

OPTIMIZING THE ROLES OF VILLAGE HEALTH WORKERS IN VANUATU: A CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

- As per the Role Delineation Policy, Village Health Workers (VHWs) are the sole care providers in delivering primary health care to the communities: first aid, basic health services, and health awareness at Aid Posts.
- VHWs are expected to fill the gaps in health human resources by reducing the burden on health centres and dispensaries in Vanuatu.
- However, there have been bottlenecks in effectively implementing the VHW program, and needs have been raised by the Ministry of Health to enhance the roles of VHWs.



INTRODUCTION

Research Aim

- To understand the roles of VHWs in primary health care settings
- To assess barriers to the current VHW program

Research Question

- How can the barriers and challenges that the VHW program faces be addressed to enhance the roles of VHWs in Vanuatu?

Research Significance

- Outline policy recommendations for the VHW program
- Develop VHW Curriculum and Career Pathway



METHODS (I)

- **Period:** September 2022 – October 2023

- **Study design:** Mixed methods approach

Qualitative method

Interviews of relevant stakeholders (n=33, 20 in 2022, 13 in 2023)

Focus group discussion with VHWs (n=7)

Quantitative method

Online survey of VHWs using the Qualtrics platform (n=21)

Paper-based survey of VHWs (n=12)

Pre/post-test of the VHW Pilot Training in Sanma (n=12)

- **Data analysis:** Stata/SPSS (for quantitative analysis)



METHODS (2)

■ Survey instrument

The screenshot shows a web-based survey editor interface. On the left, there is a sidebar with various editing options: 'Edit question', 'Question type' (set to 'Text / Graphic'), 'Content type' (set to 'Text'), 'Response requirements', 'Add validation', 'Question behavior', 'Display logic', 'Skip logic', and 'JavaScript'. The main area displays a draft question with a 'Background' section containing a thank-you message and a 'DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS' section with a question: '1. What is your highest education level completed?' followed by radio button options: 'Bachelors', 'Diploma', 'Class 11-13', 'Class 9-10', 'Class 7-8', 'Class 6 and below', and 'Others'.

A smartphone mockup displays the survey instrument. The text on the screen reads: 'Thank you for choosing to do the survey for VHWs conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Health. The responses from this survey will be really important towards policy recommendations for the VHW program in Vanuatu. The survey is anonymous and will not take more than 15 minutes of your time. Please attempt to answer all questions, and if you are unable to understand the questions, please leave them blank. Thank you!' Below this is a question: '1. What is your highest education level completed?' with radio button options: 'Bachelors', 'Diploma', 'Class 11-13', 'Class 9-10', 'Class 7-8', 'Class 6 and below', and 'Others'. A yellow arrow button is visible at the bottom right of the screen.



■ Focus Group Discussions

■ Pre/Post Test (Pilot Training)



RESULTS (I)

- Results: Online (Nov 2022) & Paper-based (Sep 2023) VHW Survey & qualitative study (interview, FGDs)
- Finding I: Importance of the Role of VHWs
 - Shortage of health workers in Vanuatu—1.77 health workers per 1000 population (WHO recommends 4.45 health workers per 1000 population)
 - VHWs play a key role by acting as the first point of contact for primary health-related services to the community.

“Focal point within the community to assist in mobilisation” (FGD, 2022).



What services/activities do you deliver? (Please select all that applies)

#	Answer	Count
1	Giving medicine (Kivem meresin)	12.1%
2	Dressing wounds (Tresem soa)	11.7%
3	Basic health care to individuals (Basic helt kea long ol man)	10%
4	Referral of patients/clients to dispensary/health centre (Referem ol sik man iko long dispensary / helt centa)	12.1%
5	Health advice/counselling to individuals (Kiven helt advaes/kaunseling long ol man)	10%
6	Health awareness to community (Kiven ol helt awenes long komuniti)	12.1%
7	Support visiting health teams (eg: MCH, EPI, Malaria).(Sapotem ol narafala helth tim [MCH, EPI, Malaria])	11.3%
8	Develop Community Health Needs Assessment and Action Plan (Fainem aot helt nid blong komuniti mo mekem plan forum)	8.2%
9	Community health improvement activities (incl. Village Clean-up).(OL wok blong blong liftem ap helt blong komuniti. Wok blong klinem vilij)	10.8%
10	Others	1.7%

*The services/activities are based on *the Role Delineation Policy* and *the VHW Scope of Practice* which were endorsed by the Ministry of Health.

RESULTS (I)

- Finding 2: VHWs are not adequately trained and compensated for the level of responsibilities that they currently perform.
 - VHWs undertake a 10-week Pre-Service Training (includes 12 modules)
- Finding 3: Inadequate incentives (both financial and non-financial) to retain VHWs
 - Currently a token amount of VT70,000 per annum is paid to VHWs.
- Finding 4: Need for stronger coordination and management of the VHW program
 - At the national, provincial and community levels.



