

Women and Girls in ICT Experiences & Development in Vanuatu

Shop Vanuatu – eCommerce Website for Vendors
www.shopvanuatu.vu

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Executive Summary

The Women and Girls in ICT-Vanuatu with the financial assistance of the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR) under the department of Consumer Affairs have worked on an ecommerce website project embracing ICT as an enabler to achieve the business objectives of the market vendors in a cost-effective trading system. The project was very intensive and lasted for only six weeks from mid-March till April to finally produce an outcome of Phase I of the project deliverables which is an ecommerce website called Shop Vanuatu. Shop Vanuatu was created for vendors to sell their products on-line. The website can be viewed on www.shopvanuatu.vu

The main purpose of the project is to increase economic opportunities for Ni-Vanuatu vendors especially women and girls to grow their small businesses and create economic security for themselves, their families and communities and achieved their aspirations by leveraging their sales and revenue through an accessible worldwide online marketplace.

In a way, it is to bring the market place to a global space by way of using technology and introduce an innovative way of doing business for the vendors.

Embracing technology into small and medium entrepreneurship will enhance the business environment and business trading methods of the market vendors. Women especially who occupies 90% in this business sector will be empowered with the business growth and experiencing different approach to marketplace. One benefit it will bring is women will retain back their roles to spend more time with their families at home and concentrating on the special skills of weaving, sewing, carvings, paintings that they are good at, knowing that their product is selling on line. In such circumstances, specialized skills will grow bigger and cultural knowledge is retained through more practices.

The project team involves a project coordinator, a photographer, a website designer and TRR managers who worked endlessly to ensure deliverables are achieved and the final product is completed within time frame.

The challenges encountered during the course of this project are remarkable and are lessons to be learned from. They are documented in this report for future references should the same model of selling local products online be replicated to other parts of Vanuatu.

A total of 15 market handicraft vendors were interviewed and 5 local restaurants were all part of the development of Shop Vanuatu. Out of a hundred products taken 59 were uploaded on Shop Vanuatu and the rest were pending Phase III of the project to full complete the website. Some of the undertakings in phase III will include install payment gateway that will facilitate online payments, integrate logistics fees, and install product codes, training and promotions.

The phase II of the project was launched of Shop Vanuatu. It was launched on the day of celebrating International Girls ICT Day which falls on Thursday 26th of April 2018, by the Head of Government Officials, Mr George Borugu the Acting Director General of Trade, Mrs Dorosday Kenneth the Director of Womens Affairs, Mrs Anthea Toka first Political Advisor Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the first Political Advisor of Ministry of Finance.

1. Introduction

The Vanuatu marketplace of Port Vila town has two main market locations, the Port Vila market house and the **Haus blong Handicraft market**. Some other market houses are located in the outskirts of Port Vila town. This project had primarily focus on the two main market houses in the city of Port Vila that sells handicraft to tourists, green and vegetables and local restaurants.

The project was initiated to provide solutions to social issues encountered by market vendors and to engage them to participate in the global market place through an eCommerce website platform. The initiative embrace ICT as an enabler and further taking into account opportunities provided by the Telecom operators to tap on the availability of data network capability including 80% of the coverage around Vanuatu. Further this project is in a way building a local content for users to have access to these information available online wherever they are. It is also to entice the consumers to use Telecom internet services available on the market.

Specifically the objectives of the project are to:

- Build ecommerce website for market vendors to market and sell their products online
- Use the power of internet to promote economic empowerment
- Use internet to transform the market place from a traditional norm to an online market place
- Increase economic opportunities for vendors
- Increase sales and revenue
- Promote women and girls to take up ICT in their education and business careers
- Close digital divide
- Promote gender equality

Below are some of the challenges and issues that market vendors faced while conducting their small businesses. These issues were highlighted in the project proposals and is explained further in the box below:

1) Issues and Experiences on Space Availability at the Market places

While the market vendors enjoy the market houses sponsored by Aid donors to sell their products there is still issue of sufficient spacing availability to accommodate over 1000 of handicraft sellers who are scattered to four different locations; Market house, Centre point, Mamas market at the road junction to the wharf and the newly New Zealand donor funded building at the sea front. There are other market locations at Independence Park, Stade and Manples area.

About 90 of the handicrafts sellers are located in the big market house sharing the same space with green vegetables and local restaurants. The handicrafts sellers are all crowded occupying about 1/4 of the market house building. The booths are about 4 square meters each separated by hanging clothes and small tables to display their products.

