



*This Project is executed by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund,
with financing from the GEF, implementation support by UNEP
and technical support from the CMS Dugong MoU Secretariat.*

Country presentation: Vanuatu

2nd Executive Project Steering Committee meeting

1-2 November, 2016

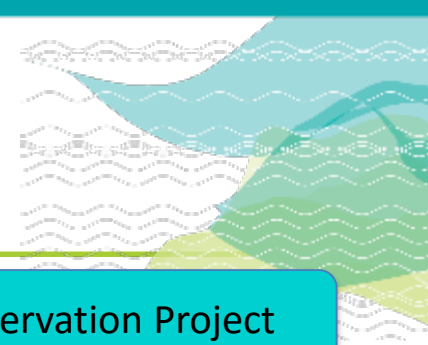
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Key national objectives in Vanuatu



- Update the information on dugongs and their seagrass habitat by conducting the CMS developed dugong catch / by-catch questionnaire throughout Vanuatu. Collect at least 250 responses.
- Create a map of 'hotspots' for dugong and seagrass conservation with the results of the survey.
- Conduct at least 10 awareness workshops within these hotspot areas.
- Conservation actions for dugongs and seagrass incorporated into Community Conservation Area (CCA) Management Plans in at least 50% of the hot spot areas.
- National Plan for Dugong and Seagrass Conservation

Project implementation structure



VU2: National Facilitating Committee for the GEF Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project

National Facilitating Committee (NFC)

Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC)
Vanuatu Department of Fisheries (VFD)
Department of Tourism (DoT)
Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS)
Wan Smol Bag Theater (SMB)
Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS)

National Facilitator

VESS

Oversees

VU1: To develop recommendations for a National Plan for conservation of dugongs and their seagrass habitats, identify areas important for dugongs and seagrasses conservation in Vanuatu and to raise awareness about dugongs and seagrasses in these area.

Implementing Partner
VESS

Project Partner
VFD

Project Partner
DEPC

Vanuatu achievements



VU1 – Employment of Project Scientists

- Douglas Koran is a Ni-Vanuatu national and graduated this year from USP in Fiji with a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Science. Douglas started work on the 13th September as the Project Scientist.
- Ajay Aurdere, also a local Marine Science graduate has also been employed part time to assist with the data entry and surveys.

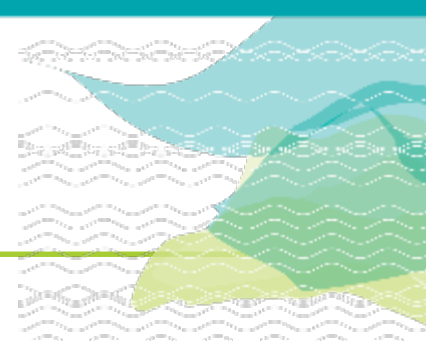
VU2 -National Facilitating Committee (NFC)

- The NFC was formed at a meeting on 23rd of September 2015.
- Members of the committee are from government departments and conservation NGOs
- VESS was appointed the National Facilitator for the project in Vanuatu.
- The NFC has met 3 times: on 14th December in 2015 and on 29th March and 27th October in 2016.

VU1 - Equipment

- A computer printer and a camera have been purchase for this project.

