

# VANUATU

## Update on progress towards malaria elimination

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Annual National RAM Conference  
14 November 2021

# VANUATU: UNIQUE SETTING

## CONTEXT

- Lower Middle income country
- High dependence on tourism and pacific labour mobility initiatives (with Aus and NZ)
- 80% rural population
- 83 islands with 138 indigenous languages
- “Kastom” (culture and tradition) prominent in society and politics
- Christian principles espoused in NSDP
- Independence in 1980
- 3 official languages (Bislama, French, English)



40<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, July 2020

# VANUATU: UNIQUE SETTING

## GOVERNANCE

- Government: Prime Ministers and Council of Ministers
- Advisors: Council of Chiefs
- Community Leaders: chiefs, church, women, youth groups

## HAZARDS

- Most natural disaster-prone country in world: cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic activity

## MOH TECHNICAL CAPACITY

- Leadership changes: MOH DG and all 3 Directors currently acting appointments
- Technical leads busy: good continuity but heavy workload, frequent travel to provinces, and re-assignment to COVID-19 (including vaccination)
- Staffing limited: many vacant positions & lack of qualified candidates

# VANUATU: MALARIA ELIMINATION

## CONSIDERATIONS

- Strong development partner support from 2004 (WHO, Aus Gov, GF) though reduced in 2014-15
- Continue to be challenges with staff and finances, with COVID-19 interrupting activities
- Elimination requires intensive activities and documentation
- Locally-tailored IEC/BCC essential but resource-intensive

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Committed leadership who want to show a 'win'
- Renewed interest in 2020-21 by GF and RAM
- Surge staffing (Community Malaria Elimination Officers and WHO STOP-malaria consultant)
- Excellent example from Tafea provinces of successful elimination that leverages community structures

# VANUATU: MALARIA ELIMINATION

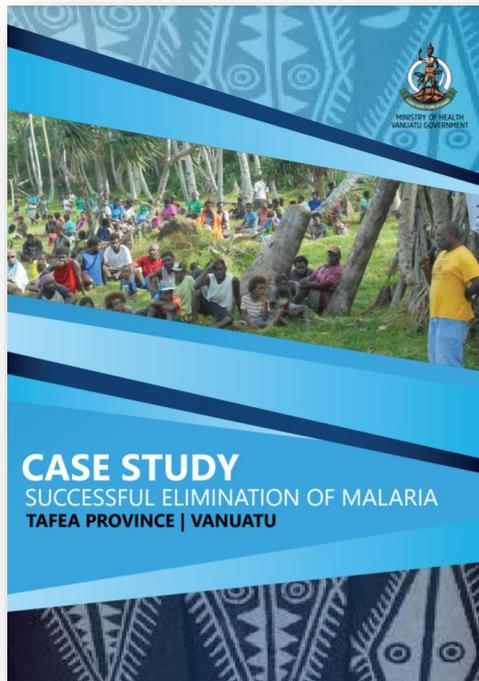


Figure 4: The Tafea Model



# VANUATU: MALARIA ELIMINATION

**502**  
malaria cases  
in 2020

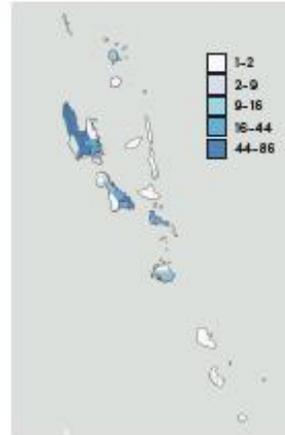
**93%**  
of *P. vivax* cases  
(465 vs 37)  
in 2020

