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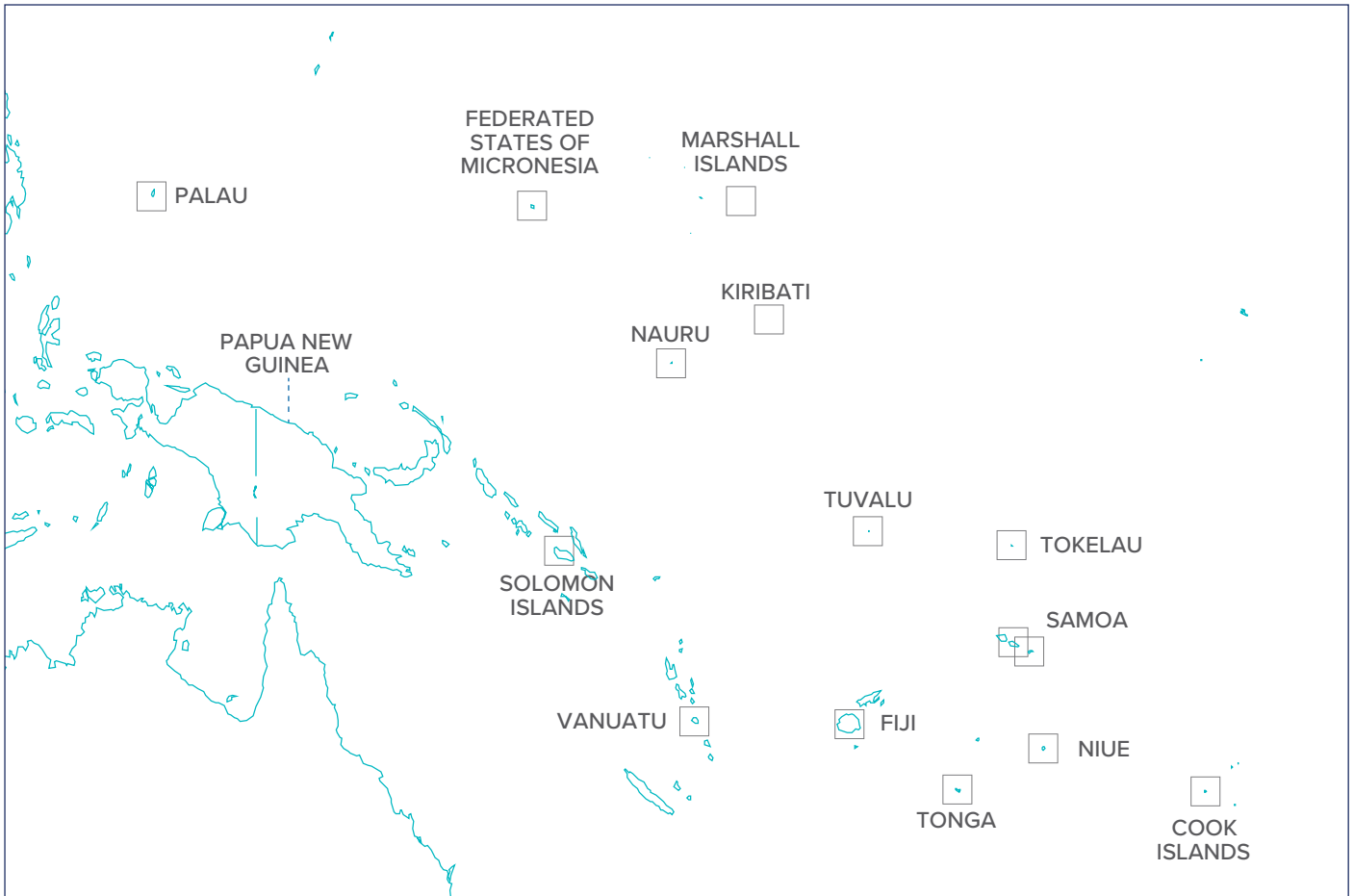
PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT HUMAN-INTEREST

STORIES FROM THE PACIFIC





PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT HUMAN-INTEREST STORIES FROM THE PACIFIC



Introduction

The Vaka Pasifika Project, funded by the European Union, has been instrumental in strengthening public finance management (PFM) across the Pacific by empowering journalists to uncover the impact of financial policies on people's daily lives. Through this project, journalists from the region have developed compelling stories that highlight the real-life implications of government spending, infrastructure, and essential services, reminding us that this is ultimately "people's money" and should work to serve the public.

This collection of stories provides insight into the challenges that Pacific Islanders face due to gaps in PFM. In Tuvalu, Yvette highlights how budget allocations to healthcare can transform lives in remote areas like Funafala. For years, families had to make dangerous journeys to access medical care. Now, thanks to a new clinic included in the health budget, residents can receive essential care close to home, underscoring the impact of targeted health funding.

In Palau, Sayuri Pearl Marumoto's story shows how urban public health initiatives can reshape community well-being. With her extensive public health experience, Pearl has led efforts at the Belau Wellness Center, supported by the Asian Development Bank's Covid-19 Response for the Affected Poor and Vulnerable. An urban gardening project has improved food security for 54% of surveyed households, with caregivers benefiting from physical activity and families saving costs while accessing fresh produce. Pearl's advocacy demonstrates how strategic funding can uplift vulnerable populations.

In the Solomon Islands, two stories shed light on how inadequate infrastructure funding impacts rural livelihoods. Eliza's report from Gheghende Village details how poor road conditions increase transportation costs for pineapple farmers, cutting into their earnings and limiting access to markets. Meanwhile, Ian's story focuses on the hardships Temotu Province residents face due to unreliable shipping services. Here, poor PFM decisions have left communities without the necessary transport infrastructure, isolating them from essential services and economic opportunities. Both stories emphasize the need for timely, effective investment in infrastructure to support rural economies and connect communities to essential markets and services.

Josepheen's story from Vanuatu brings attention to the urgent need for improved maternal healthcare services at Vila Central Hospital, where overworked staff and insufficient facilities endanger expectant mothers. Despite substantial budget allocations, the story reveals a gap between funds on paper and effective service delivery, reinforcing the need for strategic and efficient use of public funds to meet the needs of vulnerable populations.

In Papua New Guinea, Dale's story highlights the government's initiative to support the growth of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs). As Business Editor at Post Courier, Dale reports on the SME loan program, which has helped many businesses access funding through BSP Financial Group and the National Development Bank. However, Dale points out that there is still a need for better education and awareness about how citizens can access these loans, calling for more support to simplify the application process.

In Fiji, Meri exposes the severe impact of inconsistent water supply on communities in urban and peri-urban areas. Despite significant investments in water infrastructure, families continue to face health risks, additional costs, and inconvenience, highlighting the importance of improved oversight and accountability in resource allocation to fulfill the constitutional right to clean water.

Lastly, Ritika's story addresses the rising challenge of drug addiction in Fiji, as the government allocates funds toward a new National Narcotics Bureau and Counter Narcotics Strategy. The story reveals the complex needs of communities grappling with addiction, emphasizing that public funds must be used for effective prevention, rehabilitation, and community support initiatives to achieve meaningful impact.

Together, these stories underscore the critical role of PFM in shaping public welfare across the Pacific. They advocate for transparency, accountability, and efficiency in spending, reiterating that funds dedicated to development should provide tangible improvements in people's lives. Through these accounts, we are reminded that public money is a collective resource, meant to build a more resilient, equitable future for all.

