



THE UNBLOCKED CASH EXPERIENCE IN VANUATU

Private Sector Implementing a Cash Transfer System
for Humanitarian Response

The **Connecting Business initiative (CBI)** is a partnership between the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and is dedicated to supporting the private sector in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. Contact: connectingbusiness@un.org

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at undp.org or follow on Twitter: [@UNDP](https://twitter.com/UNDP).

OCHA coordinates the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crises. Our vision is a world that comes together to help crisis-affected people rapidly get the humanitarian assistance and protection they need. We advocate for effective and principled humanitarian action by all, for all. Learn more at unocha.org or follow on Twitter: [@UNOCHA](https://twitter.com/UNOCHA).

Purpose of document

This document provides details of the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council's (VBRC) role and approach to supporting the businesses in the Oxfam UnBlocked Cash humanitarian programme in 2020-2021 in Vanuatu.

While this report documents the learnings using blockchain technology, by sharing the key details from this programme, VBRC aims to encourage more appropriate inclusion of commercial businesses in humanitarian responses as well as support the appropriate use of similar digital cash transfer programmes in humanitarian response more broadly.

One of the key benefits of the approach taken in this programme, is that by including commercial businesses in the response, we have supported the recovery of communities and the businesses within them concurrently and strengthened value chains and offered more sustainable long-term solutions.

Ultimately this builds resilience more broadly across the economy and community.

Disclaimer

These occasional policy papers are non-papers. They are produced primarily for internal purposes and serve as a basis for promoting further discussion and policy analysis in their respective areas. They do not necessarily represent the official views of OCHA. They are available online on the OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business initiative (CBI) website www.connectingbusiness.org

Acronyms

VBRC: Vanuatu Business Resilience Council

VCCI: Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry

KYC: Know Your Customer (Legal Requirement for Data Validation)

Acknowledgements

This paper was written by Nicola Barnes.

Managing Editor: Glen Craig

Copy Editor: Dr. Rebecca Bogiri

We are grateful for the support and advice provided by reviewers and advisers.

Cover Photo: Groovy Banana/VBRC.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS UNBLOCKED CASH	4
A SIMPLE TAP AND PAY SYSTEM	5
BUSINESSES SUPPORTING THEIR COMMUNITIES	6
CHAPTER 2: PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	8
OUR VBRC TEAM	8
VENDOR SELECTION	9
REGISTRATION	12
TRAINING	13
ELECTRONIC TRANSACTIONS	15
CORE TECHNOLOGY	18
SUPPORT	19
GENDER	20
CHAPTER 3: PROJECT CLOSURE	21
AFTERMATH	21
LESSONS LEARNT	22
THANKS	22

Puichee Lo in his store in Luganville. He says the programme has helped his community. He especially likes that it gives access to goods to the most vulnerable, and has seen many new customers come through his store. He has also been able to assist smaller unblocked vendors with wholesale prices and goods for them to sell in their small stores. Photo: Arlene Bax/Oxfam in Vanuatu



WHAT IS UNBLOCKED CASH?

The 'UnBlocked Cash' solution applied in Vanuatu provides aid response to communities affected by a humanitarian disaster.

A SIMPLE TAP AND PAY CARD

Unblocked Cash uses e-voucher payments and mobile phone technology as the means to provide access to funds for affected families to pay for goods and services that they require. Rather than receiving aid by means of traditional tinned and dried food supplies chosen by the government, the recipients are provided with a way to pay for goods and services via a "tap and pay" card. This card is then processed by selected businesses and service providers using a smart phone app to receive payment directly to their bank account.

One of the key benefits for the recipient is that they can choose what purchases best suit their recovery needs – such as food supplies and shelter for example. Each family can choose the right recovery items depending on their situation and for their needs, and purchase them from local suppliers.

Cash solutions can often meet people's immediate needs more quickly and appropriately than traditional aid. This choice supports improved dignity for the families and more appropriate

use of funds for the specific family recovery needs.

Making local business part of the recovery

Another important aspect is that local businesses in affected communities are part of this recovery approach, working as suppliers of goods and services to their communities and are being reimbursed directly and electronically for what is purchased by the participants by the project. No cash money exchanges hands; vendors are provided with smartphones and trained on how to use them to accept card-based payments.

This approach is dramatically different than traditional forms of aid that usually bring in imported goods as forms of aid and bypass the local businesses creating further damage to the local economies.

