



# PORT VILA

## SDGs Cities Challenge Snapshot

### Challenge Overview

Port Vila municipality is surrounded by customary land, however sustained rural-to-urban migration means that urban planning now has to consider adjacent rural 'peri-urban' jurisdictions. In peri-urban areas migrant communities have made alternative arrangements with customary landowners.

Unfortunately, there are many reasons why customary landowners may revoke permission to settle on their land: land values rise, making it more profitable to rent to others; migrants fail to make payments; and conflicts between individuals or groups can lead to evictions.

*Our challenge is to plan our urban communities and city-neighbourhoods in a way that makes the city accessible to anyone seeking its opportunities.*

This means tenure security so that people can develop their communities with confidence that their investments in housing, livelihoods, waste management, gardens, climate change adaptation, community space, and community development aren't wasted.

### Key City Characteristics

- **Population:** 78,270 in the Greater Metropolitan Area; 50,944 in the Municipality
- **City Classification:** The Capital of Vanuatu, a Least Developed Country Pacific Small Island Developing State
- **Governance:** Port Vila Municipal Council is elected every four years, with a Lord Mayor chosen by the councillors-elect. The peri-urban region is governed by the Shefa Provincial Government Council, one of the six Provinces of Vanuatu that includes the peri-urban regions of Efate island (on which Port Vila is located), as well as the island's rural areas and a number of other surrounding islands. At a national level, both local governments are supported by the Department of Local Authorities, as well as the newly formed Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
- **Climate & Geography:** Port Vila is located on the south-west coast of Efate Island, the focal point of the north-south 'Y-shaped' Vanuatu archipelago. The city is characterised by a two-season tropical climate, experiencing relatively mild annual average temperatures year-round, with minimal observed inter-annual variability. Rainfall is highly variable with inter-annual and seasonal fluctuations heavily influenced by regional climate systems.
- **Economy:** Only 4 in 5 households in Port Vila primarily rely on wage-based income, however This is in contrast to Vanuatu as a whole, where only one third of households rely on salaried incomes, with roughly half of the wider population dependent on the sale of fish, crops and handicrafts (Trundle & McEvoy 2015, p10). 1 in 7 households in Port Vila in 2010 were unable to meet basic needs. Urban employment is dominated by tourism and the presence of the national public service; one fifth of Port Vila's wage-earning inhabitants are engaged in services and sales, followed by 15% engaged in craftwork and trades (ibid).
- **Languages:** Official languages of Vanuatu are Bislama, English & French, however more than 100 languages are spoken across the Pacific Island Country, many of which are regularly used by the largely migrant population of Port Vila.
- **Cultural Features:** Customary laws, practice, and social structures (known as *kastom*) are prevalent, particularly in rural areas but also within Port Vila itself, and are given preeminence over State Law under the Vanuatu Constitution. As a result, these traditional cultural and societal features are central to not only land tenure, but also community function and the persistence of the *wantok* (literally 'one language') social system.

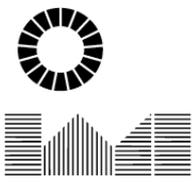


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS  
CITIES CHALLENGE



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# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS CITIES CHALLENGE

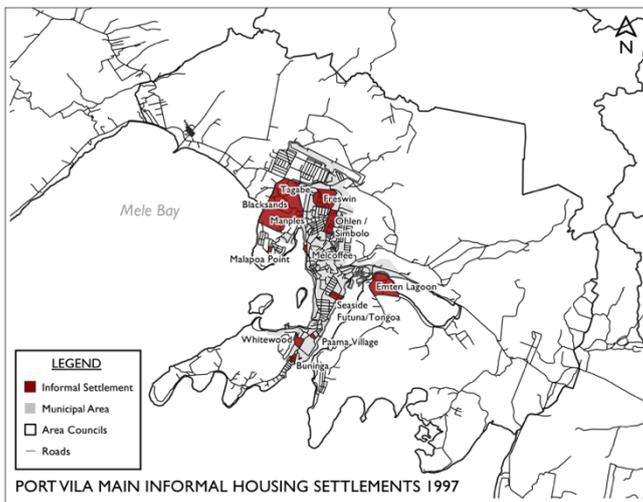
## Existing Data & Challenge Data Needs

Comprehensive assessments of the extent of informal housing across Port Vila are both heavily outdated and limited by a lack of frameworks for considering the unusual variants of tenure arrangements present within the municipal boundary and in the city’s peri-urban periphery.

