

**Vanuatu National Youth
Council
Strategic Plan 2011 - 2015**



Executive Summary

The Vanuatu National Youth Council was initially organized in 2007 by the Department of Youth Development Sports and Training in line with the government's policy of prioritizing the youth and the urgent need to develop programs that would respond to their growing needs and numbers. Young people viewed VNYC's establishment as a positive step in giving young people the needed voice to inform government of their capacities, realities, and aspirations.



Nationwide consultation culminated to the formal launching of the council and its executives' election in 2009. This activity was supported by all youth delegates and the different NGOs donor partners and some international organizations in Vanuatu. Consecutive meetings and capacity building activities followed. Constitution and by-laws together with Council's Vision, mission, core values and thematic areas were likewise formulated.

In preparation for the development of its strategic plan, VNYC developed several instruments to gather needed information from the youth at the grassroots level in 2010. These include: Registration of Active Youth Organizations, Needs Assessment Questionnaire, Youth Service Provider Mapping and Government Agency Workshop on mainstreaming the Youth concerns. However, due to financial limitations, Youth Service Provided Mapping and Government Workshop on Youth Mainstreaming were not conducted. The registration and needs assessment were initially undertaken but failed to kick start due to the same reason.

In 2011 the Department increased VNYC's budget by more than a hundred percent, VNYC once again attempted to do nationwide needs assessment with all of its municipal and provincial council executives. However, upon the decision of the first VNYC Annual General Meeting in March 2011 at Malekula, this plan was dropped due to the priorities set by the Executive Board and AGM. Two focus group discussions were successfully held and several key informant interviews with local youth leaders were conducted.

In Port Vila, VNYC has conducted several VNYC awareness workshops in Pango, Erakor, Nambatri, Mele, and Mangalilui from 2010 - 2011. These awareness workshops gathered youth feedback on the establishment of VNYC and the role that it should play in the society and in the

life of the youth. Participants included youth leaders, some elders and the youth themselves. Informant interviews were likewise held with some youth and NGO representatives.

A review of literature was undertaken by the VNYC volunteer in lieu of the needs assessment and consultation. The review covered the different thematic areas on economic development, education, training and capacity, gender, health, participation and governance, migration, culture, environment and social and professional integration. Key informant interviews with partner NGOs and international organizations were likewise undertaken.

The VNYC Strategic Plan was developed out of a five-day workshop held in Murray Youth Hostel, Port Vila from May 16-20, 2011. With funding from the Department, it gathered all VNYC executives from different provincial and municipal youth councils. Participants included two representatives from seven provincial and municipal youth councils, and youth representatives from different NGOs and the church.

Key contributors to the workshop and development of VNYC Strategic Plan were: Department of Youth Development Sports and Training, Voluntary Services Overseas, Pacific Leadership Programme, International Labour Organization, Ministry of Health, Transparency International, Vanuatu Association of NGOs, Vanuatu Council of Churches, Ministry of Health, Vanuatu Police Force, Youth Challenge Vanuatu, Wan Smol Bag, the different youth councils of Port Vila, SHEFA, Luganville, SANMA, TAFEA, PENAMA, and TORBA.



The strategic plan explains VNYC's vision, mission, core values and ways of working. It identified key focus areas (thematic areas) where VNYC will implement from 2011 – 2015. Also part of the Plan is a background information and challenges on each thematic areas from the literature review. Most importantly, it outlined the different goals and objectives for achieving its mission.

This Strategic Plan will inform and direct the activities of the Vanuatu National Youth Council for the period 2011 – 2015.

Organization History

The Vanuatu National Youth Council (VNYC) was re-established in 29th October 2009. This was following an extensive consultation led by Vanuatu department of youth development, training and sports, provincial governments and youth inter-agency group. Provincial youth council presidents gathered in Pango Village to elect an executive for the national youth council and develop a draft youth strategy to guide its activities.

Since then, the council has recognized that the strategy does not sufficiently clarify the role, function and immediate priorities of the VNYC. As such, the executive initiated a process to further refine the national youth strategy and develop a work plan of activities to be implemented by the council. Capacity building workshop followed which led to the VNYC's formulation of Mission, Vision and Core Values Statements and thematic areas.



Successive meetings provided the council with its guiding policies in the form of its Constitution and by-laws which was immediately endorsed and signed by all youth presidents. Further capacity building on financial management for VNYC executives was likewise implemented with funding support from the Pacific Leadership Programme.

Since its inception, the Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training served as its main partner and funder. International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) Vanuatu Office provided financial and technical support, respectively. VSO in partnership with the Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training sent a volunteer who served as the Council's technical and administrative Adviser.

The volunteer helped in the strengthening of VNYC through organizing of the area youth councils and active youth registration, capacity building for VNYC executives and youth groups, providing technical and administrative advice on the 2011 annual work plan, development of VNYC structures and systems and on the facilitation and writing of this strategic plan.

Organizing the area youth council is a huge undertaking. Due to limited resources, VNYC, with the help from the Department and the Pacific Leadership Programme started the active youth registration program. Capacity building for provincial executives to run the

project has been started and implementation is now underway. This capacity building also coincided with the training for the executives on the basic of project management, leadership and governance.

Networking with partner NGOs, donor agencies, volunteering organizations, church organizations and government agencies were likewise pursued.

VNYC was able to participate in numerous national occasions where youth participation is highly needed which include: Independence Day celebration, Fest Napuan Festival, World Aids Day, international and regional meetings with the Pacific Youth Council and the commonwealth Youth Programme and other equally important occasions.



Programmes such as international youth exchange and youth development courses for young people have likewise been facilitated. VNYC acted as the main focal point where selection, recruitment and capacity building for youth delegates are conducted. These programmes include: 23rd Ship for World Youth Programme, O'la Fou Youth Development and Leadership Course Programme, and the Awards of Duke of Edinburg Program.

Several international conferences was also attended by select VNYC executives and the secretariat. These conferences, meetings and capacity building programmes are mostly overseas with organizations like PLP, Oxfam, Commonwealth Youth Programme and the Department as main sponsors.

