

**Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Vanuatu**

**46th session
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Stakeholders' Submission on:

**Children Rights in Vanuatu:
The situation of children and their families in the Republic of
Vanuatu**

Submitted by:

Marist Foundation for International Solidarity (FMSI)

(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

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FMSI: The Marist Foundation for International Solidarity is an international NGO with ECOSOC Special Consultative Status and operating in 65 countries. FMSI was established in 2007 and has a special focus on promoting and protecting the rights of children through supporting projects, especially the access to quality education and advocacy.

The report, based on concrete experience and the elaboration of recommendations with the direct participation of local children, teenagers and adolescents, is focused on the situation of the children in the Republic of Vanuatu and specifically above three main topics:

- Right for education
- Right for protection
- Right for health and services

*“We, the Children of the **Republic of Vanuatu** are dignified by our rights that fortify and serve our interests and benefits our well-being in the society in which we reside. For years, the government has been trying remarkably and ensuring that children reap the benefits of their rights. However, there are some of our **RIGHTS** that need special realisation from the **Government**. It is strongly recommended that sectors emphasis below should be prioritised for the good of ourselves, **children**, the ambassadors of Vanuatu”.*

The groups involved in the elaboration of the report of the Universal Periodic Review are as follows:

- ❖ A Youth group from the local Parishes communities. They are forty of them, including children and young people aged eleven and above.
- ❖ About fifteen students aged seventeen and above from Lycée et College Technique schools. They are grade 11 and 12 students.
- ❖ A group of adults, including teachers and managers from various schools.

1.1 Right to education

Despite the assistance and support from the government and other diplomatic partners, the Vanuatu Education System is still facing challenges.

- For secondary schools, Shefa Province had the highest NER at 51%. Most secondary schools are in Shefa Province but only a small portion of secondary schools are in urban areas (Port Vila and Luganville).
- According to a survey conducted by the MOET (Ministry of Education and Training) it was indicated that parents fail to meet school fees which is the largest barrier.
- There is a considerable interest amongst parents and students in vocational or technical school, but the enrolment figures indicate limited access to or awareness of the programs that are available.

- Rural students face other barriers to education including reduced access to cash income generation opportunities to meet school fees, and geographic barriers to access schools which would impact enrolment and performance.
- At secondary level, there are more females enrolled than males, and females' drop-out rates are significantly and consistently lower than males.
- There is a significant gender disparity in enrolment in vocational programs, with almost twice as many males as females enrolling.
- Meeting School Fees (including the existence of fees, aggravated by income poverty, income generation difficulties, and misuse of income)
- Lack of Parental Support or Value on Education (parental perceptions)
- Access to school due to distance to travel and poor road infrastructure.
- Disability – access and teaching inclusion, discrimination
- Disaster – impact of disasters on the community and education facilities, as well as relocation of population and use of school buildings as evacuation centers.
- 'Gender', 'quality of education infrastructure' and 'conflict between culture and education' are determinants that globally have been recognised as core determinants in lack of school attendance.

These are some Risks that were identified by study participants as relevant in Vanuatu were:

- Exposure of children to alcohol or marijuana, causing disinterest in school.
- Absent parents (due to Recognised Seasonal Employment (RSE) or broken homes).
- Low child interest in education (including peer pressure from friends to drop out).
- Access to social media and mobile phones distracting children.
- Desire to earn immediate income.
- Parents' perceptions of risk of exposure to sexual relationships and risk of teenage pregnancy through school attendance.

Other barriers to access and learning?

Disability was seen as a significant determinant to education access in Vanuatu, with study participants naming disability-specific barriers such as access to school facilities, teaching inclusion, curriculum inclusion, discrimination and limited access to income (to meet school fees).

1.2 Right for protection

- a. Vanuatu Government and NGOs have to recognise cultural and Christian values of Vanuatu people so that children can benefit and be part of these when growing up.
- b. Government and NGOs must provide good shelters and evacuation centres for the children especially when it comes to natural disasters such as cyclone since Vanuatu is vulnerable as one the disaster Zone in the world.

1.3 Right for health and services

- a. Vanuatu Government must make sure that there is free of charge in health system for the children.
- b. Vanuatu Government and NGOs have to provide more health facilities to every community that can benefit all young people and the communities.

- c. Health sectors should work closely with educational sectors to deter **underage pregnancy** as the number increase every year. Do awareness on contraception methods which will help students to be aware of their behaviours.

1.4 Recommendations

- a) Improve parental and child perceptions of the relevance of education to future goals, and to future income.
- b) More awareness needs to be provided at community level on the practical contribution of education to future life activities.
- c) More awareness needs to be provided that parents' responsibilities with education aren't limited to paying school fees but require active support and interest from parents.
- d) More resourcing is needed for vocational education pathways.
- Awareness needs to be raised on the links between knowledge and local industry skills: e.g. management of farms and agricultural operations, budgeting, documentation and decision making. That is, to raise awareness of the relevance of education to everyday island life.
 - Reduce access issues from geographical factors Teachers, principals and youth coordinators suggested that to resolve this barrier would be to construct more boarding schools: "to overcome the issue of Geography as an issue/factor, Government, through the MoET and donor partners, should construct more boarding schools in the islands of Vanuatu to accommodate the growing number of children craving for education. Since we cannot bring education and better infrastructure to them, we would make education accessible to them by allowing them to live where education is situated."
 - Improve access and quality of education for children with a disability that more training should be given to teachers on inclusion, and special needs teachers should be trained and posted to provide support in schools. Need to improve the curriculum to be more inclusive.
 - Continue with gender equity initiatives in education, as they are having a positive impact in moving Vanuatu's education system to a gender equal environment.
 - Raise awareness of the impacts of child labour on education Domestic and agricultural work expectations can be concluded to have an impact on children's participation in education.
 - Vanuatu government together with the help of Non-Government Organisation to make sure that education should be prioritised to all children start from four years old and above.
 - The Government has to make sure that free education is apply to all children.
 - Vanuatu Government and Non-Government Organisation must provide sufficient learning facilities/ to all learners that can fit high rate of young people.
 - Underage drop out from school is provocative and alarming for Vanuatu educational sectors. Government should amend a policy that allow free education is for every child in the family and none should left at home.
 - Scholarship is meaningless for students in Vanuatu. Government should create more job opportunities for the qualified graduate.

Conclusion:

Through this document, we would like to address the following **recommendations** to the Government of Vanuatu:

- a. Enhance the perception of education's relevance** to future goals and income for both parents and children.
- b. Increase community-level awareness** about the practical benefits of education for future life activities.
- c. Promote awareness** that parental responsibilities in education go beyond paying fees and require active support and involvement.
- d. Allocate additional resources** to vocational education pathways.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the government of Vanuatu for its dedicated efforts in addressing various challenges and concerns, that demonstrates a genuine commitment to the well-being of its citizens. The government's dedication to fostering positive change and creating a better future for all is glaring.

Furthermore, we are eager to express our willingness to collaborate with the government in further enhancing and refining these recommendations. Our organization recognizes the value of a collective approach in addressing complex issues, and we believe that by working together, we can make even more significant strides toward achieving our common goals. We are open to offering our expertise, resources, and support to assist in the implementation of these recommendations, and we look forward to the opportunity to collaborate closely with the government to ensure their continued success and improvement.

Together, we can create a brighter and more prosperous future for the nation and its people.