



GOVERNMENT OF VANUATU

THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

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GOVERNMENT OF VANUATU

**THE
NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU**

WE, the people of Vanuatu... CHERISHING our ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity...

From the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu



National and official languages

- (1) The national language of the Republic of Vanuatu is Bislama. The official languages are Bislama, English and French. The principal languages of education are English and French.
- (2) The Republic of Vanuatu shall protect the different local languages which are part of the national heritage, and may declare one of them as a national language.

From Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu



Right of a citizen to services in own language

- (3) The A citizen of Vanuatu may obtain, in the official language that he uses, the services which he may rightfully expect from the administration of the Republic of Vanuatu.
- (4) Where a citizen considers that there has been a breach of sub-article (1) he may make a complaint to the Ombudsman who shall conduct an enquiry in accordance with Articles 62 and 6W3.
- (5) The Ombudsman shall, each year, make a special report to Parliament concerning the observance of multilingualism and the measures likely to ensure its respect.

From Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu



A vibrant cultural identity underpinning a peaceful, just and inclusive society

The country was founded on Melanesian values of respect, harmony, unity and forgiveness. These values shape our cultural heritage, which is the country's strength. They are expressed through our oral traditions, languages, performing arts, social practices...

From the National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030, p.3





SOC 6- Strong and Effective Institutions: A dynamic public sector with good governance principles and strong institutions delivering the support and services expected by all citizens of Vanuatu

Policy Objective SOC 6.4- Strengthen national institutions to ensure they are cost-effective and well-resourced to deliver quality public services.

From the National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030, p.12



Five (5) Strategic Priorities for the MPM Corporate and Business Plans

- (1) Promote effectiveness and efficiency of institutions for improvement of service delivery.
- (2) Set policy & legislative directions for the Government.
- (3) Build institutional & human resource capacity.
- (4) Progress availability & accessibility of information for all.
- (5) Provide and enable a framework for a safe, secure, inclusive & equitable Vanuatu.

From the Corporate Plan of the Ministry of the Prime Minister



2.1 To launch & implement the Department's Language Policy

- (1) Director, Admin Officer, and DG to finalise the alignment of Language Policies with NSDP by Q3, 2020 using Recurrent budget (Activity 2.1.1)
- (2) Director, Admin Officer, and DG to launch the Language Policies by Q4, 2020 using Recurrent budget (Activity 2.1.2)

From the Business Plan of the Language Services Department



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Foreword

On behalf of the people and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, I am delighted to present to you The National Language Policy of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Though languages are the first cultures and identities of Vanuatu citizens, this is the first time, ever since the independence of our country in 1980, that Vanuatu has a National Language Policy (NLP). This NLP Framework will regulate the use of the many languages of our nation, whether official or vernacular, since some of them are widely used or spoken and some others are disappearing.

The vision of the National Language Policy is to promote, protect and preserve the over one hundred (100) languages that the country has, without neglecting any of them, whether official languages or vernacular languages. Multilingualism must be promoted and maintained in our country.

The NLP aims to guide all institutions under the public sector and the private sector to deliver effective language services to the people of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Through this National Language Policy, the Government will now better address issues related to language in this nation, since the Policy is a

framework that covers all areas of language use: language services delivery from the Government, education and training, private sector, promotion and protection of vernaculars, foreign languages other than our official languages, and advisory and enforcement of language provisions.



The Policy will be administrated by the Language Services Department (LSD) and the Vanuatu National Language Council (VNLC). It will be implemented in collaboration with the stakeholders listed in this document and all other institutions from the public sector and the private sector.

I salute the efforts of the Language Services Department for the coordination of the establishment of this Policy and all the institutions and people whose contributions have allowed it to happen for better service delivery to the people of this nation.