About the Project

The Vaka Pasifika Project is a collaborative initiative aimed at enhancing PFM practices across Pacific Island Countries (PICs). It focuses on building the capacity of local stakeholders, including government entities, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the media, to ensure that public financial resources are managed transparently, efficiently, and accountably. By promoting good governance and fiscal responsibility, the project seeks to foster sustainable economic growth and improve public service delivery in the region. Working with journalists in the Pacific is crucial for several reasons. Journalists play a pivotal role in informing the public about PFM issues, government budgets, and spending decisions. Their reporting can enhance transparency and accountability by shedding light on how public funds are allocated and utilized. Investigative journalism can hold governments and public officials accountable for their financial management practices, advocating for reforms and better governance. Moreover, training journalists in PFM enhances their understanding of complex financial issues, enabling them to produce more accurate and impactful reporting, which contributes to a more informed citizenry that can engage in civic discussions. Empowering journalists also strengthens civil society by fostering a culture of dialogue and debate around public finance, encouraging citizen participation in governance processes.

So far, the Vaka Pasifika Project has engaged in various activities, including capacity-building workshops for government officials, CSOs, and journalists to improve their understanding of PFM systems and best practices. Specialized training programs have been implemented to equip journalists with the necessary skills to report effectively on PFM issues, such as budget processes and financial accountability mechanisms. The project has partnered with local media organizations to produce informative content on PFM, helping to disseminate key messages to the public and engage them in discussions about financial governance. Through advocacy and awareness campaigns, it emphasizes the importance of transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in fiscal matters. The project continually assesses its impact and effectiveness, using feedback from stakeholders to refine its approach and ensure it meets the specific needs of the Pacific context. By focusing on these areas, the Vaka Pasifika Project aims to create a more transparent, accountable, and participatory approach to public finance management in the Pacific, ultimately leading to better governance and improved outcomes for communities in the region.

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📍 Fiji

Families Struggle Amid Persistent Supply Issues and Infrastructures Challenges

Meri Radinibaravi



Meri Radinibaravi

Fiji Times

Meri Radinibaravi is an Investigative Journalist with the Fiji Times. She started with the media organization as a Junior Attachee in Editorial in 2022 and later became a permanent reporter with the News Department. In mid-2023, the Fiji Times established its Investigative Unit, and Meri, along with two senior colleagues, was selected as a pioneer of this unit while also being a member of the News Department.

She joined the Business Department in December 2023 before becoming a permanent Investigative Journalist in June this year. Meri is passionate about her work and hopes to help bring about change that will contribute to the social improvement and development of the Fijian people at the grassroots level.

Families Struggle Amid Persistent Supply Issues and Infrastructure Challenges

Student absenteeism, having to fork out extra money to pay for transportation to get water from elsewhere, and the health issues associated with the consumption of contaminated water—these are just three of the many challenges that Fijian families have had to endure due to inconsistent water supply.

Recurring water shortages, untreated water for domestic use, and an erratic supply are not just rural or maritime area problems in Fiji; they extend into urban and peri-urban areas as well. From the capital Suva to smaller settlements, residents have been feeling the strain for years.

Located about 15 kilometers from Suva city, Lami Village has been facing chronic water disruptions for years. There have even been instances where staff of The Fiji Times, residing in the Lami area, have had to leave home early in the morning to use the office lavatory because there was no water supply at their houses.

Further along the corridor from Tacirua to Colo-i-Suva, the story is no different. Despite a water pump in Tamavua servicing these areas, water issues persist for weeks, even months at a time. Manoa Rakai, a youth leader from the Vunijaina settlement in Tacirua, shared how students often miss school because they “have no water to bathe or cook their lunch.”

For families like Satya Nand’s, who live in the Savutalele settlement, the situation is dire. As a person with disabilities and with a wife suffering from diabetes, water cuts have



become an ongoing struggle. They now have to stretch their limited resources to cope with daily challenges, often involving walking long distances to collect water. The impact is even more severe in Colo-i-Suva, where 200 households went over a week without water—no water trucks arrived until the ninth day.

Sixty-two-year-old Dilaite Navuso from Colo-i-Suva shared her frustrations. “Our eldest daughter is here with her children, and having kids means we have to do laundry every day. Not only that, we need water for cooking, bathing, and my flower nursery, which has to be watered daily if there’s no rain. It’s a serious issue because water is essential for survival. We’re constantly running around looking for water, even going to other communities just to fill our containers.”

While new government strategies like the Viria Plant were meant to address these issues, communities still struggle with supply gaps. Navuso explains, “We were told that when the Viria Plant comes online, we’ll have a consistent water supply. But this hasn’t been the case.”

Statistics tell a deeper story. According to a United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) assessment on Fiji’s Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) conducted in 2022 by the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), 84.39percent of Fijian households have access to piped reticulated water, 19.1percent use rainwater, 6percent access boreholes, while 3percent still rely on wells. Despite Fiji being one of the most developed Pacific nations, 40percent of households still draw water from untreated sources.

What is the government doing? The 2024-2025 budget allocates \$135 million as a capital grant to the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), which is 3percent of the total budget. Additionally, \$6 million is allocated to the Public Works Department (PWD) for maintenance and refurbishment of public structures and water lines, and \$1 million to the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development for rural high-risk water sanitation projects. The Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources received \$5.75 million for groundwater assessment across the islands.

But these figures only scratch the surface. In earlier budgets, WAF was allocated millions to improve water distribution systems, yet aging pipelines continue to burst at alarming rates. During a tour of the Viria Water Project, WAF’s former CEO, Seru Soderberg, revealed that WAF deals with 300 leaks per 1,000 connections and 200 bursts per 100 kilometers of water mains. To meet Fiji’s growing demand, WAF needs an estimated \$0.78 billion over the next five years just to renew water and wastewater infrastructure.

The 2013 Fijian Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to “clean and safe water in adequate quantities,” but many feel this right remains unmet. The intersection of public financial management and infrastructure improvements is key. The government’s shifting responsibilities to the Public Works Department (PWD) reflect a deeper attempt to integrate water management into the wider scope of public infrastructure. This movement means aligning the goals of different departments—WAF, PWD, and others—to finally address the water issues communities like Colo-i-Suva, Tacirua, and Lami have faced for decades.

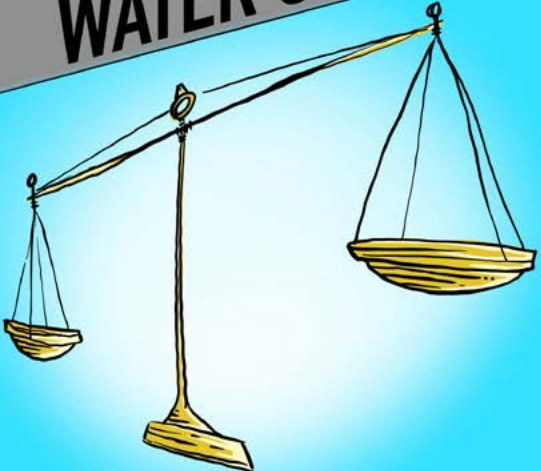
Over the years, more funds have been allocated, but what’s needed is better oversight and efficient spending to truly bring relief to struggling communities. The Fiji Water Strategy 2050 offers some hope with its focus on improving water sector sustainability, but for many families, these remain distant promises.

For now, Fijians continue to live day by day, scrambling for clean water—hoping that the next wave of reforms and the next budget will bring real, tangible improvements.

“We’ve been waiting for years,” Navuso said. “We just want water.”



WATER SUPPLY



SELECT YOUR OUTCOME...

EDUCATION

BASIC NEED

The right panel features a balance scale against a light blue background. The scale is tilted, with the right pan being much heavier than the left pan. Below the scale, the text "SELECT YOUR OUTCOME..." is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the panel, there are two rectangular boxes: the left one contains the word "EDUCATION" and the right one contains "BASIC NEED".



📍 **Fiji**

**From Addiction to Advocacy:
Sofaia Tutani's Journey and Fiji's Fight
Against Rising Drug Abuse**

Ritika Pratap



Ritika Pratap

Fiji Broadcasting Corporation

Ritika Pratap is the Deputy News Manager at the Fijian Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), where she has worked for over 19 years. She began as a cadet journalist in 2005 and quickly advanced to a full journalist role by December 2008.

