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# Quick Guide on Network Engagement and Coordination with Humanitarian Actors



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

## Purpose of document

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This guide is designed to highlight how a business resilience organization in the Pacific, the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council (VBRC), has integrated itself into government and non-government humanitarian processes to play a meaningful role in disaster recovery as well as support and influence resilience building overall.

In this document, we will share our lessons learnt and best practices around how to engage with humanitarian and development stakeholders as a business network.

Our story has been one of localization. Rather than always await external "disaster experts" the VBRC has successfully lobbied the Government for them to realize the added value of coordinating with local private sector stakeholders already operating in country; purchasing materials locally; engaging local technical experts; and prioritizing local logistical systems. Our aim has been to do a better job in humanitarian spaces by having our local business community fully engaged.

## Private Sector Involvement in Humanitarian Activities

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The private sector is a fundamental part of local communities. When they are affected by humanitarian crises, business has been engaged in humanitarian emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.

Private sector actors are present before humanitarian crises occur and as crises unfold, and they are often among the first part of society to respond. Both small and large private sector actors, whether they are operating directly in humanitarian contexts or indirectly through supply chains, can leverage their own expertise, resources, channels, and influence to address humanitarian needs and make positive contributions to long-term sustainable peace and development. They can do so independently by working directly with people affected by humanitarian crises, as well as by collaborating with governments and humanitarian organizations at the local, regional, and international levels.

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## 1. Private Sector in the Pacific

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Private sector stakeholders in the Pacific, ranging from the smallest village shops to the largest multinational hotels, are often the most active players when it comes to responding to crises.

Typically under-acknowledged, and always under-resourced when it comes to disaster management, the private sector plays an essential role in Pacific resilience building by, for example:

- Contributing actively and directly to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery activities
- Supporting the economy and keeping the money circulating within local businesses and communities
- Understanding and articulating the needs of the communities as business leaders and employees live and work there too.
- Local vendors being best placed to organize logistics for the delivery of goods and services, as they already know how to do this and have done it for years.
- Local businesses relying on existing value chains with trusted contacts and ways of doing business that work in island communities.
- Local businesses employing and training local staff, so that economic benefits are invested directly into the resilience of local families.

## Facing the Climate Crisis

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.

For Vanuatu and the wider Pacific region, a warming climatic system is expected to impact the availability of necessities like freshwater, food security, and energy, while efforts to redress climate change, both through adaptation and mitigation, will similarly inform and shape the global sustainable development agenda. Absent significant action being taken by all stakeholders, including the private sector, climate hazards are likely to increase poverty, worsen inequalities, exacerbate food insecurity, and cause health problems, among other hardships, which is already reversing years of progress on sustainable development initiatives in Vanuatu and the region.

## 2. GUIDANCE FROM EXPERIENCES IN VANUATU

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This guidance document is meant for private sector networks in the Pacific who are currently engaged in emergency operations and who are interested to learn more about the VBRC's approaches to emergency response. This document is not specifically tailored to a particular type of industry and only broadly covers general emergency response priorities of the private sector networks.

By sharing the key aspects of the creation and operations of the VBRC since 2017, we hope to motivate other Pacific Island countries to establish similar private sector humanitarian and climate change focused networks that expand the role of commercial businesses in humanitarian responses and support resilience programming in the communities in which they operate.

One of the key aspects of Vanuatu's approach is that by including commercial businesses in humanitarian actions, we have supported the recovery of communities and the businesses within them concurrently while strengthening value chains and offering more sustainable long-term solutions. Ultimately this builds resilience more broadly across the economy and community.

## 3. HOW THE VBRC GOT STARTED

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In 2021, Vanuatu was again ranked the most risk exposed country in the world. For small business owners in Vanuatu, it is a matter of WHEN, not IF a disaster will affect operations.

The catalyst was super storm Cyclone Pam which cut a path of destruction from North to South across the Vanuatu island archipelago on Friday the 13th of March 2015. The eye of the Category 5 cyclone passed close to Efate Island, where the capital Port Vila is located, with sustained winds up to 270 kilometers per hour. Overall, the storm affected 188,000 people – more than half of the national population – and all six provinces.

Southernmost provinces Tafea and Shefa were hardest hit, with 50–90% of shelters destroyed,. Eleven people lost their lives. In addition to housing, infrastructure was decimated, schools and hospitals flattened, gardens uprooted, and water sources buried, leaving communities hungry and vulnerable. Because the majority of individuals and enterprises do not have insurance, the cost of recovery on Vanuatu's private sector was astronomical. The total economic value of the effects caused by Tropical Cyclone Pam was estimated to be approximately US\$449.4 million.