Vanuatu achievements



VU1 – Dugong catch / by-catch questionnaire

Questionnaire survey adapted to Vanuatu

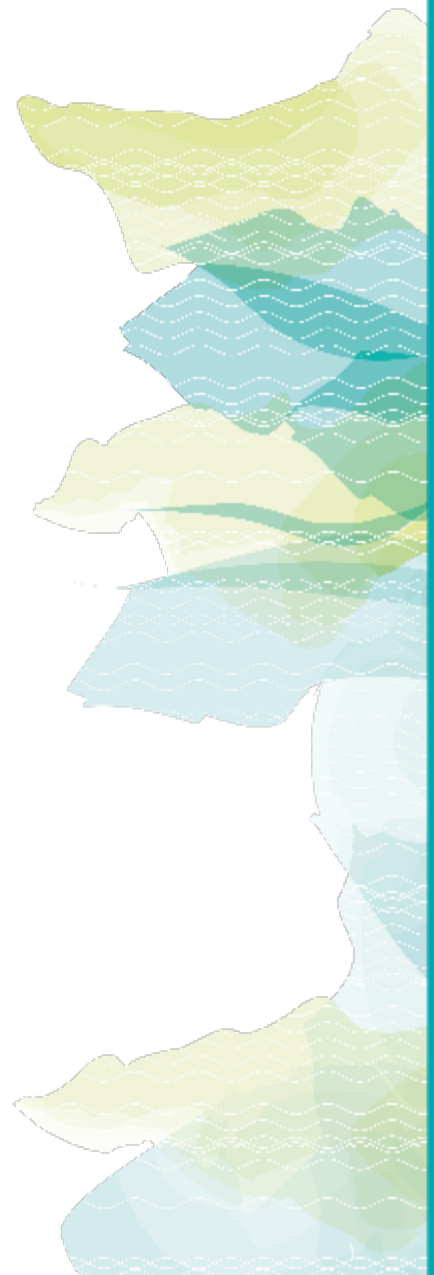
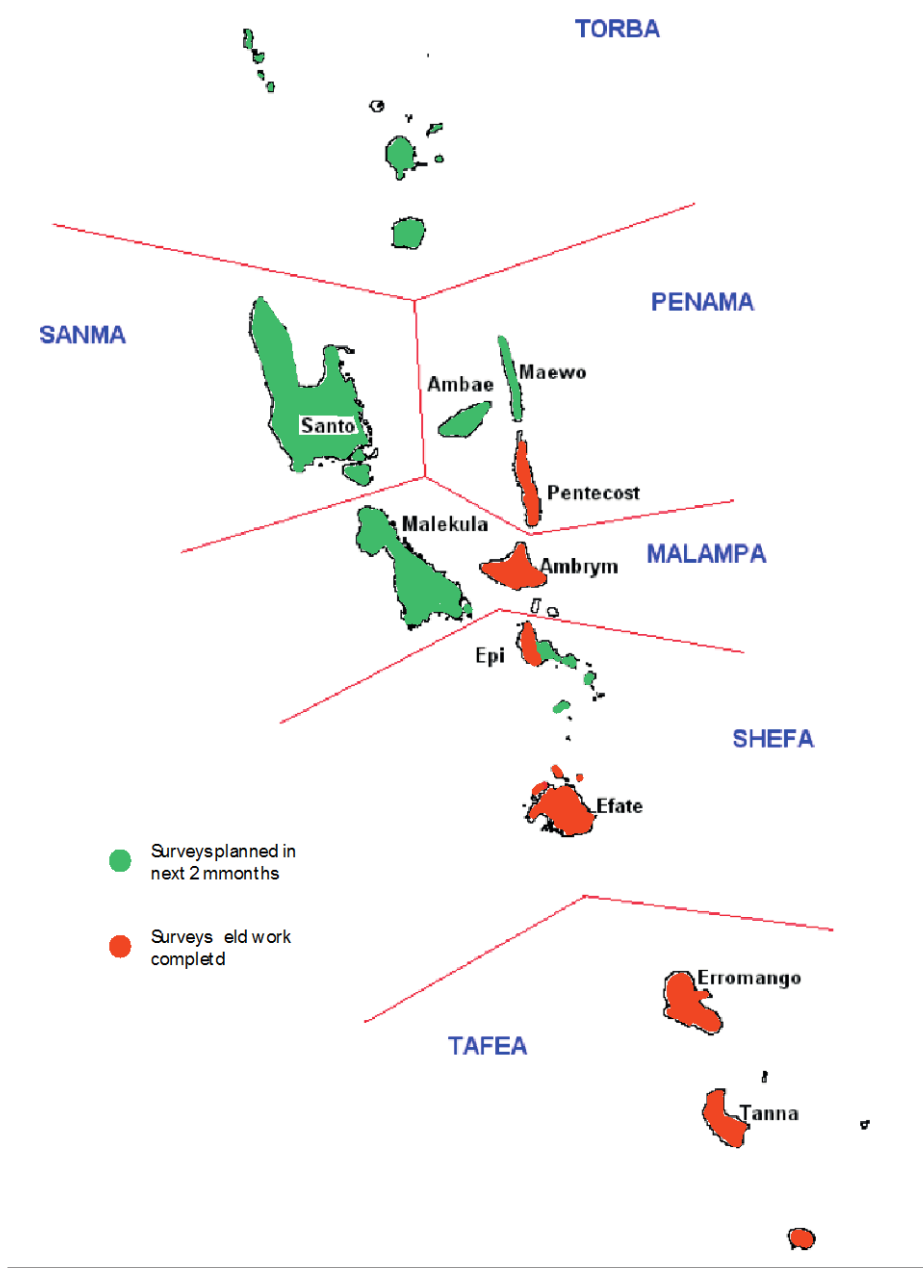
- The Standardised Dugong catch / By-Catch Questionnaire was adapted to Vanuatu by adding questions about tourism interaction and by translating it into Bislama.

