VANGO
VANUATU ASSOCIATION OF NGOs




# Proposed Guidance Note on Localised Humanitarian Action in Vanuatu –

## Presented to the Vanuatu Government

January 2026

# Introduction

The Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO) is the national umbrella body for civil society in Vanuatu, representing in excess of 230 organisations across all provinces. Close to 80 of these are current financial members, with the remainder being affiliate members currently developing the financial and governance capacity to achieve full membership. These organisations and associations, and many others like them, play integral roles in their communities, including in areas of humanitarian action. They are deeply embedded in their communities, trusted by local leaders, and are often the first and last responders during crises.

In recent years, there has been a positive and growing shift in how humanitarian action is being delivered in Vanuatu, as evidenced through the Localisation in Vanuatu: Progress Report 2025. Local and national organisations are increasingly being partnered with by the Government of Vanuatu, bilateral and multilateral partners, UN agencies, the Red Cross, and international NGOs to implement humanitarian responses. This reflects a widening recognition that locally led organisations are not only capable, but central to delivering timely, culturally grounded, and contextually appropriate assistance.

As the umbrella body for civil society, VANGO has a mandate to represent the collective interests, experiences, and priorities of its members to Government and other stakeholders. This includes advocating for systems, policies, and partnership models that enable local and national actors to contribute fully and equitably to humanitarian action, rather than being confined to short-term subcontracting or operational delivery roles without influence over decision-making, funding structures, or risk management.

It is in this context that VANGO proposes this Guidance Note on Localised Humanitarian Action to the Government of Vanuatu and other donor partners. It is intended that this Guidance Note will provide the basis for best practice localisation efforts across all Government ministries, NDMO, provincial authorities and Area Councils; development partners, UN agencies, INGOs, Red Cross, local and national non-state actors, faith-based organisations and the private sector.

The Guidance Note is a practical, operational tool grounded in the lived experience of Vanuatu's local and national humanitarian actors. It reflects the findings of the progress report, what has worked in recent responses and what can better enable locally led organisations to deliver effectively for their communities. It is not intended to be prescriptive but rather support further achievable progress, as applicable to respective partners, towards localisation best practice.

By advancing this Guidance Note, VANGO is seeking to consolidate the positive progress already made toward locally led humanitarian action; create greater consistency across ministries, donors, and international partners in how localisation commitments are applied; reduce fragmentation and power imbalances in humanitarian partnerships; strengthen accountability to affected communities; and ensure that humanitarian investment builds durable national and community capacity rather than parallel systems. VANGO stands ready to support Government and other partners in the application and implementation of these principles, priorities and minimum standards.

# Proposed Government of Vanuatu Guidance Note on Localised Humanitarian Action

## 1. Preamble

### Localisation in Global Context

Globally, localisation has been recognised as a central shift in humanitarian action, reinforced by the Grand Bargain and related commitments. These commitments aim to move leadership, decision-making and resources closer to affected people by strengthening national and local and national actors, improving the quality of partnerships, and enabling more direct, flexible funding.

### Localisation in the Pacific

For the Pacific, localisation is not a new concept. The region has a proud history of leading our own responses, and communities supporting our people through disasters and crises, anchored in Pacific values, faith-based approaches, traditional leadership and community networks. Pacific leaders and civil society have long advocated for locally led response as part of our broader aspirations for sovereignty and self-determination; given its close link to decolonisation and regional solidarity.

### Localisation in Vanuatu

Vanuatu has been at the forefront of advocating for a locally led humanitarian model, and we are keen to build on these developments even further. In 2018-2019, Vanuatu was among the first countries globally to undertake a localisation baseline1, establishing an evidence base for action. Vanuatu applies the principle of being 'as local as possible and as international as necessary', ensuring responses are Vanuatu-led, Government-driven and community-focused. The Government of Vanuatu further embeds localisation through our decentralisation approach by empowering provincial and area-level structures to work with our communities in leading preparedness, response and recovery, in close collaboration with our local and national civil society partners.

[1] VANGO, PIANGO and HAG, Localisation in Vanuatu: Demonstrating Change, 2019, https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Vanuatu-Baseline-Report_February-2019_FINAL.pdf

# 2. Purpose and Scope

This Guidance Note sets Government policy direction for a locally led, nationally coordinated humanitarian system in Vanuatu. It translates practice and evidence into clear commitments, roles and minimum standards so that responses are as local as possible and as international as necessary. It is applicable to all Government ministries, NDMO, provincial authorities and Area Councils; development partners, UN agencies, INGOs, Red Cross, local and national non-state actors, faith-based organisations, private sector.

The Note is structured around the seven key domains identified in Measuring Localisation Framework[2] (the development of which was also shaped by Vanuatu humanitarian actors): Partnerships; Leadership; Coordination & Complementarity; Participation; Funding; Capacity; and Policy Influence & Advocacy.

