

# VITAL network hopes to bring telemedicine capability to remote villages

**IN THE ULTIMATE DISPLAY** OF grassroots initiative, the villagers of Naviso on the remote eastern coast of Maewo island have taken it upon themselves to bring telemedicine services to their side of the island.

With the experience of Peace Corps and now Office of Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) volunteer, Alexis Cullen, the communities of Maewo have mobilized their resources to raise funds for a carrier tower to be erected that would connect Naviso to Kerembei and eventually to Lolowai Hospital on Ambae and Northern Provincial Hospital on Santo.

"The remote and unforgiving geography of Naviso means that villagers have to traverse steep slopes and carry their sick and injured over rugged roads, often washed away by heavy rains and only accessible on

foot," Ms Cullen told the national audience at the recent ICT day in Port Vila. "Having lived for two years in Naviso, I have seen the difficulties that mothers and their babies, the sick, the blind and the injured villagers, have to face when they need to access a hospital or receive vaccinations.

"The village is so isolated that there is no phone reception. So you can imagine the communication difficulties that we face with health services and referring emergency cases."

With her presentation, Ms Cullen showed the harsh reality of the mud-covered path, snaking around cliffs and tree roots, that Naviso villagers have to cross, to get to higher ground.

From there, it is often a trip by truck to Kerebei Health Centre for emergency treatment and referral. "Telemedicine would mean access to health services can

be improved dramatically for Naviso village," she added. Together with the Ministry of Health, OGCIO, and TRR, Ms Cullen has been rallying behind her adopted village of Naviso, to pilot a telemedicine network that is called, the Vanuatu Inter-island Telemedicine And Learning network, or VITAL for short.

"It's about using the cheap technology that is available, to show that even in the remotest of areas, and the existing government broadband network, we can allow Village Health Workers and rural nurses working in isolation, to access specialist services, for example in Northern Provincial Hospital.

"Telemedicine will also allow learning and teaching to reach these health care workers, in order to inform and up-skill their knowledge base.

"Telemedicine promotes health information sharing

and collecting data.

"It will be great for providing clinical support to health workers who are often left on their own, to manage emergencies and complications with limited resources.

"It is about empowering our health workers to provide life saving treatment, make early diagnosis and refer cases early," concluded Ms Cullen.

The Telemedicine ICT day presentation was summarized by co-panelist Dr Basil Leodoro, who added, "We all want access to good health.

"Telemedicine is one way for us to achieve that. This VITAL network is vital to the work of the Ministry of Health.

"It is a tool to achieve good health and empower our health workers working in rural and remote locations."

To offer support, the working group can be contacted on [acullen@vanuatu.gov.vu](mailto:acullen@vanuatu.gov.vu)

## Partnership supports Asia tourism and trade flows across the Pacific

**ANZ YESTERDAY ANNOUNCED** that ANZ point-of-sale (POS) and ATM terminals across nine countries in the Pacific will begin accepting UnionPay cards, enhancing services and

ceremony held at the Radisson Blu in Fiji today, ANZ Fiji Acting CEO Saud Minam said acceptance of UnionPay cards at ANZ POS terminals and

foundation for card-issuance there in the future.

"Local issuance of UnionPay cards will offer new payment option for the

implementation of the 'Belt and Road' Strategy."

UnionPay card acceptance will be introduced to ANZ EFTPOS terminals and ATMs

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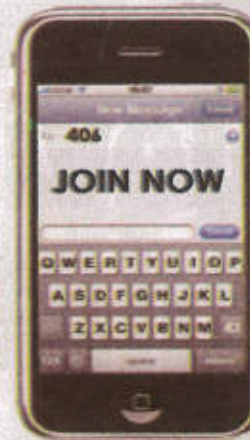
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