Awareness campaign for VNYC and initial organizing of area youth councils have been done in some selected areas in Vila and Efate. These areas include: Nambatri Area Youth Council, Pango Youth Council, Erakor Youth Council, Mele youth group and Mangalilui youth organization.

In accordance with the VNYC Constitution and by-laws, the very first meetings of both Annual General Assembly and Executive Board were held in Malekula last March 2011. The meeting achieved a milestone in VNYC's history because it was able to identify and select the membership of the Executive Board and the VNYC Advisory Committee. VNYC AGM, Executive Board and the Advisory Committee are the missing structures within the VNYC to support the Secretariat in the execution and monitoring of all programs and activities outlined in its Annual Work Plan. Successive meetings of members of the Executive Board were all held in Port Vila where strengthening of the VNYC Secretariat and NGO support groups for the provincial and municipal council have been discussed. The focus was to strengthen secretariat operations by identifying problematic areas in terms of administration and management.

Finally, in May 16 – 20, 2011, VNYC conducted its very first strategic planning attended by all of its executives, youth and NGO representatives. The workshop was facilitated by the VSO volunteer with the help from Department of Youth Development Sports and Training.

Vision, Mission, Core Values & Beliefs

Vision

“Youth are united; their rights are recognised and promoted to become good leaders for the Nation”

Mission Statement

“Strengthen and build networks, initiate capacity building to involve and empower youth in decision making”



VNYC Core Values and Beliefs

VNYC will be guided by the following core values and beliefs towards the achievement of its mission and vision:

- **Transparency**

VNYC seeks to have honest and transparent internal and external working relationship with all its stakeholders as it promotes the rights and welfare of the Ni-Van youth. As an organization where youth could emulate from its values, VNYC encourages more active youth participation at all levels and sectors, especially in all of its activities and decision-making. It will be a responsible partner and agent of change in the realities of the youth and society in general.

- **Accountability**

VNYC pushes for more accountability for its actions and decisions, especially to all youth leaders from national, provincial, municipal or area youth councils. On the same note, it promotes accountability from all leaders of society (politicians, government servants, business people, religious, chiefs, civil society leaders and other key stakeholders) as it advocates for empowered youth constituency in Vanuatu.

- **Respect**

VNYC believes that respect for all societal institutions and peoples are of great importance as it embodies the true Melanesian value. VNYC practices respect in all its relations, and engagements both within and outside the organization. It

guides how decision-making within VNYC should be made and how it expects other organizations to do so, as well. Respect to and the promotion of young people, their opinions, rights, ideals, situations, choices, decisions and beliefs forms the core mandate of the VNYC.

- **Creativity**

As an organization composed of and representative of young people, VNYC practices and promotes creativity in every decisions and activities it undertakes. It instils and taps the creativity of young people as it works with them, for them and with other stakeholders.

- **Justice**

VNYC believes that fair and just representation and distribution of power and resources are needed to secure a bright future for the youth of Vanuatu. It believes that true justice is carried out when society listens and acts to the voices of the marginalized sectors which include: children, women, disabled and the youth.

- **Self-Reliance**

VNYC supports the right of all young Ni-van people to pursue any legal activities which could help them economically-empowered and exercise their rights fully. It advocates and coordinates for more programs, projects and activities which help them conquer their fears, lack of self-esteem and confidence into a more productive and self-reliant youth who pro-actively participates in the developmental needs of the country.

- **Establish relationship**

VNYC believes that relationship building is essential to the achievement of its mission and vision for the youth. It seeks to establish strong relationship with the young people to earn their trusts as the proper body to represent all their concerns and ideals. It maintains good relationship with the government, donors, civil society organizations, the community, chiefs, churches, and other stakeholders in carrying out its mandate.

To achieve its mission, VNYC will:

1. *Organize, strengthen and support* provincial, municipal and area youth councils
2. Develop strategic *partnership, networking and meaningful engagements* with concerned stakeholders, particularly the government and NGOs on the achievement of its thematic objectives
3. *Facilitate good communication and cooperation* between and across VNYC Executives, Provincial and Municipal Youth Councils and Area Youth Councils
4. *Cooperate and share information* with relevant stakeholders on youth development policies, programs and activities
5. *Promote youth development principles and youth empowerment* in Vanuatu
6. *Support, encourage and partner* with organizations providing services to the youth
7. Develop *effective, productive and realistic targets and relationships* in capacitating the youth

VNYC Thematic Issues

The Vanuatu National Youth Council has identified the following thematic areas for the youth as its priority concerns for 2011-2015:

1. Education, Training and Capacity
2. Participation and Governance
3. Economic Empowerment
4. Health
5. Social and Professional Integration
6. VNYC Organizational Development

It will also work on Gender, Environment, Culture and Information and Communication as cross-cutting themes among all thematic areas mentioned.



Thematic Goals and Objectives

1. Education, Training and Capacity

Education remains to be a key concern and highly valued by the young Ni-Vanuatu today especially in the face of continued lack of employment, globalization and rising poverty. They look at the education as a means of achieving their dreams for the future to develop appropriate skills in order to gain productive employment and/or start business.

In a research conducted in 2009 by the Vanuatu Young People's Project (VYPP), many young people expressed doubt that they could achieve their career dreams because of their limited education, or a belief that they would have no chance to enter higher education or training in the future. Formal education is perceived by the youth to be selective in terms of who gets to continue to develop skills and favours those who have parents who can afford fees in high school or fares to other islands to continue studies.¹

Official statistics put primary school attendance at around 8000; however, as one gets to continue up to Class 13, this figure dramatically fell down to about 120-150 graduates per² year. *Young People Speak 2*³ pointed out that lack of money for school fees, school and transportation expenses, shortage of spaces in schools and training centres were the major contributing factors that limited young people's access to education and work skills. Furthermore, the same research shows that most school leavers (drop-outs and push-outs) attributed their being 'out-of-school' due to their failure to pass the examination, lack of parental support, family commitments, work, disability and unsupportive school teachers.

