

Vanuatu: Building a Road for Greater Possibilities

Supporting Women and the Disabled

Not too long ago, in the village of Meten on Efate Island, Vanuatu, a mother's trip to sell her flowers and produce at the main market place in Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital, would take hours on a narrow, dusty and pothole-ridden road. Flat tires were common and some trucks wouldn't even make it the whole trip. Women that did make it to the market would often arrive with back pains and damaged fruit and vegetables – barely marketable to customers looking for fresh produce. This was the condition of most of the roads on the island of Efate.

Then in 2006, Vanuatu entered into a \$66 million compact with the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) for road reconstruction. By repairing these badly riddled roads, women are gaining more and better transportation options to the marketplace in Port Vila. With an abundance of fresh flowers and produce, the market is full of more color and flavor than ever before.

Capitalizing on the success of the road project, Janet Orah, a women's development officer for the provincial government, worked to establish a fund to build roadside markets outside of Port Vila and along village centers. This initiative gives women the option of selling their flowers and produce closer to their homes and families. Given that travel has increased substantially since the road upgrades, there are more customers willing to stop and make purchases. The women of Meten - and similar villages on Efate Island - are able to earn extra income to invest in their gardens, their children's education and their future.



Brasio Kaltoua, First Vice President of Shefa Province (left) and Janet Orah, Women's Development Officer at the Shefa Provincial Government (center), attend a ribbon cutting ceremony for Meten's new roadside market on July 16, 2010.



Two women from Mangaliliu village work to clear scrub alongside the road to make way for their new community roadside market where they will sell produce, flowers and crafts.

teams (women's organizations, youth groups, etc.) to regularly clear, scrub and clean weeds from culverts. Those involved with the maintenance within the community are compensated for their work. This initiative is generating additional income for the community and pride and respect for the road.

Throughout road construction, MCA- Vanuatu documented every tree that was removed to make way for the wider, safer road. Now, after each road section is completed, MCA-Vanuatu is offering a selection of replacement trees - grapefruit, coconut, banana, etc. MCA-Vanuatu is also including higher value crop tree options such as coffee. Since coffee is not widely grown on Efate Island, a trained technician is teaching villagers how to maintain and care for the trees. This program is part of MCA-Vanuatu's goodwill initiative to guarantee villages are properly compensated for any lost assets during construction.

Building roads do more than just impact travel times; they can create new income possibilities and better access to health and education services. The people of Vanuatu call the new road on Efate Island "the Road of Life." For the women and people with disabilities in Vanuatu, the road lives up to its name.

But income opportunities aren't the only benefit of the improved roads. Janet Orah also works with people with disabilities on Efate Island. She says, disabled patients previously would only come to Port Vila once a year for medical services because the road was too rough and the dust made them sick. Now, patients are able to go to the hospital for treatment once a week – helping to maintain healthier communities.

Supporting Community Ownership and Goodwill

To help ensure the road's sustainability and success, the Public Works Department, provincial governments and MCA-Vanuatu, the local entity implementing Vanuatu's compact, are entrusting the maintenance of sections of the completed road to nearby villages. These villages are responsible for organizing