

Enhanced Food Security in Vanuatu's Disaster Prone Communities

Introduction

Vanuatu is an agriculture based economy, with 80% of the population depending entirely on subsistence agriculture for both their daily sustenance and well-being, and collectively the sector accounting for at least 20% of GDP (MALFFB, 2014). In April 2015, category 5 Tropical Cyclone (TC) Pam struck Vanuatu with wind gusts of over 300km/hr. The cyclone devastated up to 96% of crops, heavily impacted livestock and disrupted fisheries. With such a significant portion of the population engaged in agriculture activities, the livelihoods of up to 188,000 people were affected.

Significant disaster events are a frequent reality in Vanuatu: since TC Pam, communities have also experienced drought, volcanic eruptions and two other major cyclones. Consequently, it is imperative that risks associated with climate change and disasters are **integral when making any development decisions**, such as the choice of seeds or seedlings, construction materials, infrastructure location and who within communities receives which benefits. Taking into consideration resource and technical constraints, it is also critical that Government, partners and communities work collectively to pool their resources to address these risks and maximise the effectiveness of development spending.

With this in mind, a number of partners, led by the Vanuatu Ministry of Agriculture's Risk and Resilience Unit, worked together with communities to deliver a **Resilient Agriculture initiative**. The initiative involved a combination of training, demonstration plots, Knowledge Hubs, material distribution and establishment (or strengthening) of community led committees to oversee activities. This approach was adopted by communities in Efate, Tafea, Sanma and Shefa Provinces with support from a network of Agriculture Extension Officers who have been trained in climate change and disaster risk management (CCDRM).



Womens Group engaging in community development planning. Photo credit: Live and Learn Environmental Education, Vanuatu.

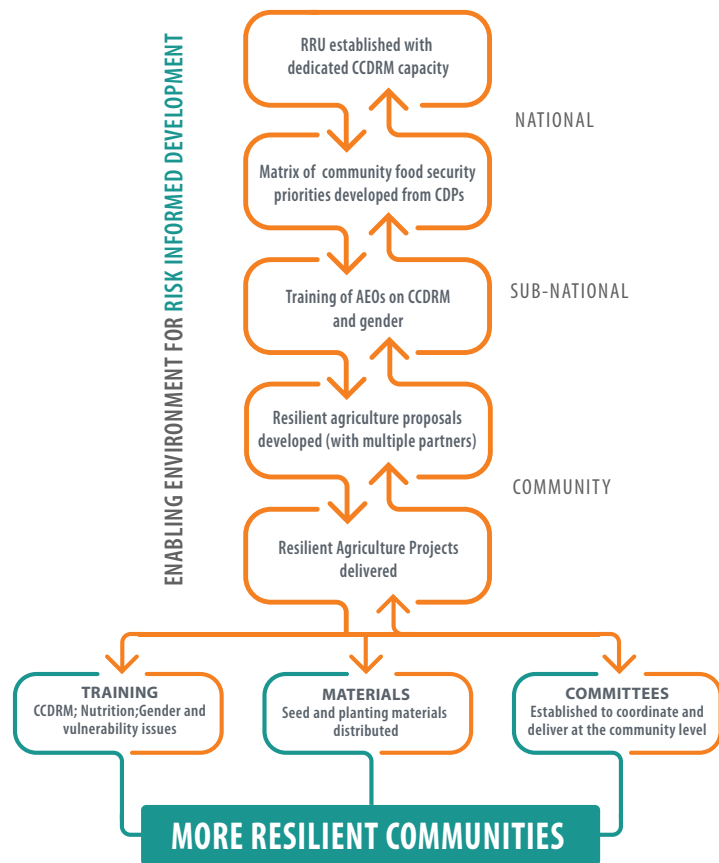
Approach

This Briefing Note outlines steps which have been undertaken by communities, government and NGOs to deliver the Resilient Agriculture initiatives in select communities in Vanuatu. This was possible with support from the UNDP Pacific Risk Resilience Programme (PRRP) which contributed to building the enabling environment to ensure initiative was systematic and sustainable:

- A **Risk and Resilience Unit (RRU)** was established within the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB) to mainstream risks into day to day development activities of the Ministry, coordinate response and recovery activities, and ensure a systemic and harmonised approach to both.
- **Partnerships** were forged between MALFFB and a variety of development agencies (GIZ, FAO, SPC, UNDP), coordinated by the RRU to pool resources and achieve common food security objectives.
- **Dedicated capacity** for climate change and disaster risk management (CCDRM) has been established in the Ministry to sit within the RRU.
- The RRU, with support of partners, has delivered a **comprehensive capacity building** programme with Agriculture Extension Officers across the country on strengthening resilience in the sector.
- As a result of collaboration with the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), food security messaging, proposals and activities delivered by the RRU and partners has **incorporated gender and protection considerations**.
- The **cluster system** which is led by the Ministry has been strengthened to deliver CCDRM outcomes, and support coordination in conjunction with wide range of additional partners, including World Vision, Oxfam and Save the Children.
- In order to strengthen **coordination and address priority community development needs**, Government has endorsed the Department of Local Authorities' (DLA) **Risk Informed Sub-National Planning Guidelines**. DLA and Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE) piloted these guidelines through the production of Community Development Plans and Area Council Development Plans in three provinces. Food security was a major priority for many of these communities.

Activities

The following flow chart highlights the activities from national to community level undertaken to deliver the Resilient Agriculture initiatives. This diagram highlights the change that the enabling environment has undergone to facilitate the initiatives. Importantly strengthening the **enabling environment**, rather than just delivering to the projects, will ensure climate change and disaster risks are integral considerations in projects in the sector in the future.



Results

The impact of the Resilient Agriculture Project has included:

- **A contribution to increased food availability, diversity and quality in the markets**, particularly vegetables (lettuce, tomato, greens) and onions as a result of improved risk management.
- **An improvement in nutritional food sources available** in these communities as reliance on imported food has decreased and diet has become more balanced as crop diversity has increased. In partnership with health advocates such as CARE International, work to reduce malnutrition has included backyard gardening and use of homemade compost in Tanna, with Aid Post Nurses reporting a reduction in diseases showing in the clinic.
- **Women are playing a key role in implementation** of food security priorities of communities, including observations that the knowledge hubs with active participation of women that are the strongest. For example the women's group in the Paunigisu Knowledge Hub are now germinating vegetable seeds all year round to generate income for use post disaster.

As a result, there has been a transformation in resilience in communities, and in the way crops are shared between communities on neighbouring islands:

- **Resilience in relation to food security has increased**, particularly as a result of increased crop diversity and a shift back to more traditional crops.
- **Inter-island crop and seedling sharing has been enhanced**. Linked to the improvement in resilience, through the Agriculture Extension Officers and the Knowledge Hubs, distribution of materials between neighbouring communities has increased, particularly in response to disaster events.
- **Replication**. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, through the Agriculture Extension Officers, are replicating the Resilient Agriculture initiatives, for instance in Tanna. Utilising this model as an example for future Extension Officer activities will allow demonstration of more resilient cropping, improved nutrition and improved coordination.



Nursery developed after TC Pam through the Knowledge Hub in Efate. Photo credit: Live and Learn Environmental Education, Vanuatu.

Lessons Learned

- **Strong partner coordination** has resulted in pooling of resources, less duplication and better outcomes for communities.
- **Examples are extremely powerful**. Farmers and community members who were sceptical of new techniques were often convinced upon seeing the success of the demonstration plots.
- **Strengthening the enabling environment** for delivery of more resilient agriculture projects ensured the approach was more systematic and sustainable. This included the establishment of the RRU within MALFFB, the establishment of dedicated CDRM capacity, capacity strengthening for the Agriculture Extension Officers, and the endorsement of the risk informed Sub-national Planning Guidelines.

Reference:

MALFFB (2014). Vanuatu Agriculture Sector Policy, 2014-2024

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