Improvements in access to quality education since independence, on the other hand are reflected in literacy rates of the population. Youth literacy rate (ages 15-24) is increasing with 91% for male and 92% for female⁴. Reform in the educational sector is now underway through the implementation of the *Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy* using *Vanuatu Education Road Map* as a vehicle in achieving strategic objectives and priorities in education which include: 'Fee-free' School Grant program from Class 1-6, basic education coverage Class 1 – 8, Revision of Vanuatu's Standard Curriculum Development through the NEAT and facilities development. These initiatives are part of Vanuatu's UN MDG and UNESCO's *Education for All* commitments.

While Ministry of Education has made considerable progress towards achieving universal primary education, this has only lessened the burden on parents to pay for primary

¹ Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Youth Empowerment Strategy, 2010, Port Vila

² AusAid, *The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu*, 2007

³ Young People's Project, *Young People Speak 2*, 2008, Port Vila

⁴ NSO, 2009 National Population and Housing Census, 2009, VNSO, Vanuatu

education. Secondary education is exceptionally poor due to the absence of sufficient educational standards upon completion of primary school.⁵

Because of a shortage of secondary school spaces, access to education beyond primary school is severely restricted. Eligibility is determined by the Grade 6 (now Grades 8, 10 and 12) selection examination. About 85 percent of the limited supplies of secondary places are filled by students from the wealthiest 20 percent of Vanuatu society. Several factors contribute to produce this inequitable access to secondary Education which include: access to the best primary schools and the most extensive supply of secondary schools, and expensive secondary school fees. In addition, there are opportunity costs in connection with the schooling of older children, who are less available to help with farming and domestic work. Remoter areas are disadvantaged in the supply of teachers and teaching materials, rarely see an inspector, and have much less exposure to English language in the community.⁶

Young people's expectation to find work after finishing school still remains and in fact increased with more students having to stay longer in schools.⁷ About 3500 school leavers per year enter the workforce with only small numbers gets the job. Of the total labour force, about 29.2% failed to complete primary education while 17.7% had received less or no education at all.⁸

One of the respondents in the VYPP research said that *"I don't know what kind of work I'll ever find. I try to apply but I am not able to get any work."* This statement reflects the reality on the skills being developed inside the formal and some informal training institutions versus the skills and capacities needed by the market. VYPP research further added that there is a gap between young people's desire for skills training and their access to facilities that provide training.⁹

Moreover, in a *Tracer Study for VIT Graduates* conducted by the Ausaid and Vanuatu Government in 2006, most of the unemployed respondents (26% for 2004 graduates, 36% for 2005 graduates) felt that lack of appropriate and practical skills were some of the impediments to unemployment. Most of the employed graduates, on the other hand have continued to train further to better equip themselves with needed skills. Vocational training graduates felt they lack generic skills (e.i. communication skills) that would help them land a job while majority of them (80%) would like to have more training to better enable them to find employment. It is also notable that nearly 20% of the employed graduates are currently

⁵ Henckel, T., Pacific Economic Bulletin Vol. 21, No.3 2006 – Vanuatu's Economy, Half Empty or Half Full, ANU, 2006, Canberra

⁶ The World Bank, Human Development in the Pacific Islands, Opportunities to Improve Social Services in Vanuatu: Summary Report; 2005

⁷ Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Youth Empowerment Strategy, 2010, Port Vila

⁸ AusAid, The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu, 2007

⁹ Young People's Project, Young People Speak 2, 2008, Port Vila

employed in areas where they are not trained. Lastly, it was notable to mention that most of the respondents find job counselling very useful in helping them to find employment. It is not therefore surprising that one of tracer study recommendations was to strengthen the connection between courses/skills offered and the demand of the labour market.¹⁰

In a recent 2010 *Social Audit Summary Report* funded by the NZaid called *Institutional Strengthening Project* with the Vanuatu Rural Development Training Centres Association (VRDTCA), rural training centres provides alternative venues where young people can have access to capacity and training in the rural areas. This however is restricted as to the capacity of the young person to pay training fees, complete the course requirements and the capital needed to start a business or to be employed. Social Audit Summary examined the state of each rural training centre and the different needs to make these training centres competitive and that which produces quality training.¹¹

Alternative pathways should be encouraged for the youth who were literally ‘pushed-out’ of the school systems. Rural training centres and TVET offers these alternative venues. Special focus need to be directed at creating technical, vocational education and training to provide more options for the young people. Furthermore, special programs and focus interventions are likewise needed to improve the educational and training needs of marginalized youths including the disabled, youth in the remote islands and uneducated youths.



¹⁰ TVET Sector Strengthening Program and Ausaid, Tracer Study for VIT Graduates, August 2006, Port Vila

¹¹ VRDTCA and NZaid, Social Audit Summary Report – Rural Training Centres, November 2010

GOAL:

Improved access to education, skills and capacity of the youth

OBJECTIVES:

1. To advocate for increased funding on Education to establish more classrooms and secondary schools nationwide
2. To advocate for more scholarships opportunities for the youth,
3. To facilitate more training programs for the youth to increase capacity and skills (management, computer, leadership, life skills, etc.)
4. To regularly coordinate with NGOs and other service providers on the availability of trainings and capacity building opportunities for the youth, especially marginalized youth
5. To advocate for the effective implementation of Education for All (EFA) and Standard Curriculum development policies
6. To support the formation of accessible facilities (Rural Training Centres) for training and capacity building in all provinces
7. To advocate and support job counselling centres, youth volunteerism, apprenticeship programs to prepare youth for employment and business opportunities
8. To lobby for a youth representative inside the Scholarship Board
9. To advocate for granting of eight (8) youth scholars from qualified youth council executives in each provincial/municipal youth councils

2. Participation and Governance

Governance as defined by the UNDP¹² is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus of men and women, boys and girls. It finds ways to hear the voices of the poorest, the marginalized and the most vulnerable when decisions are made on the allocation of the country's resources.

