

ONG SUBMISSION

For the

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

Submitted by:

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Republic of Vanuatu

Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review

Introduction

1. The present report¹ will focus on the **right of children to a compulsory and free primary education and a secondary education that is available and accessible**, according to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 26) and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Article 28).
2. The Government of Vanuatu has done commendable and considerable work in recent years to deliver these rights to the children and young people of Vanuatu and it would appear that significant change in policy and infrastructure has occurred. However, the reality on the ground for students and potential students in Vanuatu is that many barriers to universal, available and accessible education remain.
3. The undersigned organizations would like draw the attention of the Council to those barriers and encourage the Government of Vanuatu to address them, in particular:
 - Compulsory and free primary education has still not been realised.
 - Factors hindering universal education have still not been fully addressed, e.g. teacher resourcing and training, family and social factors impeding school attendance, and health issues for students.
 - Secondary Education that is available is not always useful in providing knowledge and skills that translate into paid employment.
 - Available, accessible and appropriate secondary education is not an option for all students reaching the end of primary school.
 - Finally accurate, up to date, data on enrollment and retention rates of students is not readily available.

Compulsory and free primary Education

4. *The Republic of Vanuatu Education Act (No. 21 of 2001) Part 1 Section 7 (2)* states that it is the duty of a child's parents to ensure that the child attends school. Further legislation on compulsory primary education is being considered. However, according to the survey conducted, "parents not taking seriously their responsibilities to send children to school" is a considerable factor in children and young people not attending school. Introduction of a compulsory education program

¹ In order to gain a current and contextual understanding of the issues facing students a recent survey and consultation was conducted with students at a Diocesan College in Vanuatu. In consulting the students there it is hoped that this report captures some of the 'voices' of the young people this submission concerns. School experiences for students and their siblings aged between 4 and 32 years were considered. Data was collected from 489 people. The students surveyed may not be a 'typical' sample of Ni-Vanuatu students as they are already fee-paying secondary students in a private school. However some of their data and their reflections are useful in supporting this submission.

along with a parent awareness program on the importance of primary education for the children of Vanuatu may be needed. Compulsory education in itself will be a major achievement; however, in order to be effective, associated issues linked to providing universal education need to be addressed.

5. Although there is a free education policy, all students in Vanuatu pay school fees. *The Republic of Vanuatu Education Act (No. 21 of 2001) Part 1 Section 35 (1)* states that fees are payable in relation to tuition, boarding, books and other materials, and other services. Further to this *Part 1 Section 35 (5)* states that children can be excluded from school for non-payment of fees.
6. School fees as a barrier to school attendance was recognized as a problem to be addressed in *Education for All National Plan of Action (2001-2015 Republic of Vanuatu)* published in 2004, p. 38. The document also acknowledges the fact that many parents do contribute beyond expected fees in terms of labour, maintenance and further funds.
7. “Parents not being able to afford fees” has been underscored in our survey as one of the most common reason why children do not attend primary school and are not able to progress on to secondary school². Students report paying on average 1000vt to 5000vt per term in primary school and 20 000vt to 25 000vt in secondary school. Secondary school fees usually include the cost of boarding. These fees would be typical for both state and private secondary schools.

Social, family and health factors interfering with school attendance

8. The survey indicated several factors that interfered with school attendance. These include: “family problems”, “pregnant students feeling ashamed to go to school”, “needing to stay home to care for siblings or relatives”, and “losing contact with parents”. Another factor cited was that “they might have a dangerous sickness”. While time and process did not allow us to explore this suggestion further, it raises the question of how health problems may be impacting on student attendance³.
9. The tension between traditional family life and the need for an education in order to combat levels of poverty for children, young people and community would appear to still exist. The argument for formal education is harder to make when the prospects of paid employment at the completion of secondary school or University are low.
10. The survey shows how social, family and health factors influence children and young people exiting the education system. The government should therefore

² *Priorities of the People: Hardship in Vanuatu (January 2003)* published by the Asia Development Bank cites case studies where male adults state that finding opportunities to generate cash to pay school fees are among the most significant factors in creating hardship. In fact, not being able to afford school fees and related materials was the fourth highest indicator of hardship for people consulted

³ *The Education Sector Strategy Update: Achieving Education For All, Broadening our Perspective, Maximizing our Effectiveness. World Bank 2005* indicates that HIV/AIDS is one significant illness that can have an impact on education systems in third world countries.

consider providing support and counseling to families and to communities, improving health services and encouraging children and young people to complete their studies.

