

VARS NEWSLETTER

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



THE WORLD BANK



GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION

ENSURING OWNERSHIP, COMMITMENT, AND SUSTAINABILITY IN VARS IMPLEMENTATION

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

The VARS Project is firmly embedded under the Ministry of Lands & Natural Resources, which ensures that implementation aligns with national mandates and policy frameworks. Ownership is reinforced through:

- **Institutional Reform Strategy:** Endorsed by the Council of Ministers, this includes digitisation of land systems, governance reform, and infrastructure upgrades with US\$16 million in World Bank support.
- **Policy Integration:** Placement under MoLNR ensures strategic alignment across land governance, infrastructure, and policy reform.
- **10-Year Masterplan (2026–2036):** A national blueprint for land and resource management that integrates climate resilience, customary land rights, and digital systems.

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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Sustainability depends on communities seeing VARS as their project. This is ensured through:

- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Conducted in informal settlements to identify priorities such as drainage, lighting, sanitation, and safety.
- Community Liaison Committees (CLCs): Active across settlements, ensuring inclusive representation of chiefs, women, and youth.
- Public Consultations on EIA: Held to ensure transparency and environmental safeguards.
- Ownership in Action: Residents to form maintenance groups and mobilise resources to care for new infrastructure.

LANDOWNER AND CUSTOMARY ENGAGEMENT

Given that over 90% of land in Vanuatu is customary, the VARS Project prioritises landowner involvement and protection of kastom rights:

- Customary Land Negotiations: Agreements with chiefs and landowners are prerequisites before contracts proceed.
- Land Bank Task Force: A multi-agency group is studying Fiji's Land Bank model to adapt lessons for Vanuatu.
- Safeguards in Practice: Emphasis on consent, transparent leasing, and fair revenue returns for landowners.

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

The project embeds resilience into physical and institutional systems:

- Resilient Infrastructure: Waste platforms, street lighting, drainage systems, and disability access ramps designed for climate resilience.
- Digital Transformation: LMIS digitises land records, integrates GIS, and introduces online services, improving transparency and revenue collection.
- Capacity-Building: Training staff, establishing specialised revenue and compliance units, and fostering partnerships ensure reforms outlast external funding.

CONCLUSION

The VARS Project's implementation model demonstrates a holistic approach to ownership, commitment, and sustainability.

- Government ownership ensures reforms are institutionalised, not ad hoc.
- Community and landowner participation guarantees social legitimacy and shared responsibility.
- World Bank financing provides resources to embed systems that can sustain themselves.

In sum, VARS is not just upgrading settlements but rebuilding trust, governance, and resilience for generations to come.



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

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.