In a South Pacific country like Vanuatu with small and highly dispersed population, high cost of inputs and transportation, public or civil society participation in the policy process is fairly limited. Politics is considered unstable and fragmentary with a frequent change in leadership caused by numerous "Votes of no-confidence" in the Parliament.



Political competition is based on patronage rather than policy platform which is characterized by fierce in-fighting within political parties and coalitions to access government and resources – chronic short-termism undermining sustained approach to development. Health clinics and primary schools in the rural areas represent the sole contract between the state and most Ni-Vanuatu citizens.¹³ Customary and informal institutions at the local level are seen as highly legitimate and far more relevant to people's lives.

Capacity and interest among civil society actors to contribute to national policy debates is also quite limited and the opportunities that exist are not being used effectively. NGOs in Vanuatu have traditionally been active in service delivery than in advocacy, voice and accountability.¹⁴

The *2004 Review of Vanuatu's National Integrity System (NIS)*¹⁵ conducted by the Transparency International revealed that NIS is not fully functioning due to numerous reasons. It was able to identify ten priority areas in which government need to undertake to strengthen governance which include: general education and awareness; institutional strengthening through capacity building; enforcement of laws; facilitation of the integration

¹² UNDP website, www.undp.org, visited April 2011

¹³ AusAid, *The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu*, 2007

¹⁴ Ibid...

¹⁵ NIS is a framework of laws that establish and regulate institutions, and encourage transparency and accountability in governance which include: Legislative, Executive, Judicial powers, Auditor General, Ombudsman, Public Prosecutor, Public Service, Private Sector, Media and NGOs

of NIS and investigation of decentralization, urbanisation and youth unemployment; investigation of corrupt practices and dealings; increased transparency and accountability in all levels; inclusive and participatory decision making; gender participation and increased data capture and collation. However, implementations of these recommendations are very slow and most of it is yet to be realized.¹⁶ NIS pillars are still weak and participation especially by the youth at all levels is far from being achieved.

The Report furthered that Civic Education as a foundation to understand how the cost of corruption affects the government and the people's lives are being done by very few NGOs. Whilst it is widely recognized that Vanuatu has a relatively good legal framework, its implementation of its laws is at times, non-existent. Ownership and transparency of administrative decisions are lacking which results to lack of nationalism among the population, especially the youth. Women and youth voice and representation are far from the ideal in terms consultation, and policy making.¹⁷

Many young people are still not aware of how the government works in terms of its governing structures and systems of law making. They do not understand what it means to be a citizen of Vanuatu and how they can engage fully in a democratic debates and discussion of national development.¹⁸ Conditions to support young people to participate in decision-making are still lacking which may pose a danger in the immediate future due to the increasing youth bulge.

Vanuatu YES stated that when young people are disenfranchised they may become less caring of contributing to national goals of peace and stability and may be drawn to reckless and violence. Nurturing responsible, active citizenship and civic consciousness is a step towards building national pride in young people.¹⁹

In an observation made, Downer said that not enough jobs (lack of economic participation) is leading to poverty and it results in crime, violence and instability. In the Pacific, this could lead to a lost generation of young people.²⁰ Furthermore, Dobell noted that parts of Melanesia are heading towards this youth bulge threshold...this youth bulge and lack of jobs are part of explanation for the violent unrest that is becoming too familiar...²¹ An urgent need to look at the social structures in order to preserve peace and stability by addressing issues which are brought about by the unemployment, frustrations and rising criminality amongst the youth are extremely needed.

¹⁶ Transparency International, National Integrity System- Country Study Report, Vanuatu, 2006

¹⁷ Ibid..

¹⁸ Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Youth Empowerment Strategy, 2010, Port Vila

¹⁹ Ibid...

²⁰ Downer, A., Australia's International Development Cooperation 2004-2005, Commonwealth of Canberra, 2006

²¹ Dobell, G. Australia Confronts its Pacific Taboo; ABC Radio Australia, Pacific Economic Bulletin, Vol21, No. 3, 2006

Although youth participation at the national level can be hardly seen, participation at the village level is evident as youth alongside with women and churches support the chief in any *kastom* and leadership activities. Furthermore, churches in Vanuatu also provide venue for the youth to participate and be active in community activities. Despite the absence of payment, most youth offered voluntary services to both the chief and churches. The support that they are giving offers the opportunities for young people to participate in local governance.²²

On the other hand, membership in the provincial councils by the chiefs, churches, women and youth are not being followed despite the Decentralization Act due to cost saving measures by the local governments²³. Currently, there are only 3 out of 8 provincial and municipal councils that allow members of the provincial and municipal youth council to sit and attend council meetings. However, the support that these Provincial and Municipal Councils are giving is only restricted to the sitting during council meetings. Concrete programs and projects for the youth are yet to be seen.

VYPP research says that most young people have clear ideas about leadership. Most (90%) of them feel that they have the right to participate in decision-making. However, because of the prevailing norms in the community and society, youth are only expected to listen and obey what the adults have decided, thereby limiting their ability to enrich and own every decisions made. The critical and sometimes negative perception of the youth towards highly respected government representatives (fewer than half of the respondents) can be attributed to loss of respect and the negative issues (i.e. corruption) that the government are facing.

In a recent youth employment forum organized in Port Vila last March 28-30, 2011 by the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the Vanuatu Government, youth participation in decision making was also pointed out. The absence or lack of regional strategies to youth participation and attention to youth issues were raised.

Moreover, integration or mainstreaming of youth issues within the Corporate and Business plans of all concerned government agencies are missing, much more with their participation. Youth leaders are not being consulted in the formulation of policies, directives and priorities in areas of education, environment, land, labour and health. Youth participation or consultation in the review of important government documents and commitments such as Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, CRC and other regional and international laws are yet to be fulfilled.

The absence of a legal framework which guarantees involvement of youth in decision-making at the area, municipal, provincial and national level hinders youth participation and blocks the voice of the huge part of the population from being heard.