In country training for survey team by CMS-DTG

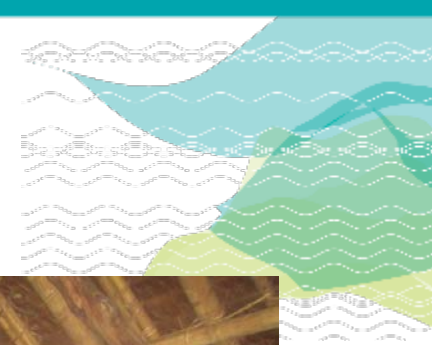
- A 2-day workshop to train interviewers was conducted on 10th and 11th December 2015.
- The workshop was held in North Efate where dugongs are regularly seen just off shore. Dr. Nicolas Pilcher from the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animal (CMS)- Dugong MOU Technical Team of Experts visited Vanuatu to deliver the questionnaire-training workshop
- Twenty-three people attended the workshop. The planned output for this activity was to train at least 4 field workers. Due to the interest in this project more people than expected volunteered, particularly students. Currently 8 undergraduates and recent graduates are still actively participating in the survey team activities.

Implementation

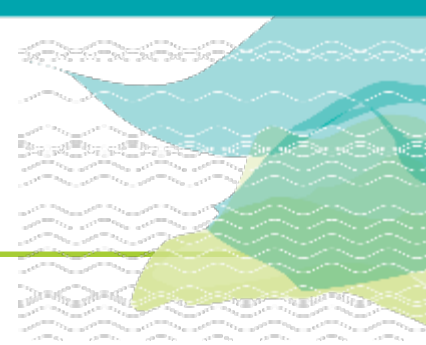
- The expected minimum output is 250 questionnaire responses. So far 217 questionnaires have been completed. However the geographic spread of responses is not Vanuatu wide yet.



Survey team in action



Vanuatu achievements



Press releases / communications activities / publications on internet sites

- An event was held to launch the project on the 3rd December. There was considerable interest in the project from the media with a half page story in the Daily post (the only national daily newspaper) and mentions on the national television and radio channels. Fifty-eight people attended the launch event.
- The VESS Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/vanuatuconservation> has carried posts of dugong sightings including video of rare footage of a female dugong suckling calf. VESS has also posted photographs of the survey team at work.
- The VESS website <http://www.vanuatuconservation.org> has been launched and features a page of current projects including the details of the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project. The educational materials which were produced with a small grant from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and will be given out during this project are also available to download from the VESS website.
- The Vanuatu Times featured two articles about dugongs and seagrass in March. “Dugong twins from Pango are a real rarity” and “Seagrasses are modest plants of the sea that usually won’t receive much attention”. Christina Shaw was interviewed for the articles and the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project was mentioned in both articles.
- The project has been donated a dugong puppet made by Ann O’Brian. This prompted a second puppet donation, slightly smaller than the first puppet but a welcome addition to the awareness campaign dugong family.

Newspaper article in the Daily Post after the launch of the project

Conservation Campaign Launch Today

Vanuatu takes part in an international effort to save the dugong

By Dan McGarry

THIS EVENING AT 5.30PM AT Chantilly's an international campaign to save the dugong and its ocean habitat will get underway.

The three-year project involves information gathering, awareness raising and active village-level

habitat preservation activities in order to protect one of the last remaining areas in the world where dugongs live mostly unmolested.

Little is actually known about Vanuatu's dugong population, and little more about its habitat. There have been a few attempts to conduct population

surveys, but the results were inconclusive and there is evidence that the data might be very wrong.

But it is clear that Vanuatu is a haven for a globally significant proportion of these wide-ranging, largely solitary seafarers. Natural predators here are few, and habitat disruption in

this country has been less widespread than elsewhere. Indeed, dugongs are still seen regularly—if not frequently—even here in Fatumaru bay.

Anecdotal evidence suggests healthy population levels in the waters between Eratap and Pango, and in the Maskelynes. But, as the saying goes, the plural of anecdote

is not data. The three-year habitat conservation project will begin with the training of qualified surveyors who will assist in painting a clearer picture of how things look in Vanuatu.

This will allow outreach workers to target specific communities with their conservation message and,

with luck, to foster the health and perhaps even growth of the local dugong population and the sea grass on which they live.

