



Strengthening Vanuatu's capacity to respond to Loss and Damage

What already exists, where the main gaps are, and what to invest in over the next 15 years.

Prepared by the Nabanga Consortium | July 2026

Vanuatu is already experiencing climate-related loss and damage, including impacts on livelihoods, land, homes, infrastructure, food systems, ecosystems, culture, identity, health and wellbeing. As these impacts intensify, Vanuatu will need stronger systems, practical skills, trusted relationships and knowledge flows to support nationally led and locally grounded action over time.

This brief summarises findings from the capacity development and knowledge brokering assessment undertaken as part of the Santiago Network technical assistance to the Government of Vanuatu. The assessment considered what already exists, where the main gaps are, and what priority investments could help Vanuatu implement its Loss and Damage agenda over the next 15 years.

WHAT WE FOUND

Vanuatu is not starting from scratch

A dedicated Loss and Damage Policy, strong disaster response experience, customary governance and *Storian* practice provide real foundations to build on.

The enabling environment is the binding constraint

Policies, mandates, financing arrangements and planning systems have not yet caught up with what Loss and Damage action requires.

Capacity is about people as much as systems

Participatory practice and soft skills, data and valuation capability, strategic leadership, and the underused skills of returned seasonal workers.

Knowledge brokering is not an add-on

Different actors need different information in different forms — and that translation work must be funded inside programmes, not treated as a one-off event.



What Vanuatu already has

Vanuatu has a dedicated Loss and Damage Policy, strong experience in disaster response, established climate and disaster coordination mechanisms, and recognised regional and international leadership on climate justice. It also has practical experience in areas directly relevant to future Loss and Damage responses, including cash transfers, community-based resilience, traditional knowledge systems and locally led planning.

Customary governance is a major strength. Chiefs, tabu systems, oral communication, dispute resolution practices and community decision-making structures provide locally grounded ways to discuss difficult issues, including loss of land, culture, livelihoods and identity. These are supported by wider networks, including churches, women's groups, youth networks, cultural fieldworkers, climate action networks, Area Councils and provincial structures.

Traditional knowledge and *Storian* practices are also central. The Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta and its fieldworker networks provide an important foundation for documenting, protecting and sharing knowledge about cultural practices, sacred places, oral histories and community relationships with land and sea. *Storians* provide a culturally grounded way to share lived experience, build trust and support sensitive conversations about loss, grief, displacement and future change.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The systems that let action happen

The assessment found important gaps in the systems that allow Loss and Damage action to happen.

Policies and mandates

Many responses will require clearer policies, financing arrangements, legislation and operating procedures — social protection, cash transfers, parametric insurance, planned relocation, human mobility and standard operating procedures that go beyond immediate disaster response. Some policies need updating or stronger legislative backing; elsewhere, roles and responsibilities need clarifying so ministries, agencies, provincial authorities and partners can act with confidence.

Financing and fiduciary systems

Vanuatu will need the capacity to access, manage and coordinate Loss and Damage finance from multiple sources — including stronger capability in proposal development, project management, reporting, accountability and coordination.

Planning

Many sectors understand Loss and Damage in broad terms, but it is not yet well integrated into sectoral plans, business plans, budgets or implementation systems. Agriculture, health, statistics, infrastructure, finance, land, culture and social protection all have roles to play. Loss and Damage will need to be mainstreamed into relevant plans and linked to future national development planning.

Future skills

Vanuatu will need more ni-Vanuatu professionals with expertise in engineering, customary land law, climate and blended finance, agriculture, mental health, social work, data analysis and valuation. These skills require tertiary pathways, vocational training, scholarships, professional exchanges and practical experience — not only short-term workshops.



Four priorities for people and institutions

Much of the work of responding to Loss and Damage will be carried out by people and organisations — government officers, provincial staff, Area Administrators, NGOs, churches, chiefs, frontline service providers, technical agencies, researchers and community leaders. The assessment identified four priority areas.

1 Participatory practice and soft skills

Loss and Damage work involves difficult conversations about trauma, grief, relocation, cultural loss, ancestral sites, livelihood decline and uncertain futures. Trusted local actors — chiefs, pastors, Area Administrators, village health workers and NGOs — will need support in facilitation, cultural competency, negotiation, mental health first aid and psychosocial support.

