A modern Document Management System for Vanuatu now available

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL Vanuatu (TIV) attended a very interesting and positive event last week. The event, organized by the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, presented an update of the Document Management System (DMS) that is being reviewed, and strengthened by the Stretem Rod Blong Jastis program.

It is hoped that via the DMS computer system it will gradually become much easier for parties with ongoing legal matters to track the status of their cases using their mobile phones. It is often difficult and frustrating for parties based in Port Vila and Luganville to do this, and so much harder, time consuming and costly for people in the outer islands.

This is the future of our case and document management system through the 'Justice Window', a program that will bring 'transparency, confidence and justice to the people of Vanuatu', and vice versa for the judiciary system. This new approach will enable people from anywhere in Vanuatu to;
- Enquire on the status of case
- File a document
- Lodge a complaint
- Receive a court order

Anytime and anywhere, as long as you have access to the Internet and fortunately Vanuatu is leading the Pacific in this field.

The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) is working hard to make sure that Vanuatu reaches all time high internet coverage of 98% by 2018.

TIV recently spoke Mr. Fred Samuel, the first Chief Information Officer for Vanuatu. We asked him:

How is information communications technology (ICT) going to support this DMS initiative?

"Today when you go to a government department you see piles of papers and documents stored in offices, and sometimes when we talk about key departments such as the Ministry of Finance (MoF), or the Ministry of Lands (MoL), or even the State Law Office or in the Court, there is a special room that keeps all these files. The documents and information they hold are vital, it's the information the departments use to do their job.

But most importantly, some of these documents contain information that we as citizens need. For example, when you go to get a copy of a lease document from the MoL, the document is probably filed somewhere inside one of the cupboards, you would have to photocopy the lease document. The document management system is an ICT system that once implemented, will enable access to that lease document in real time.

Even Ministers and Director Generals, when they need to make a decision or to develop a project, and they need the information, they will be able to get it in real time. They won't need to go and find a key, open a door, and search through folders until they find it. So when have all this information available in real time our government will be more efficient, and be able to make more timely decisions that will produce faster service deliveries. And as for you the citizen, it means that when you go to a government office for information you get it in real time."

That is positive news for Vanuatu, what is the current status of this project?

"The project has already begun; it is currently going through the procurement stage. As soon as we have completed that we will look at how we can ensure that all the government departments have access to it within the next 12 months. I think it is a good way to improve how the government manages its services and how they deliver services by using real time information".

As an anti-corruption organisation, it is good for TI-V to hear that we are upgrading to that level. Because, we can assume that when dealing with a lot of paper work, some papers can get lost in the process either for genuine or non-genuine reasons. What are your thoughts on this, do you agree?

"I fully agree with you, I think as soon as we make the information available there will be a lot more transparency and accountability. And eventually if the government of Vanuatu becomes more transparent and accountable, then definitely we will begin to see more impact in regards to fighting corruption."

"Information is like power, and with this power comes responsibility, we have to use information for the right purposes".

Thank you, do you have a final comment?

"My statement is to you as citizens, we don't only need to develop the telecommunications industry, we have to encourage our MPs and government not only to focus only in the telecommunications. They also have to make sure that we have good roads, good wharfs, health centers and education; I am just talking about one sector, which is an important sector, but it is good to talk about the other sectors too, it would be good if they follow this model".