CONTENTS

Summary of findings 3
Results matrix 3

Key strengths and weaknesses 5

Domain 1. Policy process 7
Domain 2. Public financial management 11
Domain 3. Human resource management 15
Domain 4. Information management 18
Domain 5. Quality assurance 21
Domain 6. Public communications and influencing 25

All photographs: UNICEF Pacific/2014/Alcock
**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

**RESULTS MATRIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy process</th>
<th>Predictive learning</th>
<th>Navigational leadership</th>
<th>Strategic anticipation</th>
<th>Agility</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
<th>Open collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 Clarity and consistency of child protection priorities</td>
<td>1.2 Coherent specification of key child protection concepts</td>
<td>1.3 Preparedness to volatile environment</td>
<td>1.4 Policy coordination structures</td>
<td>1.5 Policy monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>1.6 Synergies across sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 Multi-year budgeting based on realistic costing</td>
<td>2.2 Transparency and credibility of budget allocations</td>
<td>2.3 Spending flexibility</td>
<td>2.4 Neutrality of financial incentives</td>
<td>2.5 Value for money</td>
<td>2.6 Effective structures for decentralized funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1 Standards for child protection professionals</td>
<td>3.2 Personnel accounting and payroll control</td>
<td>3.3 Continuity across electoral cycles</td>
<td>3.4 Training to maintain up-to-date expertise</td>
<td>3.5 Performance evaluation</td>
<td>3.6 Attracting and retaining qualified staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1 Use of evidence in policy process</td>
<td>4.2 Quality of child protection databases</td>
<td>4.3 Responsiveness to changing policy demands</td>
<td>4.4 Data consolidation and exchange</td>
<td>4.5 Links between data users and producers</td>
<td>4.6 Links to national child protection research agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1 Quality guidance and standards</td>
<td>5.2 Credibility and regularity of inspections</td>
<td>5.3 Encouragement of innovation</td>
<td>5.4 Effective gate-keeping and referrals</td>
<td>5.5 Enforcement and follow-up</td>
<td>5.6 Integration with communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1 Clarity of child protection Communication Strategy</td>
<td>6.2 Availability of evidence on values and attitudes</td>
<td>6.3 Alertness to changing risks</td>
<td>6.4 Interactive engagement with key audiences</td>
<td>6.5 Building on existing positive values</td>
<td>6.6 Involvement of opinion leaders into behaviour change agenda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Four criteria for each indicator**

Assessment: “Was the benchmark achieved?”

- “Yes” = 1
- “Yes, restricted” = 0.75
- “No, extended” = 0.25
- “No” = 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total points received for each indicator</th>
<th>Resulting score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[3 to 4]</td>
<td>Score A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[2 to 3]</td>
<td>Score B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1 to 2]</td>
<td>Score C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[0 to 1]</td>
<td>Score D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vanuatu is determined to build a system of child protection that would be effective but realistic, given the fact that there is limited funding available to expand formal services, and significant cultural and informational barriers that need to be addressed in order to promote the importance of protecting children from abuse and exploitation. To achieve this, the lead government agency in child protection, the Ministry of Justice and Communal Services (MJCS), is developing an innovative hybrid system of child welfare, building on support mechanisms which are already available through traditional community-based structures and within other sectors (in particular, Education and Health). While this work has generated important lessons and improvements in the lives of many children in pilot communities, many elements of the new system are still uncertain.

Strong dimensions:

- **Open collaboration.** Child protection stakeholders in Vanuatu are strongly focused on achieving results through developing partnerships across sectors and effectively combining existing assets. In 2013-2014, the effective cooperation between the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Task Force and agencies at national and provincial levels allowed Vanuatu to double birth registration rates within one year. The Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) follows an exceptionally open and collaborative policy, pro-actively seeking ways to share its data with external researchers and cooperating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to run surveys and process data. Government activities in awareness raising and behavioural changes for child protection involve a wide range of stakeholders, including innovative agencies such as the Wan Smol Bag Theatre, a Vanuatu-based regional NGO working on socially significant issues through unorthodox approaches such as drama and TV-series.

- **Strategic anticipation.** While preparedness for new and emerging risks specific to child protection is not yet well developed (there are no specific programmes addressing such risks), key agencies in the Government are flexible and open to innovation. The MJCS is currently leading an exploratory pilot project in the Tafea Province to source ideas for a new child protection model. Data collection and processing systems are fragmented but responsive to changing policy demands: the VNSO has a corporate objective to respond to “emerging data requirements” particularly in the area of “gender statistics, disability and children,” and responded positively to requests for accommodation for new variables into existing surveys (e.g., in the case of disability analysis).

- **Navigational leadership.** In order to embrace changes and confidently follow a policy leading into an uncertain future, stakeholders require a clear picture of the current state of things. Vanuatu has one of the most reliable and predictable systems of public financial management and personnel accounting among the Pacific Island States. Budget allocations do not significantly deviate from original plans; the release of funds is well controlled against approved commitments and payment arrears are explicitly monitored. Legislative reform processes are based on transparent and inclusive whole-of-government consultations led by the Law Commission, which helps to raise and agree on debatable issues before bills are finalized. In the area of child protection, while statistics describing the system are fragmented and uncoordinated, it covers important areas such as information on attitudes and values on which a range of surveys were conducted by the Government and non-state partners.
Weaker dimensions:

- **Resilience.** It has been challenging for the Government to establish mechanisms for positively incorporating lessons from adverse past experiences. The system of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) across ministries lacks performance data and does not include analyses of policy impact. While individual staff performance is transparently monitored against job descriptions and work plans, there is no system of performance-based rewards, which demotivates the already overstretched workforce. Existing providers of services to children often operate without registration and are not inspected for compliance with standards and professional oversight. Initial studies and pilot activities in child protection have produced evidence on positive child-related attitudes as a side effect, rather than a core strategy aimed at positive behaviour influencing.

- **Agility.** While the 2011 Child Protection System Mapping report illustrated that a successful model will depend on ensuring coordination across existing mechanisms, the Government lacks effective mechanisms to align energies for quick and effective joint responses. The National Child Protection Working Group has not yet become sufficiently functional and authoritative in leading policy change. Coordination and referral mechanisms at community and provincial levels are not developed, which obstructs access to services even where they are available. Statistics on child protection is collected through isolated sector-level information systems and is not integrated or reconciled for analysis and policy planning.