**0**  
malaria deaths  
since 2012

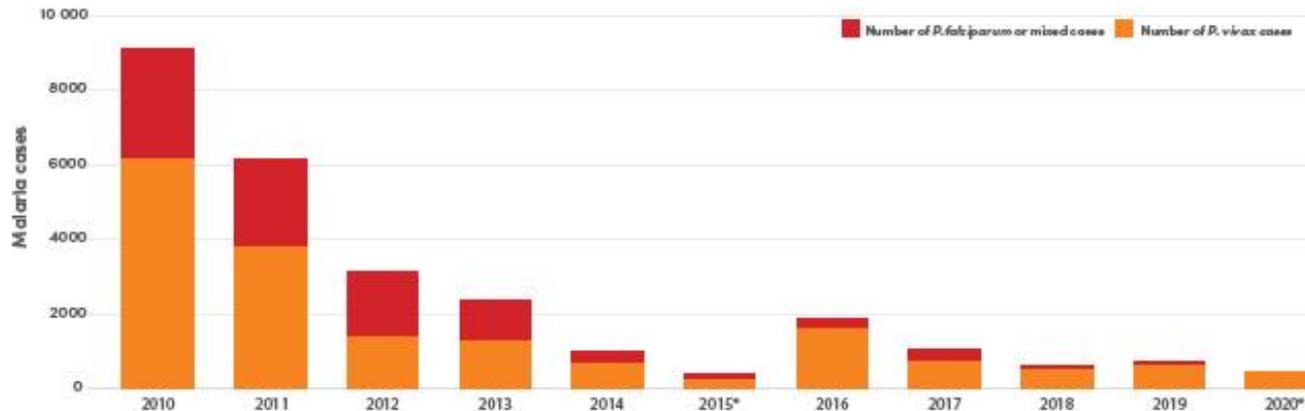


Bed nets are distributed throughout Vanuatu to prevent malaria. A nationwide survey in 2020 confirmed that net access and usage rates are high in most areas.

Annual malaria cases  
by health zone, 2020



Annual malaria cases, 2010–2020



**Excellent progress** in 2010-2020 despite two category 5 cyclones and COVID-19 disruptions

**Further significant declines** indicated for Jan-Sept 2021 – approx. 30% ↓

**Elimination target** = end of 2023

To reach target, last pockets of transmission to be allocated extra resources

# VANUATU: MALARIA ELIMINATION

## TARGETTED INDOOR RESIDUAL SPRAYING

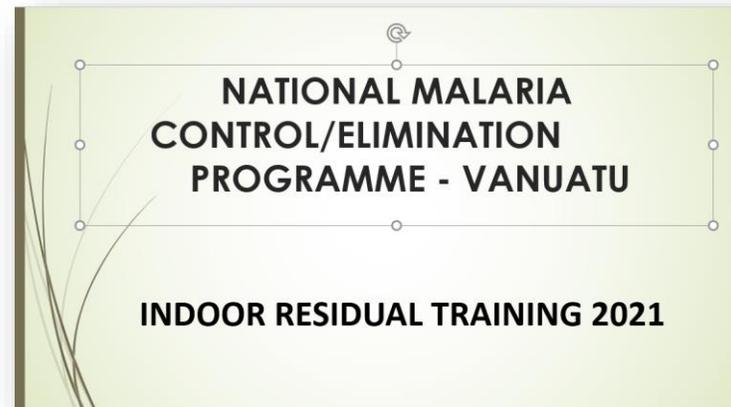
To be targeted to areas with remaining active foci (Santo, Malekula)

Supported by Global Rotary Grant:

- Training materials
- Training of trainers
- Insecticides + spray equipment
- Baseline mapping

Training completed

Spraying to be commenced 2022



# VANUATU: MALARIA ELIMINATION

## MALARIA ELIMINATION OFFICERS

To be selected from the area and based in or near active foci, to assist in case investigations, directly observed treatment, community engagement

Support from Global Fund and Rotarians Against Malaria for 10 MEOs for 2022-2023

- Training
- Nominal salary
- Travel to access patients

13 May 2021

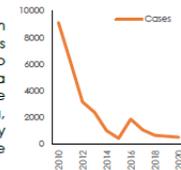
## FORGING TOWARDS MALARIA ELIMINATION IN VANUATU

### What is malaria elimination and why is it important?

Malaria elimination is the interruption of local transmission of malaria parasites so that there are no malaria cases. It is critical that even countries with few malaria cases actively pursue and maintain elimination due to the high risk of malaria resurgence. Extensive experience from around the world shows that resurgence often occurs when malaria programs weaken (see [here](#)).

### How close is Vanuatu to eliminating malaria?

Since 2010, Vanuatu has achieved an impressive 95% reduction in malaria burden. In 2020 there were just 502 malaria cases nationwide and since 2012 there have been no deaths due to malaria. The southern province of Tafea achieved zero malaria cases in 2017 and was certified as malaria-free 3 years after. The few remaining malaria hot spots are on the islands of Malekula, Santo and Epi. Despite major damage and disruptions caused by Tropical Cyclones Pam (2015) and Harold (2020) as well as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, elimination is within reach.



### What is required to reach elimination in Vanuatu?



The new [Malaria Elimination Strategic Plan](#) for 2021 – 2026 shifts the goal of malaria elimination 2 years closer, with zero local monthly cases expected by the end of 2023 and WHO certification in 2026. Intensified efforts will rely on bednets and indoor sprays to prevent infective bites of malaria mosquitoes, as well as active tracking of every malaria case to ensure timely and correct diagnosis and treatment. With Vanuatu ranked as the most natural disaster-prone country in the world, ensuring continuous action against malaria in the case of cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and flooding are essential. All actions are accompanied by engagement of communities to improve knowledge and practices.