As shown in the map below, the most recent spatial assessment of informality in Port Vila is more than two decades out of date, having been conducted by the Asian Development Bank in 1997 (Trundle, 2020), while the most recent survey of these settlements was by the now-defunct National Housing Corporation in 2012 (Chung and Hill, 2002; UN-Habitat 2016).

Critically, the question structure of the most recent national census excluded respondents who did not self-identify as ‘owning’ their land from responding to a question relating to informality of land tenure (Trundle & McEvoy 2015), preventing use of these comprehensive national datasets. Enumeration Areas up until the 2016 ‘mini-Census’ were also too large to identify smaller pockets of informality within the city. As a result, Vanuatu’s official levels of informality have remained unchanged or unreported in global datasets and official United Nations records, with Oceania as a whole having been estimated to have 24.1 percent of its urban population living in slums since 1990, without any revision of this figure.

As a result, a critical aspect of this challenge is establishing the current extents of informal settlements in their various and differing



Source: Trundle 2020

## Existing Challenge Partners

Port Vila has strong civil society organisations such as the Tagabe Bridge Development Association and the Elang Etas Community Association. The Port Vila Project Team are collaborating with those grassroots associations to inform the new Department of Urban Affairs and Planning about the nature of land-use planning and tenure security on customary lands.

Other key national government actors include the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) and the Ministry of Lands & Natural Resources, both of which hold critical data relating to tenure arrangements and customary landowner jurisdictions.

Key international agencies include the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), the International Office of Migration (IOM), and the University of Melbourne, which has ongoing engagement with both the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the City.

## Key Linkages

Localisation of the SDGs in Port Vila is aligned with Vanuatu’s National Sustainable Development Plan *Vanuatu 2030: The People’s Plan* (NSDP), which sets out national sustainable development goals that parallel the UN SDGs. The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu also released a comprehensive *Voluntary National Review* (VNR) in 2019, which noted that Vanuatu has made “some but limited progress” towards SDG11.

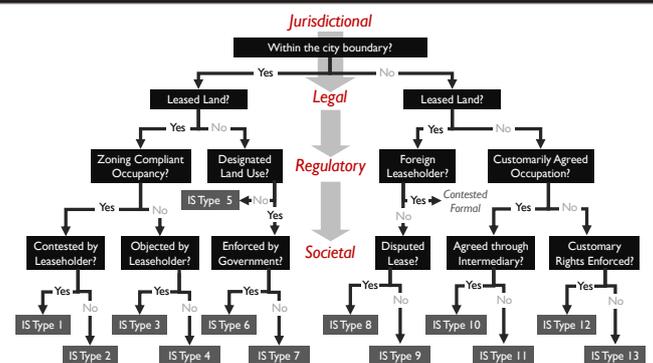
While the VNR notes alignment between the SDGs and the NSDP, Goal 11.1 is absent from the national development plan (along with 11.7).

Other key linkages include the 2018 National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement, which includes protections from eviction for urban inhabitants. This policy is currently being written into standard operating procedures for each government department.

## The Challenge Pitch

It is hoped that this SDG Challenge will:

- Map, through community consultation, the different types of informal tenure present in Greater Port Vila;
- Through this identify the distribution and extent of informality, as well as forms of tenure insecurity, across the city building on the typology below;
- Develop critical legislative and policy support for the inhabitants of these informal spaces across levels of government; and
- Set in place a cross-jurisdictional framework for supporting the rights of informal inhabitants in pursuit of sustainable and affordable urban housing for all.



Key Literature & References

Source: Trundle 2020

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