Hon. Bob Loughman WEIBUR
Prime Minister
Republic of Vanuatu



Acknowledgement

The National Language Policy (NLP) was established through the commitment of the Language Services Department (LSD) that coordinated its drafting, and the consultation, survey and awareness that led to its finalization. The establishment of the NLP wouldn't have been possible without the valuable contributions of the main stakeholders listed in this document and of the different language groups from the six (6) provinces of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Acknowledgement is therefore expressed for the input of the secondary schools and nearby communities in the provinces of Torba, Sanma, Malampa, Penama, Shefa and Tafea. Valuable comments and inputs were gathered at the time of consultation in each area visited. Thus, gratitude is conveyed to chiefs, heads of household, mothers and secondary school students who recognized the importance for Vanuatu to have a National Language Policy and took their time to attend the consultations organized in their areas to give their highly regarded contributions.

Consultations were successfully conducted thanks to each Provincial Education Office and the offices of Area Administrators in each province that facilitated the communication with secondary schools and communities. Furthermore, the Provincial Education Officers (PEOs) and Acting PEOs, the School Improvement Officers (SIO), the School Coordinators, the Area Administrators and Area

Secretaries, the school Principals and the Chiefs of visited areas in the six (6) provinces played a very vital role in gathering the students and community members together for consultation, survey and awareness. A big hug to all these people!

Most importantly, sincere appreciation is conveyed to the office of the Director General of the Ministry of the Prime Minister and the Honorable Prime Minister himself and his Cabinet for supporting the establishment of this National Language Policy Framework.

Moreover, the hardworking staff of the LSD deserve all gratitude for their unity and collaboration in the undertaking of the consultation, survey and awareness in the six (6) provinces of Vanuatu, as well as for their input in the drafting of the NLP. Lots of blessings to them all!



Gregoire NIMBTIK
Director General
Ministry of the Prime Minister





Background

Language is a God-given culture as He created man using words in a language and communicated with the first people on earth using a language. Furthermore, according to Genesis 11:1-9, through the issue of the Tower of Babel, God brought into existence multiple languages, which divided humans into different language groups. Therefore, each people around the world have their own language, which determines their culture.

In Vanuatu, language is the first culture of an individual – his/her identity. With over one hundred (100) vernacular languages and populated by nearly three hundred thousand (300,000) people, this over eighty (80) islands archipelago is very rich in languages. These local languages are part of the national heritage, as per Article 3(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu. In addition, the three (3) official languages stipulated in Article 3(1) of the Constitution make the country unique in the world.

However, some of these vernacular languages tend to disappear because their speakers do not realize the importance of preserving and promoting them. Moreover, our official languages, which are foreign languages, are also forging their place into each local dialect – prompting the dialects towards extinction. Furthermore, the Government services delivery in terms of languages to the people of the Republic of Vanuatu keep on increasing so that a guideline is required for better delivery.

Language services delivery are increasing in the education and training sector, cultural sector, Government services, media and enforcement of language provisions. Therefore, the relevant stakeholders really need this Policy to better manage the delivery of language services. These stakeholders are as follow.

Background

The Main Stakeholders

The Language Services Department (LSD), in charge of the Government services delivery in terms of official languages;

- The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), as well as schools and training institutions, responsible for teaching and learning of languages;
- The Vanuatu Cultural Centre, responsible for preservation and protection of vernacular languages;
- The Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation (VBTC), and the Media Association of Vanuatu (MAV), ensuring information are in the official languages in the media;
- The Vanuatu National Language Council (VNLC), in charge of promoting Vanuatu languages and providing advice to the Government concerning language affairs;
- The Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, responsible for recommending the Government to promote and preserve vernacular languages;
- The Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC); and
- The Office of the Ombudsman, responsible for enforcing language provisions.

The Other Stakeholders

- The State Law Office (SLO) – through its drafting unit, ensures all bills are in English and French;
- The National Parliament – ensures that debates are in Bislama though bills are in English and French;
- The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) – ensuring information disseminated through the Government Intranet are in the 3 official languages;
- Other public and private institutions and all individual members of each Vanuatu language group.



Vision, Mission, Goal and Objectives of the NLP

Below are the vision, mission, goal and objectives of the National Language Policy (NLP).

Vision

To protect, promote and preserve all the vernacular languages of the Republic of Vanuatu and to promote the official languages of the nation.

Mission

To ensure effective and inclusive implementation of Article 3, Article 64.1 and cultural provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Goal

To guide relevant institutions in the public and private sector that are dealing with languages, to deliver effective language services in the Republic of Vanuatu.