Sea grass may not be as photogenic as a mother-and-child pair of dugongs wafting gracefully under the waves, but it is equally important in its role in the ocean ecosystem.

□ Story continues on page 3

Conservation Campaign Launch Today

READ THE FULL REPORT BY DAN MCGARRY

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Conservation Campaign Launch Today

□ From Page 2

The aquatic grass typically grows in shallow, tidal areas such as those found in the mouth of the Port Vila lagoon, near Ifira island and in Fatumaru bay.

These areas spread slowly over time. The grass propagates rather like strawberries do, with a plant sending out stolons, or runners, that become separate plants themselves.

Areas with healthy sea grass

populations report frequent sightings of dugongs, sometimes numbering in the dozens. The animals are largely solitary, but just like good wifi in a café, the greenest undersea pastures often attract numerous individuals.

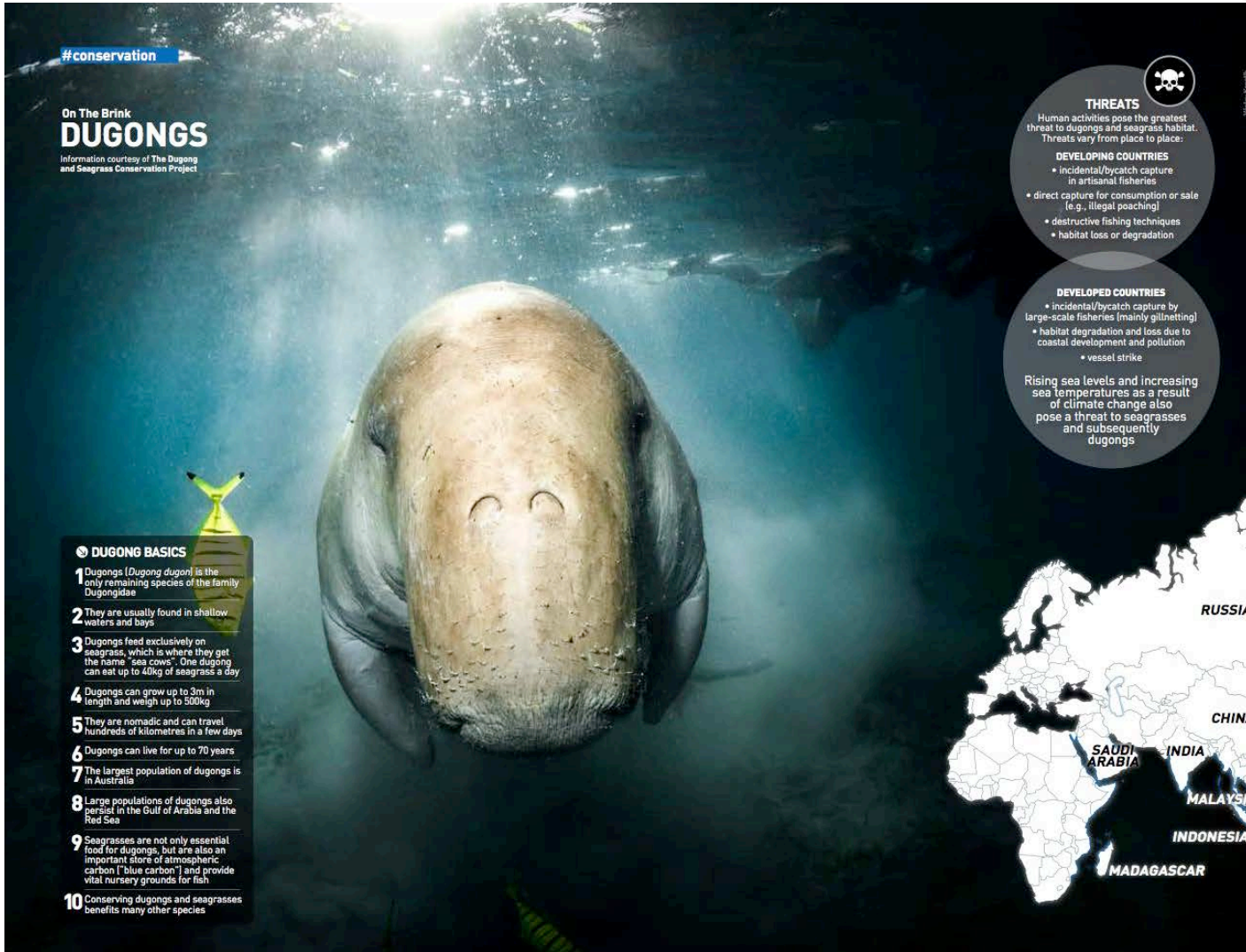
One aerial photograph taken from a drone operating in the Maskelyne islands shows nearly two dozen dugongs in a single frame.