Of this, US\$270.9 million is attributable to damage, and US\$178.5 million is attributable to loss . This is equivalent to 64.1% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in Vanuatu, giving an indication of the scale of impact. Note that because of data limitations, it is likely that these figures underestimate the total impact.

<sup>1</sup>The WorldRiskIndex 2021 assesses the disaster risk for 181 countries. This covers almost 99 per-cent of the world's population <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-world-risk-report.pdf>



The humanitarian and recovery aid received by Vanuatu was less than US\$100 million, meaning island families and micro, small and medium size businesses (MSMEs) had to foot the costs of a climate-change fueled cyclone.

Cyclone Pam was a wakeup call of epic proportions. To survive the current climate emergency, the private sector in the Pacific must get organized, get ready, and pivot into the climate change and disaster management space quickly and boldly.

## 4. AMBITIOUS BEGINNINGS AT THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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The VBRC commenced operations in late 2017, in coordination with the Ministry of Climate Change (MoCC) and through the support of the UNDP Connecting Business Initiative (CBI), the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS).

VBRC was established as a standing committee of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) to promote and strengthen mobilisation of the local private sector to support the country to meet its climate change and disaster risk reduction objectives.

The VCCI is the country's official national private sector organisation established in 1995 under the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Vanuatu Act. The organisation is a statutory body with a 16-member elected council that represents the broader private sector.

All individuals and companies with a valid business license are automatically members of the VCCI, and thus get access to the VBRC, ensuring the widest possible reach for private sector risk programming.

## 5. A STRONG ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

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The VBRC's climate and disaster ambitions are fully reflective of the overarching national Government's and regional policies and plans. Vanuatu has placed climate change and disasters at the center of its development agenda, with for example:

- the National Sustainable Development Plan's Environment Goal 3, which aspires to a strong and resilient nation in the face of climate change and risks posed by hazards and natural disasters;
- the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) Policy;
- regional priorities identified in the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP);
- the SAMOA Pathway (Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action);
- commitments towards Goal 13 on Climate Action in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the Pacific Regional level, leaders from all Pacific Island States released the Boe Declaration in 2018, and the Kainaki II Declaration in 2019 which both reaffirm that climate change presents the single greatest threat to development in the Pacific region and have mandated that all sectors must include climate resilience in their programmatic approaches.

In this context, disaster and climate issues are now a key mandate of the VCCI. In the VCCI's 2019-2021 Strategic Plan, there are seven key result areas, one of which is "Helping businesses to be resilient to disasters and the effects of climate change."

## Key Success Factors

- The VBRC is housed under a statutory body that has legal standing and longevity.
- All business license holders are automatically a part of the VCCI and thus automatically get access to disaster risk management support by VBRC.
- The VBRC was established with both a climate and disaster risk mandate, fully in line with regional and national CC-DRR integration policies, making it flexibly able to contribute to both "sectors" as well as obtain finance for its activities.

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## 6. VBRC GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