# 3. Guiding Principles for Localised Humanitarian Action in Vanuatu

- National leadership, local ownership: Government leads; Communities, Chiefs, women, youth, persons with disabilities and local and national non-state actors shape priorities and decisions.
- Complementarity: International support, not supplant, national capacity; surge is national and Pacific regional first.
- Equitable partnerships: Partnerships centre on mutual accountability, transparency, fair financial resource coverage and power-sharing (not subcontracting).
- Use of kastom and local knowledge: Traditional practices and local languages (Bislama and vernaculars) are designed-in, not added-on.
- Inclusion and 'Leave No One Behind': Systematic inclusion of women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and people in remote islands and peri-urban settlements.
- Accountability to affected people (AAP): Communities must always be at the centre before, during and after any response. They must have accessible feedback and decision-making roles through nakamal/church forums and CDCCC structures.
- Do no harm, share risk: Risk analysis and risk-sharing are joint responsibilities across Government, donors and implementing partners. Development partners and international actors should not simply transfer their risks to local and national actors.

[2] HAG and PIANGO, Measuring Localisation: Framework and Tools, 2019
https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/measuring-localisation-framework-and-tools/

# 4. Key Definitions

## Definition of localisation

For Vanuatu, we use the below definition that reflects the Pacific-derived understanding of localisation, which emphasises sovereignty, cultural context and community leadership rather than purely operational efficiency.

> Localisation is the process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership and decision-making of national and local and national actors in humanitarian action, so that responses are driven by those closest to affected communities and aligned with their context, capacities and priorities.

## Definitions of Actors

Following are proposed to be used to have a clear understanding of different actors operating in Vanuatu during a response period, but also during non-response times.

- **Local and national non-state actors:** Organisations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in Vanuatu and which are not affiliated to an international NGO. Local and national non-state actors include:
    - **National NGOs/Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):** National NGOs/CSOs operating in Vanuatu (where they are headquartered), working in multiple provinces, and not affiliated to an international NGO. This category can also include national faith-based organisations.
    - **Local NGOs/CSOs:** Local NGOs/CSOs operating in a specific, geographically defined, provincial area of Vanuatu, without affiliation to an international NGO/CSO.
- **Local Affiliate Organisations:** Organisations that are affiliated to an international organisation through inter-linked financing, contracting, governance, branding and/or decision-making systems.
- **International NGOs:** NGOs not based in Vanuatu and carrying out operations in one or more aid recipient countries.
- **International Affiliate Organisations: NGOs which are a nationalised arm of an International NGO**
- **Multilateral Organisations:** Agencies of the United Nations (UN), Multilateral Development Banks and other international organisations.
- **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement:** the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), as well as Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies operating outside of their own country.
- **Red Cross/Red Crescent National Society:** Vanuatu Red Cross operated as the National Society that in country.
- **International private sector organisations:** Organisations run by private individuals or groups as a means of enterprise for profit, that are not based in an aid recipient country and carrying out operations in one or more aid recipient countries

# 5. Localisation Priorities

Given below are high-level priorities for the Government of Vanuatu under the seven localisation domains, to be implemented by all stakeholders, including donors, international actors and local and national non-state actors.

## A. Partnerships

- Establish and promote equitable partnerships based on mutual accountability, transparency, and respect for local leadership.
- Develop and apply partnership principles to guide collaborations and ensure open two-way conversations take place regularly.
- Promote long-term, strategic partnerships that strengthen systems, not just deliver projects.
- Ensure visibility and recognition of ni-Vanuatu partners in all branding and communications.

## B. Leadership

- Affirm Government-led coordination at national and provincial levels, with clear roles for PEOCs and clusters.
- Recognise and promote the leadership role of VANGO in non-state actor coordination.
- Mandate local language use (Bislama) in all coordination forums and official documents.
- Increase Ni-Vanuatu leadership representation in decision-making across all humanitarian structures.
- Require co-authorship of assessments and evaluations with national actors.

## C. Coordination & Complementarity

- Maintain Government-led cluster system and where appropriate, designate non-state actor co-leads (ideally local or national actors).
- Carry out regular provincial level coordination talanoa and support response mapping by province to reduce duplication.
- Use clusters/PEOCs as decision-making spaces; align plans and pipelines to endorsed priorities and PEOC tasking.
- Shift surge profiles to national/regional rosters and technical accompaniment rather than substitution.
- Prioritise resourcing and scaling up of existing ni-Vanuatu actors during a response before deploying international actors to duplicate presence and interventions.