This approach also removes common aid distribution issues by supporting existing transport networks as that already supply the communities. It also allows other transport providers to be part of the solution by allowing them to register in the network of vendors that accept the tap and pay card. So, people can move about to make their

purchases from the best suppliers and their transport costs are paid by the programme.

The card provided to recipients is an unrestricted "e-voucher", which allows recipients to pay for any goods that the selected vendors across the network are selling. All transactions, including what is being purchased and where, is fully traceable, and is available via an online dashboard that can be monitored by partners.



Sempo app on a smart phone reading the QR code. Photo: Groovy Banana Photography, VBRC



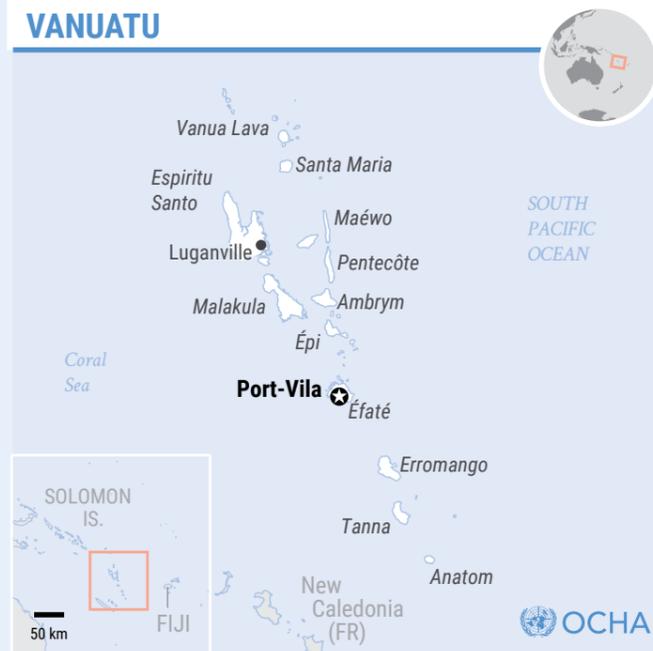
The VBRC team is delighted to see the opportunities and growth this programme has offered the businesses and encourage broader engagement with government and humanitarian partners in future humanitarian responses."

- Glen Craig, Chairman, Vanuatu Business Resilience Council (VBRC)

VANUATU, A SMALL ISLAND NATION

Vanuatu is one of the most disaster-affected countries globally.

With its remote Pacific Ocean location, small population of approximately 300,000 people living across 68 habited islands, speaking over 100 languages, the geography and less developed infrastructure offer innate challenges to supporting disaster recovery.



Map Sources: ESRI, Gov't. of USA, UNGIS.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Sep 2019.

BUSINESSES SUPPORTING THEIR COMMUNITIES

By including local businesses, we build stronger and more resilient communities and strengthen existing supply chains.

Some of the benefits of including private sector business in a humanitarian response include:

- Supporting the economy and keeping the money circulating within local businesses and communities.
- Local businesses understand the needs of their communities as they live and work there too.
- The local vendors are best placed to move goods – they know how to do this already and have done it for years.
- Local businesses rely on their existing value chain and have set up contacts and ways of doing business that work in their communities.



Linda Lau at her store A.S.K, one of the unblocked cash vendors who is very excited about the roll out of unblocked Cash in Tanna. Photo: Arlene Bax/Oxfam in Vanuatu.

- Local businesses employ and train staff, so by including them, the economic benefits are circulated more widely to families.



Mele Rara is an unblocked cash vendor in the rural village of Tasiriki where he runs a fish market. He has new customers and has made increased profits which have helped him and his family in the wake of cyclone Harold.

Photo: Arlene Bax/Oxfam in Vanuatu.

INTRODUCTION

Not only did 2020 bring the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic globally, but in April that year, Vanuatu became the first country in the world to be affected by a devastating Category 5 Cyclone in lockdown and, to make matters worse, soon thereafter a volcano erupted causing damaging ash to fall on areas of Tanna Island, one of the nation's main islands.

This ash destroyed crops and affected the drinking water supplies. These compounding disasters meant that fast and effective solutions were required to support the recovery in the affected areas.

As a leading provider of humanitarian response in Vanuatu, Oxfam coordinated the donor funding and recovery programme for these three disasters on behalf of the Vanuatu Government using the UnBlocked Cash method. Oxfam partnered with the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council (VBRC), a sub-committee of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), to provide support in managing

the businesses in their UnBlocked Cash programme.