- **Predictive learning.** The Government has not yet developed a realistic and functional Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, which could be used to agree on new policy initiatives and the reallocation of resources. Priorities in child protection are formulated in a straightforward and realistic way, but in very broad terms (these priorities were defined through the 2011 Child Protection System Mapping, which proposed to postpone system design until better understanding of the current interactions between community-based and formal structures were identified via a pilot project stage, which was reflected as an objective in the country’s mid-term plan (the “Planning Long Acting Short” (PLAS) 2013-2016). While a wealth of information on child protection was collected through surveys, this data was mostly used for reporting rather than diagnostics and policy development.
Current progress

• Following up on the recommendations of the 2008 Baseline Assessment “Protect me with Love and Care”, in the years since that time, the Government has worked persistently to build a viable child protection system despite the challenging institutional and cultural contexts. These efforts developed in three major waves.

  o Immediately around the time of the 2008 Baseline Assessment, Vanuatu scaled up its international commitments in the child protection area, joining several additional international covenants - including both optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), similar to only two other countries in the Pacific region: New Zealand and Australia. Around the same period (2007-2010), the Government launched its new Planning Long Acting Short (PLAS) strategizing approach and developed several long-term sector and multi-sector strategies related to child safety – the National Children's Policy, Youth Policy, Disability Policy, as well as Education and Health strategic plans. In 2009, the newly established Child Desk within the Ministry of Justice and Community Services (MJCS) commissioned the first study to develop a model of child welfare. This study outlined a scenario of developing a full-fledged system of formal care, which was not supported because of its significant resource implications.

  o In 2011-2012, first developments from initiatives launched in previous years were reviewed and upgraded. At the overall strategic planning level, the Government refreshed its 2006 Priority and Action Agenda (PAA) to sharpen its focus on equity and realism. In the area of child protection, the MJCS reiterated its attempt to design a child welfare framework, but this time through the prism of resource constraint and viability. The new exercise was structured as a three-stage positivistic process; it began with a mapping of what support mechanisms were already in place and could be utilized at community level, leading to the second stage of pilot-testing practical community-based solutions in select communities, and was intended to result in a third stage of rolling out a viable national system. The first two stages resulted in a 2011 Child Protection Mapping report and the launch of the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme led by the MJCS and UNICEF.

  o The years preceding this assessment (2013-2014) saw the Government preparing a major new page in its social policy making. The expiring 2006-2015 PAA is expected to be replaced with the new long-term 2016-2030 National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP). While the NSDP will have Social Development as one of its three core pillars, it will also have to balance social investment objectives with the need for economic policy priorities. In view of this, the MJCS and its international partners undertook two reviews of progress since the 2011 Child Protection Mapping in order to identify practical ideas for the national rollout. The MJCS intends to use these findings to develop a Child Protection Policy that will shape the basis of the new community-based welfare system.

• Child protection stakeholders, including the Child Protection Working Group of the National Children's Committee (NCC), have established strong partnerships with the Law Commission – the key structure leading the legal reform process in Vanuatu. It was utilized successfully to promote the Birth Registration Initiative (via currently on-going consultations to review the outdated Civil Status Registration Act, Cap. 61) and to lead consultations on the review of the Family Protection Act (which is also on-going).

• Vanuatu Parliament has a strong Social Policy Standing Committee which cooperates with the Ministry of Health and Vanuatu Family Health Association on reproductive health issues. While child safety has not yet been addressed by the Committee, it would be a natural future channel to promote child welfare agendas in parliament. The MJCS also receives help from UNICEF in advocating for child rights issues and providing technical support to promote relevant bills through cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme Parliamentary Strengthening Project.
The National Child Protection Working Group, coordinated by the MJCS Child Desk, is functional, but it has not yet become a strong whole-of-government oversight structure to effectively lead policy design and implementation. One factor is the limitation in capacities available for coordinating the activities of the National Child Protection Working Group, given that the Child Desk, which has only one permanent officer, is stretched across two major programmes, including periodic reporting under the CRC and its two optional protocols.

There is also little capacity at the moment for advocating child protection issues at the level of mainstream inter-ministerial coordination, which is led by the Department of Strategic Planning and Aid Coordination (DSPAC) under the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO). Liaising with DSPAC is critical for promoting a new child protection policy, as well as safeguarding appropriate budget allocations.

RECOMMENDATION: Identify the DSPAC Sector Analyst who would be responsible for the future work on child protection policy and start involving this individual into relevant technical discussions and advocacy.

During 2008-2014, Vanuatu led a highly successful Birth Registration Initiative which helped the country to nearly double its registration rates among children under one year of age in just a single year (between 2013 and 2014). This experience was an important roadmap, providing examples for replication in the future development of child protection policies. The birth registration work included an extensive preparatory and awareness-raising phase (2007-2013) launched through an initial memorandum of understanding between two ministries (Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), and Ministry of Education (MOE)). In 2013-2014 it was scaled up through:

- Setting up a much wider task force to work on CRVS (now extended to the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO), the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), and the Ministry of Justice and (MJCS)), comprising of a national umbrella and provincial taskforces meeting monthly and guided by clear terms of reference;
- Launching a review of the Civil Status Registration Act 1988 through the Law Commission, including technical support for consultations and the production of the respective Issue Paper in 2014;
- Importantly – supporting the initiative with significant infrastructure components, which helped roll out IT connectivity to provincial centres. This made the CRVS database accessible from central and provincial levels, enabling direct connection to provincial hospitals, which allowed nurses to issue certificates immediately upon the discharge of new births. The system is also directly linked to the Vanuatu Education Management Information System (VEMIS) enabling provincial education officers to directly input school-based registration statistics into the database. It is also linked to the VNSO database to enable cross-checks with the Census data.

Open challenges

The Government is in the process of developing a robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) platform for the national strategic planning cycle. But none of the existing mechanisms enable practical result-oriented analysis of child protection policies. The first annual report produced by the MJCS in 2013 was focused on descriptions of inputs and intermediate indicators of progress, but contained no analysis of policy impact (e.g., improved child safety or protection from abuse). On the other hand, the Government’s overall annual development reports did include evidence-based analysis of policy impacts, but not for child protection.

RECOMMENDATION: The Government is currently finalizing a new M&E Strategy which would support the new National Sustainable Development Plan (NDSP) 2016-2030. This work is undertaken with technical support of the UNDP. It focuses, in particular, on ensuring a stronger link between programme targets and budget
allocations, and is expected to feed in to the preparation of the annual budget for 2016. It would be important to make sure that the new NSDP includes child protection objectives aligned with an intended system model to be built in the following years, and is supported by respective M&E criteria.