Objectives

- To establish relevant languages policies for different language areas;
- To preserve all Vanuatu languages, both vernacular and official;
- To promote the use of and access to all Vanuatu languages, both vernacular and official, for study and research purposes;
- To promote the right of Vanuatu citizens to use and access their respective vernacular languages and the official languages;
- To promote inclusiveness in the access and use of Vanuatu official and vernacular languages;
- To consider the standardization of Bislama, which is the current national language of the nation, and the possibility of declaring a Vanuatu vernacular language as another national language, pursuant to Article 3.2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Scope of the NLP

This document is the National Language Policy of the Republic of Vanuatu.

- It provides guidance to addressing all language and language-related matters in the country;
- It identifies the different areas of the use of languages in Vanuatu;
- It furnishes processes for the delivery of language services by the Government;
- It will be used as a guide to future language policies developed by an institution dealing with a specific area of the use of Vanuatu languages, including official and vernacular languages;
- It promotes inclusiveness, teaching and learning, research, training and standardization of languages; and
- It also promotes collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders towards an efficient and effective implementation of the policy.

This Policy shall be applied in the public and private sectors, as well as in the civil society and different communities of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Language-Related Advice to the Vanuatu Government


- 1** The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu shall be advised on any language-related matter by the Vanuatu National Language Council (VNLC), which is the supreme body responsible to give advice, so as to take sound decisions concerning the use of the Republic's languages.
- 2** The VNLC shall consult with relevant institutions dealing with languages in the country before giving sound advice to the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu.
- 3** The Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, as per its mandate to recommend the Government to promote and preserve vernacular languages, may also advise the Government on matters related to Vanuatu languages.
- 4** Ombudsman Special Report on the Observance of Multilingualism shall be endorsed by VNLC before submission to Parliament.
- 5** The six (6) provincial Governments of Vanuatu shall also advise the Government on Vanuatu languages related matters.

Use of the Vanuatu Official Languages in the Government Services Delivery

- 1** The three (3) official languages of the country, namely Bislama, English and French, shall all be used in the language services provided by the Government.
- 2** The public administration has the obligation to deliver all information to all the people of Vanuatu in the three (3) official languages of the nation.
- 3** Article 3.1 and Article 64(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu shall be taken into account in the language services delivery to the people of this nation. These Articles are quoted as follow:

“ Article 3.1. The national language of the Republic of Vanuatu is Bislama. The official languages are Bislama, English and French. The principal languages of education are English and French.

“ Article 64.1. A citizen of Vanuatu may obtain, in the official language that he uses, the services which he may rightfully expect from the administration of the Republic of Vanuatu.

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- 4** The language services provided by the public administration to the people of Vanuatu shall require collaboration and cooperation of the relevant stakeholders.
 - 5** Translation and interpretation work, which is part of the Government language services delivery, may be devolved to other relevant stakeholders and agencies for the purpose of the speed of service delivery, as long as quality concern is taken into account.
 - 6** Parliament Bills could also be drafted in Bislama since debate in Parliament is held in Bislama.

Use of Languages in the Education and Training Sector

Languages are widely used in the education and training sector.

- 1** Services in this sector shall be provided in the two (2) languages of instruction, namely English and French, and may also be provided in Bislama and vernaculars when necessary.
- 2** Classroom teaching and learning in all schools around the country shall be done in English and French, as per Article 3(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.
- 3** Vernacular languages and Bislama may also be allowed in a classroom only to ease understanding of young Ni-Vanuatu children, as they easily learn and understand in their own mother tongue.
- 4** The Ministry of Education and Training, as the authority in the education and training sector, may allow for vernacular languages to be taught and learnt in existing schools.
- 5** Bislama teaching in classrooms shall first go through careful consultation with all the national stakeholders before it shall be applied.

- 6 Not limiting subsections 1, 2 and 5, teaching and learning in Rural Training Centers (RTC) may also be conducted in Bislama, as is the reality in this field of training.
- 7 Language policies established in the education and training sector shall serve as guide to deal more efficiently with matters related to the official languages of Vanuatu.