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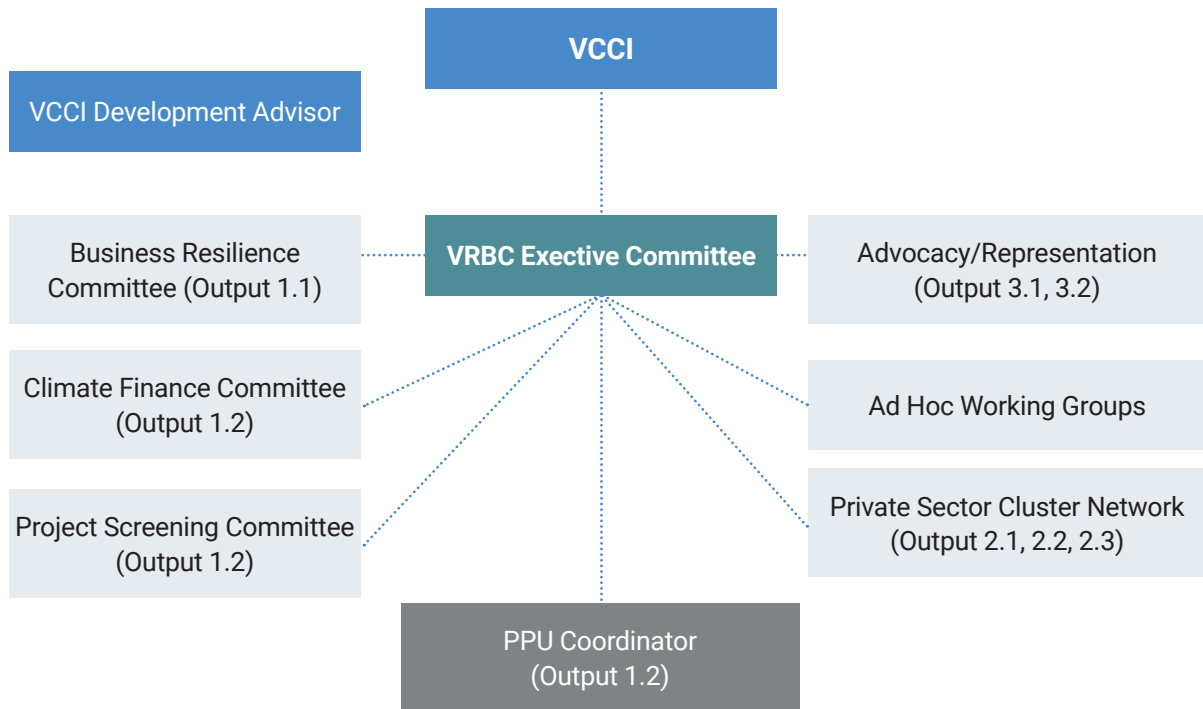
The organisation is governed by an Executive Committee comprised of elected board members representing various strategic sectors, thematic areas and industries relevant to climate change, resilience and disaster risk reduction and loosely aligned to the National Cluster System.

In April 2020, the VBRC was officially registered as a charitable association with the Vanuatu Financial Services Commission to enable it to receive climate and disaster finance and implement programmes and projects independently of the VCCI.

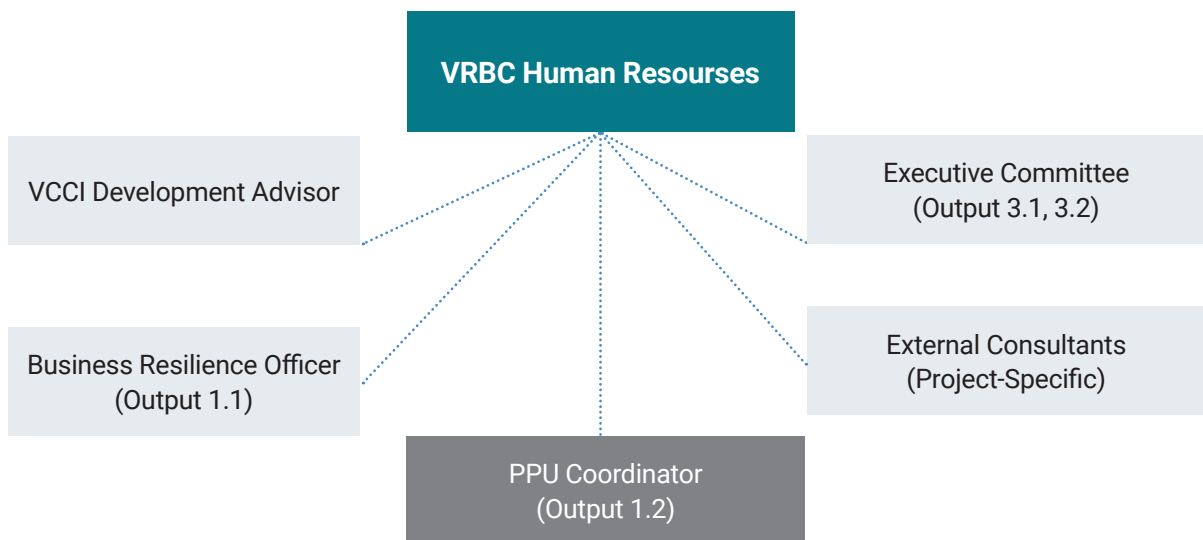
The Executive Committee is comprised of elected board members serving for representing various strategic sectors, thematic areas and industries relevant to climate change, resilience, and disaster risk reduction and loosely aligned to the National Cluster System. Specifically, the VBRC sought representation from the following risk-related sectors:

- Food Security and Agriculture
- Banking and Finance
- Transportation, Shipping and Logistics
- Tourism
- Telecommunications and ICT
- Infrastructure