Car parking has become a major issue at the main market house down town as a result of more than three different businesses all happening under one roof. There are not enough parking spaces to accommodate consumers and public at large who desired to shop for green vegetables or eat at the

restaurant or tourist shopping for souvenirs and or customers wanting to shop at the ABM supermarket and eat at the restaurant. Moreover, the market vendors selling green vegetables experienced parking issues when their trucks loaded with vegetables have difficulties finding a space to deliver the produces at the market house. With a high growth in demand thus leads to growth in businesses this issue will be greater experience in the next 5 to 10 years if not resolved immediately.

2) Issues and Experiences on Market House Conditions

Some other risks associated with selling of products in an open house market are exposure to bad weather conditions. Bad weather conditions can affect business opening hours, daily targets on income and costs of restocking. The worst conditions are during heavy rainfall and cyclones when products and items are in an open market house and are susceptible to being damage thus drop values. Examples are with clothing materials soaked in water during heavy rainfall affect its value and pricing. Business hours are affected in which most times the booths are closed for a whole day and are likely to extend when heavy rainfall prolonged to several days. During cyclone, market vendors physically move their products from market houses to safe houses. Relocation costs and items are prone to damage during handling and transportation.

A solution is introduced at the new market house at the sea front with construction of storage boxes. However, there is still issue with spacing since in most cases not all items could fit into one storage box.

Another issue experienced is the unfavorable health conditions market vendors faced when selling their produces for more than a day that would require them to sleep at the market houses for security purposes. It has been noted that some families bring in their children most likely kids who are not attending schools to the market and spent few nights sleeping in an open, cold, wet and dirty environment until their products are sold out. This unhealthy sleeping condition could impose health problems on the family member if this practice continues for a long period of time.

Furthermore, issues of family breakup, child molesting, and incest are all related to parents separation where normally a mother will move to town to sell vegetables and the father is left with the children at home. With the bright lights and social life experienced in town market vendors have the tendency of socializing as well and this could lead to family problems.

3) Issues and Experiences on Unavailability, Inaccessibility and Payment of Products Online

Generally, the opportunities for boosting businesses across the country to be available and accessible to all types of producers and consumers are inadequate. And the exposure to Vanuatu handicrafts to international market is insignificant. Most valuable items that are locally made can only be accessible from booths at the market houses in Central city of Port Vila and Luganville Santo. Consumers, local and tourists visited the booths in person for shopping. The richness of the cultural items that are of high values is still untouched. These are valuable handicrafts that are produced in large quantity in the islands that rarely reach the market places.

There is lack of information available on neither internet nor an online integrated system created to enhance accessibility and availability of products to the buyers and consumers. There is lack of online payment facilities provided by the market vendors to the buyers to ease their purchase to meet a high level of service satisfactory.

The majority of the market vendors is women who are disadvantage to owning a mobile phone and are discouraged to use the internet. As such, the market business operations of handicraft and green vegetables is merely labor intensive with long delays, slow sale and insufficient stock level.

The project began on March 12th with logistics, consultations, photographs and script writings, website designing and development were all done during this time frame towards its launched on the 26th April, 2018. In phase III Shop Vanuatu will be fully completed. All lessons learned from this project will greatly give guidelines to replicate the same initiative when dealing with selling local products.

2. Project Area and Location

This is a first ever project of its kind to build an ecommerce website for the market vendors to sell their products on line. It is regarded as a pilot project, all lessons learned will be helpful to replicate a similar model to other vendors in Vanuatu. As a pilot project with limited funding available for Phase I, it consists of 15 vendors from the vendors selling handicraft to tourists at the Haus blong Handicraft and Port Vila market, 5 local restaurants at the Port Vila market and the green fruits and vegetables.

3. Beneficiaries and Participants

With more information available and reachable by vendors through internet and other forms, women vendors who constitute over 90% of the business will be better informed with information and knowledgeable of their surroundings towards decision making. Their understanding of things concerning their livelihood has grown wider and deeper. They can speak up and be able have better security for their families.

As commonly known that when women are economically empowered and educated through some form of education taking ICT as an example, the impact will be an educated nation. Women will spend their money on things or where they believe will have a greater impact for their children. So when they get some form of education, it is believe that they will put more efforts to ensure their children get better education as well.

When women are economically empowered they have confidence in themselves and are capable to occupy men's role. They take up the leading roles in their families, communities and the organizations they are part of. Men's role has now become gender equal. The impact is tremendous as more women and occupying men's role

Ecommerce online shopping promotes financial inclusion for market vendors and women in particular. The service will allow them to open Bank accounts for their business as part of the online selling requirements. Such services will benefit them to save their income, have a better record of every

transactions made and will open up for business opportunities and financial access provided by financial institutions.