Promoted to Hindi Desk Editor in July 2010, Ritika led FBC's Hindi news content and has produced news for television since FBC's TV launch in 2012. She became TV Desk Editor in January 2015 and Deputy News Manager in October 2015. Ritika is known for her balanced reporting and strong communication skills. She is also pursuing studies in International Relations and Diplomacy

From Addiction to Advocacy: Sofaia Tutani’s Journey and Fiji’s Fight Against Rising Drug Abuse

Sofaia Tutani Senikuramaisamoa, 40, first tried methamphetamine in 2015 with a group of friends at Suva’s Ratu Sukuna Park. Tutani was only 28 years old at the time. Originally from Somosomo Village in Taveuni, she moved to Tacirua in Nasinu to live with her maternal grandmother after her mother passed away and her father moved to Australia. Despite growing up in a loving home environment with her grandmother, Tutani left to live on the streets of Suva.

“I had everything at home, everything I could ever ask for,” Tutani says. “But because of peer pressure, I ended up on the streets.”

Suva’s streets became her home from the late 1990s until 2023. Now, she has four children, all of whom were conceived while she was living on the streets. Her eldest son is 22 years old, and her youngest is in third grade.

Tutani started out smoking marijuana and sniffing glue, but in 2015, methamphetamine was introduced to her and her group of friends by a European man.

“I was sitting at Sukuna Park with my friends when a European man who had come to Fiji on a yacht bought us lunch,” she recalls. “We started talking over lunch, and that’s when he told us he had drugs and asked if we’d like to try them. We all agreed, and he gave us clear crystal rocks. He said it was methamphetamine, and we got excited and took it.”

She shared further, “I lost my senses and started shaking. But after a while, it felt good. I felt energized and different. So, we started looking for this man but couldn’t find him. That’s when we met an Indo-Fijian man who said he could supply us with drugs if we gave him money. We agreed and paid him to get more.”

Tutani’s addiction to methamphetamine grew, and she resorted to prostitution to get money for drugs.



“I continued to take drugs. It got to a stage where I couldn’t sleep for 14 days straight. I started becoming violent towards my fellow street dwellers,” Tutani says.

While she was brave enough to share her story with FBC News, there are many others facing similar challenges with drug addiction, whose stories remain unheard. Drug issues have been present in Fiji for over a decade, but now they are being more openly discussed as addiction has escalated.

In July 2024, the Fiji Police Force recorded a 42percent increase in the number of illicit drug cases. They reported 188 drug cases, compared to 132 during the same period last year. Of the 188 cases, 46 were related to methamphetamine, one to cocaine, and 141 to marijuana. In August 2024, there was a 22percent reduction in drug-related cases, with a total of 143 cases—26 related to methamphetamine, five to both marijuana and methamphetamine, and 112 to marijuana.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Sakeo Raikaci, Chief of Crimes at the Fiji Police Force, says, “Policing is challenging, and every day officers risk their safety and lives in the execution of their duties. This is part of the work we signed up for, and we are committed to overcoming these challenges for our communities.”

Drugs have also infiltrated schools. Of the 163 people charged with drug-related offenses in July 2024, five were high school students.

With the rise of drug culture in Fiji and fears that it could further ruin the lives of many Fijians, the government has stepped up its efforts to tackle the issue. In the 2024–25 National Budget, the coalition government allocated \$2 million to establish a National Narcotics Bureau within the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Bureau will focus on law enforcement, investigations, prosecution, intelligence gathering, and awareness in collaboration with key agencies.

In his budget address, Fiji’s Finance Minister, Professor Biman Prasad, highlighted that the Ministry of Home Affairs had launched the Counter Narcotics Strategy 2023–2028, which focuses on seven strategic areas: demand reduction, supply reduction, harm reduction, legal reform, data collection, the establishment of a Drug Court, and partnership and international cooperation.

“You can see that this strategy addresses more than just some of the concerns,” Prasad says. “It involves prevention, reducing harm, and addressing supply and demand. So, from all angles, this strategy is going to tackle the issue head-on. Obviously, in the budget, we are providing funding.”

The coalition government’s budget also emphasizes the establishment of drug rehabilitation centers in Fiji. Investors will benefit from a 13-year tax holiday and duty-free importation of capital goods required for the centers. The government will also

provide a full tax deduction for businesses that donate to any drug rehabilitation center.

To successfully implement the Narcotics Bureau, the coalition government is working closely with the Australian government under the Vuvale Partnership.

Minister for Home Affairs Pio Tikoduadua says, “Australia is a strategic partner and a close friend to Fiji—not only because of geopolitical competition but because our relationship goes back a long way. In this effort, especially regarding drugs, our law enforcement agencies, particularly our transnational crime agencies, are working closely with Australian officials.”

He adds, “We are also sharing intelligence regarding drugs coming into Fiji and the drug trade here. We share this information with our Australian counterparts.”

However, Tikoduadua believes that in Fiji, the only area they can truly control is consumption.

“If the focus continues to be on police work or the Narcotics Bureau, all we do is pull down doors, arrest people, and bring them back. It doesn’t stop. We may catch those trying to sell drugs, but we have little effect on those consuming them,” he explains.

The government has also strengthened its collaboration with the church, the Vanua, and civil society organizations in the fight against drugs. The establishment of the \$2 million Bureau will help the government gather data to understand the extent of the drug problem in Fiji and develop a strategy to address it.

Tutani, who reached her lowest point in February 2023 and decided to quit drugs, has welcomed the government’s move to establish the Narcotics Bureau. Now working as a volunteer to help street children reunite with their families, she strongly believes the Bureau will be a beacon of hope for drug addicts.

“Many lives and families will be saved once the Bureau is fully operational,” she says.



📍 **Palau**

**Growing Wellness:
Pearl Marumoto's Mission to Elevate
Public Health in Urban Palau**

Ongerung Kambes Kesolei



Ongerung Kambes Kesolei The Ongerung Show

Ongerung Kambes Kesolei, known as Kambes, is a seasoned Palauan journalist with over 15 years of experience in print, radio, and television. From his early days as an editor at Tia Belau, Palau's oldest newspaper, to hosting The Ongerung Show and contributing to current affairs on Kausischakl, Kambes has been a pivotal voice in Palauan media.

His work spans politics, economics, and climate change, blending investigative storytelling with cultural insight to inform and inspire his community. Kambes's contributions resonate across the Pacific, fostering understanding and action on critical issues.

Growing Wellness: Pearl Marumoto's Mission to Elevate Public Health in Urban Palau

Sayuri Pearl Marumoto, a veteran in public health with close to 30 years of experience, has played a transformative role in Palau's evolving health landscape. Amid the nation's rapid urbanization, economic shifts have disrupted traditional ways of life, leading to growing health concerns among families who increasingly depend on multiple income sources to keep up with living costs, often without adequate support systems in place. Pearl, as she's affectionately known, goes beyond just observing these trends—she is actively creating solutions to address them.

Through her work with local governments, health professionals, and Palau Community College, Pearl is spearheading initiatives to improve the well-being of the most vulnerable persons. Currently, she manages a pivotal research project at the Belau Wellness Center that aims to enhance support for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities. Under a grant from the Asian Development Bank's Covid-19 Response for the Affected Poor and Vulnerable, this project has launched a service survey of homebound households and introduced innovative solutions such as urban gardening to boost food security.

The urban gardening initiative, tailored to Palau's urban environment, has made a noticeable impact: 54% of the 184 surveyed households are now participating. Through partnerships with local institutions, garden kits are provided to homes, containing essential materials like soil and green leafy vegetable seeds, allowing recipients to grow fresh produce in as little as five weeks. This initiative is yielding multiple benefits: 45% of caregivers in these households are directly involved in gardening, gaining physical activity, while 67% of families consume their harvest, citing cost savings, nutrition, and easy access to fresh vegetables as top benefits.

Pearl's seven years of hands-on involvement in these communities has highlighted the need for broader support networks. Many families, despite having employed members, are struggling to make ends meet. For Pearl, the well-being of people must be prioritized alongside environmental goals. She urges lawmakers and relevant government agencies to implement policies that raise living standards for Palauans, emphasizing urban health initiatives that address essential needs like housing quality and access to sanitation.