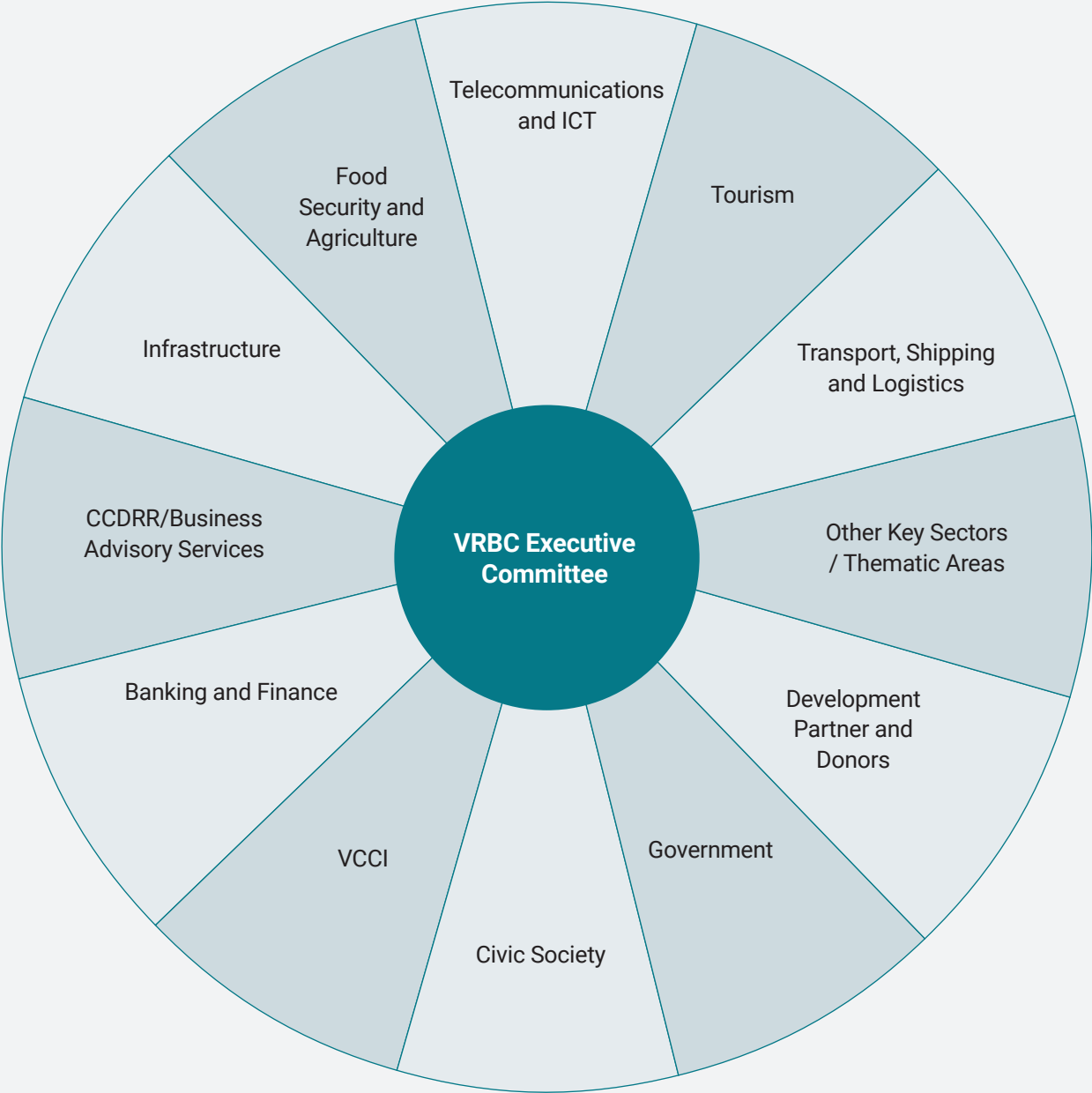
## VBRC Service Delivery Structure



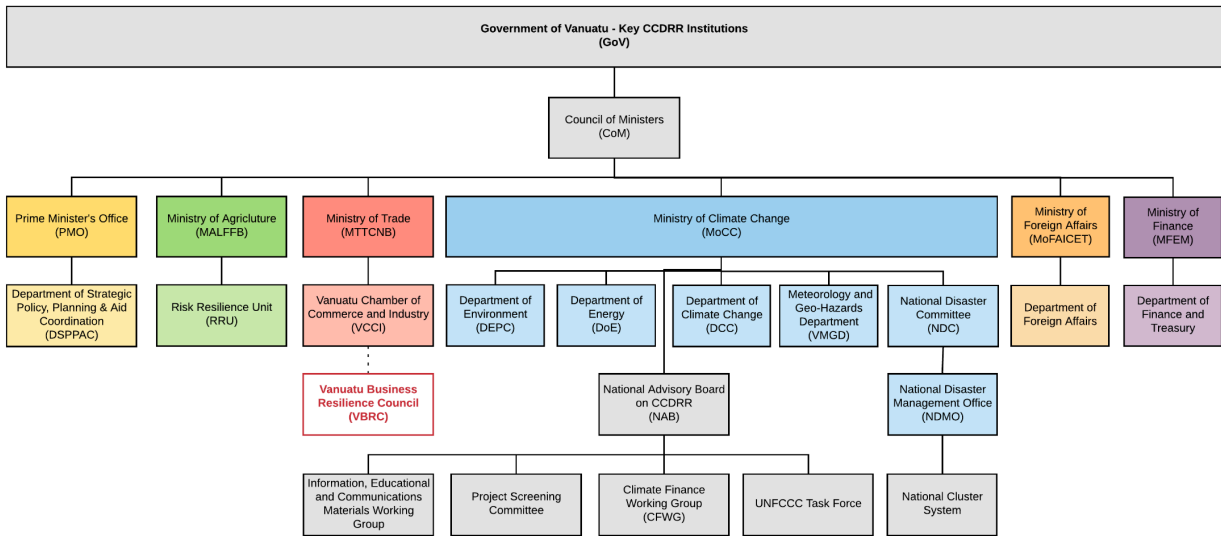
## VBRC Human Resource Structure



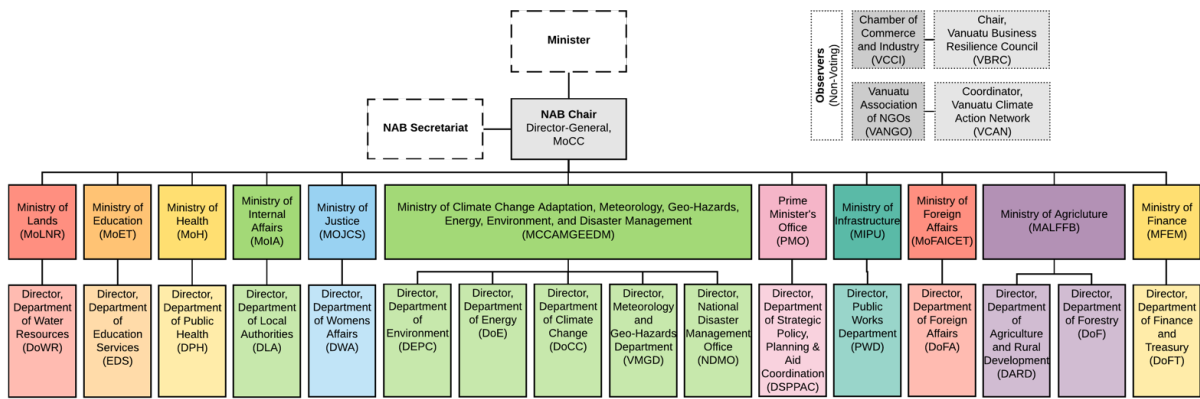
# VBRC Engagement Structure







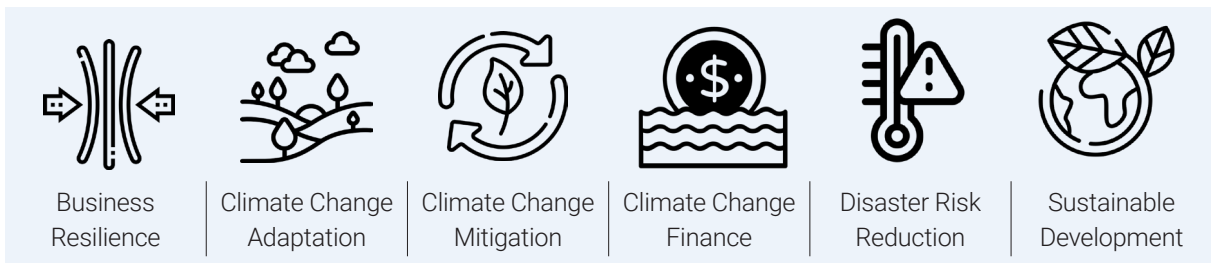
Key national institutions involved in CCDRR



Membership of the National Advisory Board on CCDRR (NAB)

VBRC Executive Committee members are selected based on their participation on other committees and national boards, taskforces and working groups. This ensures that VBRC initiatives and priorities are connected across major policy and decision-making bodies of the nation.