Use of the Vanuatu Languages in the Private Sector

- 1** The private sector in Vanuatu is free to communicate information in either the three (3) official languages of the Republic.
- 2** Without limiting subsection 1, the Government may sometimes require private sector institutions to also disseminate information in the two other official languages, as it deems necessary.
- 3** An agency or a unit may be established under the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) to ensure the good use of official languages in the private sector.
- 4** Private sector institutions may use, in their own discretion, all the three (3) official languages of Vanuatu, or a vernacular language, to disseminate information, such as in time of emergency.
- 5** A foreigner doing business in Vanuatu is encouraged to learn and speak Bislama.

- 6** For the sake of Article 64(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu, information sent out to Vanuatu citizens through mobile phones are required to be also in Bislama, as many people in the villages have limited understanding in English and French.

- 7** For information dissemination in Bislama, few resources in Bislama available at the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) and the University of the South Pacific (USP) may be of great help.



Exceptions

- 1** Languages shouldn't be an obstacle to access job opportunities. Hence, job advertisements, in some cases, shouldn't have strict language requirements.
- 2** Education and training institutions and providers are not required to disseminate information in all the three official languages – information may only be disseminated in the language of instruction used.
- 3** Foreign education and training institutions may require for education and training related information to be provided in the Vanuatu language of instruction they are using.
- 4** Any public or private sector institution may use a vernacular language to disseminate a piece of information, if it deems necessary.

Enforcement of Language Provisions

- 1** Language provisions to be enforced are found in the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu, the Language Act, the Education Act, the VITE Act, the VNLC Act and the Ombudsman Act.
- 2** The enforcement of the language provisions shall be carried out by the Office of the Ombudsman pursuant to Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.
- 3** The Office of the Ombudsman may work with other public and private institutions to ensure language provisions are effectively and efficiently enforced.
- 4** The Office of the Ombudsman may consider increasing its capacity regarding the enforcement of language rights' provisions.
- 5** The Vanuatu National Language Council shall continue to safeguard the linguistic diversity in Vanuatu and advise the Government concerning language matters.
- 6** On its side, the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs shall keep on recommending the Government to preserve and promote vernacular languages.
- 7** The Vanuatu Cultural Centre also play a part in the enforcement by promoting and preserving the vernacular languages.

Promotion of the Use of and Access to Vanuatu Languages

- 1** The use of the Vanuatu languages by their respective speakers and the citizens of the country shall be promoted by the relevant institutions dealing with language matters.
- 2** The access to the Vanuatu languages by their respective speakers and the citizens of the country shall be promoted by the relevant institutions dealing with language matters.
- 3** In the case where children have parents from different language groups, their father is encouraged to teach them his vernacular language and their mother to teach them her vernacular language.
- 4** A Vanuatu citizen can learn and speak any vernacular language of the country, but without abusing the custom properties of this particular language.

5 The promotion of Vanuatu languages could be undertaken as follow:

- Vernacular schools may be created, in consultation with the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs that detains the ownership of vernacular languages, to promote a particular language to its speakers;
- With regards to the above bullet point, representatives from Malvatumauri shall visit the different communities in the islands in order to help them create their vernacular schools;
- Existing schools within an Area Council may take the responsibility to offer the teaching of the vernacular language existing in this area;
- In cases where children originated from an area do not speak the vernacular language of that area, parents are encouraged to teach them this language so that they don't lose their identity; in the same manner, children whose parents have two different


Promotion of the Use of and Access to Vanuatu Languages

vernacular languages are encouraged to learn and speak both languages;

- A vernacular language may be chosen to be one of a national language of Vanuatu, as stipulated in Article 3(2) of the Constitution of Vanuatu;
- A province, an island or area could also choose one of its vernaculars to become its common language;
- The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu shall declare all vernacular languages of the country to be national languages like Bislama;
- Cultural events could be held regularly to promote vernacular languages.

6 Vanuatu citizens are encouraged to use vernaculars during custom ceremonies, except for ceremonies involving different language groups.

7 Any citizen of the Republic of Vanuatu is free to learn and speak any official language in addition to his/her vernacular language(s).

