MEDIA RELEASE

World Bank Recognises Government Leadership in Shaping Vanuatu's Urban Future

PORT VILA, 03 August 2026

A high-level World Bank delegation has commended the Government of Vanuatu for its leadership and long-term vision in advancing sustainable urban development, following a two-day mission from 28-29 July, examining major land, settlement and urban development initiatives in Port Vila.

Led by Mr Han Fraeters, World Bank Division Director for Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the delegation met with Government Ministers and senior officials and visited key initiatives being advanced through the Vanuatu Affordable and Resilient Settlements (VARS) Project and the Government's broader urban development agenda.

The mission included site visits and briefings on the Elol Etas pilot subdivision and the Port Vila Central Business District (CBD) Redevelopment Programme, together with briefings on the Government's Settlement Upgrading Programme. In partnership with the World Bank, these initiatives demonstrate how the Government is building a coordinated approach to land development, settlement upgrading, urban planning and resilient infrastructure.

The visit recognised how the Government is building on the foundations established through the VARS Project to create a broader national programme of land mobilisation, settlement improvement, urban planning and institutional strengthening that will guide Vanuatu's future urban development.

Director-General of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Mr William Nasak, said the initiatives represented much more than individual infrastructure investments.

"*Through the VARS Project, the Government has been able to develop practical models for planned settlement development, settlement upgrading and stronger land administration. More importantly, these initiatives are helping us establish the policies, institutions and delivery systems required to guide Vanuatu's future urban growth in a coordinated, resilient and sustainable manner.*"

Mr Nasak said the Ministry was committed to expanding the lessons gained through the Project into a broader programme of land mobilisation, housing, urban planning and institutional strengthening that would benefit communities well beyond the current Project sites.

Throughout the mission, the delegation was briefed on the Government's broader vision for managing rapid urban growth through planned land development, settlement upgrading, strengthened land administration and modern urban planning. The discussions also recognised the importance of working in partnership with customary landowners, communities and other Government agencies to deliver long-term development outcomes.

The delegation observed the Elol Etas pilot subdivision, which has been designed as a model for providing planned, serviced and resilient residential land for Ni-Vanuatu families and will be the location of demonstration low-cost model houses. The mission also received a comprehensive briefing on the Government's Settlement Upgrading Programme, which is improving infrastructure, access and resilience across established informal settlements while providing practical lessons to guide future settlement upgrading throughout Vanuatu.

The visit concluded with a briefing on the Port Vila CBD Redevelopment Programme, where the delegation received an update on the Government's long-term vision for rebuilding the capital's commercial centre following the December 2024 earthquake. The delegation also received an overview of the Port Vila CBD Vision and Concept Plan, current redevelopment activities and priority projects progressing towards delivery. The redevelopment forms an important component of the Government's broader urban resilience agenda by supporting economic recovery, improving public infrastructure and strengthening the city's role as Vanuatu's principal commercial and tourism centre.

Director-General of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Mr Leith Veremaito, said the Government was focused on translating its long-term vision into coordinated projects that strengthen communities, support economic recovery and improve resilience.

"*The Port Vila CBD is the country's principal economic hub and an important gateway to Vanuatu. Rebuilding the CBD is about creating a safer, more attractive and resilient capital that supports businesses, creates employment, strengthens tourism and provides lasting benefits for future generations*."

Mr Han Fraeters, World Bank Division Director, said the mission had highlighted the strong ownership being demonstrated by the Government of Vanuatu in advancing its long-term development agenda.

"The Government of Vanuatu is showing clear leadership and taking the opportunities presented through the VARS project to strengthen land administration, improve urban planning, and further expand access to affordable, resilient settlements. These are the foundations Vanuatu needs for longer-term growth. The World Bank Group is proud to support the Government as it turns this vision into action."

The World Bank and the Government of Vanuatu continue to work as long-term partners in supporting resilient infrastructure, stronger institutions and sustainable urban development. Through this partnership, the Government is strengthening its capacity to respond to urban growth while improving opportunities and quality of life for communities across Vanuatu.

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