Observer seats are provided for Government, civil society, donors and development partners who provide relevant technical and financial support in areas like:



Importantly, VBRC Executive Committee members are volunteers, and commit their time freely for at least one Executive Committee meeting per month plus additional service for specific initiatives. Meetings are kept short (maximum one hour), acknowledging the busy schedules of local business owners.

## 7. VBRC COMMITTEES

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In addition to the larger Executive Committee, the VBRC has established several committees and units with very specific functions:

- The PPU Project Screening Committee: provides recommendations and technical inputs on members' climate and disaster project proposals, with a private sector resilience lens, in order to get these business initiatives across the line for donor funding
- Climate Finance Committee: designs, implementations and monitors projects for the VBRC itself
- Business Resilience Committee: designs, implementations and monitors any current or future 'business resilience' activities on behalf of the VBRC, including Business Continuity Planning (BCP) trainings.
- The VBRC Secretariat is an essential component of the operational structure, made up of paid VCCI and VBRC staff and project-based consultants who provide administrative and operational support to the Executive Committee and members. The Secretariat calls meetings, follows up on decisions, drafts letters and represents the VBRC in routine meetings of VCCI, Government and development partners.
- At any one time, there are between 1-3 people working full-time in the VBRC Secretariat. These positions are paid both by donor funds and core financing by the VCCI.

## 8. VBRC STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

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To deliver what our private sector members most require, the VBRC developed a Strategic Plan 2020-2023 based on extensive consultation and validation, outlining both the vision and mission.

### **Vision**

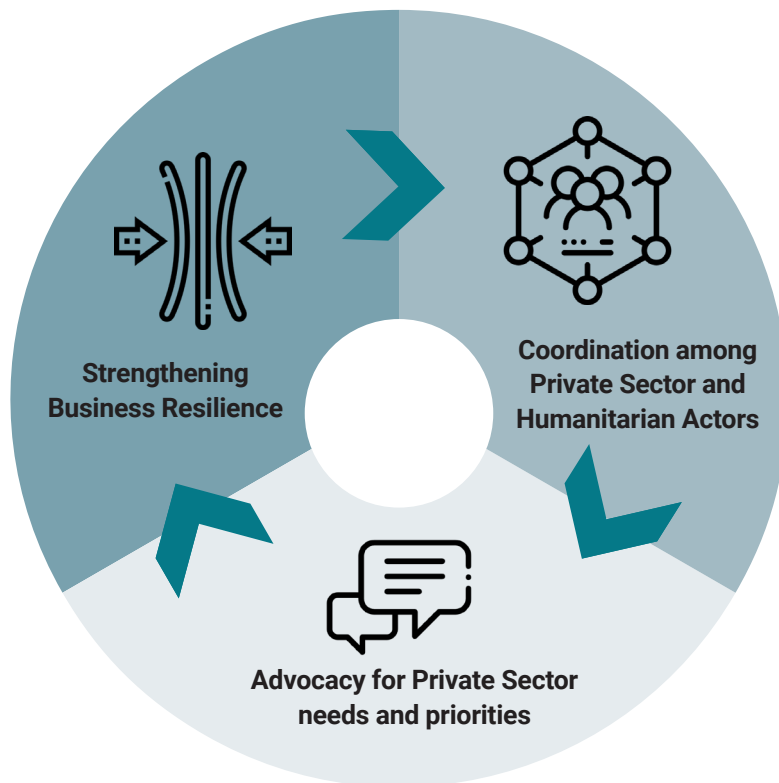
To deliver what our private sector members most require, the VBRC developed a Strategic Plan 2020-2023 based on extensive consultation and validation, outlining both the vision and mission.

### **Mission**

Provide a platform for the private sector to both manage impacts to themselves, and support Government, civil society and development partners in building climate resilience and preparing for and responding to disasters and emergencies.

Importantly, the VBRC Strategic Plan 2020-2023 centers on three Strategic Focus Areas with supporting objectives further outlined in an accompanying Results Framework:

Three Strategic Focus Areas:



## 9. ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR NETWORK

The VBRC has generated key lessons for engaging the private sector in climate and disaster initiatives. These general experiences may be useful for other Pacific resilience networking initiatives.