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- 8** Sign language shall be taught in Vanuatu so that disable people could also have access to information.
 - 9** Bible, which is widely used in Vanuatu, must be translated in Bislama and all the vernacular languages of the country, and the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) and its churches should take the lead in this area.
 - 10** Bislama language must be standardized and dictionaries in Bislama and vernaculars need to be developed.
 - 11** Products from Vanuatu shall also be labelled in Bislama.
 - 12** All Vanuatu languages, official and vernaculars, shall be equally promoted for the purpose of keeping multilingualism in the country.


Protection of Vanuatu Languages

- 1** The use of and access to all Vanuatu languages must be regulated under a Language Act and a Language Policy in order for them to be well protected and preserved.
- 2** For the sake of Subsection 1, research on any Vanuatu language must be undertaken as per customary purposes and in consultation with the Office of the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs – a fee may be imposed – or as per the Bible translation purposes.
- 3** To be better protected, all languages of the Republic of Vanuatu, whether official or vernacular, need to be promoted as per Subsection 10.5 of this Policy.
- 4** For the sake of Subsection 3, a Vanuatu citizen is free to access any language of the Republic of Vanuatu, official or vernacular, taking into account the restriction stipulated in Subsection 10.4.

- 5** Speakers of each vernacular language are encouraged to put their local language into writing for the sake of better preserving them.
- 6** All languages spoken by Vanuatu citizens, whether official or vernacular, shall keep their tunes and accents as these make the languages beautiful.
- 7** The Vanuatu National Language Council shall work with the Vanuatu Cultural Council to protect the vernacular languages of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Use of Foreign Languages other than English and French in the Services Delivered by the Public and Private Sector

- 1** Services delivered to the people of the Republic of Vanuatu, by the public or the private sector, shall only be in either the three (3) official languages of the country.
- 2** Notwithstanding Subsection 1, any citizen of the Republic of Vanuatu, is free to learn and speak a language other than the official and vernacular languages of Vanuatu.
- 3** Services delivered to the people of the Republic of Vanuatu, by the public or the private sector, could be in a vernacular language of the country if it is necessary or urgent.
- 4** Any foreign product or service offered in the Republic of Vanuatu in a language other than the official languages or the vernacular languages of the Republic shall be labelled, taking also into account people with special needs.

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- 5** Any public or private institution in Vanuatu wishing to offer a product or service in the Republic of Vanuatu shall ensure that its user instructions are in either the three (3) official languages of the Republic.
 - 6** Notwithstanding the subsections 3 and 4, the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training could allow any foreign language to be taught and learned in schools around the Republic of Vanuatu.
 - 7** Any foreigner, except for tourists on a one-day stop, entering the Republic of Vanuatu must speak or understand either of the three (3) official languages of the country, namely Bislama, English and French, or shall be accompanied, at their own expense, by an individual speaking either these three official languages.

Legal and Financial Implications

- 1 Vanuatu languages, both official and vernacular, are so far stipulated in the following legal provisions:
 - Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu (Article 3 and Article 64);
 - Vanuatu National Language Council Act No.32 of 2005;
 - National Language Act;
 - Education Act No.9 of 2014 (Section 6 – Language Policy);
 - VITE Act No.25 of 2001 (Section 4.g).

- 2 Protecting, preserving and promoting Vanuatu languages, both vernacular and official, is a costly exercise in the same way as the protecting, preserving and promoting exercises in other sectors, therefore the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu must ensure available funding for this exercise in order to comply with Article 3(2) of the Constitution.





Implementation

This National Language Policy shall come into force upon its signing and official launching by the Honorable Prime Minister who is responsible for language matters



Policy Review

- 1** This Policy shall be reviewed every five (5) years, as of its effective date.
- 2** A Review Committee shall be established within the Language Services Department to coordinate the review.
- 3** The review may take into account all the Policy stakeholders.
- 4** Amendments to the Policy shall be made during its review.

TSUUBUNG MWAMAK

MORE VISOKON

RANTAVUHA

IPASMETEVAREN

ROBONG HAREA

NALARA TARAPEI

HALO

TEVIRLAPLAPEN

ERES RORPONG

MALPONG

NDAMTUMPHORH

MANGORISE

ULIRANPANI

RANKAREA