Her focus on urban health promotion includes advocating for standardized housing regulations to ensure that every household has access to safe and hygienic living conditions. She also sees urban gardening as a vital policy solution for increasing food security in densely populated areas. By addressing these needs, Pearl envisions a healthier, more resilient community where the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly the homebound, are met through a multi-faceted and multi-pronged government coordinated policy efforts and practical interventions.

Pearl Marumoto's work is more than a career—it's a call to action for public health transformation in Palau by the government. Her advocacy for urban health and targeted interventions offers a model for addressing the challenges facing Palau's growing urban poor population. Through her initiatives, she is making a tangible difference in building a foundation for improved quality of life across the community.





📍 **Papua New Guinea**

**More Awareness Needed for
PNG's SME Focus**

Dale Luma



Dale Luma Post Courier

Dale Luma, a distinguished professional from Papua New Guinea. Dale currently serves as the Business Editor at Post Courier, a leading publication under South Pacific Post Ltd, a subsidiary of News Corp. He holds a bachelor's degree in Literature, with a minor in Journalism and Public Relations, from the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), where he completed his studies in 2018.

Dale's career in journalism began in 2019 when he joined The National newspaper as a business reporter. Over the course of three years, he covered a broad spectrum of business sectors, including banking, mining, petroleum, and agriculture, honing his expertise in economic reporting.

In 2023, Dale took on the role of Business Editor at Post Courier, where he is responsible for overseeing the paper's business coverage. His commitment to delivering insightful, accurate, and engaging stories has made him a key figure in educating the public about significant economic developments in Papua New Guinea. Through his work, Dale plays a pivotal role in shaping the understanding of the business landscape in his country.

More Awareness Needed for PNG's SME Focus

Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) development in Papua New Guinea has seen significant progress, with new start-ups emerging and existing businesses expanding. This growth has been largely facilitated by the Papua New Guinean Government's annual budget allocation of K200 million—an initiative championed by Prime Minister James Marape.

Since 2020, the government has partnered with two financial institutions for its annual SME loan programme: BSP Financial Group Limited (BSP) and the National Development Bank (NDB). However, challenges remain in educating citizens about accessing these funds for their business ventures.

State Enterprise Minister William Duma, who oversees the National Development Bank, recently highlighted the merit-based nature of the loan programme. "Since the MSME Credit Facility was initiated by the Marape Government in 2020, with K100 million to BSP, K80 million to NDB, and K20 million to the Department of Commerce, we have witnessed numerous success stories from national small businessmen and women who have borrowed and grown their enterprises," Mr. Duma said.

He emphasised the programme's commitment to transparency: "Unlike in the past where loans were given mostly to friends and cronies, strict controls ensure loans are now given on merit only to our people." The NDB currently maintains a balance of K51 million available for applications, with special allocations for entrepreneurs in Bougainville.



Programme Performance

As of June 2024, the programme's achievements include:

- Total allocation to NDB since 2020: K200 million
- Amount lent to MSMEs: K92.7 million
- Number of businesses supported: 854
- Remaining funds (after administration fees): K102 million
- Default rate: Less than 1% of the loan portfolio

The MSME Credit Facility offers loans at 4% per annum through the NDB, featuring less onerous repayment conditions. Recent improvements made in March 2024 have strengthened NDB's position to become PNG's preferred MSME bank.

Call for Enhanced Education

Des Yaninen, president of the Micro Small Medium Enterprise (MSME) Council of PNG, while commending the government's initiative, has called for additional support measures:

"We appreciate the government's commitment, but educational and informative programmes are essential to help citizens understand the loan application process," Yaninen stated. "We urge the NDB to streamline loan processing times—applicants need quick, decisive responses rather than weeks of waiting."

He added that the programme has been "a game-changer" for small businesses but emphasised the need for:

- Better educational resources about the application process
- Streamlined loan processing
- Enhanced accessibility for average citizens

The Marape Government's focus on MSME development continues to show promise, with the programme's low default rate indicating its sustainability. However, the success of this initiative will largely depend on improving public understanding and access to these financial resources.



📍 **Solomon Islands**

**Gheghende Village Farmers Struggle
with Infrastructure Woes to Sustain
Pineapple Trade**

Eliza Kukutu



Eliza Kukutu

Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation

Eliza Kukutu is a multi-media journalist at the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) and currently serves as the Sub-Editor for the organization. She graduated from the University of the South Pacific in 2021 with a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and Politics and started at SIBC as a News Reporter right after graduation. Eliza has covered local, regional, and international events for their radio, TV, and online platforms.

She has experience covering stories related to climate change, health, politics, gender equality, the environment, court, and economics. Eliza actively contributes to SIBC's radio current affairs programs.

Gheghende Village Farmers Struggle with Infrastructure Woes to Sustain Pineapple Trade

Gheghende Village in East Central Guadalcanal, known as the pineapple hub of Guadalcanal Province, continues to face mounting challenges due to deteriorating road conditions. For years, pineapple farming has sustained the local economy, with farmers like Flincy Ravea contributing to Honiara Central Market's produce supply. However, worsening infrastructure has made it difficult for farmers to bring their crops to market, exacerbating transportation costs and food security concerns.

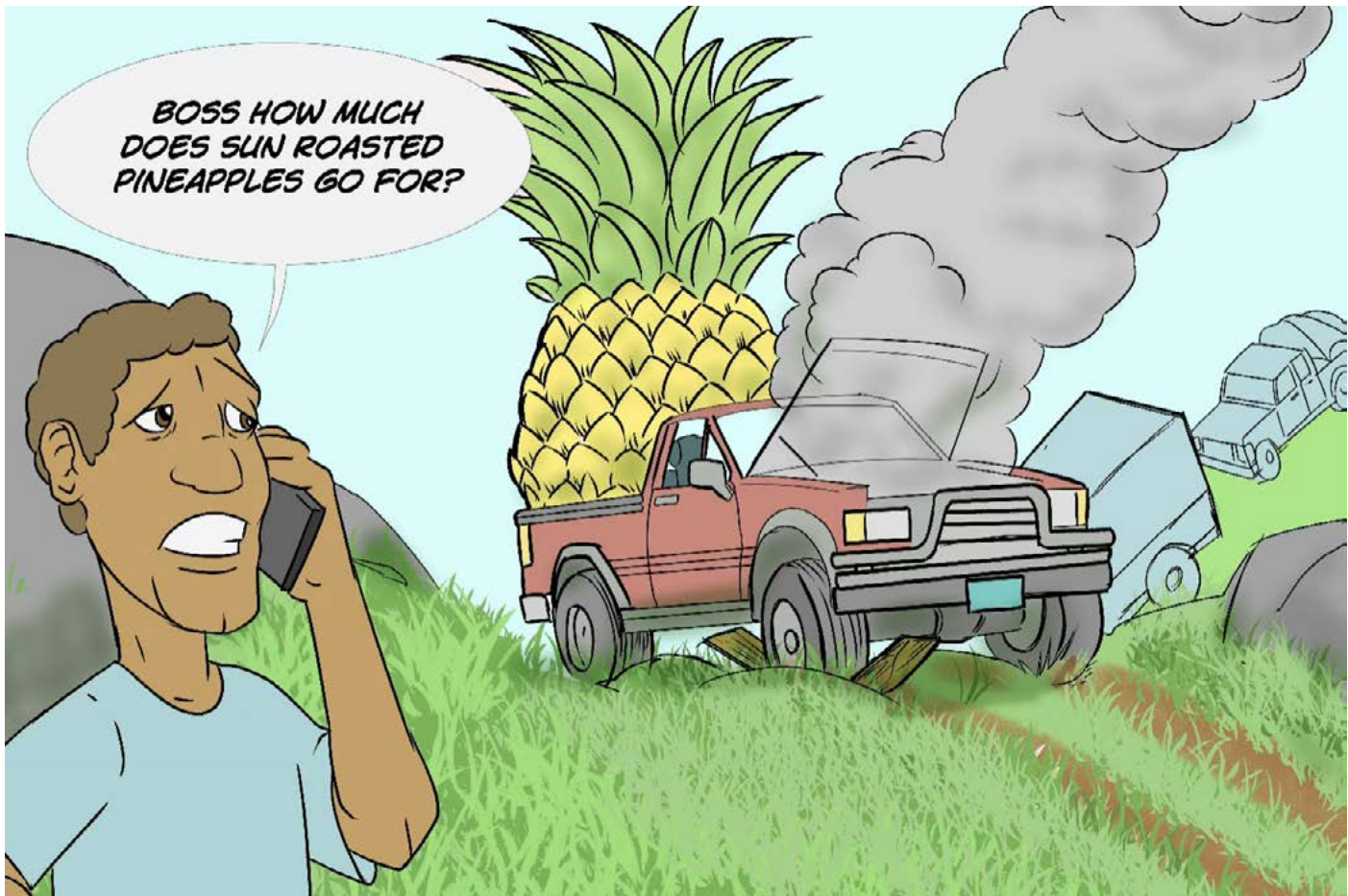
"We now have to pay SBD 200 per drum of pineapples for transportation, compared to SBD 150 when the roads were better. Hiring a four-wheel-drive vehicle costs us around SBD 2000 for each trip to Honiara, which is a massive strain on our earnings," explains Flincy. This hike in transportation expenses reflects the broader economic strain on small-scale farmers as the government wrestles with its infrastructure funding challenges.

