

VARS NEWSLETTER

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



THE WORLD BANK



JIMMY PIERRE, MOLNR PRINCIPAL LANDS OFFICER & SCANNING TEAM @ WORK

TRANSFORMING LAND ADMINISTRATION IN VANUATU: A NEW ERA FOR THE MINISTRY OF LANDS & NATURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION: VISIBLE CHANGE AND RENEWED CONFIDENCE

The Ministry of Lands & Natural Resources (MoLNR) in Vanuatu is undergoing one of the most significant transformations in its history. At the heart of this change is a comprehensive digitisation and institutional strengthening effort supported by the World Bank through the Vanuatu Affordable and Resilient Settlements (VARS) Project. The impact of this support is already being felt across the Ministry, particularly within the Lands Registration Office, where improved systems, infrastructure, and capacity are translating directly into better public services.

This progress is perhaps best captured by the optimism expressed by Mr. Jimmy Pierre, Principal Registration Officer at MoLNR. Mr. Pierre has observed first-hand how recent investments have fundamentally changed the way the Registration Office operates, enabling staff to serve the public more efficiently, systematically, and transparently. His confidence reflects a broader sense of renewal within the Ministry—one grounded in real improvements and a clear vision for the future.

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DIGITISATION AS A CATALYST FOR SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

A cornerstone of the transformation has been the digitisation of lands records and archives.

Historically, MoLNR managed vast volumes of paper-based files—titles, leases, applications, survey documents, and correspondence—often stored in constrained spaces and difficult to retrieve quickly. This created delays, increased operational risk, and placed heavy demands on staff time.

Through VARS support, MoLNR has now embarked on a structured, well-resourced digitisation programme. Dedicated scanning stations have been installed within the Registry, supported by new shelving systems, scanners, and computers. Four staff members have been engaged specifically to focus on scanning and processing archival records, ensuring that this critical task is handled systematically and at scale.

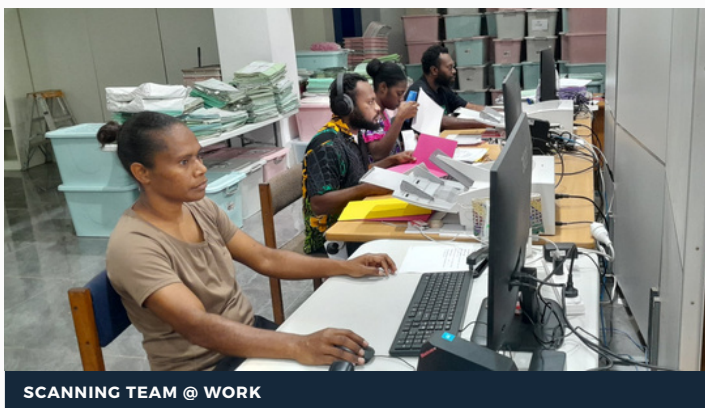
Crucially, digitisation is not being undertaken in isolation. It is embedded within a broader information management reform, anchored by the rollout of the M-Files Document Management System. This modern platform enables scanned records to be securely stored, automatically classified, and made easily searchable using metadata and optical character recognition (OCR). For staff, this means faster access to information and fewer hours spent searching for files. For clients, it means quicker turnaround times and more reliable services.

BUILDING CAPACITY AND STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS

The digitisation effort has been complemented by targeted investments in people and systems. Training on M-Files and related workflows has been provided to MoLNR staff, supported by regular drop-in sessions and ongoing technical assistance. This focus on capacity building ensures that technology is not just installed, but actively used and embedded into daily operations.

At the same time, the Ministry has been addressing long-standing data quality and system integration challenges. Cleansing of registry and invoicing data, clarification of authoritative title status, and alignment between Registry, Survey, and financial systems are improving accuracy and confidence in land information. These reforms directly support better revenue management, reduce duplication, and enhance accountability—outcomes that are already evident in the reported increase in revenue collection.

The result, as confirmed by Mr. Pierre, is a Registration Office that operates in a more structured and systematic manner. Clear workflows, reliable records, and improved coordination across units have made it significantly easier for staff to respond to customer needs.