Relevant, accessible and useful education for young people

11. Vanuatu has a growing population of children and young people⁴. Coupled with this large young cohort is an increase in numbers of people moving to urban centres. People are moving to urban centres in search of employment, and this is leading to urban squatter settlements⁵.
12. Engaging this large group of young people and providing them with an education useful in obtaining paid employment is no easy task. Our survey suggests that some young people do not find incentives in continuing secondary education and do not find it relevant. Statements such as, “Students can’t cope with the school regulations” and “Students don’t like to go to school” that we found in our survey show the lack of motivation of a certain group of students. Often these students appear to lose social standing once they exit the system and can be viewed as “lazy” or “aimless”. Through no fault of their own these students may be overlooked by society in Vanuatu.
13. Students consulted also said that “When students fail the exam they don’t have other choices to do” and that, “The system of education didn’t help much of the students”. There is a lack of alternative options for students unable to pass exams in order to progress on to secondary school and tertiary education. As agriculture dominates the economy of Vanuatu and other major areas of employment would include fishing, offshore financial services and tourism (*Asian Development Bank & Vanuatu 2008 Fact Sheet*); more technical and vocational schools are needed.

Primary to secondary school transition

14. Even if the percentage of students progressing from primary to secondary school has increased since 2000, there are still many young people out of secondary school⁶. *The Vanuatu National Statistics Office* states that in 2007, 38,026 students were enrolled in primary school and 15,132 in secondary school. Statistics on retention after enrollment are unavailable.
15. Issues affecting students attending secondary school would be very similar to the above. These are: fees, social factors, and issues such as pregnancy, health and

⁴ Results of the 1999 census indicate that 77, 409 people of the total population of 186,678 were aged under 15. At that date, the median age was 18.8 and the birth rate was 28.2 (*Vanuatu National Statistics Office*).

⁵ Statement by Mrs. Nadine Alatoa, head of Delegation on the Occasion of the United Nations General Assembly on Children, 10th May 2002.

⁶ “While 96 percent of children go to primary school, only 20 to 30 percent proceed to secondary school” *Family Law and French Law in Vanuatu, An opportunity missed (Victoria University of Wellington Law Review, 2004)*.

especially the need for most secondary school children to travel and board away from their families, villages and neighborhood.

The need for more specific data.

16. Most of the data readily available on Vanuatu is drawn from the 1999 Census. Another Census is planned for 2009. Little data is currently available on school retention rates in Vanuatu. A first measure in considering the achievement of universal education would be more data on school retention rates. At what point are students 'pushed out' of primary school and what are the reasons for this exit.
17. The government of Vanuatu has made some progress in addressing the need for centralized data collection and analysis. Government bodies that have been set up in recent years such as the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education would appear to give responsibility for this to appropriate people, *Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education Act 2001 (Part I, Section 7)*. Bodies such as these are also charged with ensuring the quality of teacher education which in itself contributes to an accountable, quality education system.

Recommendations

In light of our report the undersigned would respectfully recommend the following:

- 1) The continuation of the good work of the Government of Vanuatu in setting up policy and infrastructure (such as bodies to oversee the quality of teacher training and monitoring, collection of data on student results and a system for monitoring and improving the quality of the curriculum) to address the rights of the children and young people of Vanuatu in relation to Both the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 26) and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Article 28).
- 2) Encourage the Government of Vanuatu to implement compulsory primary education and to promote a parent awareness program on the importance of education for children.
- 3) The government should find effective ways to support children whose families cannot afford school-fees and other expenses related to their compulsory education; e.g. scholarships need to continue.
- 4) The continuation and further development of data gathering by the Ministry of Education and the Vanuatu National Statistics Office, particularly in the areas of school retention rates and the reasons why children and young people exit school, including health factors.
- 5) That the Ministry of Education continues to find relevant and appropriate secondary school and vocational education models to assist young people find paid and meaningful work. This is particularly essential for those young people who have 'dropped out' or been 'pushed out' of the education system.