- The MJCS Strategy intends to create a new juvenile justice system for Vanuatu, but, at the moment, capacities to address youth-specific needs in the justice process are lacking. About 28 per cent of all detainees in the Vanuatu Correctional System are below the age of 20, and separating them from adult prisoners is not yet possible. It is expected that a new juvenile correctional facility will soon be operational within the Efate Correctional Facility and an expansion of the probation and community-based rehabilitation services is under way, albeit not focusing directly on juvenile issues for the time being.

**RECOMMENDATION:** In developing child protection objectives for the MJCS corporate planning and the NSDP, identify juvenile justice as a specific area of attention.

- The Healthcare system has relatively good and even coverage of Vanuatu communities through its rural health centres and dispensaries (staffed by registered nurses and nurse aids), supported by a network of paraprofessional Village Health Workers (VHWs) operating from communal aid posts. However, child protection is not mainstreamed into health care provision; it is not reflected in corporate documents, training or guidelines. Stronger engagement of nurses and VHWs into identifying and addressing children at risk and victims of abuse is unanimously supported by all child protection stakeholders.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Building upon the existing resources of the health centre in order to develop a new community-based model of child protection is one of the potential options proposed by this report. This idea assumes cooperation with the Ministry of Health (MOH) along the lines established during the Birth Registration Initiative, and developing a new capacity in provincial hospitals for child protection surveillance. This could be achieved via upskilling dedicated staff (e.g. nurses) to serve as small Child Protection Units (CPUs) in such hospitals. VHWs could be used as a resource and as a model for a new child protection framework.

- Major support for the child protection agenda is provided through the education system, and this cooperation could be further extended. Education is a big and relatively well developed sector in Vanuatu, absorbing a considerable and growing portion of public funds and using advanced data systems (although enrolment rates are low and static, and access to schools is limited in rural remote areas). Strategic plans in education include child safety objectives. To achieve this, Vanuatu, in 2011, introduced Minimum Quality Standards for Primary Schools (VQMS) which included a requirement for every school to develop and implement a “Safe School Policy”, covering child protection, school safety, non-discrimination and emergency preparedness. However, lack of universal guidance on the content of individual Safe School Policies, the novelty of the issue and weak capacities at the school level made it difficult for primary schools to comply with the new approach. It is also not yet supported with a realistic M&E system.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Assist the MOE in developing universal guidelines and templates for school safety policies. This should be done in parallel with two other tasks: the finalization of the referral framework (which would be reflected in the School Safety Policy Guidelines, including in a form of clear report templates) and extension of the Vanuatu Education Management Information System (VEMIS) to cover child protection variables (which would allow adding respective templates and instructions into the School Safety Policy Guidelines).
DOMAI...N 2.
PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Current progress

• Vanuatu has a public financial management system which orientates tight control of public spending, high accuracy and predictability. Repeated Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessments1 gave the highest score to elements of Vanuatu’s Public Financial Management (PFM) system related to the transparency and credibility of allocations. In particular, actual composition of expenditure allocations across administrative heads did not usually deviate from the original budget (which meant that the budgets were reliable indications of policy intent), expenditure arrears were transparently monitored (which is rare across other Pacific Island States); and systems for commitment controls and cash flow forecasting for individual ministries were generally reliable and continually improving.

• In particular, Vanuatu has developed a strong system of payroll expenditure; the payroll system and the personnel accounting systems in all ministries are automatically linked through the SmartStream Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS) and cross-checked against the records of the Vanuatu National Provident Fund. This helps ministries avoid overpayments and controls the possibility of ghost workers.

• Sector ministries have a reasonable level of flexibility in preparing their budgets and using their budget allocations during the year.

  o Resource envelopes for administrative heads are defined at the annual Ministerial Budget Committee (MBC) hearings where line ministries have the opportunity to defend their budgets. At the same time, lack of evidence attached to proposals is reported to be one of the reasons why “budgets remain unchanged”. According to the interviews conducted for this assessment, negotiations with the MBC can be rather intensive and “it is usually difficult to influence the MBC without attaching numbers to justify proposals.” However, the initiative for evidence-based justification has to originate from the sector ministries rather than the MBC, since the latter is unlikely to prompt the ministries to improve the quality of their proposals. As a result, “the budgets often remain unchanged, with only political arms of the ministries getting increases.” Lack of evidence attached to proposals is reported to be one of the reasons why “budgets remain unchanged.”

  RECOMMENDATION: Provide technical assistance to key ministries (especially MJCS and MOH) to strengthen their budget submissions for child-protection related activities.

  o Once the budgets are approved, the in-year execution allows some reallocation of funds between the lines in order to respond to changing priorities or unforeseen circumstances, but this is done with transparent approval by the Minister of Finance.

• The Government is pragmatic and cognisant of the sensitive fiscal context in which it has to operate. From 2011 and until Cyclone Pam disaster in March 2015, Vanuatu’s economy enjoyed steady growth and sound macro-fiscal outlook. Already during those years, the Government was trying to build up buffers for potential emergencies, albeit at a scale which was incomparable to the disruption caused by Cyclone Pam. The cyclone damaged half of the country’s economy which requires massive new

---

1 PEFA assessments are rather actively used in Vanuatu. In the past ten years, Vanuatu went through three rounds of country assessments under the PEFA framework (in 2006, 2009, and 2013), which is more frequent than is typical for most countries (although the latest report is not publicly available) – see details on page 69.
investments, but once growth is restored, the Government will have to start spending prudently to begin repaying the resulting debts. While some sector ministries (such as Health and Education) were reported in previous years to “plan to do too much with too little resources”, the MJCS seems to be more pragmatic in drafting plans for a new child protection system, an approach which has to be maintained but supported with efforts to increase the envelope where possible.

Open challenges

- Vanuatu has been trying to implement strategic budgeting since the first PFM reforms in 1997, linked to the Government Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP), but multi-year financial planning has remained a significant challenge throughout the decades since that time. Whole-of-government strategies and policies (such as the CRP and the initial PAA) have tended to lack focus, which has made it difficult to reflect them in a realistic Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). While PLAS 2013-2016 specifically requires the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) to finalize and institutionalize the budgeting process, including the development of national and sector MTEFs, it still does not seem to be mainstreamed into the planning process, including on child-related programmes. While some of the sector strategies (such as Health) contain multi-year financial projections, these do not seem to be integrated into a reliable multi-year expenditure forecast. The MTEF is not publically available and the 2015 Budget Policy Statement discusses priorities for the upcoming year without reference to medium-term forecasts (Government of Vanuatu, 2014). This lack of strategic financial perspective makes it difficult for the Government to fund new policy priorities and agree on the strategic reallocation of funds.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The MJCS and other involved ministries such as the MOH may require technical assistance in costing new proposed elements of child protection frameworks.

