in further Better Balance work.

Lesson 3: Refresher workshops for Skills Centre and national staff identified that collaboration with Provincial DWA Officers is limited. An opportunity exists to bring them into Skills Centre WEE activities, in order to strengthen mainstreaming of better balance considerations across these provinces.

Actions:

- Support Skills Centre staff to collaborate with Provincial DWA Officers in planning and implementation of activities.

PRIORITIES FOR THE SECOND HALF OF 2025

Women's Economic Empowerment

- Finalise DWA video about women entrepreneurs.

Women in Leadership

- Participate in DWA / MoJYCS women's leadership thematic working group.
- Support to BoP/DoBT on their work promoting women in leadership in Torba province through inclusive skills development.
- Finalise printing of the WFF brochure.
- Support the WFF mentoring workshop in August.

Elimination of Violence Against Women

- PSEAH Policy:
 - Incorporate risk assessment and reporting into the Partnerships' processes.
 - Undertake risk assessment on a small number of activities to identify issues and needs, and to inform the development of the policy.
 - Finalise policy.

Review better balance approaches, identifying good practices, lessons and recommendations for the next phase.

KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

RISKS	MITIGATION STRATEGIES
Pacific Australia Skills does not continue APTC's way of working as a key training provider partner in Better Balance efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Continue collaboration and discussion with Pacific Australia Skills as they develop their Vanuatu Country Plan and inclusion strategy, to ensure coherence.
Better Balance approaches in the next phase are limited, or do not utilise effective ways of working identified by Vanuatu Skills Partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Undertake a review of inclusion approaches, identifying achievements, lessons, and recommendations to be utilised in the next phase.
Engagement with DWA is limited.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Utilise the review of inclusion approaches to explore issues and identify possible ways forward in the next phase.