VBRC identified, trained, and supported over 345 businesses (called "vendors" in this programme) across three provinces who provided the goods and services to the selected households in the affected areas.

This approach ensured that the supply chain was supported, and community stores received business from their communities, thereby playing a vital role in the recovery.

In the Vanuatu programme, there were 19 partners all with different roles. These partners for example worked in their geographical areas of expertise to select the beneficiaries or in their fields of experience, such as the electronic payments and/or liaising with banks.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

The process of implementing the solutions that enable the vendors to be part of this humanitarian response are outlined in the chapters below.

Each section contains an overview of how the process was implemented and then highlights what worked well and recommendations for improvements. This detail is intended to provide support to implementing bodies supporting the businesses in future UnBlocked Cash programmes.

OUR VBRC TEAM

The VBRC team that managed this project were all on the ground in Vanuatu and had commercial backgrounds, having worked in private retail and tourism businesses prior to the project. This meant that they were familiar with the business environment and systems, spoke the local common language Bislama fluently and had existing contacts in the business community. This team was hosted by VCCI and led by a local project manager with her own retail store (in a non-competing tourism sector).

WHAT WORKED WELL

The selection of staff from the private business environment (knowledgeable with contacts and good language skills).



The VBRC Team. Photo: VBRC

Esther Wenau -
The VBRC Team
at work with
Vendors across
Vanuatu

Photo: N.
Barnes, VBRC



VENDOR SELECTION

One of the first tasks assigned to VBRC in each province was the selection of the appropriate businesses to become vendors. The vendors are the stores, retailers and service providers registered in the programme.

Timing was important to the programme start – there needed to be a short amount of time between the actual disaster and the start of the programme, so that the stores were checked as safe and operational. The next focus was on the type of goods they sold, which needed to match with the demand and disaster situation – for example in cyclone-affected areas where homes often had roofs lifted or damaged, hardware stores were important and sawmills were added to the vendor network for roofing lumber.

Similarly, water providers were a priority to ensure families had easy access to safe drinking water.

Vendor selection was broadly based on their location and readiness to operate, the goods they sold, willingness to participate and their

compliance (had business license, IDs and a bank account).

While Oxfam in Vanuatu did a large-scale phone interview to identify needs in the affected areas for the initial disaster (Tropical Cyclone or TC Harold), and this identified some obvious needs such as water and hardware, the general approach was to identify a wide variety of vendors in the areas that were most affected for proximity and supply need purposes. This typically included community stores, supermarkets, electricity providers, specialist stores such as solar providers, hardware stores, pharmacies, water providers, and transport providers including buses and boats.

A special focus was placed on ensuring fresh fruit and vegetables were included in the programme as well, to encourage healthy family purchases.

The work of vendor selection included walking through areas, talking to communities, seeking transport providers who know the affected

WHAT WORKED WELL

The provincial governments in the affected areas defined the required paperwork needed by the businesses for eligibility into the programme and this was followed by VBRC – for example, while each business was asked if they held a valid business license, some provincial governments deemed this an essential programme requirement and others did not.

- Staff had existing knowledge of the areas and stores operating within walking distance (typically very small community stores) as well as larger town-based stores (such as supermarkets).
- Staff were coached to explain the benefits of the programme in a way that was attractive to the business owner (so that they mentioned points important to the vendor, like getting more customers/ income, being taught about electronic payment/money going directly to bank account, etc.).
- Larger stores with a good selection of products fared best – as they offered

people choice, variety in pricing and a one-stop solution.

- Stores that offered any form of ‘promotion or discount’ did extremely well – people in Vanuatu often purchase the same goods, at the same pricing, in all small stores. There are few unique selling propositions between competing vendors. Those who offered ‘something special’ got the largest share of the business.
- Getting the timing right – going to vendors in very affected areas too soon may mean they are not ready to begin trading; so it’s important to allow some time for basic recovery or assist in this recovery.
- Selecting a good variety of different stores and service providers.
- Including specialists – niche but appreciated specialty stores such as solar providers and pharmacies.
- Ensuring there was a good mix of vendors.

areas, identifying existing popular vendors, interviewing potential vendors and collecting core data (such as whether they had a business license or bank account), and assessing each vendor’s willingness to work with the programme. While it was uncommon, some vendors were unwilling to work with the programme because they did not know VBRC or Oxfam or not trusting that this was a legitimate opportunity.