2 Data, modelling and valuation

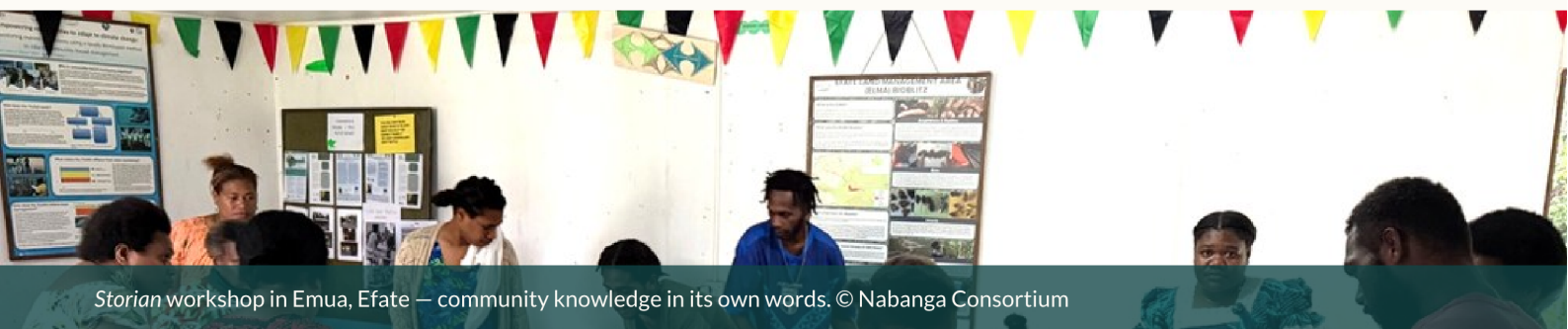
Relevant data already exists across climate, hazards, livelihoods, health, ecosystems, displacement, cultural knowledge and recovery, but it is often fragmented or underused. Stronger capability is needed from community-level data literacy through to national modelling, valuation and analysis of non-economic loss and damage.

3 Strategic, innovative and monitoring capability

Many actors still frame Loss and Damage mainly as a disaster response issue. It also requires long-term planning, experimentation, learning and strategic leadership. A broader cadre of ni-Vanuatu professionals will be needed to design programmes, test new approaches, connect local realities to national policy, and adapt implementation over time.

4 Returned seasonal workers

Many ni-Vanuatu workers returning from Australia and New Zealand bring experience in agriculture, business, livelihoods, commercial farming and disaster resilience. These skills could be better mapped and connected to livelihood transformation, food security and community resilience initiatives.



Storian workshop in Emua, Efate — community knowledge in its own words. © Nabanga Consortium

KNOWLEDGE BROKERING

Moving knowledge between the people who need it

Knowledge brokering is not an add-on to Loss and Damage work. It is essential to ensuring that knowledge moves between communities, government, technical agencies, customary systems, churches, civil society, regional partners and international finance processes. Different actors need different information in different forms.

A community leader, finance officer, health worker, climate scientist, church leader and youth advocate will not use the same knowledge product. Effective knowledge brokering will require trusted people and institutions that can translate between sectors, knowledge systems and levels of decision-making.

PRACTICAL OPTIONS

An annual or biennial national Loss and Damage forum • an accessible knowledge hub or portal • structured training and internships • peer-to-peer learning with Pacific and regional partners • stronger use of existing technical working groups. These activities should be embedded in programmes and budgets, rather than treated as one-off events.

NEXT STEPS

Invest in capacity and knowledge alongside tangible projects

Vanuatu has a major opportunity to lead globally on practical, people-centred responses to Loss and Damage. Its international leadership, new policy framework, customary systems, community networks and emerging Long-Term Programme provide a strong platform for action.

The next step is to invest in capacity and knowledge alongside tangible projects: strengthening institutions, supporting ni-Vanuatu expertise, connecting traditional and technical knowledge, building practical skills at provincial and community levels, and ensuring that every Loss and Damage investment includes learning, coordination and knowledge sharing.

KEY MESSAGE

Loss and Damage is not only a technical or financial challenge. It is also a human, cultural and development challenge — and Vanuatu's response will be strongest if it keeps people, place, culture and lived experience at the centre.

ABOUT THIS WORK

This brief summarises findings from the capacity development and knowledge brokering assessment (Outcomes 2 and 3) undertaken by the Nabanga Consortium under technical assistance from the Santiago Network to the Government of Vanuatu. It draws on a literature review, consultation with the Department of Climate Change, community Storyians in Efate, Santo and Tanna, and two national workshops held in September 2025. A full technical report is available on request.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Nabanga Consortium comprises Pacific Advisory, Sustineo, the Institute for Study and Development Worldwide (IFSD) and the Santo Sunset Environment Network. For more information, please contact:

Pacific Advisory

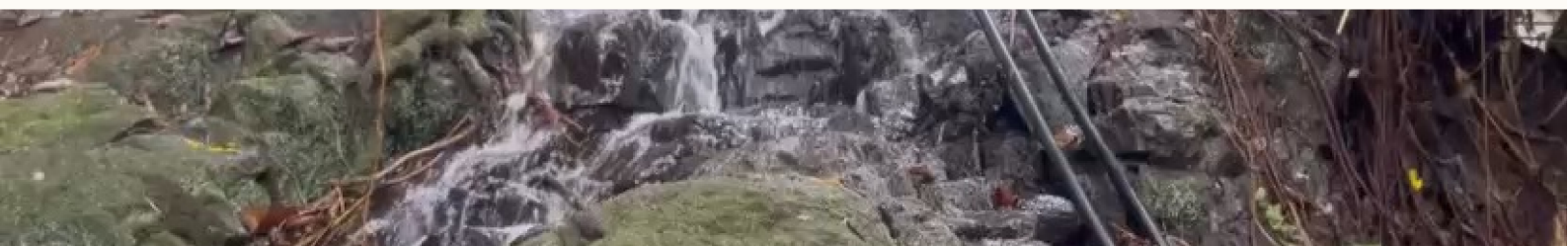
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A village water source above Emua, Efate — one of the systems communities depend on. © Nabanga Consortium

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