- While the Government is trying to build policies within limited fiscal envelopes, it does not use practical tools to achieve value for money. In particular, corporate objectives across ministries involved in activities related to child protection do not include measurable benefit targets. For example, the MJCS Plan and Annual Report for 2013 include an objective of “undertaking CRC workshop activities in six communities by trained volunteers”. Progress against this objective is analysed solely on the basis of the number of workshops held, rather than the expected results to be achieved through these workshops (e.g. percentage of pilot communities covered by awareness raising activities).

**RECOMMENDATION:** Child protection related activities under MJCS and other involved ministries might be strengthened if complemented with benefit targets for inclusion into respective corporate plans and policies.

- Formal provision of services related to child protection in Vanuatu are highly centralized, with sub-national governments playing a marginal role in the actual funding of the services. The sub-national level is represented by “local regions” (six provincial councils and three municipal councils in key urban centres). Although the Government and the people of Vanuatu are strongly determined to pursue decentralization agendas, under the current organization of the formal public administration, the sub-national level remains financially and administratively weak.

  - On the positive side, the current arrangement implies that participation of local regions in the social welfare system are not burdened by any unfunded mandates imposed by the central government (whatever is decided by the state is paid for through the ministerial headquarters).

---

2 Findings of the Public Expenditure Reviews in Health and Education led by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM, 2012).
However, the relatively small financial transfers to local regions from the central budget supporting their local activities (which may include local social welfare initiatives) are allocated without a transparent formula. Moreover, according to some reports, the current approach is to share these funds equally among provinces (and among the three municipal councils), without linking the formula to any objective (e.g. demographic) indicator of the relative demand for services, such as the amount of the population. This would imply significant inequality in per-capita allocation of these funds.3

**RECOMMENDATION:** Investigate the details of the current formula and the details of the current utilization of provincial and municipal grants by the local regions (in terms of any spending related to social welfare). Ideally, this would entail a snapshot of a provincial budget to identify whether the current grant allocation approach creates any unnecessary inequities (preferably this should be done in one of the provinces which are relatively underfunded under the presumed current scenario - Sanma, Penama, Malampa or Shefa).

Child protection stakeholders have limited access to information to track relevant financial flows. Information on the budget process, which is available publically free of charge on the MFEM website, is not disaggregated by functional classification; national budget statistics are compiled at the central level and exclude provincial spending data as well as the budgets of the three municipalities. In addition, utilization of public services provided by the formal system (especially medical and educational services) were reported to involve informal out-of-pocket payments whose volume could not be accurately assessed. It is especially problematic for child protection, as anecdotic evidence received during consultations indicates that informal payments for medical examinations may be one of the obstacles for victims of violence to seek help.

**RECOMMENDATION:** In future rounds of the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) (which may happen in a few years), consider extending the module, which describes expenditures related to payments for services, to include informal payments for medical support. Additionally, information may be collected on informal payments to local chiefs and authorities for bringing up cases which require referral to formal justice, which were described as one of the key barriers of access to formal services.

3 For example, if the distribution is indeed on par basis, the overpopulated Port Vila is likely receiving a much smaller per capita amount compared to Lenakel and Luganville. Similarly, Malampa and Shefa provinces with relatively bigger populations would be disadvantaged compared to Tafea and Torba Provinces.
DOMAIN 3.
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Current progress

- The system of civil service performance management in Vanuatu is currently undergoing major reforms. By some accounts, a functional Performance Management System (PMS) was never fully constructed in the past decades since the launch of the Comprehensive Reform Programme in 1997 (Garae, Commission confirms PMS to strengthen Public Service, 2015). As part of the change, introduction of a new PMS was launched by the Vanuatu Public Service Commission (PSC) in July 2014. The goal of the reform is to boost productivity of the civil servants and to increase public support for government employees.

- The already existing systems include key essential elements: a clear universal requirement for job descriptions and advanced guidelines on their development, and an annual performance evaluation cycle which is linked to training opportunities (as described in the 2002 Staff Manual).

- The Ministry of Education and the Vanuatu Police Force began to establish standard procedures for ensuring the safety of children within their sectors and institutionalize respective training arrangements for the staff:
  o The Vanuatu Police Force has developed, with the help of a UNICEF-funded technical adviser, a Children in Conflict with the Law (CCL) Policy, which became the basis for future organization of respective training, operations, and primary data collection. The training is based on Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for investigations involving children and youth, which outlines key principles of dealing with children, provides reference to respective laws, describes required duties in the process of taking a statement from a child witness and defines key procedures (e.g., procedures for taking youths from school, persons to be present during investigations, providing advice to parents, legal representation, conducing personal searches etc.). A special section of the SOP describes actions for cases of suspected child abuse and neglect, and on investigations of sexual abuse matters. Training is provided to future police recruits and currently employed officers through the key facility in Port Vila and cluster-based sessions in the provincial outer stations.

  o The Ministry of Education, in partnership with Save the Children, is working on introducing child protection modules into teachers’ education. Once child protection was integrated into the safety component of the Minimum Quality Standards for Primary Schools, respective issues became part of the formal teacher curriculum – although, as of 2012, only 12 per cent of teachers were estimated to have gone through pre-service training. In addition, in the course of the Save the Children Child Protection Programme in Vanuatu, over 200 teachers were trained in the implementation of child safety policies.

Open challenges

- The frontline workforce in child protection operates without relevant professional standards. At the moment, the field workforce in child protection in Vanuatu is limited to two Child Protection Project Officers contracted by the MJCS to work on the Islands of Tanna and Erromango in support of the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme. Other professionals who might be involved in child protection include health workers, educators, police officers (especially those working in the Police Family Protection Units which operate in every province), as well as, potentially, registered councillors who are expected to be declared under the Family Protection Act 2008. None of these specialists providing (or potentially providing) services to children are covered by professional standards related to child protection.
Although MJCS pilot projects in child protection (UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme and Save the Children Child Protection Programme) both work through establishing community-based groups of child protection enthusiasts (or “champions”), the role of child protection volunteers is not formalized. Members of the communal child protection project committees felt that some volunteers needed more support to safeguard their commitment.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Consider ways to formalize the role of community child protection champions, perhaps following the example of the Ministry of Health Programme of Village Health Workers (VHWs), implemented via Save the Children.