This struggle is echoed by Shirley Shaghapu, another farmer, who emphasizes the safety risks posed by the poor road conditions. "It's become dangerous, especially for women and children. Just recently, we had to jump off a truck and push it through the mud," she said. Such stories underscore the everyday hardships faced by rural communities, who are left to tackle failing infrastructure on their own.

The National Budget for 2024, passed in December last year, allocated over SBD 300 million toward infrastructure development, including road maintenance and rehabilitation. However, as these funds are disbursed, provincial areas like East Central Guadalcanal remain on the margins of attention. The road from Gheghende Village, constructed years ago by logging companies, still isn't registered, disqualifying it from provincial road funding.

"We've been trying to fix the road ourselves using stones and timber, but this is not enough," said Micah Job, a community elder.

Hon. Lazarus Rina, the newly elected Member of Parliament for the Constituency, noted that funding delays continue to hinder road repairs. "I've acquired fuel, but we still need machines to get the work done. We're waiting on the release of Constituency Development Funds (CDF) to purchase the necessary equipment," Hon. Rina told SIBC News. Constituency Development Funds, drawn from the annual national budget and donor contributions, are designed to support rural development priorities.



Unfortunately, as highlighted in Parliament by the Minister of Public Service, Hon. John Jnr Tuhaika, recruitment delays for constituency officers have held up the disbursement of these funds.

These delays are further complicating efforts to improve rural infrastructure, which is key to unlocking economic potential for communities like Gheghende. The Solomon Islands Government's budget for 2024 prioritizes infrastructure development, particularly in rural areas, but operational and logistical challenges have slowed its rollout.

As the nation waits for action, Gheghende's farmers remain hopeful that the promised road repairs will arrive soon, reducing transportation costs and enabling them to regain access to their main markets. "We depend on our pineapples, and the road's condition affects us all," says Flincy, voicing a sentiment shared by many in her community.







📍 **Solomon Islands**

**Temotuans Angered by
Poor Shipping Services**

Ian McDonald Kaukui



Ian McDonald Kaukui

Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation

Ian McDonald Kaukui is a senior journalist currently working at the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC). He graduated with a Certificate in Journalism and Media Studies from the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), now known as Solomon Islands National University (SINU).

Ian is a dedicated reporter with a passion for educating and informing the public about critical issues such as climate change, economics, politics, education, and sports. Additionally, he actively contributes to advocating for gender issues and the rights of women and girls. His hobbies include watching football and staying updated with TV news.

Temotuans Angered by Poor Shipping Services

The continuous poor shipping services to the outermost eastern part of the Solomon Islands, known as Temotu Province, have caused immense hardships for its people.

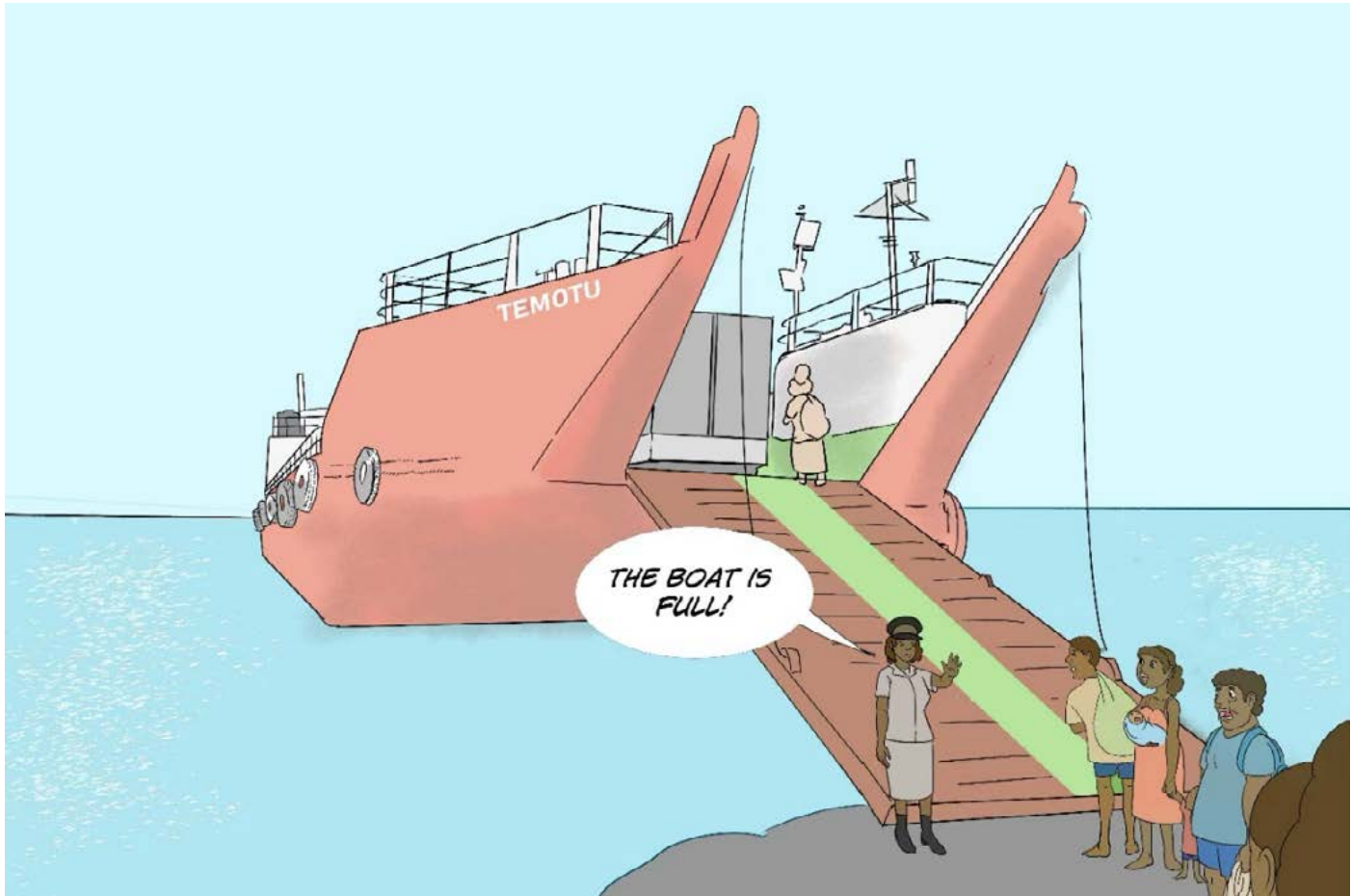
With a population of around 30,000, Temotu Province is highly dependent on shipping services as the only reliable means of transport to and from the capital, Honiara. Over the past 20 years, shipping services in Temotu have deteriorated steadily, leaving families in Honiara unable to visit their home province.