²² AusAid, The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu, 2007

²³ Ibid...

Allowing young people to actively participate in decision making forums in their communities guarantees greater ownership of decision by young people which ensures sustainability of initiatives developed. Participation and Governance also advocates for promoting leadership capabilities of young people to improve self image and in empowerment on education, skills training to enable them to participate in the formal economy.

GOAL:

Active Youth Participation at all levels of decision making

OBJECTIVES:

1. Work with the Department and concerned NGOs to draft and lobby for the passage of VNYC Act
2. Advocate with key NGOs and government agencies for more training and capacity on civic-education, active citizenship, human rights and voter education trainings
3. Promote gender equality awareness program involving young boys and girls at the provincial and municipal level
4. Support and facilitate programs on Culture and Youth both at the national and local levels through *Annual National Forum/Festival on Youth and Kastom*
5. Engage government for more youth-sensitive and empowering policies, especially on area, municipal, provincial and national levels

3. Economic Empowerment

Pacific Economic Monitor released by the Asian Development Bank last February 2011 estimated that Vanuatu's economy has expanded by at least 3.0% in 2010 after a record of eight consecutive year of growth. Construction and agriculture remained strong due to refurbishment of tourism industry and high prices of copra, coconut oil and beef, respectively. Growth in credit to the private sector remained subdued, averaging 12.3% on for the first 3 quarters of 2010 while imports grew by 17.1% in the September quarter of 2010. Tourist arrivals in the first 9 months of 2010 were 4.3% below the same period in 2009.²⁴

Growth is forecasted at 4.2% for 2011. The driver is an expected recovery in tourist arrivals from Australia, boosted by the firm economy, a strong Australian dollar, and an increased number of flights. Agricultural production is expected to pick up in response to higher commodity prices.²⁵



Despite the increasing economic improvement for the last eight years, these economic gains are hardly felt by the young people. Huge youth unemployment is still a reality for many young Ni-Vanuatu. It ranks as the highest issue for them especially at the urban and peri-urban areas. Youth unemployment rate is at 64.1% as of 2006²⁶. This reality translates not only disenfranchisement but also a negative feeling of lack of self esteem, uselessness, discouragement and disillusion. High rates of unemployment and underemployment are contributing to a range of social problems, including crime, substance abuse, prostitution and high rates of STIs and possibly HIV-AIDS.

The motivation to get a paid employment to both schooled/unschooled and the push/drop out youths varies from wanting to repay their parents for the money spent in school, the urgent need to meet basic needs, to cope up with the ever-increasing prices of goods and the long term goal of improving their standard of living²⁷.

²⁴ Asian Development Bank, Pacific Economic Monitor, February 2011

²⁵ Ibid...

²⁶ AusAid, The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu, 2007

²⁷ Young People's Project, Young People Speak 2, 2008, Port Vila

Competitions for the small number of available jobs, which are mostly unskilled, are fierce among the youth. These are brought about by the increasing number of youth migration from rural to urban areas. The insufficient job opportunities also makes the youth vulnerable to a lot of work-related exploitation and human rights violations. The weak implementation of the labour laws enable prospective employer to give wages which are below the minimum rate and the luxury to 'hire and fire' young people anytime they want.

Occupations such as *hoasgels*, cashiers and gardeners are common in urban and peri-urban areas. Youth wage is estimated to be less than the minimum wage of Vt. 15,000 to 20,000 a month. Although tourism and hospitality industry is expanding which offers most of youth employment, it is likewise notorious for their wages and working conditions.²⁸

VYPP research revealed that most youth complained about not finding work, no work available and poor education when it comes to employment. A considerable frustration among young people who have pursued higher education but were also faced to the massive unemployment and underemployment are also prevalent.

With the rapidly increasing population growth, Vanuatu is projected to go from 94,000 workers to 147,000 by 2015, with only 12% in formal sector employment, leaving 129,000 workers outside the formal sector. Certainly, many outside the formal sector will remain in the villages²⁹. As this continues, increasing numbers of long term, unemployed and underemployed, and illegally employed youth...poses a threat to increasing social problems such as drug use, prostitution, crime and suicide which in turn provide one of the ingredients for social unrest. Hence, becoming one of the factors behind the low levels of investment and job creation³⁰.

Other parts of economy rely on the subsistence affluence with plentiful of natural resources in unspoilt communities. 80% of the population (which include majority of the youth population) works on the land and produces only about 10% of the GDP. Most of their products are exported in the same low-value added form. Few opportunities are available to rural communities for profitable small holder farming.

In a recent youth empowerment forum in Vila, issues such as availability of updated and data on youth unemployment, inter-governmental coordination on youth employment programs and other opportunities, regional strategies on youth empowerment and its implementations were raised and found to be lacking³¹. Access to seek redress and

²⁸ Ibid...

²⁹ Dobell, G., Australia Confronts its Pacific Taboo; ABC Radio Australia, Pacific Economic Bln, Vol21, No. 3, 2006

³⁰ Luthria et al., At home and Away: Expanding job opportunities for Pacific islanders through labour mobility, World bank, Washington DC, 2006

³¹ Minutes of the Meeting, Youth Empowerment Forum, Commonwealth Youth Program and Vanuatu Government, 28-30 March 2011, Port Vila

protection of the young people in the work place and labour malpractice which includes child labour and gender problems are likewise weak if not in place.

Although youth unemployment and underemployment persist, there are handfuls of young people who pursue small businesses. In Vila and Luganville, few numbers of young people are engaging in small businesses like kava bar, catering/food preparation and dressmaking. Proliferation of these small business results to stiff competitions among small owners and are considered an over-crowded market that supplies the same kinds of products and services.

In a focus group discussion with young people in Malekula, respondents are mostly young farmers. Most of them are more focused on cultivating the land which provides them enough food and small surplus to market. The limited capacity of the young farmers who are involved in copra, cacao and other cash crops products, hinders them to maximize whatever potential gains they may have achieved given proper training and market support. Poor economic infrastructure such as access roads and technologies to provide value-added component to their produce discourage them to go on a full-scale production. Furthermore, high cost of transportation and low market demands also pose a big challenge to achieve greater economic independence.