- Political volatility, frequent change of leadership and significant amounts of political appointments were noted to have had a significant impact on the effectiveness of civil service.
  - At the national level, a range of donors are providing support to strengthen the continuity of policy commitment within the Government and across elected parliaments. In particular, the UNDP Parliamentary Development Programme provides support to the Parliament’s technical secretariat, as well as induction training for Vanuatu’s newly elected parliamentarians. However, these trainings have been so far focused on law and parliamentary process, rather than issues relevant to children and social welfare.
  - Moreover, while some support is provided to build up the capacity of the politicians at central level, there is less evidence of such support at the level of local regional councils, which represents a growing concern. Consultations conducted by this assessment, as well as existing literature, show that the weakness of locally elected councils creates a feeling of alienation from formal governance structures among communities, as well as a perception of the traditional “Nakamal Way” as an alternative rather than a complementary communal decision-making system.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Liaise with UNDP Parliamentary Development Programme to discuss possibilities for future support for elected officials at provincial levels. If any such plans materialize, aim to introduce child protection issues into respective capacity building programmes.
Potential providers of social welfare services in Vanuatu have few possibilities to receive professional training.

- Tertiary degree programmes relevant to child protection, including social work, are only available via the University of South Pacific (USP): national tertiary education providers, including the Vanuatu School of Nursing Education (VSNE), do not seem to offer degrees in relevant disciplines.

- The only current possibility of receiving relevant vocational training for specialists in Vanuatu are also limited to courses provided in the Suva-based USP campus. The Vanuatu College of Nursing currently offers six diploma and certificate level courses, but these are narrowly focused on nursing, without any other disciplines (e.g. community-based rehabilitation). However, the Vanuatu system of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is being currently developed with support from the TVET Sector Strengthening Program\(^4\) funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which helps to set up provincial TVET centres linked to provincial skills plans.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Once the new model for child protection is drafted, share plans for the future outlook of the local welfare arrangements with the TVET Sector Strengthening Programme. It would be useful to promote the possibility of engaging professionals and paraprofessionals from child protection and social welfare through the network of TVET centres in order to develop the Provincial Skills Plans.*

- The Government Performance Evaluation Cycle for all employees assumes that individual training needs, established depending on the post’s objectives, must be satisfied by either on-the-job or additional training, whether in Vanuatu or overseas. However, in reality, possibilities for covering continued training needs in areas related to child protection are limited. The Vanuatu Institute of Public Administration and Management under the Public Service Commission is currently being restructured and seems traditionally focused on managerial and generic skills.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Investigate what possibilities for continued professional development exist within the MJCS and how these could be strengthened.*

- The current reward system includes minimal opportunities for motivating exceptional performance and is one of the factors behind high staff turnover. According to the current Public Service Staff Manual, staff salaries are defined by the Salary Schedule with the possibility of gradual incrementation based on the decisions of the Director-Generals and Directors, with only marginal options to reward excellence (in a form of fast-track incrementation in exceptional cases). New performance-related awards have been planned for introduction since 2015, but their coverage seems to be limited to a small number of exceptional employees (only three awards are introduced for exceptionally performing employees: a Public Service Award, a Ministerial Award, and a Departmental Award). At the same time, evidence of how poor incentives affect staff motivation is available in the Education Sector where, despite high salaries, lack of performance-driven salary components leads to low productivity (see analysis in the full report).

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Advocate for the gradual introduction of performance-related rewards within public services – useful examples of this approach can be found in the experiences of Fiji and the Philippines.*

*Consider introducing a range of non-financial rewards for outstanding performance, including future paraprofessionals and current community child protection champions already involved in the MJCS pilot projects.*

\(^4\) [http://www.vanuatutvet.org.vu/](http://www.vanuatutvet.org.vu/)
Current progress

- Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) is a relatively strong, established organization which undertakes a range of relevant surveys, including through partnerships with international organizations. Apart from the 2009 National Population and Housing Census, it ran two rounds of Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) (in 2006 and 2010) and a unique Integrated Vanuatu Demographic and Health Survey (VDHS) and a Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in 2013.

- A wide range of additional surveys of particular relevance to child protection were also undertaken by sector ministries and NGOs (often in partnership with the VNSO). These included: the 2011 Vanuatu National Survey of Women's Lives and Family Relationships (led by the MJCS and undertaken by the Vanuatu Women's Crisis Centre in partnership with the VNSO); the 2005 ILO survey on informal economy; the 2003 Tafea Disability Survey conducted by the Vanuatu Society for Disabled People (VSDP) and Inclusion International; and the 2001 Vanuatu Suicide Baseline Survey (by the MOH). In addition, the core study which remains instrumental in shaping child protection policy debate in Vanuatu is the 2008 UNICEF/AusAID Baseline Assessment “Protect me with Love and Care”.

- Despite resource constraints, there is substantial evidence of VNSO’s openness to cooperate with the sector ministries in extending current surveys to cover new variables. Collecting data on social indicators is a statutory duty of the VNSO protected by the law. And while human and technical resources of the VNSO are tightly constrained, active requests for support are often satisfied. For example, the National Disability Policy and Action Plan 2008-2015 describes successful cooperation between disability policy stakeholders and the VNSO to include disability questions into the National Survey by 2008. Moreover, the VNSO Strategic Plan for 2008-2013 specifically highlighted an emerging need for better children-related statistics. The plan contained a section on “emerging data requirements”, which noted, “keen interest in gender statistics, disability and children.” In view of this, it was stated that the VNSO “must find ways to meet these requirements, either through existing data, collecting survey data or by using administrative data” (VNSO, 2008).

- The VNSO also pursues an active policy for “building partnerships” with data users. This includes extensive publication of details on the nature of the surveys, key reports and basic descriptive tables, as well as contact information for requests of survey data. The VNSO website also contains an interactive Geographical Information Systems (GIS) section which allows spatial analysis of the 2009 Census data. Moreover, VNSO explicitly acknowledges that the circle of its clients includes “private institutions, businesses, overseas organizations, researchers, students and the general public”. The VNSO approach in assisting these groups is through strengthening the open access of available data, “so that people with access to the internet can find what they need”. However, it also states that it remains open to “special data requests to meet the demand for ad hoc consultancy work.” (VNSO, 2008).