The Vanuatu component of the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation

Project is being led by Dr Christina Shaw, a veterinary doctor and CEO of the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society, or VESS. It is funded from the Global Environment Facility and executed by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MbZSCF) and implemented by the United Nations Environment Program.

In all, eight developing countries are participating, with two developed countries as supporting partners.

Article about the Vanuatu dugong project in Scuba Diver Australasia magazine



#conservation

On The Brink DUGONGS

Information courtesy of The Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project



THREATS
Human activities pose the greatest threat to dugongs and seagrass habitat. Threats vary from place to place:

- DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**
- incidental/bycatch capture in artisanal fisheries
 - direct capture for consumption or sale (e.g., illegal poaching)
 - destructive fishing techniques
 - habitat loss or degradation

- DEVELOPED COUNTRIES**
- incidental/bycatch capture by large-scale fisheries (mainly gillnetting)
 - habitat degradation and loss due to coastal development and pollution
 - vessel strike

Rising sea levels and increasing sea temperatures as a result of climate change also pose a threat to seagrasses and subsequently dugongs

BREEDING

- Female dugongs take between 6 and 17 years to reach sexual maturity
- Dugongs are slow breeding: Females only bear one calf every 3 to 7 years
- Calves will stay with their mothers for up to two years

FAMILY TIES

- Dugongs are members of the order Sirenia, which also includes three species of manatees
- The name "Sirena" comes from Greek mythology in which sirens, or mermaids, would lure sailors to a watery death. Legend has it that sailors in the past mistook dugongs and manatees for these mythological creatures!

POPULATION

It is currently impossible to know how many dugongs still exist in the wild. The best "guesstimate" is around **120,000**



DISTRIBUTION

Dugongs are found between East Africa and Vanuatu between latitudes of about **27°** north and south of the Equator

DUGONG BASICS

- 1 Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) is the only remaining species of the family Dugongidae
- 2 They are usually found in shallow waters and bays
- 3 Dugongs feed exclusively on seagrass, which is where they get the name "sea cows". One dugong can eat up to 40kg of seagrass a day
- 4 Dugongs can grow up to 3m in length and weigh up to 500kg
- 5 They are nomadic and can travel hundreds of kilometres in a few days
- 6 Dugongs can live for up to 70 years
- 7 The largest population of dugongs is in Australia
- 8 Large populations of dugongs also persist in the Gulf of Arabia and the Red Sea
- 9 Seagrasses are not only essential food for dugongs, but are also an important store of atmospheric carbon ("blue carbon") and provide vital nursery grounds for fish
- 10 Conserving dugongs and seagrasses benefits many other species



Vanuatu challenges



VESS capacity – There was a delay in employment of a Project Scientist due to lack of office space for them to work. Initially it was thought they could be housed in DEPC however there was no space. VESS has a capacity building grant from CEPF which has allowed us to rent an office. This grant was meant to start in March 2016 however it did not start until July. So for the first 9 months of the project there was no base for the survey team.

Difficulty in Employing project scientist – The position was advertised in July and several suitable applicant applied. The job was offered to one graduate who accepted then changed her mind the day before she was due to start work. The position was then offered to the second choice candidate who accepted but could not start for several weeks. He did not turn up to work and when contacted said he had extended the contract as his previous job. Douglas Koran was then offered the job and accepted and is currently working at VESS. These false starts have significantly lengthened the recruiting process.

Challenges with implementing the questionnaire throughout Vanuatu - Vanuatu is a country of 83 islands, many of them remote and has limited infrastructure for travelling. Therefore travelling take time and is expensive.

The questionnaire is long and the survey team report some community members begin to get tired of answering the questions by the end.

Using undergraduates for the survey team is good for capacity building of these students however many of them are shy and don't necessarily draw out all the stories from the community members.

Community knowledge of dugongs is not extensive. Many members of the community have seen dugongs but know little about them or seagrasses.

Vanuatu challenges



NFC communications– Most of the participant of the NFC have been committed to the project. However the representative from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre has not turned up to any meetings or participated in any discussions.