Another area of concern is the limited or absence of access to financial capital to start their own business or to produce more. Although there are numbers of capacity building trainings that encourage young people to become entrepreneur, schemes to provide financial capital are quite limited. A number of financial institutions which include Vanwoods and several local banks offer loans and financial capitals. These windows however restrict youth to borrow due to numerous reasons, such as high interest rates, complicated requirements, problems on collateral and limited technical know-how on the management side. Furthermore, micro-finance programs are likewise not tailored fit to suit the needs and wants of the youth.

Another area of concern is the limited participation of the youth in terms of decision making when it comes to the use of land. With the increasing demand to cater for the hospitality industry and other infrastructure development programs, land sale and lease are quite common. Youth leaders have expressed concerns about tighter measures to guide the sale of land and the need to provide more information to the elders on the equitability that

considers amicable benefits for the investor, the custom owners and the future generations within the lease period and afterwards. Concerns were also raised on the benefits of economic growth not reaching the rural areas which continues to alienate the young people from their ancestors and therefore limits their ability for access to an economic or social base³².

The realities in the urban areas now are that we are having more young people who are living on less than a 100 Vatu a day. Some resolve to illegal activities just to have access to luxury or basic needs. While a lot of resources are spent on developing facilities to rehabilitate young people, there should also be the same focus or even more in terms of resources given to develop institutions and programmes that allow them to channel their creative intuitions into healthier behaviours. Legislative reforms should look at the implementation of minimum wage to improve living standards and social protection systems to help workers adapt to cyclical and structural change with young people's interests as paramount.³³

As for the country's economic development, ADB pointed out that the sustainability of Vanuatu's economic growth depends on private sector investment. Policies for private sector development have improved in recent years, but difficulties remain. Constraints stem from inadequate physical infrastructure, poor governance, outdated legal and regulatory environments for private sector investment, corruption, and government involvement in inefficient enterprises that crowd out the private sector. Difficulties with land tenure create problems for foreign investors as well as local businesses.³⁴ With these constraints, tapping the greatest and abundant human resource of Vanuatu through the youth is just but of utmost importance.

Sercombe noted that development is critical in the Pacific and some limited access to the Australian job market is an important component of providing support for the Pacific to develop and create opportunities for young people.³⁵ This view was also shared by Mr. Maurice Williams of the Youth Business International Singapore during the youth unemployment summit in Port Vila that 'Pacific source can be a resource in the region' through the establishment of programs that promotes exportability of skills by the Pacific to the Pacific region labour requirements, including Australia and New Zealand.

GOAL:

Young people have more opportunity to engage in employment, access to financial capital and other productive activities

³² Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Youth Empowerment Strategy, 2010, Port Vila

³³ Ibid...

³⁴ Asian Development Bank, Pacific Economic Monitor, February 2011, Manila

³⁵ Sercombe, B. Towards a Pacific Community: Labour Policy Discussion Paper, 25 September 2005, Canberra

OBJECTIVES:

1. Engage the government for an issuance of youth employment policy and other related policies which protects the youth from exploitation in the work place
2. Support and encourage more avenues which provides easy access to business trainings, capital and job counselling
3. Support and facilitate more skills trainings and capacity building for drop out and push out youths
4. Encourage and support initiatives for more labour and business research and statistics with focus on demand and supply chain of education, skills, training and market opportunities
5. Engage government to provide youth recourse to the law to address current labour violations and the effective implementation of existing labour policies
6. Engage international and regional organizations which promotes youth employment opportunities
7. Engage government in providing effective and enhanced infrastructure for the free flow of goods and services through lowering the cost of transportation, farm to market roads, business licensing and other market opportunities
8. Support and facilitate more programs for young women and marginalized youth
9. Support and engage government and NGOs to provide venues for qualified youth to gain experience through volunteerism, apprenticeship and government - employment programs
10. Engage government for further cooperation with other countries in terms of seasonal works and improved overseas working conditions



4. Health

Vanuatu's continuously changing economic, social and cultural transformations have shaped young people's exposure to and capacity in dealing with risk situations. The pressure of accompanying changing needs through the introduction of modern and high technology lifestyles coupled with increasing poverty, unemployment, urban drift, limited capacity and education, media exposures, availability of so much information, and negative/poor self-image generate lots of pressure to the young people to make unhealthy and risky decisions.

Sexual and non-sexual negative risk behaviours include abuse on drugs(marijuana), alcohol, kava and tobacco, street violence, pre-marital sex, rape, incest, abortion, which most of the times lead to criminality, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV-AIDS and other gender-based violence.



Sexual behaviours of young people is changing rapidly with more young people becoming sexually active at an increasingly early age. The rise in sexual activity places young people at greater risks for unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.³⁶ This statement has been confirmed in a study conducted by the UNICEF Pacific Office and the Ministry of Health on *Baseline Report on understanding the Risk and Vulnerability*

Among Vanuatu Youth last 2010. Report said that young people as early as 7 years old of age have already had their first sex experience. Mean age of first sex ranged from 15.1 for most –at-risk- adolescents and 17.9 for mainstream youth.³⁷

Of the youth surveyed, 42% was reported to be using condom while 58% are all unprotected. Transactional and commercial sex are likewise reported with only 39% are considered protected. Risk factors related to substance abuse was very significant, 43% reported alcohol use, 34% kava and 18% home brew.³⁸ Unemployment problem was also linked to the vulnerability which provides young people more time to have 'kilim time'

³⁶ Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Youth Empowerment Strategy, 2010, Port Vila

³⁷ Unicef Pacific Office and the Government of Vanuatu, I No Bin Gat Protection, A Baseline Report on Understanding HIV and AIDS Risk and Vulnerability Among Vanuatu Youth, 2010

³⁸ Ibid...

activities. Youth who have been exposed to the effects of Kava, marijuana, alcohol combined could suffer lethargy, lack of motivation and mental illness.