This issue has pushed many travelers to rely on chartered landing craft vessels, which are not authorized by the maritime authority for transporting passengers due to safety concerns. As a result, thousands of Temotuans have been denied the opportunity to travel home or come to Honiara for essential business. The real human cost is felt most by teachers, students, and farmers who depend on these services for their livelihoods.

Without proper shipping services, more than 50 teachers remain stranded in Honiara, unable to return to their schools. Some have seen their salaries seized by the Ministry of Education for not attending classes, creating a ripple effect that disrupts both education and community stability in the province. Parents and students who have worked hard to succeed in national exams are equally trapped, unable to further their studies or transport goods for sale in the capital.

“Our children’s education is at risk,” says Naison Naive, a concerned chief from Utupua Island. “Some of our kids are in town waiting to return home, while others who should be pursuing secondary or tertiary education remain in the province because there’s no transport.”





THE BOAT IS FULL!

Mr. Naïve called on the leaders of Temotu Province to quickly address the transport difficulties by chartering a passenger vessel for those stranded passengers both in Honiara and those in the province.

The issue is compounded by the high freight rates imposed by the few charter vessels still running cargo-only services to Temotu. According to John Tally, a local from the province, the high charges imposed by charterers are slowly strangling small businesses.

“If we want LC Temotu to be sustainable, the freight charges need to be reviewed. Only then will people feel confident about doing business with LC Temotu,” he said.

The rising cost of freight has created a chain reaction, causing the prices of everyday goods to skyrocket, leaving Temotuan families struggling to make ends meet. Mary Inoni, a mother of six, laments the impact on her family’s daily life. “We can’t afford basic necessities anymore because the prices have doubled. Those who bring in the goods are charging us higher prices to recover the freight costs.”

Local businessman Erick Kalae echoed these concerns, explaining how the soaring freight costs have forced him to raise prices just to stay afloat. “With the high costs imposed by the charterers, I have no choice but to increase prices. It’s the only way to cover my expenses and keep my business going,” he said.

The shipping crisis reflects the broader issue of poor public finance management, as local communities bear the brunt of delayed or mismanaged government support. In 2022, the former national government led by then-Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare provided SBD\$5 million to Temotu Province to purchase a vessel. The Temotu Provincial Government opted to buy a landing craft from Indonesia. However, this decision has frustrated many in the province, as the vessel is unsuited for carrying passengers—Temotu’s greatest need.

Former Premier Clay Forau explained that the choice was made due to a lack of sufficient funds for a larger passenger and cargo vessel. “We went for the landing craft because it could generate revenue, and from there, we hoped to buy a proper passenger and cargo vessel,” he said.

While the intent was clear, the outcome has been disappointing. Premier Stanley Tehi acknowledged that the new ship would not solve the province’s immediate concerns. However, he said the provincial government must move forward with

what they have, hoping that the vessel will start generating income that can be reinvested in a more suitable solution.

“People are still frustrated because the vessel isn’t for passengers, but we need to start somewhere. Once we’ve made enough money, we can buy the passenger vessel everyone is waiting for,” Tehi said.

The entire ordeal has cost approximately SBD\$13 million, pulling funds from several sources, including the Prime Minister’s Office (SBD\$5 million), Temotu Youth Center (SBD\$3 million), the Ministry of Rural Development (SBD\$4 million), and financial assistance from the People’s Republic of China.

However, the community remains skeptical. Hon. Stephen Kumi, Member of Parliament for Nende Constituency, emphasized the need for greater collaboration between the province’s three MPs and the provincial government to ensure that funds are managed responsibly and in the best interest of the people.

“The government has already provided financial assistance to purchase the vessel; now it’s up to the provincial government to make sure it’s run efficiently,” he said.

Simon Salopuka, another concerned Temotuan, on one of the Temotu social media Facebook pages called for the immediate establishment of a neutral, interim committee to manage Temotu Shipping Services and ensure transparency and accountability.

“Politicians, both provincial and national, must stay neutral unless there’s a good reason to intervene. Let’s be accountable to our people and ensure this service benefits them,” Salopuka said.

Meanwhile, Temotu Provincial Secretary Philip Tuplo said that despite the newly bought vessel already arriving in the country, there are a few things that need to be done before the vessel can start its services.

“A few issues still need to be sorted out with the LC Temotu. First, there is a leakage at the bottom of the vessel where an assessment is currently ongoing. Secondly, we need to clear all the items with duties on the boat with customs as well as with the shipping agency. Then it will be taken to dry dock for patching the leakage, and the ship will be ready to make its first trip to Temotu,” he said.

He said the current engineers and captains who brought the vessel home will still be maintained.

The Temotu shipping saga underscores a critical point in public finance management: it's not just about funding, but about how those funds are managed and how decisions affect the lives of everyday citizens. While investments are being made, the real question is whether these efforts will meet the needs of the people, or if the community will continue to suffer from poor decision-making and mismanagement.

Temotu Province is represented by three Members of Parliament in the National Government and 17 Members of the Provincial Assembly, headed by the Premier and his executive.



A colorful abstract graphic at the top of the page, featuring splashes of blue, green, yellow, orange, and red on a light beige background.

📍 **Tuvalu**

A Lifeline for Funafala: Bridging Health Gaps through Public Finance

Yvette Tepaula D'Unienville



Yvette Tepaula D'Unienville Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation

Yvette Tepaula D'Unienville is a senior journalist at Tuvalu Broadcasting Corporation with over a decade of experience at Radio Tuvalu. She earned her BA in Journalism, Language, and Literature from the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 2014 and was honored with the PINA Best Pasifika News Story Award.

Yvette extensively covers topics such as fisheries, climate change, meteorology, environment, and disaster-related stories, as well as health, education, sports, and trade. Her goal is to highlight these issues to foster positive changes in Tuvalu.

A Lifeline for Funafala: Bridging Health Gaps through Public Finance

People residing on Funafala islet will no longer have to worry about traveling to the main island if they get sick or attend weekly clinic sessions for people with diabetes and other non-communicable diseases.

A long-awaited clinic has finally been included in the budget for the Ministry of Health for the year 2024 - 2025, and the Government will see to it that a nurse will be stationed there and will equip the clinic with necessary medicines.

“Since we started to settle at Funafala islet decades ago and till now, we still have to travel from Funafala islet to the main island of Funafuti to get medical attention when someone in the family is sick,” said Mr. Ianuali.



Families on Funafala bring relatives to visit their islet of Funafala.

The Ianuali family was among the first to move from Funafuti to Funafala decades ago, establishing their own home there. More families moved to Funafala during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the then-government exercised relocation as one of the preventative measures to reduce the risks of the pandemic.

Under the measure, people from the outer islands who were residing in the capital could return to their home islands, and most people of Funafuti Island who lived in the main settlement moved to the islets of Funafuti, mainly Funafala, Papaelise, and Fualefeke. The biggest number, however, fled to Funafala islet.

There, Mr. Ianuali runs a small fishing business in which he brings his fish to the main settlement to support their children’s

education, provide daily meals, and contribute to community and church activities.

“We decided it was better to reside at Funafala, where we can cut down on expenses as there are lots of local food like germinated nuts, coconuts, and we can get fish easily from the reef to eat,” explained Mrs. Ianuali. “Another reason was that we had space to grow a garden and plant many local fruit trees for food, as neither of us were employed, and the only money we got is from fishing. On the main island, we lived in an extended family under one roof, so you can imagine.”