### What are Community Malaria Elimination Officers?

A critical component to enable uptake of these activities at community level is the availability of trusted and trained individuals within the community. Recruited locally, these Community Malaria Elimination Officers are selected based on their experience, skills, work ethic and standing in the community. Their tasks include liaison and information sharing between community leaders/members, health workers and provincial malaria staff; follow-up with nurses and patients to ensure compliance with treatment; support to operations such as bednet distributions or spraying campaigns; and timely reporting of cases. These Officers are paid around AU\$300-400 per month and the aim is to recruit 10 Officers to be stationed in malaria hot spots in Malekula, Santo and Epi.

### How do we know that Community Malaria Elimination Officers will help with malaria elimination?

The experience in Tafea provinces has proven very valuable to know what works – and does not work – to eliminate malaria in Vanuatu (see [here](#)). Malaria Elimination Officers were the foundation for the success achieved in Tafea and will similarly enable achievement of elimination elsewhere in the country in support of the Ministry of Health and aligned with the Plan.



# VANUATU: MALARIA ELIMINATION

## ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT

Sports event to be held around World Malaria Day in each province – “Kikem aot malaria” soccer tournament in each province (6)

New community engagement strategy under development

Support potentially provided by Rotary Clubs (to be determined)

To commence 25 April 2022



# VANUATU: MALARIA ELIMINATION

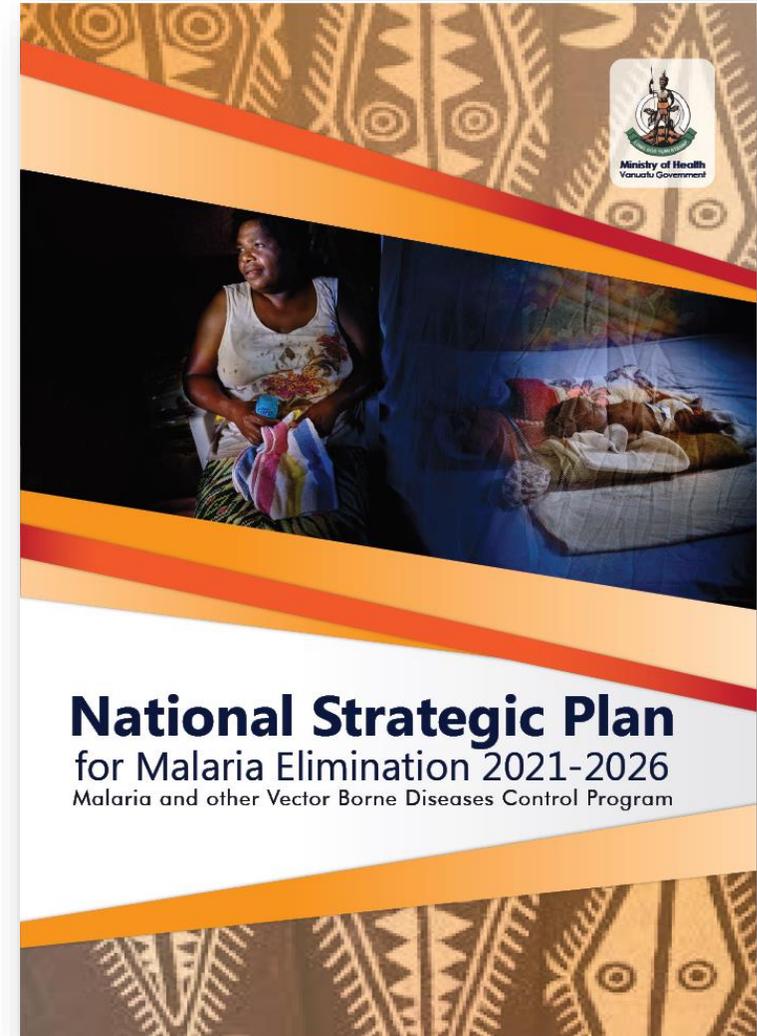
## CONCLUSION

Good indication there should be  
<300 malaria cases for 2021  
(for an API < 1 per 1000)

Targetting of interventions required to  
ensure elimination is achieved

Partner support essential for the surge  
staffing and intensified activities

Thank you to Rotary Clubs in Australia  
and New Zealand, Rotarians Against  
Malaria and Global Rotary Grant for  
support thus far!



TANK YU  
TUMAS