### 9.1 Lesson 1: From a disaster context emerged a galvanized Private Sector

VBRC blossomed in a post Cyclone-Pam context where most businesses had yet to receive any significant recovery support from the Government, and the voice of the private sector was largely absent in high-level disaster-related decision-making spaces. Discontent was high, businesses were closing their doors, and there was a major gap in coordination at all levels.

The first priority was to pull private sector together, as a unified force for change. Interest was strong and immediate. The first meetings were standing room only, and private sector actors were able to share their grievances, often pent up for two years since the cyclone, in a safe space. From the complaints emerged powerful solutions and recommendations, and a sense of unity among the business community. The network had formed.

The second priority was getting these private sector demands into the right decision-making spaces. An inclusive approach by the Ministry of Climate Change ensured that VBRC was quickly given a seat at the table of the National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction where policy decisions are made and projects are endorsed.

## 9.2 Lesson 2: Work must be directly relevant and responsive to local business needs

Cyclone Pam also cast a strong light on the gaps in our members' readiness for the next disaster. We quickly realized that almost no businesses had made plans or contingency arrangements to be able to continue operations in the event of a major crisis.

As a first priority, the VBRC engaged experts to design training materials on Business Continuity Planning with a Business Preparedness Plan How-to guide. The planning exercise takes businesses through simple steps to identify risks and how they affect core products, services, staff, equipment, supplies and customers. It takes local businesses through relocation options, insurance, backup of records and training.

More than just developing the materials, the VBRC has since undertaken 18 training sessions, supporting hundreds of businesses in developing their first disaster risk continuity plans, in each province of Vanuatu.

## 9.3 Lesson 3: Show us the money

It is no exaggeration to say that the Pacific private sector is the least acknowledged and most under-resourced stakeholder in the climate change and disaster risk management sector. Nearly all of the climate and disaster finance available to the Pacific flows directly to Governments or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), despite the fact that private sector has been on the ground in longer and directly engaging in more communities than any other player. VBRC members were left wondering how they could tap into these finance flows to implement their aspirations to turn their businesses into a real channel for building resilience.

In response, the VBRC engaged experts on climate finance. We put in a successful proposal to the National Designated Entity of the Green Climate

Fund requesting a portion of the annual USD1 million provided by the Green Climate Fund for readiness activities.

That money was specifically allocated to turning private sector investment ideas into real funding applications. We have now been able to support up to five different companies prepare climate and disaster project proposals and develop their capacities around donor funding.

## 9.4 Lesson 4: Jump in immediately where our strengths and people are

When Tropical Cyclone Harold was still days away from hitting Vanuatu, the VBRC was already in action.

Through our diligent engagement with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) Cluster System, we were already in contact with authorities and began to mobilize private sector experts. We were able to communicate early warnings through businesses across the country, and they in turn reached every island and every remote community. Businesses were provided in advance the necessary reporting formats used by the NDMO and some private sector stakeholders with capacity opened their doors to become evacuation centers.

As soon as the storm passed, VBRC members located throughout the country were able to spring into action. For example, members based in remote Western Santo, which took a direct hit, mobilized within hours to commence community first assessments, and were able to provide twice daily updates to authorities using their own satellite phone equipment. This worked saved lives as in two instances medical emergency helicopters were called in to evacuate children injured under fallen houses.

In Port Vila, VBRC members mobilized ships, planes and massive inventories of food and non-food items ready for the response effort. By the time Government and Humanitarian partners had coordinated, private sector was ready with full inventories, logistical arrangements, and deeply discounting pricing options.

## 9.5 Lesson 5: Get Tech Savvy

The technology world is moving fast, and the private sector is at the forefront.

After Cyclone Harold took out huge swaths of community and productive livelihoods across the Northern Islands, the VBRC swung into action to make sure that our technology and business Networks could bring the most efficient recovery support possible. The premise was to put real cash in the hands of the most vulnerable (women headed households, the disabled, the elderly) and allow them to access their trusted local suppliers to get what they most needed for their own unique contexts. Recovery with dignity.

To do this we had to prove to donors that the money was getting to the right people, and it was being spent on legitimate recovery items. We did this by partnering with Oxfam and using cutting edge blockchain technology.