Vendors received a onetime bonus of 10,000vt (approximately equivalent to AUD\$120) for joining the programme. This was especially important to motivate them to try something



Aldona Tamata from VBRC working with vendors in Santo Fruit Market. Photo: N. Barnes, VBRC

new, to enable them to purchase additional stock to be ready for the programme start, and to meet consumer demands.

It also later compensated the vendor for unexpected bank fees (related to electronic payments) and for more remote vendors it covered their travel costs to go to the bank to get money to buy more stock.

In the Vanuatu programme, long life food was by far the most sought-after item, followed by hardware and at times sanitation (especially early in the response).

Tips for future improvements

1. Much greater general community awareness of the programme – who funded it, who was delivering it and what it was for – would have greatly shortened the interview time for each vendor. Use radio, TV and common media to do this before the selection of vendors is made.
2. Vendors that did not commercially earn large amounts of income through the programme included transport vendors and fresh fruit and vegetable vendors. Likely factors include:

- **Transport Vendors** – VBRC focused on registering a fairly large number of transport vendors (buses, taxis and boats) for each of the areas where partners lived assuming recipients would want to use the cards to pay for transport to go shopping. While transport vendors received business from these clients, most payments for transport were not from the ‘tap and pay card’ but rather cash. This could be due to strongly ingrained habits of having some loose coins for transport and not seeing this as a purchase large enough to warrant the ‘card payment’ and saving funds from Oxfam for larger purchases.
- **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Vendors** – some reasons they may not have fared so well include; with no electricity under normal conditions and less after a disaster (such as cyclone) many recipients cannot appropriately store fresh vegetables for long times. Therefore, preferring to purchase long life food for ease. In the case of Tanna, the disaster happened in the hot season when vegetables are difficult to grow – therefore selection was poor and discouraged purchases.
- Vanuatu people traditionally have gardens and a **high percentage of non-urban people**



Max Zacharie from VBRC supporting a vendor in Tanna.

Photo: N. Barnes, VBRC



Esther Wenau from VBRC explaining details to vendors.

Photo: Arlene Bax, Oxfam in Vanuatu

grow their own fruit and vegetables therefore not needing to purchase them.

- **Vendors not coming to market every day** – therefore unreliable supply affected demand/ confidence.
- In some instances, **the recipient areas were not very well defined** by partners working with the communities, leading to VBRC needing to select vendors prior to the areas being accurately identified. This was a small issue but it caused some re-working once the recipients were identified to fill gaps by selecting vendors in areas that were initially missed.

Details recorded included:

- Business Name
- Owner Name
- Contact details
- Mobile phone network quality in business location
- Type of Business
- GPS
- Details on suppliers (where goods were purchased from to support supply chain)
- Copy of Business License (photo)
- Copy of ID for owner (photo)
- Bank Account Details (for where funds would be received by the vendor)

Paper-based contracts were signed with the vendor in duplication – one copy being returned to Oxfam and the other staying with the vendor and used as ID to enter training and receive phone assets later in programme.

REGISTRATION

In our programme, the registration of vendors took place at the same time as the selection. Once the vendor was selected (as per above), the team used a tablet and data collection software, Kobo, to register the vendor.



Despite some initial trepidation, rural vendors completed their training and left excited and confident about using this new tap and pay retail system. Vendor training in Canal Fanafo, Sanma Province September 2020. Photo: Groovy Banana Photography, VBRC

WHAT WORKED WELL

- Storing all this registration data electronically was fast and efficient for the field teams.
- The electronic collection of data was then able to support legal requirements for customer data verification (KYC - know your customer) and it was easy to then share the data electronically with partners (such as the accountant who facilitated bank transfers later in the programme).

TRAINING

The vendor training was conducted close to the programme 'go live' date which was the time of the first distribution of funds to beneficiaries with cards.

This ensured that the skills learnt by the vendors were put into practice quickly following the training as customers came to shop.

For most vendors, the training took a half day and was based in their communities. In the very rural areas, the training was conducted over a full day to allow extra time with touch-screen phone technology and more repetition.