More specifically the benefits are:

- It will increase economic opportunities for small and medium enterprises in particular women who occupy the majority of the handicraft business
- Selling online will connect all capable vendors especially women to a global exposure, where their products will be marketable and saleable to the global community through 24 hours service
- It will increase vendors sales and revenue thus will improve their livelihoods and be able to achieve their goals, dreams and aspirations for their families and themselves
- An ecommerce platform will transform all aspects of trade ecosystem starting from producers level of quantity and quality standards to a sellers mindset of producing to meet an increase customer expectation and of high quality standard
- Online selling will have a direct impact on the market place where we will see a transformation of traditional way of selling at the kiosk and booth to embracing innovative approaches through internet where the globe is moving to.
- Increase market portfolio will increase quantity and thus will retain traditional knowledge and expand on specializations of skills.
- On line selling will support minimizing the current social challenges and issues that are affecting families and communities
- It will improve digital inclusion and support to close digital divide between women and men and boys and girls. Women will take up ICT for business careers and girls will take up ICT for educational career
- It will have direct impact on financial inclusion where we will see vendors and consumer at large using online transactions via visa and master cards for trading
- It will empower women in their decision making thus will have a positive impact on gender equality
- Vanuatu is expected to see an evolution of eCommerce with data capacity now available through Telecom networks
- It will close geographical distance between vendors and customers and bring everyone closer through the power of internet.

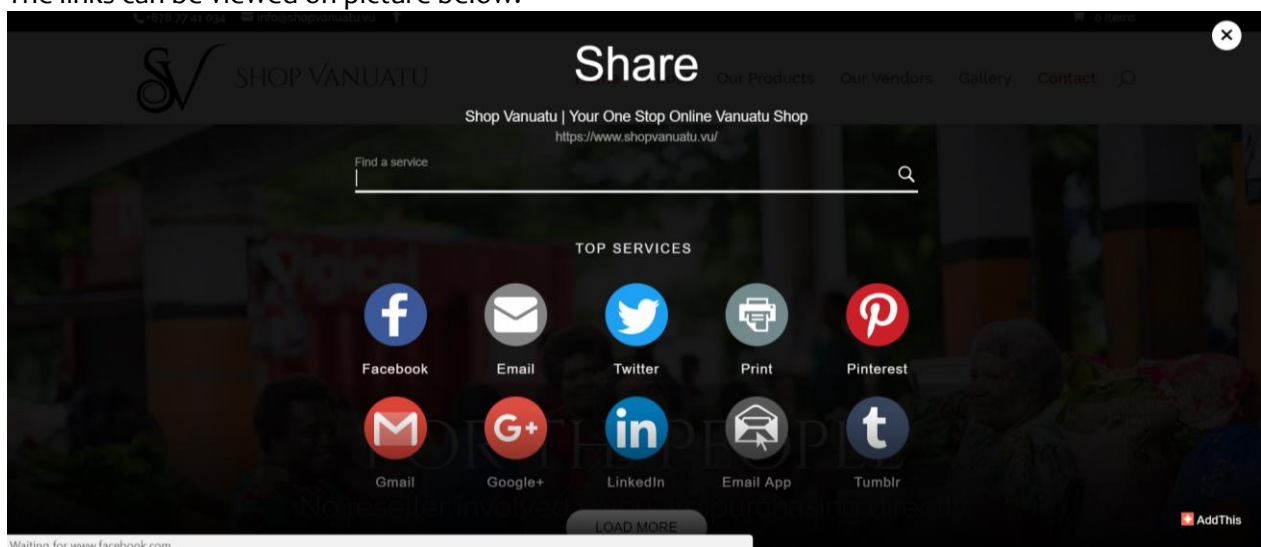
4. Ecommerce Website - Shop Vanuatu



Shop Vanuatu is a first authentic online market place for vendors. Shop Vanuatu has all the elements of an ecommerce website except the online payment gateway. The products are displayed according to product types and are linked to vendors selling the product. There are 57 handicraft products displayed, 5 local restaurants and a page on green and vegetables. A total of 15 vendors with their profiles. Shop Vanuatu has a narrative on About Us and also has a Contact details; email: info@shopvanuatu.vu. In the meantime a mobile contact use is 7741034. This will be changed in the phase III of the project.

