

Supporting evidence-based policy making in Vanuatu's parliament

Sometimes we make mistakes as leaders and are accused of making decisions based on political affiliation. This is not our intention to exclude groups, but we did not have the proper information available. Having reliable statistics for areas and communities will help us make informed decisions.

Hon Marc Muesul, Vanuatu Parliament



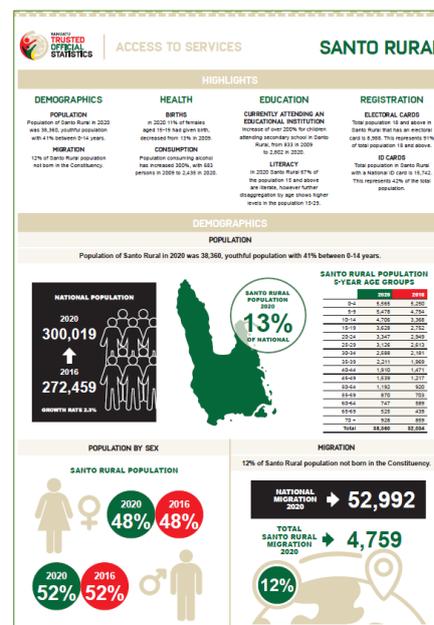
Vanuatu, alongside partners PARIS21 and the Inter-Parliamentary Union joined efforts to increase the use of data and statistics for decision making in parliament; an issue that was hampering parliamentarians in adequately performing their roles of oversight, representation and legislation. Through a series of trainings for parliamentary staff and meetings between MPs and the Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics (VBoS), Vanuatu has been able to improve data use in policy making to ensure policies meet the needs of the most vulnerable. This is the first focused effort in Vanuatu to introduce data for sustainable development monitoring to MPs with the aim of enhancing good governance. VBoS is making efforts to scale-up the project. Building on the success of the initiative, the next phase of the project will target a broader audience of parliamentary staff and MPs, as well as cover more development priorities in the country.

Trusted official statistics for good governance and evidence-based decision making in Vanuatu

In 2019, PARIS21 invited countries to send a proposal for its pilot project “the Trust in Data Initiative”. The Bureau of Statistics in Vanuatu was awarded EUR 50 000 of funding alongside technical support from PARIS21 for their project targeted at strengthening data use in parliament.

The main achievements of the project include:

- Seven briefings with MPs to discuss data needs for policy-making and raise awareness of the use of data for decision making.
- Fourteen trainings for parliamentary civil servants focused on strengthening data skills for parliamentarians. VBoS conducted a pre and post assessment to measure progress. The results showed an increase in scores against all 17 learning objectives.
- First-ever constituency profiles developed in Vanuatu that help MPs target marginalised subpopulations more effectively (example above).
- Improved ties between VBoS and parliament, including a ground-breaking invitation for VBoS to present the initiative and their work to the newly elected MPs.



“If Parliament needs to access data quickly, we can work together in partnership through this project [...] we should also be able to trust the source of the data to ensure it is reliable”

Raymond Manuake, Clerk of Vanuatu Parliament



Using data to make decisions

For the first time, stakeholders such as statisticians, policy analysts, expenditure analysts in different line ministries and the parliamentary secretariat have shared ideas on how to use data to improve public service delivery. These include:

- using data to track whether scholarships are aligned with current labour market needs;
- developing M&E frameworks to understand the impact of investments;
- creating core performance indicators for MPs, so communities can hold them accountable in their role of representation;
- using Inland Revenue data to understand how businesses and government can develop policies and legal frameworks to support growing industries.

Through this initiative, MPs and parliamentary civil servants (PCS) have enhanced their skills to use this information meaningfully for policy making. For example, participating MPs used VBoS data to gazette a parliamentary bill increasing import duties on products related to non-communicable diseases. The initiative has also brought a greater appreciation for the work of VBoS and the national statistics system, and greater parliamentary support for statistical activities is expected. Making data usable for MPs has been an investment in governance, better public services, and more sustainable development.

The vision for Phase II

- Briefing all MPs on data available to support their legislative, budget, oversight, and representation roles, particularly in tracking the National Sustainable Development Plan
- Include more parliamentary civil servants in the trainings on data use to produce policy briefs
- Broadening the scope of the engagement to cover all national development priority areas

Scaling-up efforts to engage parliament in data use

Building on the successful implementation of the initiative, and growing interest from Parliament, the VBoS and PARIS21 are taking stock of lessons learned to scale-up the engagement. VBoS held a workshop with MPs and parliamentary civil servants to gather views on the design of the next phase. This phase will broaden the scope of the engagement by including more parliamentary representatives and covering a broader range of topics. Additionally, it will include the finalisation of Vanuatu’s first digital open indicator tracking platform that will highlight key performance indicators to be used by parliament to measure the quality and coverage of public service delivery. VBoS is looking to mobilise technical and financial resources to continue the project and support the institutionalisation of data use in parliament.