**RECOMMENDATION:** In order to make full use of the VNSO’s openness to cooperation with the research community, the MJCS/National Child Protection Working Group (NCPWG) would need to develop a list of particular factors that require academic exploration to support the development of viable child protection systems in Vanuatu. This list may include, for example, the prevalence of child maltreatment, its drivers and its impact on communities; the inter-relation between kastom and formal systems in the context of decentralization reforms; and the nature of child-related attitudes and beliefs. Resulting research agenda, along with information on the possibilities of cooperation with the VNSO, could be advertised to the interested academic communities (e.g., via the USP).
Open challenges

- Whilst considerable amounts of information relevant to child protection has already been collected in Vanuatu over the past decade, the use of this data (especially surveys) in the planning process is limited. Government agencies tend to use survey data for monitoring, evaluation and especially reporting, rather than diagnostics and policy planning. Diagnostic sections in current policies, such as the National Disability Policy 2008-2015 and the Mental Health Policy 2009-2015, are very brief and only refer to limited epidemiological data. The Education and Health Sector Strategies rely on their sector-specific surveys for sourcing monitoring data, rather than as a diagnostic tool to identify issues and goals.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The VNSO Strategic Plan includes a commitment “to provide other government departments with necessary tools and an understanding of the statistics that highlights the important role they play in delivering quality statistics for Vanuatu”, as well as “to train key people within the government who use VNSO statistics to develop good policies for the people of Vanuatu” (VNSO, 2008). Future development of the child protection data management/surveillance system should benefit from these possibilities: once responsibilities for the new Management Information Systems (MIS) are delineated, relevant training could be requested from the VNSO.

- One obstacle in using data for planning is a lack of performance data and information on policy outcomes across all social sectors. The Public Expenditure Reviews in Health and Education in 2011-2012 showed specifically that it was impossible to analyse the efficiency, equity and effectiveness of health programmes without access to information relating to output data from the service providing facilities.
**RECOMMENDATION:** Undertake a mapping of the needed data on child protection outcomes (which may include child labour statistics, prevalence of abuse and exploitation and corporal punishment) and identify variables which are not currently covered by existing surveys. Communicate these data needs to the VNSO, National Child Protection Working Group, interested donors and academic community.

- Child protection datasets in Vanuatu are institutionally fragmented and incomplete:
  - Statistics, relevant to child protection, are collected by several agencies and are not consolidated into a comprehensive national system. One barrier to such consolidation is a lack of coordination with how the relevant data is generated: every ministry operates its data systems according to individual policies and templates. These include: Detainee data from the Correctional Services Department; Crime Reporting and Information Management System (CRIMS); Vanuatu Education Management System (VEMIS); and Health Information System (HIS).
  - The VEMIS system, which has some of the strongest data, has received considerable technical support from donors and generates administrative data which is used by the Education Sector in planning and reporting. Initially, the VEMIS survey contained a Child Protection section (Form B9), which seems to have been removed upon a review, which found the data unreliable (given the lack of practical guidelines for completing the forms). No new variables seem to have been introduced to cover child protection issues, including those in regards to school safety policies introduced by the Minimum Quality Standards.

**RECOMMENDATION:** As was discussed previously, it would be very important to discuss with the MOE potential ways to use VEMIS to collect child protection information. If Form B9 is indeed not functional, an alternative set of questions may be developed to describe compliance with the School Safety Requirements. To avoid difficulties which led to the removal of the Form B9 in the past, the new variables must rely on clear definitions and sufficient information to enable respondents to provide consistent and reliable estimates.

- The two contracted child protection officers working in the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme produce monthly reports which describe: the number of cases addressed during the month, detailed information on the cases (such as what was the type of abuse), what was the age of the victim, as well as descriptions of other activities undertaken during the month. There is no specific template for these reports and their content is not consolidated.

- The quality of labour statistics in Vanuatu is very weak, which is a significant barrier to analysing child labour issues and policies. The latest labour survey was undertaken in 2000 and, as of 2010, there were no plans for a repeat study in this area. Limited information on the labour market is available from the HIES. The International Labour Organization (ILO) 2009-2012 Decent Labour Programme works with the Labour Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as the VNSO to strengthen their capacities for extending labour data collection and analysis. According to the ILO Programme document diagnostic, the key barrier to these plans was the weak and stretched capacity of both of these agencies (ILO, 2009).

**RECOMMENDATION:** Follow up on the progress with plans to undertake a Household Labour Force Survey.
Current progress

- The Government is determined to build a viable, realistic and context-specific system of child protection in Vanuatu, and, in order to achieve this, the Government is highly open to innovation and creative solutions. As was discussed earlier, the MJCS has supported several exercises to model a new child protection system, and rejected the formal approach of the initial proposal developed in 2009 on the grounds of its poor fit to actual reality (Tyedmers, 2014). The current roadmap for child protection system building, outlined in the 2011 Mapping report (Copland & Soalo, 2011), explicitly calls for an experimental stage (“testing” or “piloting”) in order to develop an innovative, Vanuatu-specific arrangement that would be both realistic and effective.

- In line with the 2011 Mapping, the MJCS has supported multiple pilot initiatives to explore ways to develop a realistic child welfare system in Vanuatu. These included, primarily, the two community-level initiatives implemented by the Save the Children (Child protection programme) and UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme, described in previous sections.

- Vanuatu is the only country in the Pacific apart from Australia and New Zealand which has a child helpline. The Vanuatu Family Health Association cooperates with Child Helpline International (CHI) as an associate member, and maintains a helpline available for children to voice their complaints and concerns. The helpline (00 678 08 7777) is focused on the issues of sexual and reproductive health. The CHI helps its members to cooperate with the telecommunications sector to ensure wide access to child helplines, to provide the helpline support service and to use the helpline data to advocate for child protection.

**Open challenges**

- One of the key open questions of the current discussion on the future system of child welfare in Vanuatu is how to organize a viable and realistic process of identifying and referring children to the appropriate support services at community levels. The model of referrals for child protection services in Vanuatu is not yet developed. Exploring options for such future mechanisms is one of the goals of the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme. While the pilot has not yet produced a complete model for a possible referral system, some observations and lessons are already emerging. These include lessons on:

  o The importance of the Community Child Protection Committee (CCPC). Composed of enthusiasts appointed by the community leaders, the CCPC is a platform which helps to introduce child protection to the communities and deal with any collisions between child protection concerns and customary rules. It is also a surveillance mechanism, identifying children at risk and using its authority to refer such “cases” to Child Protection Officers;

  o The key roles of Child Protection Officers. Child protection officers play pivotal roles in driving, directing and supporting child protection referrals in the pilot communities;

