

Story of Change

Strengthening Women-Led Craft Enterprises through Skills and Market Access in Sanma Province

*In October 2025, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership completed a series of client ‘storian’ to understand how skills training and coaching through the **Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)**’s provincial **Skills Centres** has affected clients and their enterprises.*

In Sanma province, 24 craft producers from three associations (50% of all members) shared their stories with us through focus group discussions and individual surveys. These insights are helping us understand outcomes for clients and shape our future support.



Members from the Lima Bulu Headwear at their workspace in Santo.

Overview

Through sustained skills development and market access support from the MoET’s **Sanma Skills Centre**, three women-led craft associations from Sanma Province— **Yumi2 Craft (textiles and clothing)**, **Lima Bulu Headwear**, and **Bosahe Headwear** — have strengthened their technical capabilities and

confidence and improved their engagement in the craft sector. Together, their experiences demonstrate how **long-term coaching and access to markets** can translate skills into tangible social and economic benefits for women and their families, and the broader community.

Results and Outcomes: Skills to Income

The Sanma Skills Centre, in partnership with the Department of Industry and the Sanma Provincial Government, has enabled all three associations to move beyond informal production toward more organised, market-ready enterprises.

Yumi2 Craft has transformed informal sewing skills into a reliable income stream for its members. After commencing in 2017 with Skills Centre support, the 10 active members are now producing high-demand textile products such as clothing, shopping bags and purses, generating regular income that supports school fees, household expenses, and *kastom* obligations. The establishment of a formal association, access to shared workspace, and improved market access links through the Sanma Creative Industries Community Company (SCICC) have fostered confidence around selling and strengthened the financial independence of Yumi2 Craft members.

Lima Bulu Headwear was established in 2018 with support from the Sanma Skills Centre. Product quality and consistency have improved as a result of coaching on headwear design and finishing to international standards. Bulk wholesale orders (both domestic and

international) have increased earning potential, while income from weaving has motivated members to diversify into side businesses such as food sales and sewing. All 21 members have opened personal bank accounts to help manage their increased income. Higher incomes have increased confidence and motivation among members, reinforcing weaving as a viable livelihood option in the local and international marketplace. Working to complete wholesaler orders for export has also strengthened members' time-management skills.

Bosahe Headwear's engagement with the Sanma Skills Centre commenced in 2015. Today the association of 20 women has successful links with both local and export markets, particularly through Vanuatu Made events and orders facilitated by SCICC. Improved quality standards — including pandanus preparation, shaping, and finishing — have enabled members to meet international quality standards. Income from hat sales is now contributing directly to household finance with participation in savings groups, strengthening financial resilience.

Across all three associations, skills training has delivered more than just technical improvements: **it has built an entrepreneurial spirit, confidence, professionalism, and collective identity, enabling women to engage more strongly with markets and institutions.**



83% of members surveyed from across the three associations¹ stated that their income is higher now than in previous years due to the support of the Sanma Skills Centre.

Members of Lima Bulu association during production manufacturing of headwear for export sales to Fiji - using new equipment to manufacture hats to international standards



: Bronia Dick (left) a member of Yumi2 Craft who is deaf, standing with her carer (middle) and Noella Rory (right), the Sanma Creative Industry Community Company (SICCC) Manager, proudly showcasing their products during the 2025 Vanuatu Made Tradeshow.

Inclusion: Participation and Empowerment

Inclusion has been a positive and visible outcome across the experiences of the three associations. **Yumi2 Craft and Bosahe Headwear actively include members with hearing and physical impairments**, with adaptations in communication and shared work practices fostering respect and collaboration. At Lima Bulu, working alongside a hearing-impaired producer from Bosahe Headwear during skills training and sales events has strengthened awareness, friendship and appreciation of diverse abilities.

Gender power dynamics at home has also improved. Initially, some women faced resistance from husbands and families when attending workshops or travelling for trade shows. Over time, through ongoing advocacy from male champions at the Sanma Skills Centre and as income became visible and contributed to household needs, **family support and recognition has increased**. In many cases, husbands and children now assist with raw material preparation and logistics, reinforcing women’s expanding economic roles within the household.

Culture, Environment and Climate Awareness

Environmental stewardship is embedded in traditional weaving practices in **Bosahe Headwear** and **Lima Bulu Headwear**. This has been strengthened through Skills Centre support. These associations rely on **traditional pandanus harvesting and preparation techniques**, skills passed down through generations.

Post-cyclone pandanus replanting after Tropical Cyclone Harold, the **introduction of new solar drying technology in 2025, and improved storage practices** have helped protect raw materials and ensure year-round continuity of production.

Additionally, a Pandanus nursery, which opened on Malo island with support from the Sanma Skills Centre and the Department of Forestry in 2025, will further assist weavers from Bosahe Headwear to manage this critical resource.

Yumi2 Craft has also begun using recycled materials, such as fabric off-cuts and rice bags, to create products, reflecting growing awareness of environmentally responsible production.

In 2025, five female artisans from these associations traveled, with Partnership support, from Sanma Province to Darwin and Gapuwiyak in Australia's Northern Territory to learn from Australian indigenous weavers producing high-value cultural products. The skills exchange **strengthened people-to-people connections between ni-Vanuatu and Australian indigenous artisans**, creating a shared space for learning, storytelling and mutual respect across cultures. It also inspired new creative product ideas and renewed interest in reviving traditional natural dyes, supporting both innovation and cultural revitalisation.

Future Needs

Despite strong progress, sustaining and scaling these outcomes will require ongoing support. Key future needs include:

- **A dedicated production hub**, centrally located to consolidate strong entrepreneurial capabilities,

quality control, product development and higher volume of sales across a range of market segments - wholesale, retail and export

- **Strengthened and reliable market systems**, including timely payments and expanded buyer networks
- **Practical financial literacy and governance training** to support business growth and long-term sustainability
- **Integrated climate resilience training**, to protect raw materials and livelihoods as weather patterns change

We thank the members of Yumi2 Craft, Lima Bulu Headwear, and Bosahe Headwear for sharing their stories with us.



Skills training and coaching have catalysed practical climate action, with 54% of surveyed members now taking steps to prepare for environmental change, up from zero in 2020.

The newly installed solar dryer on Malo Island, supporting the Bosahe Weavers' Association.