The training was conducted in partnership with Oxfam staff and covered the following topics:

1. **Oxfam Core Programme Fundamentals:** Defining who Oxfam was, who the donors were, why the programme was being implemented, who the beneficiaries would be and how they would be selected.
2. **Oxfam Safeguards:** Gender and good business behaviour norms that were required and what would happen if these were not observed (vendors were required to sign code of conduct forms).
3. **VBRC & Oxfam:** Process overview and frequently asked questions: how vendors would receive payments (electronically), how to access additional support through the programme (a free call centre and with local vendor co-ordinator), what to do if assets were damaged or lost, what to do if internet was not available to load transactions, etc.
4. **VBRC – how to process payments via smart phone using the app:** This was the core part of the training. Participants were put into small groups of approximately 4-6 to a trainer and taken step by step through the payment process. In many cases this was the first time a vendor had access to a smart phone, so simple things like swiping, opening apps and logging in were demonstrated and practiced. Each vendor had a phone in their hands and was following and practicing step by step until they were comfortable. Role play and practicing each transaction in teams of two were repeated until the vendors were comfortable. In urban settings where people were more familiar with smart phones, this process took between 20 minutes to an hour. In rural settings where vendors had less experience with technology this could take up to 3 hours.
5. **VBRC Additional Financial Literacy Support:** Particularly for market vendors, additional financial literacy training of up to one full day was provided. Understanding that market vendors may not have completed schooling or have less overall financial literacy, this supported them with understanding simple

WHAT WORKED WELL

- Training being in the rural communities for rural vendors was positively received – this reduced anxiety and made participants feel valued (the programme went to them).
- The phone training on the app was easier and faster in cities where people have more smart phone and general technology experience and confidence.
- The app was translated to the common language (Bislama) on the app. Vendors appreciated this and choose to use it in Bislama.
- We included a small video 'how to' guide on the phone so that if people had questions after the training, they could refer to the video.
- We had a vendor support representative walking around in the main shopping areas during the first few days to help with issues/questions. This was well received and used.

financial management (recording sales) and how to manage working together to ensure they had enough stock (for example, working efficiently where one woman went to market but sold goods from a variety of household farms).

Tips for future improvements

1. Carefully ensure that the mobile phone network is good in the training location – move training to another location if it is not. Network access issues erode confidence and were very problematic in our initial training.
2. Phone set up was complicated and included many steps – this was not always done in advance and properly checked. It caused issues and delays in the field during training.
3. We encourage future apps to have much bigger buttons on the smart phone screen – many rural vendors were elderly people, had poor eyesight, and were using smart phones for the first time. Small buttons made this difficult.
4. A robust asset management system is advised – in our case we had over 350 phones, 700 SIM cards and chargers etc.,

and these were not managed well (serial numbers matched to vendor etc).

ELECTRONIC TRANSACTIONS

In Vanuatu, only 37% of the population has access to formal banking systems.

While urban vendors have electronic systems and are familiar with banking, they were the minority. The majority of Vanuatu's vendors, particularly those based in rural areas, have never processed electronic payments before this programme and beyond a calculator and phone, are not used to using technology in their business. There are many factors to this, including often a lack of electricity or access to internet networks and general lack of awareness or appreciation of retail/business tools such as point of sales systems. As a generalization for the rural areas, and given the lack of banking for the customer base, there is no/little benefit to having electronic card terminals in stores, as few people would use them.

Having a bank account was a prerequisite to joining the programme for



Sandra Heart of Oxfam supporting the training team with a South Santo vendor.

Photo: N. Barnes, VBRC

WHAT WORKED WELL

- Electronic payment to bank accounts improved vendor's financial awareness and sales recording – suddenly the value/volume of sales was recognized (whereas often when it was a cash in and cash out situation, this had not been recorded before). Consequently, savings improved, and business income was better managed.
- Detailed sales reports were available to vendors with an email account. They could enter email addresses into the phone to receive an Excel log of transaction details to their email address. This provided some detail to reconcile with the deposits made to bank accounts and was appreciated by the larger and more sophisticated businesses. Most smaller businesses had no email address and thus could not use these reports.
- Integration of the programme payment process with existing point of sales systems and processes for larger retailers was well managed. This was often done by entering Oxfam sales to an account on the Point of Sales programme the vendor used, then this account was cleared when electronic payments were made.
- The first few days to help with issues/questions. This was well received and used.

vendors. Most commonly, businesses had an account but were not used to using it regularly.

In this programme, vendors sold goods via the app on the smart phone, and then for all sales in the weekly period, payment was made by the Oxfam programme the following Monday directly to the vendors' bank account based on reported sales that came from the programme software or dashboard (Sempo dashboard is further described in the next chapter).