Data on attitudes of the youth elucidated problematic issues related to promoting safer sex. While findings related to knowledge on HIV-AIDS are very low with only 24%. Only 10% sexually active youth had been tested for HIV and received results. The study also pointed out that vulnerability of youth to HIV and AIDS varies according to their situation; marital status, employment and unemployment, level of education, geographical location and parental and community support.³⁹

VYPP research on the other hand revealed that many young people have incomplete knowledge or wrong knowledge about sexually transmitted infections, especially on its transmission and prevention. About 65% was reported to have knowledge on family planning while only 38% are using contraceptives. High STI prevalence has been reported but the incidence of HIV-AIDS remains low.⁴⁰ Health statistics reveal very high rates of STIs among women (50% in young mothers at their first ante-natal visit), indicating that casual sexual activity is common. The higher rate of STI suggests that the risk of an epidemic and actual prevalence of HIV-AIDS is already higher than reported.⁴¹

An inter-agency group organized by the Ministry of Health and other organizations such as Wan Smol Bag, Vanuatu Family Health Association, and other NGOs was set up to initiate active peer education training for the youth. Peer education will focus on the adolescent and reproductive health, STI and HIV-AIDS issues. In addition to this, the ARH Unit of the Ministry of Health started to involve schools for their advocacy activities as well as the Ministry of Education to look at areas where reproductive health care promotion could be introduced in the secondary curriculum.

During the Focus Group Discussion with young people in Malekula, respondents raised concerns on the increasing rate of teenage pregnancies. These early pregnancies oftentimes lead to physical and emotional problems of the young women due to lack of Reproductive health information and the prevailing local culture. Respondents observed that there is an increasing rate of unmarried young mothers in their communities.

Furthermore, VYPP study also showed that about 40.6% of young people are reported to be occasional smokers with 57.4% in males and 22.1% in females. Kava, home brew, alcohol, beer and rum-cola are most common forms of drinks. 46.8% of young men are kava drinkers while 18.6% are women.

³⁹ Ibid...

⁴⁰ Young People's Project, Young People Speak 2, 2008, Port Vila

⁴¹ AusAid, The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu, 2007

In an interview conducted with the Vanuatu Police Force, VPF said that there is a continued rise in the consumption and smoking of marijuana. This is especially true in the rural areas where Police have difficulty monitoring. VPF noted that there are increased numbers of crime especially gender-based violence and crime against property due to substance abuse.

Certain lifestyles place young people at risk of being marginalized from their communities while increasing their vulnerability to mental instability and health problems. Lack of physical activities and poor nutrition exposes them to an increased risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as early obesity, diabetes, hypertension and heart diseases.⁴²

Given the population structure in Vanuatu where youth sector occupies the large majority, Government have to do something about the health issues of the youth. Health programs and awareness-raising are needed to find balance to the growing societal problems caused by migration, unemployment, urbanization, gender inequality, limited knowledge on health, corruption, and poverty. As a small Pacific country where youth are majority and are sexually active, the inability of health department to provide pro-active solutions, especially in HIV-AIDS prevention could prove to be catastrophic and very costly in the future.

GOAL:

Young people have access to information and better health care to develop and enable them to make healthy decisions and improve their well being (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development)

OBJECTIVES:

1. Encourage, coordinate and support peer education training with key partners
2. Advocate for healthy Ni -Van youth free from alcohol, substance, tobacco, kava abuses
3. Coordinate and support programs on adolescent reproductive health, NCDs, HIV-AIDS, mental health and other diseases
4. Coordinate and support advocacies on behaviour change communication and health counselling
5. Support health promotion initiatives and coordinate health awareness programs
6. Advocate for more and improved health facilities for health care and treatment

⁴² Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Youth Empowerment Strategy, 2010, Port Vila

5. Social and Professional Integration

This thematic area calls for a recognition of the role that young people can play in the community and national development and the need to nurture them in family and community environment that adequately provides for their immediate needs as well as providing the necessary support to help them fulfil their aspirations.⁴³

For the first time in its history, Vanuatu is acquiring a generation of young people who have grown up in an urban environment. Their sense of identity and their expectations of life are fundamentally different to those of their parents. Often from mixed marriages, they are a Creole generation speaking Bislama as a first language.⁴⁴



Migration is seen as a driver for this situation which are brought about by the limited opportunities to earn cash income in the provinces; flight migration due to arranged marriages, customary practices, and criminal infractions; land shortages for small islands; inter-

marriages; chain migration and lifestyle choices mostly among the young people. Small communities outside Port Vila and Luganville are growing which give rise to another set of problems on land disputes, squatting, waste disposal, water and sanitation.

Inter-generational communication tension challenges the mixed of modern, urban and traditional lifestyle differences even in the villages. With more youth wanting more freedom from the authority of chiefs and tight social restrictions, some young people try their luck at the nearest urban area. Some educated youth on the other hand, uses the opportunity to have greater mobility away from their own communities. It is believed that urban drift among the youth would accelerate causing inter-generational conflict and a decline in knowledge and respect of *kastom* from which nationalist sentiment is being shaped.

In terms of family relations, the youth views family as ventral to their lives. 82% of the respondents in VYPP study have grown up with their both parents with 51% currently living with them. Extended family ties are still strong and are bound by the *kastom* traditions. Young people look at *kastom* and *kastom* practices in a new and different ways. For some

⁴³ Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Youth Empowerment Strategy, 2010, Port Vila

⁴⁴ AusAid, The Unfinished State: Drivers of Change in Vanuatu, 2007

they see it as a way to continue the family line while others see it as a means to generate income. Conflict resolution and respect are the two most important elements of kastom while arranged marriages and gender-related issues are seen on the opposite side.