SCANNING TEAM @ WORK

RESTORING THE PAST, SECURING THE FUTURE

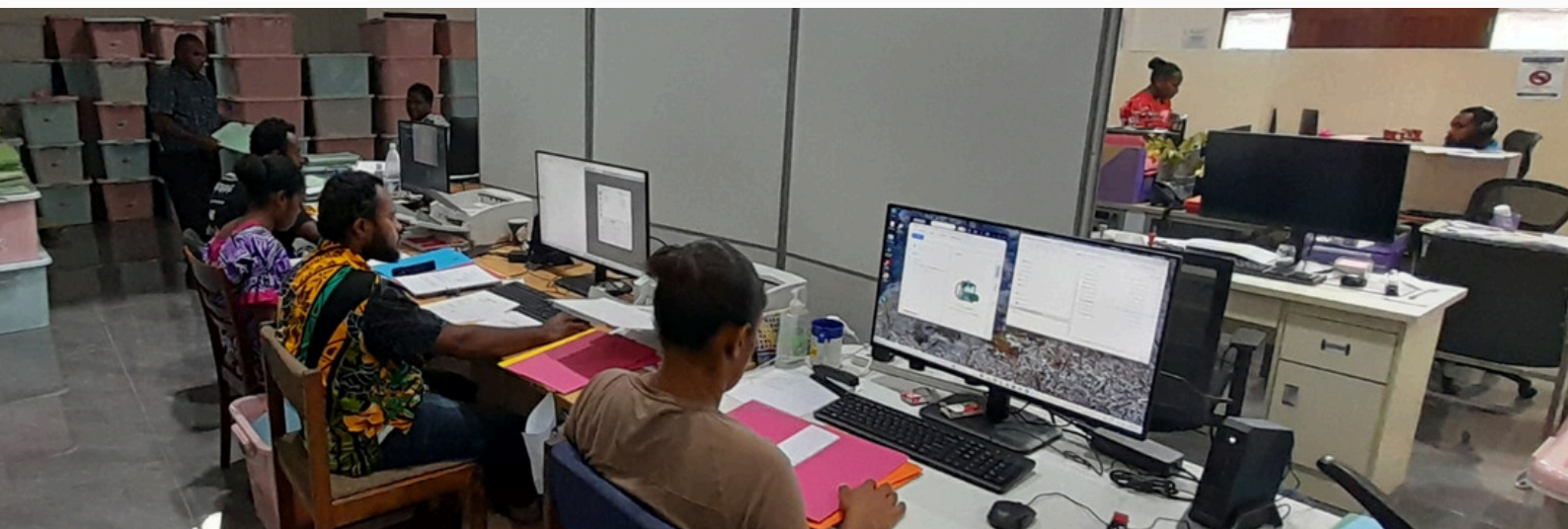
The scale of MoLNR's archival holdings is substantial, reflecting decades of land administration activity. Restoring and digitising these records is therefore a multi-year endeavour. Encouragingly, progress to date indicates that this task is well on track. It is now expected that all MoLNR lands archives will be fully restored and digitised by the first quarter of 2026.

This achievement will mark a historic milestone. Once completed, Vanuatu will have a secure, modern digital repository of land records—protecting vital national assets from physical deterioration, loss, or disaster, while making them far more accessible for legitimate use. In a country highly exposed to natural hazards, this represents a critical investment in resilience as well as good governance.

INFRASTRUCTURE TODAY AND TOMORROW

While digital systems are transforming how information is managed, physical infrastructure remains an important part of the picture. Currently, the Ministry of Lands operates from rented premises, which limit space, layout, and long-term planning. Recognising this constraint, the World Bank, through the VARS Project, is expected to fund the construction of a new, purpose-built MoLNR headquarters.

This future facility—anticipated to be completed within the next two years—will bring the entire Ministry under one roof. It will be designed to support modern workflows, secure data management, and integrated service delivery. For staff, this promises a safer, more functional working environment. For the public, it signals a Ministry that is accessible, professional, and equipped to meet growing demands.



ARCHIVISTS @ WORK



ARCHIVIST LOUISE FEIMAGA @ WORK

CONCLUSION: A MINISTRY REIMAGINED

With strong support from the World Bank through the VARS Project, the Ministry of Lands & Natural Resources is being reimagined as a modern, efficient, and resilient institution. Digitisation of archives, deployment of advanced information management systems, targeted capacity building, and plans for a new headquarters are together laying the foundations for lasting reform.

The benefits are already clear: improved customer service, increased revenue, stronger data integrity, and renewed confidence among staff and leadership. As MoLNR continues on this path, it is well positioned not only to meet today's challenges, but to serve future generations with professionalism, transparency, and pride.



HON. MINISTER OF LANDS & NATURAL RESOURCES, MP RICK TCHAMAKO MAHE FLANKED BY MOLNR EXECUTIVES & M-FILES TECHNICIANS

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.