Recalling a painful memory, she continued, “I remember very well when my children were small and if sick, we had to travel to the main island to see a doctor at the Princess Margaret Hospital. When the weather was too rough to travel by dinghy, we had to wait until the weather improved to take our dinghy and go to the main settlement to see the doctor.”

Now, with her children grown and having their own families, Mrs. Ianuali faces new challenges. “My grandchildren want to stay with us at the islet, but I always tell them to stay on the capital so they can get to the hospital easily.”

The journey from Funafala to Funafuti crosses two big channels, one being the main route for vessels. “It is suicidal to travel there during bad weather,” she emphasized. However, relief is on the horizon.

Melesia Aso, Secretary for the Funafala Kaumotu or Funafala residents, expressed her gratitude: “I am thankful, as a hospital or clinic is the most important facility to have in any place where people live. Most of the people on Funafala are elderly women and men or small children who live with grandparents.”

She said, “The need for a clinic on Funafala is justifiable as it’s hard for them to travel by boat to the main island. Some suffer from diabetes and high blood pressure and miss clinic days due to travel difficulties. A pre-school had also been established on the islet, so the small children on the islet no longer go to the main island to attend preschool.”

“At present, I am like a nurse—anyone who gets sick on the islet comes to me. If I have Panadol, that’s all I can give. So, when I come to the main island, I have to make sure I get a lot of Panadols to be ready for anyone who gets sick on the islet.”

Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Mr. Natano Elisala, said the number of families residing on Funafala islet gradually increased to more than fifty people when relocation was encouraged during the COVID period, and some decided to stay there while others returned to the main settlement after COVID-19.

The initiative to establish a clinic on Funafala islet first emerged during the Covid pandemic under the previous government of Prime Minister the Honorable Kausea Natano, who hailed from the island of Funafuti. However, it never materialized during their time.

In his first press conference after taking office earlier this year, Prime Minister Honorable Feleti Teoo announced the establishment of a clinic on Funafala. According to information, the delay in establishing the clinic on Funafala in the past years was due to the fact that it wasn't budgeted for, but when relocation took place during Covid-19, it became necessary.

Hon. Feleti said, "The clinic will be equipped with necessary medicines, a refrigerator for proper storage, solar power, and a stationed nurse. This initiative will be included in the Health Budget, to address a long-standing gap."

The Ianuali's family, along with others, expressed their relief at finally seeing this vital health service come to their community. "This clinic is not just a building," said Mrs. Ianuali, "it's our lifeline."

At present, most of the families who relocated to Funafala remain there.

Mrs. Melesia said, "A nurse is a good start, but a doctor would be more effective if there is an emergency, considering the elderly population on our islet and other diseases that require a doctor and more effective drugs that a nurse cannot prescribe."

Mr. Ianuali's family is the first family on the islet to have a boat; other families are not so fortunate and depend on Mr. Ianuali for transportation to the capital to visit the hospital.

Mrs. Melesia recalled another tragic incident: "I remember one elderly man with a leg infection who couldn't go to the hospital, probably because they didn't have a boat. After a few days, I heard he had passed away."

The 2024-2025 Government budget was presented for Parliament endorsement in June this year, and the Ministry of Health has the second largest provision in the budget.

"The improvement of clinics on the outer islands is budgeted for, and it also covers the clinic for Funafala and other expenses for the clinic," added Elisala.

The building is already there to be used as a clinic, but there are other preparations to be done, such as electricity for the clinic, perhaps solar power, according to Elisala.



In the 2024-2025 National Budget, Tuvalu's Ministry of Health has announced the allocation of resources for the Funafala clinic as part of the broader Tuvalu Te Kete development plan. The Ministry of Health's overall budget has been reduced this year; however, the government is strategically investing in key areas to enhance healthcare delivery, particularly for the outer islands.

The maintenance allocation for healthcare facilities has increased significantly by over 244%, highlighting a strong commitment to improving infrastructure, especially for the new clinic in Funafala. The staffing budget has risen by approximately 32%, which is expected to create more opportunities for healthcare workers, including those who will serve at the new clinic.

The Funafala clinic is set to improve healthcare access for remote communities, a core goal of Tuvalu Te Kete, which focuses on ensuring equitable access to essential services across all islands of Tuvalu. The increased maintenance and staffing budgets reflect this commitment, offering better facilities and workforce expansion for the country's health sector.



📍 **Vanuatu**

**Looking Beyond Budget Allocations:
The Reality of Maternal Care Services
in Vanuatu**

Josephleen Tarianga



Josepheen Tarianga
Sista and the Communications and Advocacy Coordinator
of the We Rise Coalition

Josepheen Tarianga is the Acting Program Manager of Sista and the Communications and Advocacy Coordinator of the We Rise Coalition. Sista is a feminist organization based in Vanuatu, and the We Rise Coalition is a regional feminist coalition dedicated to amplifying diverse Pacific women's voices and advancing gender equality and human rights in the Pacific. Josepheen has a background in journalism, having worked in the newsroom at the Daily Post, and continues her work in media at Sista.

Sista aims to inform, empower, and advocate for issues affecting women in Vanuatu through media communications and the arts. She is passionate about advancing gender equality in Vanuatu and the involvement of women and youth in civic processes. Josepheen is currently pursuing a combined law and arts program at the University of the South Pacific.

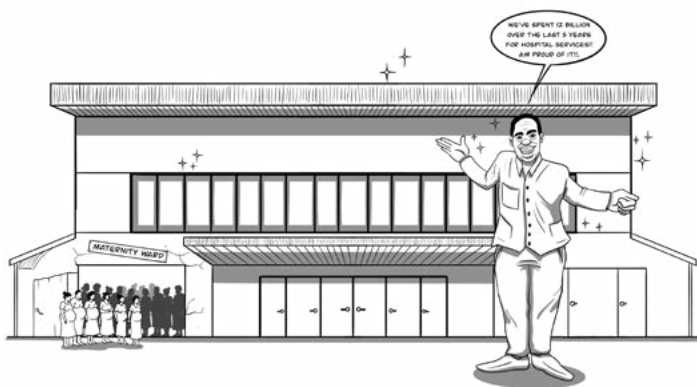
Looking Beyond Budget Allocations: The Reality of Maternal Care Services in Vanuatu

In Port Vila, the bustling capital of Vanuatu, Vila Central Hospital (VCH) is overwhelmed with the demand for maternal care. Pregnant women sit for hours, waiting for routine checkups, while the maternity ward bustles with hurried deliveries. The process is swift and impersonal: one woman is rushed out, and another is rushed in. In the midst of labor and pain, they share cramped, often unsanitary facilities. With over VT 12 billion allocated to hospital services over the past five years, the reality at VCH remains starkly underwhelming for mothers-to-be.

Rosina Kaimbang, a first-time mother from Lelepa Island, recalls her experience vividly. Living a boat and bus ride away from the hospital, she had to make this journey repeatedly for her checkups. During one visit, her blood tests revealed a potential complication. After numerous attempts to secure an appointment with a doctor, her worries were finally laid to rest—but not without significant stress. Concerned about the inadequate resources at her local clinic, Rosina decided that VCH was her safest option for delivering her baby.

Three trips to VCH later, she finally gave birth. “Each time I went, I had to wait for hours until someone was available to see me. There weren’t many staff, and I could see they were overwhelmed. I understood that, but it felt like they were just cycling women through—deliver and out—without the care or attention you need, especially as a first-time mother. Luckily, my mother-in-law was there to advocate for me. If you don’t speak up, you’re not a priority,” Rosina explained.

She also pointed out a serious shortage of health workers. “When staff are overworked and underpaid, they simply don’t have the heart to properly care for the women. Better





pay and working conditions are essential, and more beds are desperately needed. Many women are discharged far too early because there just isn't enough space."

Rosina wasn't the only one concerned about the conditions. Hygiene, in particular, was alarming. "There was blood everywhere," she said—a concern echoed by Christiane Crowby Lini, a mother of two, whose experience with VCH was also far from ideal.