Furthermore, the research also showed that participation in church activities is important to the life of young people. In addition to the chief, the church plays a governance role in the society through service delivery and the establishment of schools, skills training, health services and basic services for women, children, the youth and other vulnerable groups. It is the only national institution with an effective structure at the grassroots level. It was reported that over 80% of the young people go to church once a week.⁴⁵ Moreover, the church also provides young people with a venue to exercise leadership and responsibility. It teaches them the value of work and volunteerism which could be useful when they reach adulthood.

There are however lots of challenges in this thematic issue. One of these includes lack of role models where youth could emulate positive and strong values which would inspire them to realize their dreams. The lack of access to this positive information as well as counselling centres where youth could freely open-up and be confident about themselves exacerbates this problem. Youth mentoring is just confined with very few NGOs and are available to select few who have access to higher education. Lack of self-confidence is particularly an important issue where most of the rural youth, especially women, suffers from.

Another area of concern is the lack of venues where artistic and creative abilities of the youth could be showcased. Youth creativity is wasted because of poor support and encouragement from both the government and private sectors. Although there are a handful of institutions that provide creative and artistic expressions, most of the youth feels that more can still be done to support them. Lack of awareness and limited reach/access to these institutions especially in rural areas discourages the young people to hone their talents and artistic skills.

Although sports development in Vanuatu is very much active, most of the youth from rural areas suffer from limited and poor sports infrastructure, as well as gender inequality. A young woman from Malekula observed that it is only when big events happen at the provincial and national level where sports grounds and facilities in their village are being given attention to. This once a year sporting activity, while encouraging young people to participate, is also limited to groups of particularly good players of few young men.

⁴⁵ Young People's Project, *Young People Speak 2*, 2008, Port Vila

Vanuatu's rural sports facilities, far from being attractive to young people, draws more discrimination to young women and 'not-so good' young men players.

Lastly, although the church, community, some NGOs and the educational system provide venue to develop the leadership abilities of the young people, most of the youth leaders still feel that they lack necessary skills to make their respective organizations work. The lack of capacity, experience and resources oftentimes results to negative self image of a leader if not discouragement in face of challenging situations. Capacity building on leadership, conflict resolution, mediation and youth development are yet to reach most of the youth leaders in the rural areas.

GOAL:

Youth engages in good social behaviours, improved creativity, built healthy relationships and with access to better sport facilities

OBJECTIVES:

1. To lobby government in setting-up youth counselling centres in all provinces and municipalities
2. To work with concerned government agencies on issues dealing with youth migration (urban drift) problems
3. To create network with government, non-government organizations and churches through provincial and municipal youth councils to address youth issues in both rural and urban areas
4. To work with the Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training, Vanuatu Police Force, Churches and Ministry of Health on youth-at-risk issues
5. To support, coordinate and facilitate activities and mechanisms in providing venues where youth can showcase their talents and artistic abilities
6. To advocate and facilitate dialogues in order to address inter-generational communication (adult-youth communication) gaps and parental education
7. To support cultural activities that promotes youth development
8. To advocate and facilitate for more land and environmental policies and programs for the youth
9. To lobby government and other organizations for better sporting facilities and programs especially in rural areas
10. To facilitate the dissemination of timely information on youth opportunities like exchange programs, field trips, youth camps, capacity buildings and other training/exposure opportunities

6. *VNYC Organizational Development*

As a newly established organization representing the voice of the young people, VNYC is faced with a huge job of strengthening youth councils, lack of financial and human resources, limited capacity of youth leaders, coordination, management and geographical challenges. Despite this, VNYC still remains an independent organization supported by the government and some of its partner NGOs and donor agencies.

After the Department of Youth Development, Sports and Training finished with organizing and setting up provincial and municipal youth councils, VNYC is yet to strengthen, and consolidate functional provincial and municipal youth councils while organizing and re-convening all area youth councils. The challenge of setting up these area youth councils through the registration of active youth organizations has already been started. However, implementation of the registration has been delayed due to some financial and technical reasons.



In terms of local government support, only four out of eight youth councils have been supported and were allowed to sit and participate in the provincial council meetings. Recognition by these local governments is just limited to allowing youth leader to be present during the council sessions. Financial administrative and technical supports for the operations of the youth councils are still missing.

Human resource is another problematic area in the operations of the VNYC. Since its operation, VNYC Secretariat is manned by only one administrator who serves as administrator, finance and coordination officer. In addition to this, she also attends to the numerous external commitment of VNYC, mostly out of the country. Furthermore, geographical distribution, inactive council executive members, limited capacity and lack of financial support to the operations of provincial and municipal council also poses a challenge.

Finally, despite being mandated by the youth themselves to be their voice and to push for greater youth participation during the National Youth Summit held in Pango last 2009, VNYC is yet to receive its legal mandate from the Parliament. A National Youth Act could spell out the sustainability and determination of the government to focus on youth development as a priority area for its nation building and social development platform. Being the majority of the Vanuatu's population, the youth, through the Vanuatu National Youth Council could effectively be one of the active drivers of social change in the country.

GOAL:

VNYC strengthened with strong management, internal systems and mechanisms, support services(Secretariat), improved executive and personnel capacity, functional networks of provincial, municipal and area youth councils and proper mandate through legislation

OBJECTIVES:

1. To strengthen and sustain VNYC through the establishment and formulation of its internal structures, processes and mechanisms (Secretariat, Executive Board, Advisory Committee, AGM; Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plans, M & E Plan, Resource Mobilization Plan, Communication Plan/Strategy, Staffing, etc.)
2. To organize, strengthen and support all provincial, municipal and area youth councils through the registration of youth councils and active youth organizations, capacity building activities for executives, and recognition and support of all local governments
3. To effectively disseminate information and improve coordination among the government, donors, NGOs other stake holders on youth issues through networking and linkages
4. To lobby government for the passage of the Vanuatu National Youth Council Act for youth empowerment
5. To effectively carry out smooth youth council transition through the conduct of VNYC Elections in 2012
6. To seek, coordinate and facilitate opportunities for more financial and technical support for the operations and sustainability of VNYC and all provincial, municipal and area youth councils