## D. Participation (Accountability to Affected People)

- Require each response to evidence community decision-points (design, adaptation, closure) documented through nakamal/community meetings and accessible feedback mechanisms.
- Endorse and roll out contextualised community engagement standards in Bislama and vernaculars (with disability inclusion) and track satisfaction.
- Budget for and report on AAP; publicise changes made in response to community feedback.
- Use culturally appropriate engagement methods prioritised by local and national actors.
- Communities consulted for their input need to be informed of how their insights have been used to shape ongoing or future work (closing the loop on community insights)
- Require inclusive participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in planning and monitoring.

## E. Funding

- Explore opportunities to work with VANGO increase resourcing access to local and national non-state actors (particularly community level actors and organisations).
- Increase direct funding access for local and national non-state actors through simplified processes.
- Simplify reporting; share full project budgets with local partners; adopt risk-sharing (with funding) rather than risk transfer.
- Explore opportunities to due-diligence passporting (mutual recognition of vetted local and national non-state actors) to speed grants and reduce compliance duplication.
- Ensure all local and national actors receive operational, overhead and management costs in all grants.

## F. Capacity

- Prioritise Ni-Vanuatu capacity strengthening through mentoring, skills transfer, and leadership development - to build local civil society and government capability to respond more effectively and efficiently in a crisis.
- Prioritise ni-Vanuatu or Pacific regional surge, before international deployments
- Avoid staff poaching from local and national non-state actors or fund backfill/retention when recruitment is unavoidable.
- Support decentralised warehousing and logistics systems for rapid response.
- Prioritise commissioning local experts and researchers as default for studies and evaluations.
- Require capacity support plans to be co-designed with local and national actors and include measurable progress indicators.

## G. Policy Influence & Advocacy

- Embed localisation measures in government plans, humanitarian plans and international actor strategies at country level.
- Convene an annual localisation stocktake (with government and VANGO leadership) before each cyclone season to track progress and identify priority areas to address.
- Ensure local and national non-state actor representation in policy-making forums and advisory councils.
- Require joint advocacy by Government and local and national non-state actor to influence donor priorities.
- Local CSO citation and visibility in public plans/reports, and co-authorship in major assessments/evaluations.

# Annex: Minimum Equitable Partnership Standard

This annex sets recommended minimum standards for equitable partnerships and specifies actions required from international actors and donors/funders when engaging with local and national actors in Vanuatu.

## 1. Written partnership principles

- International actors: Include principles of equality, transparency, complementarity and mutual accountability in every partnership agreement; make agreements accessible to partners in Bislama and English. Undertake partnership brokering to set up partnership agreements.
- Donors/funders: Make signed partnership principles a grant condition; require partners to submit copies and verify during spot checks.

## 2. Visibility

- International actors: Ensure local and national actors are presented as equal partners in all branding, visibility and communication material, both in Vanuatu and outside.
- Donors/funders: Mandate equal visibility and branding of partners (including use of logos) in any material or outputs.

## 3. Genuine capacity support

- International actors: Support local/national partners to jointly define capacity needs, agree on milestones and targets, set progress markers. Avoid duplication and repetition by coordinating with other international actors.
- Donors/funders: Require evidence local/national partner prioritisation, progress markers for any capacity support provided and require collaboration between actors to provide more comprehensive capacity support that avoids duplication.

## 4. Financial transparency

- International actors: Share complete project budgets and any revisions, including overheads and indirect costs; provide narrative explaining allocations. Share full financial reports with local partners
- Donors/funders: Publish annual pass-through rates and require implementing partners to disclose budget shares to local partners.

## 5. Overheads and indirect costs

- International actors: Budget a minimum 10% overhead for local partners plus reasonable support costs (e.g., audit, safeguarding, HR).
- Donors/funders: Enforce overhead coverage; disallow proposals that exclude partner overheads without justification.

## 6. Risk-sharing

- International actors: Develop shared risk management plans (security, fiduciary, safeguarding) and agree proportional mitigation and contingency measures. Any transfer of risk to local and national actors needs to come with appropriate funding to manage risks.
- Donors/funders: Assess risk-sharing mechanisms at proposal stage; avoid risk transfer clauses that penalise local and national actors. Require intermediaries to support risks management of their Vanuatu partners, including through financial compensation.

## 7. Local language deliverables

- International actors: Produce key documents (MoUs, SOPs, meeting minutes, community materials) in Bislama and relevant vernaculars; include sufficient budget for translation.
- Donors/funders: Allow eligible translation costs and check that cluster products are available in Bislama.

## 8. Transition and power-sharing

- International actors: Set time-bound milestones to shift leadership, authorship, donor engagement and budget authority to local and national actors; monitor quarterly.
- Donors/funders: Require transition plans in multi-year grants and assess progress annually.

## 9. Accountability and transparency

- International actors: Publish an annual localisation statement covering funding flows to local and national actors, leadership composition, and partnership health checks (aggregated).
- Donors/funders: Consolidate partner data and publish portfolio-level localisation dashboards.