## 9.6 Lesson 6: Communicate, communicate and then communicate some more

The Pacific Private Sector has a clear-eyed and comprehensive view of the issues affecting the communities where we live and do business, but we often don't do a great job in communicating that knowledge. International NGOs spend huge sums on social media campaigns, snazzy websites, and donor-focused emails. Finally, VBRC took a page from this playbook.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 border closures and near collapse of the local economy, VBRC invested in professional public relations activities to show to the authorities and the world just what was happening on the ground. We produced over 10 short films highlighting the real stories of local MSMEs and how they are affected as well as their coping strategies. Not only did these videos influence a shift in Government policy towards stimulus and recovery payments, they also opened a door for external COVID-19 donor funding.

## 9.7 Lesson 7: Keeping Connections to the Government

The Government is the decision-making and regulatory body mandated to steward Vanuatu's climate and disaster resilience. Working closely alongside Government is essential.

VBRC sits on the NAB and several of its key sub-committees. We bring expert advice and guidance to the NAB's Climate Finance Taskforce, which defines climate and disaster finance priority pipelines for major donors like the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Adaptation Fund and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). VBRC members have been key authors on Vanuatu's Green Climate

Fund Country Program and the National Climate Finance Roadmap.

VBRC also sits on the NAB's United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Taskforce. VBRC members have been key authors on major UNFCCC documents including official government positions papers, the Nationally Determined Contribution NDC and the National Communications.

Our membership includes individuals with direct connections to ministers and senior officials.

For example, VRBC lobbied the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister to request urgent submission of key documents before the COP26 international climate negotiations.

Beyond the NAB, our members are regularly invited by Government to sit in on high-level dialogues, for example:

- the COVID-19 planning taskforce,
- the Disaster Planning Committee,
- the essential workers list committee to determine priority entry into country during the pandemic,
- the Health taskforce for standard operating procedures for operating businesses during different COVID-19 alert levels,
- the committee to determine the criteria for electronic passes by OGCI and NDMO for essential businesses during lockdowns,
- the safe business operation training taskforce for non-tourism business, which included information on personal protective equipment, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers,
- the COVID19 recovery plan drafting committee.

## 9.8 Lesson 8: Keeping A Regional Perspective

Our Region is one of the most disaster risk prone in the world. And due to our small economies of scale and the incredible geographic dispersion of the islands, it has been essential for us to maintain close links with our regional partners.

PIFS has acknowledged the role private sector plays in climate and disaster risk initiatives. In 2021 for example, Vanuatu hosted the Melanesia Sub- regional Private Sector Workshop on Climate Finance to devise subregional private sector engagement approaches.

VBRC also engaged in the Forum Secretariat's technical papers on leveraging climate finance opportunities in the Pacific, and their analysis of climate finance needs and priorities of the private sector, given the challenges of effective access from international climate finance sources and capacity constraints in the private sector. The analysis aimed to help explore alternative options and opportunities within the domestic and regional financial markets including innovative sources which the region's private sector can potentially tap into to support resilient businesses.

Through the VCCI, VBRC has close links with the Pacific Island Private Sector Organization (PIPSO), and is rolling out business continuity planning in several countries.



## 9.9 Lesson 9: The Global Local Nexus

The VBRC aims to connect our private sector members with global initiatives that support their aspirations and operations.

The Connecting Business Initiative (CBI) was launched during the World Humanitarian Summit as an initiative to link the 2030 Development Agenda and the Sendai's Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by strategically engaging the private sector before, during, and after disaster events, increasing the scale and effectiveness of response and recovery efforts in a more harmonized and coordinated manner.

The VBRC has been a key partner with CBI to bring Vanuatu experiences to the world and bring global solutions to Vanuatu's Private Sector. Together we have presented on experiences in engaging different humanitarian actors with the entire CBI network of 13 countries, including how our history of growth, partnerships with donors, and operating structures support national policy and practice.

Our members are also official negotiators for the Government of Vanuatu at the UN Climate Change meetings. At COP24 in Marakesh, VBRC showcased its efforts at the Sustainable Innovation Forum and provided direct textual inputs into decisions around scaling finance, meaningfully engaging the private sector, and innovative risk transfer mechanisms including parametric insurance.

## 10. CONCLUSION

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It has been a challenging journey to mainstream Vanuatu's private sector into humanitarian processes, and we still have a long way to go before crisis preparedness and response is fully localized, but this is undoubtedly the direction we need to go.

In conclusion, we hope that this Guide will help other Pacific private sector organizations take initial steps towards becoming acknowledged players in humanitarian action. By following these nine recommendations from the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council, your community will also likely begin real changes in resilience, capacity and overall humanitarian effectiveness.





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