  o The significant potential demand for cooperation with formal services at community and provincial levels. Despite the existence of useful community-based traditional practices and mechanisms, a lot of stakeholders in the communities often felt at a loss when having to deal with complex child maltreatment cases. The stakeholders subsequently appreciated the new level of clarity and agreement on how to address such cases that was achieved through support by the project;

  o The importance of personal and family links in deciding where to refer for help. Existing support mechanisms and access to formal services are fragmented, uncoordinated and unclear to the communities. As a result, people tend to seek help from their friends, relatives or trusted others, and it is this level of personal trust and knowledge that is often more important than the statutory duties of those to whom people go for help;

  o The isolation of Health and Education systems. Participation of health workers in child protection community referral mechanisms is minimal (beyond providing help when asked). The Education Sector has extensive resources to identify and address child abuse, but traditionally it deals with child protection issues in a highly isolated manner, which is stressful for education authorities at all levels.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Designing a model for a possible child protection system to inform the future development of a Child Protection Policy (including a referral system, standards and registration procedures, a data sharing and surveillance system, and a monitoring system) would require a designated assignment, which should include: institutional mapping; data flow mapping; intergovernmental financing analysis; and consultations at sub-national (provincial and community) levels.

*This drafting exercise should be based on the priorities for a hybrid child protection system formulated by the 2011 Child Protection System Mapping and should be informed by detailed analysis of the two pilots which took place since that time.*

**However, options could be considered in the following directions:**

- The NCPWG needs to be strengthened along the lines that would help it to achieve the level of functionality which was achieved by the CRVS Task Force. Specific brainstorming is required to compare the two mechanisms to identify ways in which the CRVS Task Force has been positively different from the NCPWG. It is important to ensure active participation in the NCPWG for the PMO and VNSO. As discussed further, donors supporting this process may consider developing a small but visible infrastructural component which would make this process somewhat similar to the Birth Registration Initiative, but would not create extra recurrent costs in the long term.
- Provincial and municipal councils may be encouraged (or given a delegated mandate) to establish provincial (municipal) protocols for the support, coordination and supervision of child welfare systems at the local level. The NCPWG may issue detailed guidance and support about what such protocol would entail (including multiple choice options), but can leave scope for flexibility in the exact organization of this process at the local level.

- Given that the capacities of the MJCS, in terms of frontline social welfare service provision, are tightly limited, the proposed model may be based on stronger cooperation with the Health and Education Sectors. In particular:

  ✓ The Ministry of Health could be encouraged to gradually strengthen the child protection capacity of the provincial hospitals, which, under the current system, are key providers of specialized care for victims of severe child abuse. Within the hospitals, dedicated staff (e.g. nurses) would receive upskilling to act as small “Child Protection Units” (CPUs). The slightly extended responsibilities of the CPU nurses, apart from dealing with cases of suspected or actual abuse, should include completing simple statistical templates on cases (and entering this data into the HIS, which should be respectively extended).

  ✓ It would be highly beneficial to develop a range of cost-effective and realistic measures to motivate health authorities, the hospitals, and provincial governments to participate in this initiative. The CPU nurses would ideally receive a symbolic salary increment or a non-financial award, as well as an opportunity to communicate through an umbrella organization to exchange issues and experiences. Within the Birth Registration Initiative, a significant element of the programme was the infrastructural component, which helped to computerize statistical reporting in the provincial hospitals. Ideas may be developed on equivalent investment in the case of child protection. As one hypothetical possibility, hospitals may be offered support in purchasing vehicles which could be used for transporting patients, but would be reserved for priority use in cases where children who have experienced or are at risk of abuse need to be taken to hospital, the police or shelter.

  ✓ The function of child protection officers may be organized in a number of ways and it may differ across local regions. One possibility is to replicate the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme approach where child protection officers could be appointed through the MJCS. Another possibility is to replicate the experience of the Village Health Workers, gradually developing a workforce of paraprofessional Child Protection Champions, and working at provincial or island levels. It might also appear possible to combine the Child Protection function with the activities of the current Village Health Workers (by extending their training and, perhaps, symbolic extra compensation).

  ✓ The Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) would remain key platforms for engaging at local level and ensuring community-based surveillance. It should be stressed that one of the key objectives of the new system is to arrange support to traditional leaders in achieving communal harmony by making sure that available formal services are used as quickly as possible; this is in order to prevent even bigger conflicts and problems for the community in future.

  ✓ Extending this mechanism across villages is likely to take time as it requires significant prior training and awareness raising. Communities may be motivated to create CCPCs, e.g., by linking participation in child protection policies with symbolic awards, priority coverage and by other programmes and services.

  ✓ It is critical to ensure that teachers are equipped with clear templates and guidelines for reporting suspected cases of child maltreatment, as well as personal and professional protection if they decide to report.
Vanuatu does not yet have a system for analysing and improving the quality of services provided to children and families, and a respective oversight body does not yet exist.

While child protection may be a new area for most communities, some services are still provided by the Vanuatu’s active civil society as well as by international NGOs. Examples of active organizations who also work with vulnerable children are Vanuatu’s National Council for Women, Vanuatu’s Women’s Centre, disability-focused NGOs, sports NGOs, and faith-based organizations. The active NGOs are involved in the NCPWG. However, there is no body formally charged with the oversight of all organizations working with children with the view to control the quality of their services.

There is also no unified set of requirements that must be observed by any provider of social welfare services, including services to children.

Registration is not mandatory and there is no unified register of civil society organizations operating in Vanuatu. There is a significant amount of unincorporated organizations operating across the country, and those organizations which do wish to register (e.g. to raise funds or rent property) have a variety of options and laws that regulate diverse forms of legal entities, and are listed in respective fragmented registers.

There are no inspections at the level of service providers, and current capacities for such function are limited. The MJCS Child Desk is tasked, among other things, with the “regular monitoring of the situation of children at the national level, and periodic reviews of progress towards the fulfilment of the global agenda and declaration”; but this responsibility is limited to analytical overview and reporting, rather than physical inspection and oversight of the actual services. Moreover, the capacity of the Child Desk is limited and already thinly stretched across existing functions.

At the moment, there are no reporting requirements for suspected cases of child abuse and no provisions on protecting whistle-blowers. Lack of guidance on how to report cases of suspected abuse and protection for those who report it is a major problem for the Education Sector, where many abuse cases are described to involve school principals. While teachers may be keen to assist students and parents in such situations, they do not feel well protected to report such instances.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Take urgent steps to establish sufficient protection for teachers (as well as other public servants) who report suspected cases of child abuse.

