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INTRODUCTION

I. Background

A. The World Summit for Children in 1990 and the resulting Convention on the Rights of the Child, under Article 44 of the Convention required individual states to report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in their specific countries. The government of Vanuatu has presented an extensive report on its implementation till date to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

B. The Report of Vanuatu is scheduled to be examined at a pre-sessional working group meeting. In preparation for that World Vision International, Pacific Development Group was asked by the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Geneva to provide an alternate report assessing the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the government of Vanuatu.

C. World Vision International has maintained an office in Vanuatu since 1983. During the past fifteen years World Vision has implement a range of projects focusing on primary health, literacy, rural development, education and vocational training. It has also played a key role in providing relief during cyclones and other national disasters and emergencies. World Vision has maintained close working relationships with the government of Vanuatu and with many international and national NGOs, and with the multilateral and bilateral agencies.

Because of its position, World Vision is uniquely placed to assess progress on the implementation by the government of Vanuatu of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Besides drawing on its own observations and assessments, World Vision also interviewed a number of people representing various organizations and government agencies. These were:

1. Leisale Mangawai, Church Women's Fellowship, Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union (PWMU).
2. Leonny Magekon, VANGO.
3. Alice A., Vanuatu Council of Women (VNCW).
4. Marina Laklotal, Department of Preventive Services.
5. Simon Boe, Program Manager, World Vision International.

Each of these people was interviewed separately.

This NGO Report will look at the General Measures of Implementation from the Government of Vanuatu's Report. Based on its interviews, it will address certain specific issues and make recommendations accordingly.

VI. SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF VANUATU

A. Vanuatu has had a long tradition of commitment to children. Tradition, as expressed through the laws of the Vanuatu National Council of Chief, focuses on the responsibility of parents to ensure that children have an environment that is conducive to growth and development. Since its independence in 1980, the Republic of Vanuatu through the legal framework and various laws, constitutional provisions, and government departments and agencies are addressing the needs and concerns of children and families.

B. As a further expression of its commitment to children, the Government of Vanuatu is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. After that Vanuatu at the twenty second South Pacific Forum proposed a Pacific Summit for Children. At this meeting, besides providing an opportunity to discuss regional and national initiatives being taken on behalf of children, it provided an opportunity for the Pacific leaders to sign the Summit Declaration and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Soon after this meeting in November 1992, the Vanuatu Parliament ratified the Convention.

C. Various measures were taken by the Government of Vanuatu since 1992 to harmonize national policy with the various provisions of the Convention. These have been detailed in the report presented by the Government of Vanuatu to the Committee on the Rights of the Child as required by the States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention.

D. The Government of Vanuatu has a legal framework, which protects the future and the welfare of the children besides the rights that children as individuals have. Its health policy covers all areas of primary health care, which ensures access of basic health care to all. To accomplish this it is developing the appropriate infrastructure and administration, education programs and service delivery. In the area of education the Government of Vanuatu has a comprehensive policy and program all the way from preschool to tertiary level and for special groups. The Vanuatu Public Service ensures that children whose parents are public servants are protected through various policies that ensures that all the public servant parents have adequate time and resources to care for their children. The Government has also developed working relationships with numerous NGOs that address the welfare of children through out the country. International development assistance also provides the government with resources that fund programs that target children.

E. The advantage that the Government of Vanuatu has is that it is a nation with a small population whose needs can be readily addressed by the government along with the assistance from the NGO community and international donors. The Government has defined its role and has recognized the partnership required with Churches, NGOs and the international donor community in order to be effective in protecting and providing for the children so that they can be assured of a secure future.

F. While the major accomplishments of the Government of Vanuatu in the protection of children has been its legal framework, the measure of harmonization that it has been able to accomplish and the encouragement of traditional values, it is worthwhile to note that there is no know cases of child labor or of child prostitution in the country. However, the issue of child prostitution is a new phenomenon and growing in the South Pacific and it is yet to be seen what its impact will be on a nation like Vanuatu.

VII. ISSUES OF CONCERN

A. The Government of Vanuatu has clearly indicated in its report the constraints that it faces in its implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that it mentions the problem of geography and the isolation of various communities, the lack of resources, the lack of a coordinating body and the lack of certain legal provisions. (Section II.F. para 99).

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GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

A. GOVERNMENT

I.

II. Legal Framework

1 The Government of Vanuatu's legal framework constituting the Constitution and the various laws enacted protect the welfare and the future of the children. However, there is no specific policy or law on children or for special groups of children such as the disabled. But as the Government's report repeatedly points out, while there are no specific laws for children, the interests of children are dealt with in the Constitution and the various enacted laws. While this provides a sound legal foundation for the protection and provision of children, it is inadequate in terms of providing the necessary policies and infrastructure to ensure the well being of children.

Recommendation:

1. Based on the principles outlined in the Constitution, specific laws need to be enacted that define childhood and protect children accordingly and provide for their needs.

2. Health

1

2 The Government of Vanuatu is committed to providing basic primary health to all. In 1984 it adopted the policy of Primary Health Care as enshrined in the WHO Almaty Declaration. This is being implemented through the three National Development Plans dating from 1982-1996. These cover the basics of health service delivery, administration, health education, preventative health and various targeted national programs ranging from disease control, immunization environmental health, etc.

3 Though the Government's total expenditure on health has doubled from 2,486 million VT in 1982 to 5,354 million VT in 1994, the per capita expenditure during the same period has not risen proportionately. (Government's Report, Table 1, p.14).