From the time the accountant and bank initiated the electronic payment to the vendors' bank account, it could however take many days for that payment to clear into the vendors' bank account (due to bank processes). This meant that sales were only effectively reimbursed to the vendor at least 8 to 14 days after the sale. This was a very significant change to

prior cash-based sales where the vendor was compensated at the time of sale.

Tips for future improvements

The delays in processing payments within the banking system were difficult to explain to the vendors. They were advised Oxfam had initiated payment and expected the money available in their bank that day. Vendors who had less financial literacy wanted Oxfam to work with their bank to clear the funds and did not understand that Oxfam was not authorized to check their bank accounts for balances.

Because different banks took different amounts of bank fees out of the electronic transactions depending on the bank account type, it was complicated to explain to the vendor why the

amount received did not match the amount deposited.

Vendors who lived far from wholesale stores and banking facilities needed to pay to travel to town to make withdrawals from their account to then buy more stock. This transport could be expensive (however, this was part of the reason for vendors receiving initial sign-up bonus).

The delay in receiving payments electronically (versus cash at time of sale) meant that for some vendors it was difficult to manage cashflow and purchasing stock. This affected re-stocking and then customer satisfaction. This was especially problematic for busy rural stores not used to such cash flow fluctuations

and holding small volumes of stock. More training on how to manage this would have been useful.

Future programmes are advised to provide remittance statements (of detailed transactions) with each payment and or more frequent than weekly payments for some stores.

Integration to banking systems that provide SMS advice of deposit by the bank to the account holder would be very beneficial.



Stephanie George a Santo Vendor is proud to be part of the programme. Photo: Arlene Bax, Oxfam in Vanuatu



Staff assisting vendors at their retail stores in Tafea.

Photo: N. Barnes, VBRC

CORE TECHNOLOGY

The programme success relies on the technology at its core.

Oxfam in Vanuatu chose to work with the Australian technology company called Sempo to develop the core software that facilitated this programme. Sempo is a social impact company that has created a payment platform for underserved communities. It has been recognized for its work with international NGOs, including Oxfam, Mercy Corps and the Red Cross. The technology now powers over a million payments per year and claims to be 96% faster than traditional methods. Sempo created the custom app via blockchain technology used on the mobile phones which transmitted via mobile data networks. Sempo also sourced the phone hardware. The Sempo system included a dashboard that was accessible via the internet and provided access to real time transactional data as well as reporting to the programme and partners. A detailed discussion on why and how this software was developed is outside of the scope of this document and was not the responsibility of VBRC.

Many of the vendors registered were from small rural communities not on electricity grids.

However, they could connect to mobile phone networks.

So, by using mobile data, they were able to upload and process all their payments electronically.

In the case of Vanuatu, phones were provided with SIM cards from both of the mobile phone networks that operate in Vanuatu so that vendors could choose which network was best in their area. SIM cards were topped up with data each month and this was paid for by the programme.

Using this technology, the vendors were able to better support each other also. The 'vendor to vendor cash out' option allows vendors to transfer money between themselves. This helps the smaller vendors to purchase goods from the larger wholesalers electronically (not needing to wait for deposits to the bank accounts), providing more secure and easy transactions and encouraging the vendors to support each other across the value chain.

Tips for future improvements

- Inconsistent data coverage on mobile phone networks caused problems in rural areas. Mobile phone network problems caused vendors issues in accessing balances on the phones and there were some irregularities and delays balancing payments with amounts shown on the phone.
- There were also problems reading card balances (which only vendors could do) and this led to lack of trust between vendors and beneficiaries in some cases. Despite one of the features of blockchain being that it can function offline, it is not advisable to use this system in areas where mobile phone data networks are not strong.
- For larger vendors, in some months vendors ran out of data on the SIM card. Improved monitoring of data usage (and usage on what platforms) would be useful.
- There were a significant number of problems with the phone hardware – these were replaced but caused delays and disruptions to training and operations.
- The vendor-to-vendor cash out option was not used very frequently – improvements to security of these transactions may increase usage. Reporting on this function would be advisable also.
- Ability to check bank accounts online would be strongly recommended for the vendors.

WHAT WORKED WELL

- The smart phones and Sempo app were well received and generally easy to use.
- The dashboard was useful for seeing purchase types and monitoring vendor payments. This assisted in identifying vendors who were not selling well and supporting them.