"I had my first baby in 2018. During the stitching, they accidentally left gauze inside me. I lived with it for a week before the infection and fever set in, forcing me back to the hospital to have it removed," Christiane recounted.

L.M., a mother of three, was left with long-term health issues due to what she believes was a lack of care during her delivery. "The midwife told me to push when I wasn't ready. Afterward, I

felt terrible, but they kept telling me it was normal. Weeks later, when the pain became unbearable, I was put on medication. If the midwife had been more patient, I think I could have avoided all of this."

These are just a few of the countless stories of women navigating the maternal healthcare system in Vanuatu. All three women agree on one thing: maternal care services need urgent reform. The government, through Society Pillar 3 of the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2016-2030, has committed to improving healthcare. However, for maternal care specifically, this promise is yet to translate into real, meaningful change.

Dr. Boniface Damutalau, a gynecologist and obstetrician at VCH, outlined the maternal services offered by the hospital. These include the antenatal clinic, family planning clinic, and the gynecology clinic. Mothers are categorized into high-risk and low-risk groups after their first antenatal visit, with group counseling sessions offered to first-time mothers when resources permit. "We used to conduct more walk-throughs of the maternity facilities," Dr. Boniface noted, "but with the current staffing shortages, we've had to scale back.

The antenatal clinic operates from Monday to Friday, with three low-risk clinics a week, each seeing about 60 women, and one high-risk clinic per week, serving about 30 women. This adds up to over 200 women seeking antenatal services every week. Although some low-risk cases are managed by area clinics, all mothers nearing full term are referred back to VCH for a final checkup before delivery.

According to Dr. Boniface, the two main challenges are staffing and bed capacity. “The population is growing, but our resources aren’t keeping pace. During peak times, we have no choice but to discharge patients quickly to make space. It’s not ideal, but it’s the reality we face.”

Another significant issue is the lack of training opportunities for healthcare staff. “We used to hold regular refresher courses on best practices, but the last one was over two years ago due to funding cuts and staffing shortages,” Dr. Boniface said.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Boniface believes the situation is slowly improving, with more young people entering the healthcare field. But this small victory is not enough. The government must recognize the critical need for better maternal care services. Budget allocations alone won’t suffice. The funds must be used to address the real issues on the ground. Only then can the women of Vanuatu receive the care they need—care that allows them to endure pregnancy, labor, and delivery with dignity and respect.



Rosina and Allana Kaimbang

Illustrators

Public Finance Management is a complex subject that directly impacts the lives of every citizen. To make this information more accessible and engaging, particularly for Pacific Island nations, illustrations can be a powerful tool.

By breaking down complex financial concepts into simpler terms, visuals can enhance understanding and promote transparency. They can also capture attention, making information more memorable. For Pacific Island nations, with their unique challenges like limited resources and susceptibility to natural disasters, accessible PFM information is crucial.

Illustrations can empower citizens to participate in decision-making, raise public awareness about important issues, and ultimately strengthen oversight institutions. By working closely with government officials and communication experts, illustrators can create visually appealing and informative materials that resonate with Pacific audiences.

When creating these illustrations, it's essential to keep them simple, relevant, culturally sensitive, and accessible to people of all literacy levels. By combining the expertise of governments, communicators, and illustrators, we can harness the power of visuals to make PFM more transparent, accountable, and accessible to Pacific people.

The Project has engaged three illustrators who have assisted in breaking down complex PFM information.



Ratu Naiqama

Ratu Naiqama is a self-taught digital artist who has honed his craft in graphics and illustrations since childhood. With over five years of professional experience, he blends the rich cultural heritage and storytelling traditions of his Fijian upbringing into his work.

His digital art and comic creations are designed to resonate with contemporary audiences while celebrating traditional roots.



Honson Chan

Honson Chan, a first-generation Chinese Fijian, was born in Lautoka and raised in Nadi. He is an alumnus of Mt Saint Mary's and Swami Vivekananda College.

A qualified Electrical Technician by trade, Honson worked with Energy Fiji Limited before pursuing his lifelong passion for illustration. He takes pride in creating art that brings joy to others and currently resides in Suva with his wife and two sons.



Robea Jeffery Daniel

Robea Jeffery Daniel is an accomplished mural and graphic artist from Vanuatu. Formerly an art tutor and teaching assistant, Robea chose to transition to full-time freelancing earlier this year to fully immerse himself in his passion.

His vibrant and detailed artworks bring life and meaning to public spaces and commissioned projects, showcasing his creative vision and dedication.

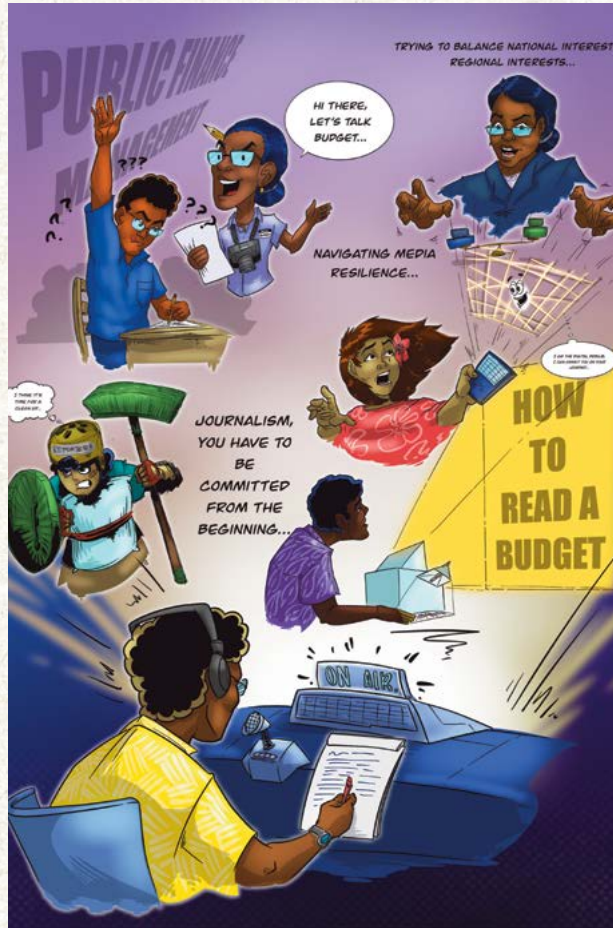
Conclusion

Journalism is a powerful force for transparency and accountability in the Pacific, playing a pivotal role in raising public awareness about issues that directly affect the lives of its people. As these stories have shown, journalists are uniquely positioned to illuminate the challenges and opportunities within public finance management by telling the human stories behind the numbers. From Tuvalu to the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu to Fiji, these journalists have bridged the gap between financial policies and the everyday realities of Pacific communities.

The Vaka Pasifika Project recognizes the essential role of the media in fostering good governance and is committed to strengthening the capacity of journalists across the region. By providing training, resources, and ongoing support, the project aims to equip Pacific journalists with the tools they need to effectively investigate, analyze, and report on PFM issues. This collaboration not only empowers journalists but also helps to build a culture of accountability and citizen engagement in PFM, reinforcing that public funds are, indeed, the people's money.

Moving forward, continued partnership with Pacific journalists will be vital in improving PFM practices. Through their reporting, journalists can bring to light inefficiencies, advocate for policy improvements, and highlight the impact of well-managed public resources on communities. The stories they share inspire trust, encourage informed civic participation, and remind policymakers that financial decisions should prioritize the welfare of all citizens.

As the project evolves, it will remain focused on enhancing journalistic capacity to uphold transparency and accountability, ensuring that PFM practices in the Pacific are responsive to the needs of its people. By working hand-in-hand with the media, we are building a foundation for a more resilient, equitable, and financially accountable Pacific region. Together, we can continue to amplify the voices of those who may otherwise go unheard and create lasting, meaningful change.





European Union



VAKA PASIFIKA PROJECT