

# CASE STUDY: STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE EPIDEMIC PREPAREDNESS IN VANUATU THROUGH THE SECURE PACIFIC PROGRAM



## Summary

The SECURE Pacific program in Vanuatu demonstrates how community-led efforts to strengthen epidemic preparedness can enhance the resilience of local health systems, while promoting gender equality, disability and social inclusion. By equipping local volunteers with the skills, tools and networks needed to detect and respond to health threats, Vanuatu Red Cross Society and its partners are helping to address public health concerns as they emerge.

## Overview

The Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS), with support from the Australian Red Cross and funding from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), is implementing a three-year program to strengthen community capacity to prepare for and respond to epidemic disease threats across Sanma and Shefa provinces in Vanuatu.

Operating in 115 communities over three phases, the program equips local volunteers with Epidemic Control for Volunteers (ECV) and Community Based Surveillance (CBS) skills to detect, report, and respond to priority health threats such as diarrhoeal diseases, severe respiratory infections, scabies and leptospirosis.

From the outset, gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) approaches were embedded into the program's design, to ensure equitable access, participation, and leadership opportunities for marginalised groups.

This includes targeted engagement of women, people with disabilities, elders, and youth during community consultations; the adaptation of materials into Bislama, and delivery through culturally appropriate methods like role play, drama, songs and home visits to ensure messages are accessible and resonate across diverse audiences.

**Community voices**

## What has changed?

**Reduced barriers to accessing health information:**

Community awareness sessions are reaching women and elders in both public gatherings and through house-to-house outreach, ensuring no one is excluded because of gender norms, mobility challenges, or caregiving responsibilities.

**Empowered volunteer workforce:**

Volunteers, many of whom are women, report increased confidence in public speaking and a sense of pride in contributing to positive change in the health outcomes of their communities. Certificates and training have also opened pathways to future employment.

*"I have gained confidence to stand face to face with the community and carry out this training...[I have] engaged with different kinds of people in the community; the elderly, pregnant mothers; [people with] disabilities and children".*

**ECV/CBS Volunteer (F), Port Vila.**

*"[I] live far from town so I'm very grateful that such awareness sessions were brought to [my] community".*

**Community participant (F), Port Vila.**



**Community voices**

## How has the project contributed to change?

Interviews with participants and volunteers highlight that SECURE Pacific activities have strengthened health literacy, self-efficacy, and social inclusion. Women consistently report gaining new knowledge that they felt would better equip them to protect their families and the confidence to act on it—whether by improving hygiene practices, protecting water sources, or encouraging safe waste disposal.

Motivated by the tangible difference they are making within their communities, volunteers describe feeling more confidence to address groups, convene activities and facilitate health discussions.

*"The CBS training will be most helpful to women as it will help them look after their children and keep a clean and safe environment to prevent sickness".*

**ECV/CBS Volunteer (F), Port Vila.**

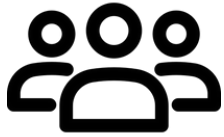
*"The information will help me take care of my family".*

**Community participant (F), Port Vila.**

*"Being part of this training is helpful because the health centres are far away, so [I'm] happy to go around giving awareness about the different [sicknesses] to help people in the community understand the risks and how they can prevent it".*

**ECV/CBS Volunteer (F), Port Vila.**

**2278**



Number of community participants reached so far

**57%**



57% of community participants are women

**64%**



64% of ECV/CBS volunteers are women



**Community voices**

*"[I wanted] to join the voluntary work at Vanuatu Red Cross to help others to [understand] the different types of sicknesses going around. With more challenges on the way, [I] now feel confident to face them in order to grow and learn".*

**ECV/CBS Volunteer (F), Port Vila.**

**Features of future programming**

**Engage marginalised voices:**

Including women, people with disabilities, youth and elders in the design of health activities ensures relevance, inclusions and accessibility.

**Sustain volunteer engagement and confidence:**

Continued mentoring, peer support and practice opportunities ensures volunteers—especially those from underrepresented groups—feel equipped to lead sessions.

**Diverse communication methods:**

Use of drama, music, and practical demonstrations in public group sessions, schools and home visits reaches a wider range of literacy levels and learning styles, while promoting gender-inclusive participation.

**Strengthen community mobilisation:**

Coordinating with local committees, community leaders, women's groups, schools and disability networks maximises reach and engagement of diverse communities.

