

Halo olgeta,

The health of humans is intricately linked with the health of the environment

Since our December newsletter, we are pleased to report that Vanuatu has maintained her Covid-free status. Other than a few incursions at the border, there has, so far, been no community transmission. Like many Pacific Island nations, Vanuatu's health services are at high risk of being overwhelmed in the event of community spread. This is significant in light of several highly transmissible variants in circulation.

A dearth of international visitors for over a year has had a noticeable impact in both urban and rural communities. There is, consequently, **debate around diversification of the economy**. Some argue against relying on tourism as a key export. Proponents argue that now is an opportune time to polish up the industry in anticipation of better times. These debates will become increasingly vital as some form of global equilibrium is re-established. In this time of pandemic and uncertainty, the revival of indigenous wisdom and *kastom* can contribute strongly to the best solutions for planet Earth and its inhabitants.

Climate and environmental changes remain at the forefront of Vanuatu's concerns. In early March, Tropical Cyclone Niran swerved unnervingly close, threatening to unleash havoc and derail ongoing recovery efforts after Cyclone Harold in 2020. Inclement weather severely disrupted a Butterfly Trust initiated dental outreach to rural Malekula, causing further delays and for many, sorely testing their pain thresholds.

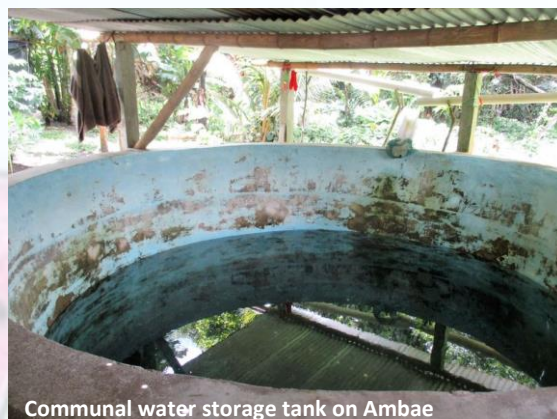
Natural disasters and ensuing disruptions have been stoically confronted by generations of ni-Vanuatu. Older ni-Vanuatu, who are often better attuned to the land and nature's forces, are leading the drive for a **revival of *kastom* and indigenous ways** of knowing and being. As extreme weather events become increasingly frequent and more intense, action from community level up, and government level down, and across disciplines, is on the rise.

At a recent cultural symposium at the Malvatumauri Nakamal in Port Vila, the Director of Vanuatu's Cultural Centre issued a statement calling for government departments and NGOs to collaborate on a project to weave customs and culture into the school curriculum, noting that *"over 74 years of colonial indoctrination had successfully alienated students from their indigenous languages, customs and culture."*

Contemplating the compound challenges of a worldwide pandemic, environmental degradation, global inequity, issues within public health and sustainable development can lead to despair and inertia. Rather than stagnate from its immense weight, we remain inspired to join the collective global effort in redressing imbalances wrought on the planet. For the past few months, in addition to facilitating the Trust's practical, on the ground work, we have been engaged in preliminary research into the emerging field of **Planetary Health**. This concept has been described by the Planetary Health Alliance (www.planetaryhealthalliance.org)

as a 'field focused on characterising the human health impacts of human-caused disruptions of Earth's natural systems'. We will provide more detail about our input in upcoming newsletters as we progress with the concept. It entails becoming more involved in ecological health while maintaining our work in promoting human health and education.

Work continues in support of communities that were seriously affected by Cyclone Harold when it ravaged Vanuatu's central islands in April 2020. The rebuilding process will take a long time. As each annual cyclone season beckons, bringing the possibility of fresh threats, the need to *Build Back Better* is paramount. We have chosen to **focus on assisting local communities improve their drinking water sources, build better sanitation facilities and keep up with good personal hygiene, to minimise waterborne diseases**.



Communal water storage tank on Ambae

Vanuatu still ranks poorly when it comes to adequate sanitation infrastructure, water access and quality of drinking water. Despite being Covid-free, hand hygiene needs to be continuously encouraged in villages and schools. Pollution of ground wells and other sources of water for drinking and food preparation are recurring issues that also need to be addressed. Escalating climate change impacts on low-lying coastal communities can no longer be ignored. Hence our focus on **WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)**. This approach connects multiple objectives around **Covid Prevention, Community Development, Cyclone Recovery, Environmental Health** and **Climate Change Adaptation**.

Please donate ~ We need your help to reach out further

Teaching how to build outhouses and long-drops may not be glamorous, but in many remote villages on the islands of Ambae, Santo, Malekula and Pentecost, households do not have their own toilets. Communal, poorly constructed pit latrines are a leading factor in waterborne diseases. More intense weather events cause widespread damage to already fragile infrastructure, resulting in overflow and contamination. There is an urgent need to Build Back Better in an increasingly volatile environment.

Please join in our collective effort to improve the lives and wellbeing of others. Your gift will purchase materials for building latrines, handwashing stations and improving water access. We also need water filters and rainwater collection tanks. As our projects are designed to strengthen local capacity, your donation will also help run community training programmes and workshops. There are no frills.