While there are some fora for coordination between NGOs, there is no specific instrument to facilitate the exchange of innovative solutions and best practices in child protection. The primary forum for experience exchange in child protection is the NCPWG led by the MJCS, as well as the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO) – an umbrella organization for the Vanuatu civil society groups. Both of these structures are highly respected, but their resources are stretched, covering policy coordination, response planning, and disaster risk management. There is no specific instrument that would be directed specifically at helping service providers and professionals exchange good practices and innovative ideas (such as newsletters, conferences and websites).
Current progress

- Vanuatu has the benefit of extensive evidence-based diagnostic research that has already been undertaken by the Government and non-state partners to establish attitudinal drivers and barriers to child safety among the country’s diverse cultures.
  
  o One of the first such studies was the 2008 UNICEF/AusAID Baseline Study “Protect me with Love and Care,” which collected evidence that revealed commonly shared values that influenced child safety, both positively and negatively.\(^6\)
  
  o Attitudinal research was taken further by the MJCS 2011 Child Protection Mapping which, in itself, was a diagnostic study into the key elements of informal child protection system arrangements, including beliefs and attitudes at community levels. This report helped to reveal some of the core attitudinal issues such as: hostility to child rights concept/approach in most communities; more positive attitudes to formal systems among young people and women; lack of a clear concept of severe child abuse in kastom; fear of “trouble-making” in intervening when a child is at risk.
  
  o A strong tradition of attitudinal research also exists, covering relevant fields such as gender-based violence and reproductive health, including the Vanuatu National Survey of Women’s Lives and Family Relationships, and a range of Knowledge, Attitude and Perception (KAP) studies in relevant areas conducted over the past two decades.

- The hybrid legal system of Vanuatu has also been in the focus of active academic research. A range of specific studies has looked into the details of Vanuatu’s hybrid legal system, as well as the links, gaps and conflicts between customary and formal law. In 2013, the University of South Pacific held a conference in its Port Vila campus entitled “Law and Culture 2013: compatibility or conflict?” which focused on the current issues found across Pacific countries, with a range of studies specifically on Vanuatu.

- Unlike many of its Pacific neighbours, Vanuatu also saw a significant effort to study and reconcile incompatibilities between traditional and formal law on behalf of the Government, and not just academics. The 2001 Chiefs’ Legislation Project Report was commissioned as a specific study into the operations of the kastom systems and ways to link it to formal law. While not all of the report recommendations were fully accepted, it played a key role in the development of the subsequent National Council of Chiefs Act 2006.

- The Vanuatu child protection landscape shows a range of examples of innovative partnerships helping to promote child safety. In recent years, several initiatives related to child protection in Vanuatu were established with participation from influential organizations and figures. The most striking example of such creativity and success is the Wan Smol Bag Theatre – a Vanuatu-based regional NGO involved in a wide range of innovative activities aimed at raising awareness and promoting community action around socially significant issues, including various aspects of child protection. Some of the most relevant and innovative initiatives of the Wan Smol Bag in child protection include: youth centres for unemployed, out-of-school youths and youths at risk; reproductive health clinics; and highly innovative awareness raising and communication initiatives, such as the Love Patrol series and resource materials. The Love Patrol is a Ni-Vanuatu television series and the first ever locally produced television series in Vanuatu. It features stories of young couples in ways which promote respective behaviour, caring attitudes and advertises support services which are available in cases where children and youths are at risk or have experienced violence and maltreatment.

\(^6\) For example, on the risk side, the study showed that adult caregivers in most communities tend to generally not believe children, which contributes to the hidden nature of abuse and disempowers children by neglecting their trust placed in adults.
Open challenges

- Despite the relative abundance of attitudinal studies, the Government has not yet formulated its public communications and behaviour change influencing strategy in child protection. Behaviour change messages are not yet explicitly formulated in Vanuatu and they are not part of any existing strategies and policies. These are expected to emerge in the broader process of developing a strategy for child protection. It was also established that the current DFAT programme is planning to support the Government specifically in the area of strategic communications: a communication component is already part of the current Policy and Justice Support Programme (PJSP) and helping the Ministry to draft a communication strategy is one of the planned activities.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Consider basing the new communications strategy in the community-based influencing approach used in the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme and successfully piloted in other countries such as Fiji.

- While there is a wealth of research on the Vanuatu hybrid justice system and, in particular, more focused findings of the 2011 Child Protection Mapping on cultural barriers to effective cooperation between customary chiefs and formal protection systems, strategies to overcome these barriers have not yet been formulated. Studies have found that while chiefs could be extremely resourceful in ensuring child safety at community level, customary traditions centre around the role of chiefs as mediators and peacemakers, which could prove problematic if helping the child requires taking sides and especially if it requires confrontation with a powerful male figure. Despite these observations now being well described and supported by evidence, ideas are not yet in place on how these attitudes could be addressed.

- Existing diagnostic studies have provided insights into some positive attitudes embedded into the Vanuatu’s cultural traditions, which could be used in communication and behaviour change strategies. However, identifying positive influencing themes was not among the core objectives of the existing research and the resulting recommendations are relatively scarce. Positive influencing is also not institutionalized as part of child protection activities. First attempts to achieve this were implemented within the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme, which tried to build on positive communal values by inclusive influencing through the CCPCs. This was done through:
  
  o Empowering communities to address barriers to behaviour change (for example, by reframing child protection debate and showing how child protection could be viewed from the angle of ensuring child safety and wellbeing - thereby replacing the suspicious child rights rhetoric; and discussing how the mediating and peace-restoring function of the chiefs could be strengthened if they could rely on additional support from police and health workers to resolve issues).
  
  o Accumulating Most Significant Change (MSC) stories from the UNICEF Tafea Province Child Protection Pilot Programme to offer useful evidence of how new solutions in child protection may benefit communities. However, the current list of such stories is currently limited and not well documented.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- Include positive influencing as a particular objective of the new Communication Strategy.
- Strengthen documentation of the Most Significant Change (MSCs) stories from the existing pilots. Collect a comprehensive description of the MSC; this includes any information that could be used to overcome barriers to behaviour change and practical examples of benefits achieved through child protection work which positively affected the whole community, its traditions and the reputation of its leaders.

---

7 Mostly linked to the association of children and the future; communal responsibility over the child’s safety and wellbeing; and generally favourable attitudes to positive disciplining methods.
8 For example, intervention by the Child Protection Officer into the case of several children missing school (upon the recommendation of the CCPC) helped to disclose a case of a boy abused in school. By helping this boy and counselling other children, the children were returned to school, which was seen as a positive communal outcome and an achievement for the community leaders.