Lack of capacity within Government departments– Government departments have limited capacity in terms of funding, personnel and space. This particularly evident at DEPC. The lack of international and local conservation NGOs in Vanuatu leave the burden of implementing most conservation project to DEPC, VFD and the Department of Forestry. At the beginning of the project Trinison Tari was the acting director of DEPC. A new director was appointed earlier this year however he has since resigned to take up another regional position and a replacement has yet to be appointed. At the same time the increased work load on the DEPC and VFD after cyclone Pam has increased the pressure on their resources. Whilst both DEPC and VFD have been supportive of this project their ability to actively participate in the field work has been limited.

Politics - Changes in the political landscape in Vanuatu is a potential challenge. It is mostly likely to manifest in changes to ministries policies and personnel. However in 2016 politics has been relatively stable. Continued communication will assist in any transitions that may occur in the future.

Vanuatu lessons learned



What went well and why?

- The project, despite the delays is still on track for the planned work plan. It is well known that things take time in Vanuatu therefore the work plan was designed with delays in mind.
- The NFC appears to work well. VESS feels NFC is supportive and useful for assisting the VU1 project.
- Gender involvement : VESS project manager is female and we have women on the survey team. The survey team are actively encouraged to interview women as well as men.
- Youth involvement: The survey team is made up of undergraduate students from USP and recent graduates. The survey team are actively encouraged to interview people of all ages.
- Finances coming through from the donors can be a issue for project implementation especially for small NGO with limited funds of their own. However for this project the in-country project partners were shielded from the delay in funds by MBZ being able to use their own funds to fill the gap.

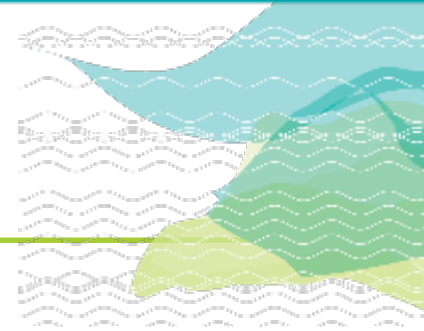
What went wrong and why?

- There was a slow start to the project due to the capacity issues initially. However now VESS has a place to work and employees the work is progressing rapidly.
- Survey techniques could be better with more experience on the survey team giving the team more confidence. However they have improved as the project progresses.
- Due to the slow start there was a long time between training and implementing most of questionnaire. Fortunately many more people were trained than required as there has been some attrition on the team with some going on to do other things.

How can we do better?

- Plan training when the capacity is already in place to implement whatever the training is for. Don't assume because the plans are in place for that capacity building it will occur within the planned time frame.

Next steps



Project activities expected for the remainder of 2017 and the first half of 2017

- Complete the Dugong catch / by-catch questionnaire survey
- Create a map of dugong and seagrass conservation 'hotspots'
- Begin the awareness campaign
- Create first draft of the National Plan of Action for Dugongs and their Seagrass Habitats.

Support needed until the first half of 2017

- GIS soft wear and training would be useful to create the maps of the dugong hotspots.
- Training on puppettering.

Next steps



Future key events/ initiatives/ projects in Vanuatu not organised by the national partners or the global Project

- VESS has sent a Letter of Inquiry to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) to extend the activities of the Dugong Seagrass Project in Vanuatu whilst there is still support from the global Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project. The proposal includes starting a Seagrass Watch Programme and conducting aerial surveys in the dugong hotspots identified by the survey using a Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV). If the LOI is accepted we should be invited to submit a full proposal by the end of the year.
- VFD is currently implementing a project to map marine resources (coral and mangroves and seagrass) in sites affected by Cyclone Pam using remote sensing and some in water surveys.
- Blue carbon project supported by commonwealth is currently being implemented in Vanuatu.

Relations to national goals and policies for Vanuatu

- Millennium development goals.
- Vanuatu's National Ocean's policy includes plans for marine spatial planning including seagrass areas.
- National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan: Includes plans to develop recovery plan for threatened species.
- SPREP marine species action plan includes specific actions for dugong conservation
- National Environment Policy and Implementation Plan (NEPIP) is currently being written
- Fisheries Act 2014: Dugongs are protected under the act as the whole EEZ is designated an marine mammal sanctuary. In 2014 when the act was reviewed the fine for contravening for protection for dugongs rose from VT 200,000 to VT 2,000,000 (US\$2,000 to \$20,000). Currently there is policy to strengthen enforcement of all fisheries regulations.