We work with local partners at the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Training and Department of Water Services under the WASH in Schools' Programme, the Health Promoting Schools' Programme, and in village health promotion initiatives.

The Trust took a hiatus from its **Clinical Medical and Dental Support Programme** when Vanuatu's border closed in mid-March 2020 and Cyclone Harold recovery work took precedence. Travel into Vanuatu is still restricted for an indefinite period. Although visiting volunteers have not been able to enter and provide assistance, we have kept up our support with local health workers leading the way in schools and villages. Oral health education and dental checks are scheduled to take place at five schools in central Malekula in the third quarter. We await the time when dental volunteers from New Zealand and elsewhere can return to Vanuatu. In the meantime, local dentists from Vila Central Hospital will conduct screenings and treatment.

Since our last update, three more primary schools and four kindergartens have joined the **Health Promoting Schools' Programme on Malekula**, making a total of 11 schools and 17 kindergartens. The programme committee held its inaugural awards ceremony in March to recognise these schools for their ongoing efforts in promoting the importance of healthy practices.

Senior dentists from Vila Central Hospital are leading the establishment of the **Vanuatu Oral Health Association** to better advocate for much-needed improvements to oral health services in the country. We took part in the first consultation meeting in April and continue to provide support as a member of the working group set up to establish this association.

*The majority of dental outreaches facilitated by the Butterfly Trust take place in rural and remote communities where there is no easy access to mains power and running water. Portable dental equipment is therefore essential. After several years in the field and multiple repair jobs, our portable dental unit is no longer functioning at optimum level. **We are therefore seeking funds to purchase a new, good quality, portable dental unit.***

On 19 May 2021, the first **24 000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine** arrived in Vanuatu. The vaccine roll-out is set to begin in June, prioritising health and border workers as well as vulnerable members on the main island of Efate. The timeline for vaccinating the rest of the population in the provinces will depend on supply. The entire roll-out process is projected to run well into 2023. Geographical challenges mean that there is a substantial staff shortage. Gaps are expected to be filled by retired nurses. Despite a number of hurdles to get around, we are currently exploring ways to facilitate entry for a small number of experienced medical volunteers able to support local health workers with the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out in the provinces.

For those readers who are new to the work of the Butterfly Trust in Vanuatu, you can access all our newsletters from our website at <https://www.butterflytrust.org/vanuatu/>

The Butterfly Trust is a New Zealand registered charity CC38025

We would love your help. Please donate to our Water, Sanitation, Health and Health Education causes. Every cent counts, and will go a long way. If you wish to set up a monthly donation to the Butterfly Trust, please get in touch with Lynn or David on david.lynn@butterflytrust.org



Account name: Butterfly Trust
Account number: 12-3233-0464934-50
Swift code: ASBBNZ2A

You can also make a donation via our page on Givealittle
<https://givealittle.co.nz/org/butterflytrust>

WASH projects in focus:

South Santo, Ambae villages and Central Malekula schools attend to sanitation and water systems improvements

The villages of Jarailan, Belmol, Narango and Vunavusi in South Santo were among the worst affected during the last cyclone in 2020. Lack of adequate sanitation infrastructure led to drinking water contamination, resulting in a rapid rise in cases of diarrhoea. Educating local communities on how to improve personal hygiene, and providing practical training on how to build and maintain basic toilets and handwashing facilities are long-term goals. The Butterfly Trust is partnering with Sanma Provincial Health, the Department of Water Services, and local communities to ensure that people are better prepared, not just in times of disaster, but during seasonal changes in weather. Ongoing sanitation improvements in the villages of Lolomanganda and Lovonda on Ambae are also being sustained by the Penama Provincial Health team.



The first stage of the project in South Santo is underway as community leaders attend theory and practical skills training on hygiene management and constructing VIP (ventilated improved pit) toilets. At the same time, technicians from the Water Department are conducting assessments on community water systems to ascertain what improvements and upgrades are required.

Schools in Malampa Province (covering the islands of Malekula, Ambrym and Paama) were involved in a WASH workshop coordinated by Unicef, the Department of Water Services and the Ministry of Education in May.

The workshop focused on field-based training which also involved plumbers and the wider community. Sanitation blocks at three schools in Central Malekula are nearing completion following this workshop. The Trust is currently working with the Health Promoting Schools Committee and Department of Water to identify other schools that should be prioritised for WASH facilities upgrades.



Despite human resource and geographical challenges, the Malampa Health Promoting Schools' Programme (HPS) is steadily extending its reach to involve more schools. During National Health Week, the Health Promotions Officer led activities along the theme '*Protecting Health from Climate Change*' at four schools currently under the HPS programme.

WATER, SANITATION & HYGIENE matters. PLEASE HELP. Supporting action in WASH helps to reduce illness. It is also a pivotal platform from which issues such as waste management and pollution of the natural environment can be further highlighted. The health of humans is intricately linked with the health of our environment.

Thank you for your support.