

VARs NEWSLETTER

Ministry of Lands & Natural Resources – Vanuatu Affordable and Resilient Settlements Project Weekly Newsletter



THE WORLD BANK



HON. MINISTER RICK TCHAMAKO MAHE & MOLNR SENIOR EXECUTIVES

MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM LEAD:

– VARs PMU

Welcome to Week 2 of the VARs Weekly Update – your go-to source for project progress, community engagement, and delivery insights. This week we saw action on multiple fronts: progress work at Etas, powerful feedback from our Focus Group Discussions, and continued growth in procurement and institutional systems. These are the building blocks of real, lasting change.

As we grow momentum, it's important to remember why this project sits under the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MoLNR). MoLNR isn't just another implementer – it's the Ministry with the mandate, systems, and national reach to deliver change that lasts. With the right reforms and deep participation, we're not just fixing infrastructure – we're rebuilding trust, governance, and the way we manage land. Thank you to all teams working across technical, policy, and community levels to push this project forward.

IN THIS ISSUE

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEEK

PROJECT UPDATES

ANNOUNCEMENTS

UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY WOMEN LEAD THE CONVERSATION



OHLEN MATASO COMMUNITY WOMEN

CHIEFS FROM INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEEK:

Etas Subdivision

The Ministry of Lands and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and representatives of landowners officially broke ground at Etas on 25 July 2024. The proposed Etas subdivision is a model site under the VARS Project, expected to deliver serviced plots in Phase 1. This marks a major milestone in delivering affordable, hazard-resilient land for Port Vila's growing population.

Community Leadership Reaffirms Support

Chiefs from informal settlements, including Chiefs from Tokyo Buninga & Tokyo Paama, Seaside, Ohlen Mataso and Anambro, publicly reaffirmed their backing of the VARS Project. Their message: "This is our chance to fix what's been broken for too long. We must stay the course."

Focus Group Discussions Complete

FGDs with women from Seaside, Tokyo, Ohlen Mataso, and Anambrou have been completed. Key themes raised include urgent drainage issues, poor lighting, sanitation, and traffic risks. Community members have also formed committees and are mobilising to maintain planned upgraded infrastructure.

Why MoLNR Leadership Matters

Placing the VARS Project under the Ministry of Lands ensures strategic alignment across land governance, infrastructure, and policy reform. MoLNR brings national reach, sectoral knowledge, and the ability to deliver integrated systems. This is about more than delivery — it's about lasting impact.

Procurement Milestones

As of July 2025, 34 procurement contracts have been awarded across consulting, goods, and works. From Compactus shelving to Etas subdivision tenders, the Procurement and Operations Unit continues to enable effective project delivery.

PROJECT UPDATES:

Component 1: Etas Gardens Subdivision

- Groundbreaking held 25 July 2024
- Designs of subdivision well underway with water and electricity agreements in place
- Customary land negotiation and environmental clearance progressing well

Component 2: Informal Settlement Upgrading

- Sites: Seaside, Tokyo, Ohlen Mataso, Anambrou
- FGD results confirmed: drainage, street lighting, and sanitation are community priorities
- Detailed designs underway with FGD data integrated
- 45 cyclone-resistant trash racks installed since late 2024

Component 3: Institutional Strengthening

- LMIS Phase 2: Compactus shelving installed; digital archiving begins in August
- Database Analyst recruitment ongoing
- Stakeholder mapping and Technical Working Group meetings held to align Phase 3 rollout

PROCUREMENT SPOTLIGHT

Procurement Progress Since 2023

By Nimrod Siosi, Senior Procurement and Operations Officer

Procurement is the engine powering delivery across VARS. Since launch, 34 contracts have been signed, covering:

- LEI for digitisation of land records
- Compactus shelving procurement
- Recruitment of key technical advisors
- Tendering of Etas site and services

What's Coming:

- Tender packages for 4 settlement upgrades (Seaside, Anambrou, Ohlen Mataso, Tokyo)
- Design services for new MoLNR office complex
- Continued consultant engagement for Phase 2 execution

All activities tracked in STEP to ensure transparency and timeliness.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

FGD Summary Report Now Available

The October 2024 Focus Group Discussion Report is now complete and published. It offers deep insights into household challenges and readiness to sustain improvements.

Draft Housing Policy Nearing Completion

DUAP's draft National Housing Policy (2025–2035) is due by end of August. Topics include: informal settlement upgrades, housing finance, rental frameworks, and low-cost self-build models. VARS is contributing to mapping and policy support.

Fiji Land Bank Study Mission Preparation Underway

A 10-day mission to Fiji is planned for October 2025. Government reps will explore how land banking can improve land access while protecting custom rights.

SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY WOMEN LEAD THE CONVERSATION

From Ohlen Mataso to Seaside, women are shaping how infrastructure responds to lived realities. During this month's FGDs, female participants flagged:

- Unsafe and unlit streets
- Shared sanitation with no privacy
- Flooded homes due to poor drainage

Community Liaison Committees have since formed zone teams to oversee maintenance. As one participant shared, "If we look after the upgrades, more will come."

This is active ownership in action — a shift from being recipients to partners in delivery.



UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES:

- **End of August:** Draft National Housing Policy due for circulation
- **October:** Fiji Land Bank Study Mission (Dates TBC)

FEEDBACK & CONTRIBUTIONS:

We want your input!

Send your updates, suggestions, or stories to de@vars.vu by Thursday 3 PM for inclusion in next week's issue.