The Shop Vanuatu has a face book page link: <https://web.facebook.com/shopvanuatu/notifications/>. The face book page and other communications link such as email, printer, twitter are all linked to the website.

The links can be viewed on picture below.



The ecommerce website called Shop Vanuatu was completed within four weeks. The work covers organizing team members, conducted meetings, consultations and working on the final product of building the website. Shop Vanuatu can be viewed on this link: www.shopvanuatu.vu.

5. Launched of Shop Vanuatu

The launch of Shop Vanuatu was hosted by the Director of Women Affairs, Mrs Dorosday Kenneth. It was jointly launched by Mr. George Borugu, the Director General of Trade, Mrs. Dorosday Kenneth, the Director of Women's Affairs, Mrs. Anthea Toka First Political Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and First Political Advisor Ministry of Finance at the Convention center media room.



Shop Vanuatu was launched on the day of celebrating International Girls ICT Day which falls on Thursday 26th April 2018. The event was hosted by the office of Department of Women's Affairs with letters of invitation signed by the Director, Mrs Dorosday Kenneth. The event was celebrated with two main achievements, a history and milestone of Vanuatu to launch the first ever authentic online website for vendors and the announcement of SMART sistas camp 2018 and Robotic competition 2018. The Acting Director General (ADG) of Trade Mr. George Borugu gave a key note speech which he emphasized on the two most important elements of promoting market is to increase quantity and improve quality. Once these two elements are achieved Vanuatu is well established and ready to export into international market. Programs are in place managed by the Ministry of Trade to ensure these two objectives are met. Vendors are encouraged to be part of this chain of boosting quantity and quality.

The theme of the day is 'Expanding on the Horizon and Changing attitudes' corresponds well with the launch of Shop Vanuatu. The main purpose of Shop Vanuatu is to expand the horizon of the vendors transforming them from a traditional way of doing business where vendors bring their products to a market place to sell, and moving towards an innovative approach to sell on a global online market place. The long term effect of this approach would be changing of attitudes from the perspective of increasing their productions volume and meeting the high quality standard set by the international market demands. This demand will affect the supply chain and transform the mindset of vendors and their families and communities to be concentrated to meet the demand expectations. Some of the social impact will be less gossip, reduce rate of incest and expansion on the avenue of point of sales. More effectively, both women and men will engage in the primary sector ensuring production targets are met thus a family is working together and providing security for themselves.

SMART sistas are part of the country's achievement of promoting the theme of the day. Since 2016 when SMART sistas was launched there are now about 20 young girls who have trained to be future engineers in ICT fields. They have gone through ICT camps and are continuing with technovation program developing mobile applications and are taking part with international competition of first global robotic competition. These young girls will become future models of Vanuatu to close digital divide and promote gender equality in digital development and innovation.

Program

The launch was well coordinated and completed within the time frame with the guidelines of a program. The program started with an opening prayer, welcome speech, followed by a drama from a wan smol bag representatives, a key note speech followed by launched of Shop Vanuatu. The announcement of SMART sistas ICT camp 2018 and robotic competition 2018 was followed thereafter.

The event happened at the Port Vila convention Centre media room. About over 100 people of different institutions including invited quest attended the launch.

6. Conclusion

The project was made possible by the sponsorship of the Telecommunication and Radiocommunication Regulator. It is part of the objectives of the department of consumer affairs for its contribution towards consumer development on internet and the overall uptake of ICT in particular the internet usage. It was well managed and coordinated by the team, as a result the project was completed within its timeframe given. All deliverables outlined in the terms of reference were achieved. The outcome is an online shop called Shop Vanuatu; www.shopvanuatu.vu. This is an authentic online shop for vendors in Vanuatu. All lessons learned from its operation from this project will be guidelines to any upcoming project of its similar context that is targeting local products sell online.

This is a beginning of transforming the mindset and the way of doing business by market vendors towards an innovative approach through the power of technology. It is a beginning of a long journey ahead where the world is heading and Vanuatu will eventually be part of this journey moving forward with technology.

It is a challenge at the beginning to get stakeholders buy in the idea and support its progress. However, with consultations information were conveyed about its purpose and how it can be beneficial to all parties involved especially the women vendors. Until understanding is reached uniformly and trust is earned the stakeholders will give their full support towards its progress.

The phase III of the project will be a full completion of Shop Vanuatu which part of it will be promoting the portal for its uptake. In the meantime Shop Vanuatu will show slow progress but will surely pick up in the long run where Vanuatu will be part of the world moving towards a digital era and an enabling environment.