SUPPORT

A core element of the success of the programme was regular face to face support with the vendors.

At times, when there were issues or misunderstandings, the vendor, who is busy running their business, left the programme phone aside and stopped using it. By regularly checking in on them physically, these issues were dealt with quickly and got things back on track.

In each province there was a staff member assigned to supporting the vendors. Common things they dealt with were phones that needed software updates, re-training new retail staff on how to correctly use the phone, how to sync transactions with the data network or clarification around small systems glitches reading beneficiaries balances.



Sanma province supplier and customer complete their first live transaction. Photo: Groovy Banana/VBRC

GENDER

With a focus on gender equity, the programme gave many female market vendors a wonderful opportunity to grow their knowledge of financial management and become more in charge of their income.

While many formalized businesses in Vanuatu are owned by men, it is mostly women who sell fresh fruit and vegetables at the roadside markets. This programme has given them an economic boost, while also providing a boost to their confidence.

The VBRC team have created specialist financial literacy programmes to work alongside the Oxfam programme to support market vendors with greater financial literacy. For many women this is their first opportunity to be part of a formal programme or receive such support.

Meriam (39), is a market vendor in Central Tanna. 'When we went to the workshop, it was my first time to touch a touch-screen phone. After the workshop I wasn't too sure, but I kept trying, and now I know and if the programme was to happen again, I would know how to help others too.'

Photo: Arlene Bax/
Oxfam in Vanuatu



PROJECT CLOSURE

At the end of the programme, the programme was officially closed by Oxfam.

AFTERMATH

At this point, VBRC re-engaged with all vendors and had a close out programme. This involved meeting with each vendor in a group setting to give them feedback on the programme, share core data such as the value of the programme in each province and area council, and thank the vendors for their important work. Phone assets were retrieved and at this time a close out survey was conducted on the vendor's observations, and additional training was also offered to the vendors by VBRC.

One aspect that was important to at this time, was that vendors did not receive their final payments until AFTER the phones had been returned. This motivated them to attend the closure event and to give the phones back.

Phone returns:

- 86% of phones were returned in working condition
- 3% were returned damaged
- 11% of phones were not returned
- 90% of vendors reported that the programme benefitted their business

LESSONS LEARNT

1. If a vendor was not active in the first month, they were not likely to become active in the programme. Act fast to solve problems right away and if they cannot be solved, remove asset from that vendor and allocate to another.
2. Some small rural vendors feel they missed out on business that should have come to them when beneficiaries choose to instead go shop in town. What we feel was driving this behaviour was simply that people want choice. They want selection and variety which was offered in larger stores in town. Small stores in rural communities often only stock a very small range of necessities. Small vendors could have had more support to widen their stock range and try different ways of working. Also, small community stores are often only open in the evening. The hours stores are open is more convenient in town.
3. Vendor-to-vendor cash out was not very widely used. It was not encouraged by VBRC or the store owners due to opportunity for fraud – in small communities, staff with access to phones could easily share credit to a friend in another store. VBRC recommend that this function have another layer of security to make it more appealing to use and less likely to be abused. There was also no reporting on this in the dashboard, whereas by including it there it would have also had more visibility which improves confidence.

THANKS

VBRC would like to thank the Oxfam in Vanuatu team for this opportunity and their approach to partnership that has enabled the success of the programme.

To the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) who was the implementing partner who provided the oversight and roll out of the programme – we thank you for your tireless efforts and professional management skills.

Sincere thanks to the provincial teams who have supported this programme, with special acknowledgment to the Secretary General of Shefa Province.

To all the business people who have been at the heart of this programme – thank you for all your efforts and care.

In addition, sincere thanks to the staff who have worked tirelessly and contributed their knowledge and passion to this project.

FOLLOW VBRC

For any further information please contact: Dr. Rebecca Bogiri, National Manager, VBRC: info@vbrc.vu

www.vbrc.vu [Vanuatubusinessresilience](https://www.facebook.com/Vanuatubusinessresilience)

FOLLOW CBI

www.connectingbusiness.org [ConnectingBusinessinitiative](https://www.facebook.com/ConnectingBusinessinitiative) [@Connecting_biz](https://twitter.com/Connecting_biz)

[Connecting Business initiative](https://www.linkedin.com/company/connecting-business-initiative) [Connecting Business initiative](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)