Vanuatu



Organization: Santo Sunset Environment Network (SSEN)
Location: Western Santo, Sanma Province, Vanuatu
Solution: Supporting grassroots Indigenous climate adaptation and resilience in Vanuatu
Factsheet Period: One round of UNDP AFCIA funding (18 months)



Santo Sunset Environment Network raising adaptation awareness among chiefs and community leaders @SSEN

Vanuatu is one of the most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change in the South Pacific, with natural disasters costing around 6% of GDP annually (World Bank, 2021). Adaptation support remains severely limited for islanders in remote, underserved villages with little to no access to government services, climate finance or modern technology. SSEN offers an innovative solution that empowers communities by preserving and enhancing traditional knowledge systems that form the backbone of local food production, fisheries, construction, bush medicine and navigation. By integrating these practices with climate risk projections, SSEN has developed a science-based, culturally relevant adaptation and development programme. This initiative is led and owned by 42 communities across two remote Area Councils on Espiritu Santo Island, Vanuatu, ensuring long-term resilience and sustainable development.

Key achievements

- Trained 89 Indigenous Climate Rangers (40% women)
- Initiated a major partnership with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Protection to formalize over 15 Community Conservation Areas in Western Santo, covering up to 50,000 hectares
- Conducted workshops on climate resilience and disaster governance for Community Disaster Climate Change Committees, in partnership with the Vanuatu Red Cross Society
- Organized traditional and custom agriculture summits to transfer knowledge and skills to the youth, empowering 600 young participants
- Participated in four major regional and international learning and exchange events in 2024 (Fiji, Port Vila and Kenya), sharing lessons on conservation, biodiversity protection and humanitarian funding

Social impact

- Empowered women to actively take the lead in nature-based traditional adaptation to ensure family food security and resilience amidst unpredictable weather
- Recognized, documented and used cultural foundations of climate change adaptation in Indigenous societies to support locally relevant and effective adaptation
- Formally engaged local communities in Community Conservation Area management planning, mapping and biodiversity assessments, ensuring local ownership of conservation efforts
- Provided practical tools to the community for disaster assessments, such as evacuation simulation drills to directly boost the preparedness and coordination of Community Disaster Climate Change Committees





Adaptation benefits

- Enhanced resilience to climate food risks through community-led training and the diversification of production processes, integrating traditional knowledge with climate-smart agricultural practices
- Implemented nature-based solutions for land management, including backyard gardening, to reduce community vulnerabilities to tropical cyclones and landslides while sustaining food sources amidst erratic weather
- Strengthened the governance and reporting structures of Community Disaster Climate Change Committees, ensuring compliance for disaster response from the grassroots level up to provincial and national authorities

Innovation

- Integrated smart agriculture with traditional methods, with households planting resilient crops like pineapples, taro and ginger to combat erratic rainfalls and drought
- Influenced government policy, with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Protection now supporting the formalization of Community Conservation Areas through the VCAP II and ECARE projects

Replication potential

- Established a National Replication Model: Integrated Vanuatu Red Cross expertise to develop standardized disaster response and assessment tools (ready for nationwide implementation)
- Policy-backed Conservation Blueprint: Formalized 45,000–50,000 ha of Community Conservation Areas under national regulations, setting the standard for large-scale conservation in other provinces

Funding snapshot

- UNDP-AFCIA grant: US$124,980 (initial grant)
- Government of Vanuatu and Community Support: US$4,000 ~ US$8,000



ADAPTATION FUND Climate Innovation Accelerator

ADAPTATION FUND

To read their story, visit UNDP-AFCIA

To watch their video, click here

To contact the initiative, visit SSEN