4 UNICEF's "State of the World's Children 1998" indicates that considerable progress has been made in the area of health. While in Under 5 mortality Vanuatu ranks 77 and % of population having access to safe water and adequate sanitation are reasonably acceptable, the immunization program for 1-year-old children and pregnant women (tetanus) needs considerable attention.

5 Health services are not easily and equally accessible to all communities. Much of the problem is in the distant and isolated islands and the rural communities where in many

cases the health services are almost non-existent. For example, The Torres Group of islands has only one dispensary on one of the five small islands. What facilities are there are invariably crowded.

6 Due to severe financial constraints the government is no longer able to upgrade and maintain existing health services and infrastructure, especially those in lower-income areas.

7 Existing government services are programs are being cut back due to financial constraints. For example, village sanitarians who were assigned to a geographical area in the province were provided with training by the provincial government. Due to the lack of financial support from the government, most have ceased to carry out activities.

8 In rural and isolated communities, which still lack sufficient health service delivery, NGOs are playing an increasingly critical role in supplementing the government's efforts. For example in communities where sanitation is still a problem, NGOs such as Save the Children Fund, National Council of Women, World Vision and the Rural Water Supply assist in building ferro cement tanks for clean and safe drinking water.

9 In spite of the government's efforts through the Malaria Unit and the help from the WHO, Vector borne diseases are still a major problem. While educational awareness has been increased, the spray teams with chemicals can only be effective in the swamps and water pools in the dry weather. There needs to be greater collaboration between NGOs with staff in the project sites and the DOH.

Recommendations:

1. The government needs to develop a coordinating mechanism to involve NGOs, community based groups, international donors and the DOH to be more focused in addressing problems such as the lack of health infrastructure, decreasing health service delivery and special projects.
2. The government needs to address the issue of funding for basic health care and the necessary infrastructure so that there is accessibility by all.

Education

1 Education is a top priority of the Government of Vanuatu. In its budget for the years 1993 and 1994 it was allocated the second highest amount in terms of the percentage of the total budget. It makes provision for 12-13 years of education for each child.

2 While much has been done in the area of education, some areas of concern have been expressed:

- a. Though schooling should be accessible to all children in the country, many children are unable to continue in school to the secondary level because of limited places and financial difficulties faced by parents. Free education is only till the primary level and children are frequently not allowed to attend classes and are asked to stay out of the secondary school until the fees are paid.
- b. There is a concern of the suitability of the primary education available to the context of Vanuatu. For children who do make it through the primary school but are not able to make it into the secondary school system, there are no opportunities for them at that stage. Besides this there is the concern that many feel that western influences are alienating young people from the communities they have grown up in. They end up drifting to urban areas and add to the already growing problems of unemployment and crime. Certain communities have established traditional and cultural community classes where traditional and cultural values are taught and a respect for them developed.

c. The Government needs to develop a stronger program of vocational training and training in appropriate technology to address the problems of the dropouts and the unemployed youths.

1 The Government does not have a clear policy on pre-school education. The third National Development Plan mentions of strengthening the preschool movement. This is seen as inadequate. Preschool has been left for communities and NGOs to organize. In 1983 The Vanuatu Pre-School Association was established. However, there is a clear need for the Government to provide clear guidelines and resources for the preschool movement in the country. There is no doubt as to how critical the early childhood years are in laying a foundation in each child that the educational system can build on.

2 The Government does not play any significant role in the area of special education for disabled children. The main provider of services to disabled children is an NGO, the Vanuatu Society for Disabled Persons (VSDP) or the Nagato Society. The National Development Plans other than "encouraging" the development of special education opportunities, does not address the needs of this group of children. The education policy of the government does not clearly address this issue either. There need to be clearer policies as to what is meant by "encouragement" and how it would be implemented. While the VSDP raises its own funds, it has been felt that the government should be involved in providing some resources also.

Recommendations:

1. There needs to be a clearer understanding in the Government's policy with regards to accessibility of secondary education. If accessibility is to be limited, then the needs of those who drop out at the end of primary school needs to be addressed. If accessibility to secondary school is to be encouraged for many, then the issue of the shortage of facilities and of school fees needs to be addressed.

2. The curriculum needs to be evaluated in terms of providing prominence to traditional and cultural values in the context of a modern education.

3. Greater attention needs to be given to vocational training and the needs of the unemployed urban youth.

4. There needs to be greater clarity in the Government's policy on preschool education and more resources provided. Clearer guidelines and defining and the monitoring the standards are the role of the government.

5. There needs to be greater clarity on the Government's policy on special education for disabled children and the necessary resources provided to the service delivery agencies.

B. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

1. Vanuatu traditionally has a very strong non-governmental and community based service delivery infrastructure through the various churches and NGOs. These play a vital role in supplementing the services provided by the Government. However there is no coordinating agency in the government that would harness these resources. While the Government recognizes the key partnership role that these agencies play in the development of the country, a mechanism needs to be developed to involve them in the government's formal planning and implementing process.

Recommendation:

1. A mechanism is developed within the government's planning process to include NGOs, church agencies and others. A permanent coordinating point needs to be

established in order to prioritize needs and channel them into areas that lack infrastructure and/or resources.

C. THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

1. The Government of Vanuatu needs to be commended for the leading role that it has played to date in affirming the rights of children in the South Pacific through its proposal at the twenty second South Pacific Forum to convene a Pacific Summit for Children. Since then, in November 1992, the Vanuatu parliament has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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