RESULTS (2)

Pilot Training: Pre/Post-Test Results

■ Training Overview

Date/Province: 27 – 30 September, Sanma Province

Participants: 1st batch (12 VHWs)

Topic: Pharmacology

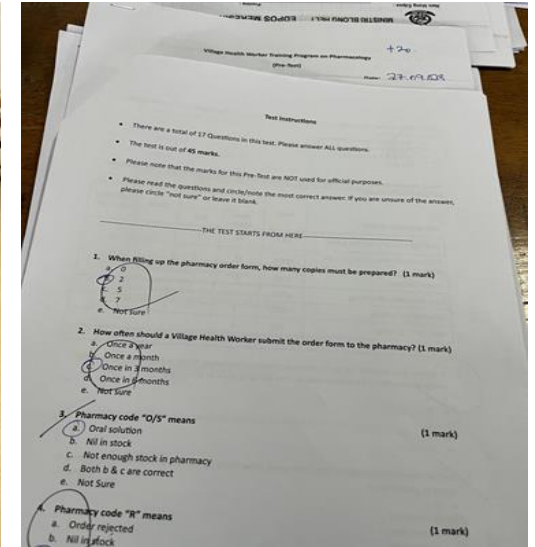
■ Results of Pre/Post Test

Score of pre-test and post-test

Pre-test 19.25 (Out of a total of 45, equivalent to **43%**)

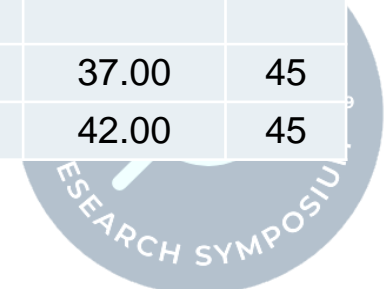
Post-test 37.42

(Out of a total of 45, equivalent to **83%**)



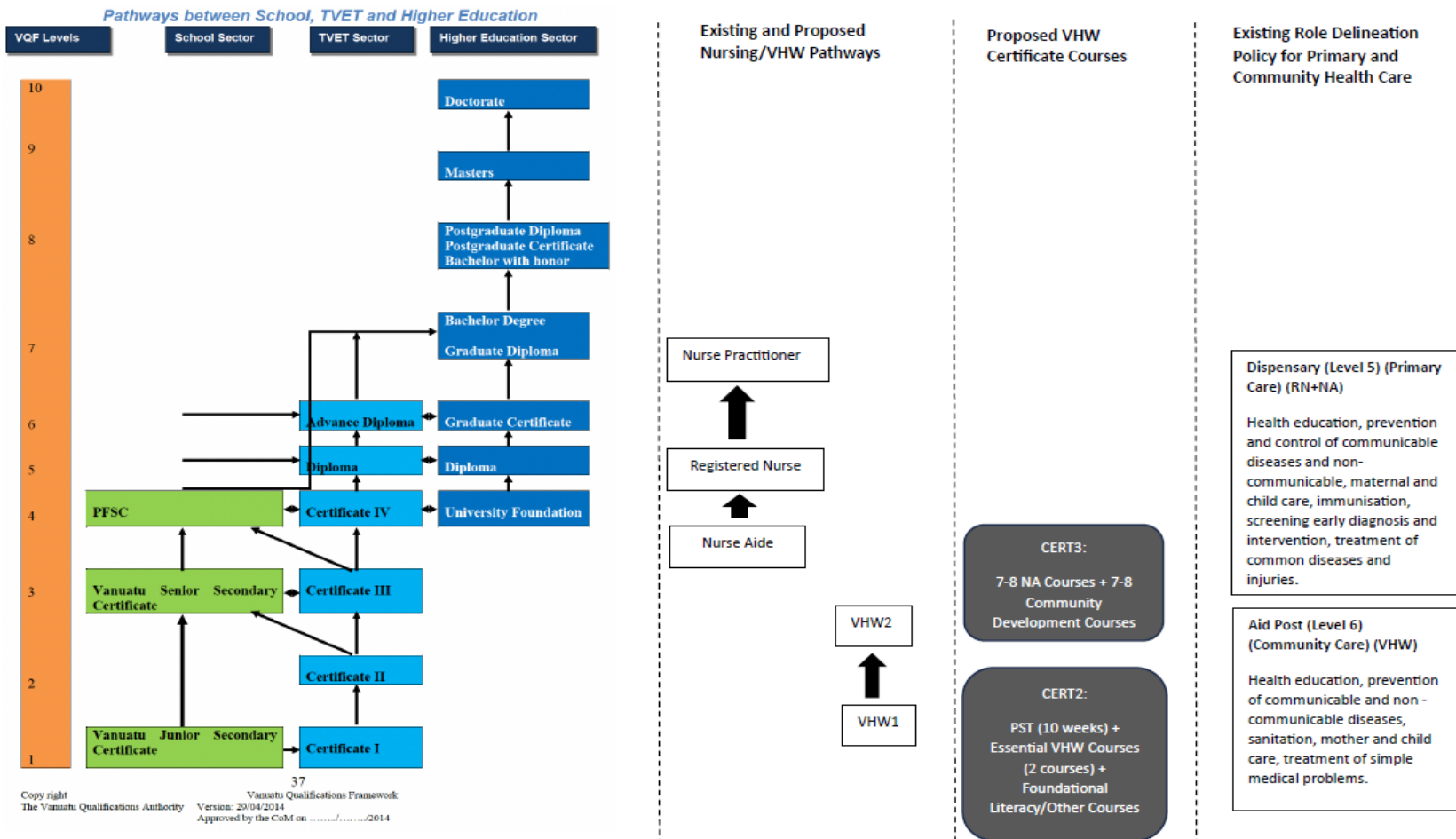
Descriptive Statistics (Wilcoxon Ranks Test)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Total
Pre-test	12	19.2500	7.41160	9.00	37.00	45
Post-test	12	37.4167	4.20948	29.00	42.00	45



DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS (I)

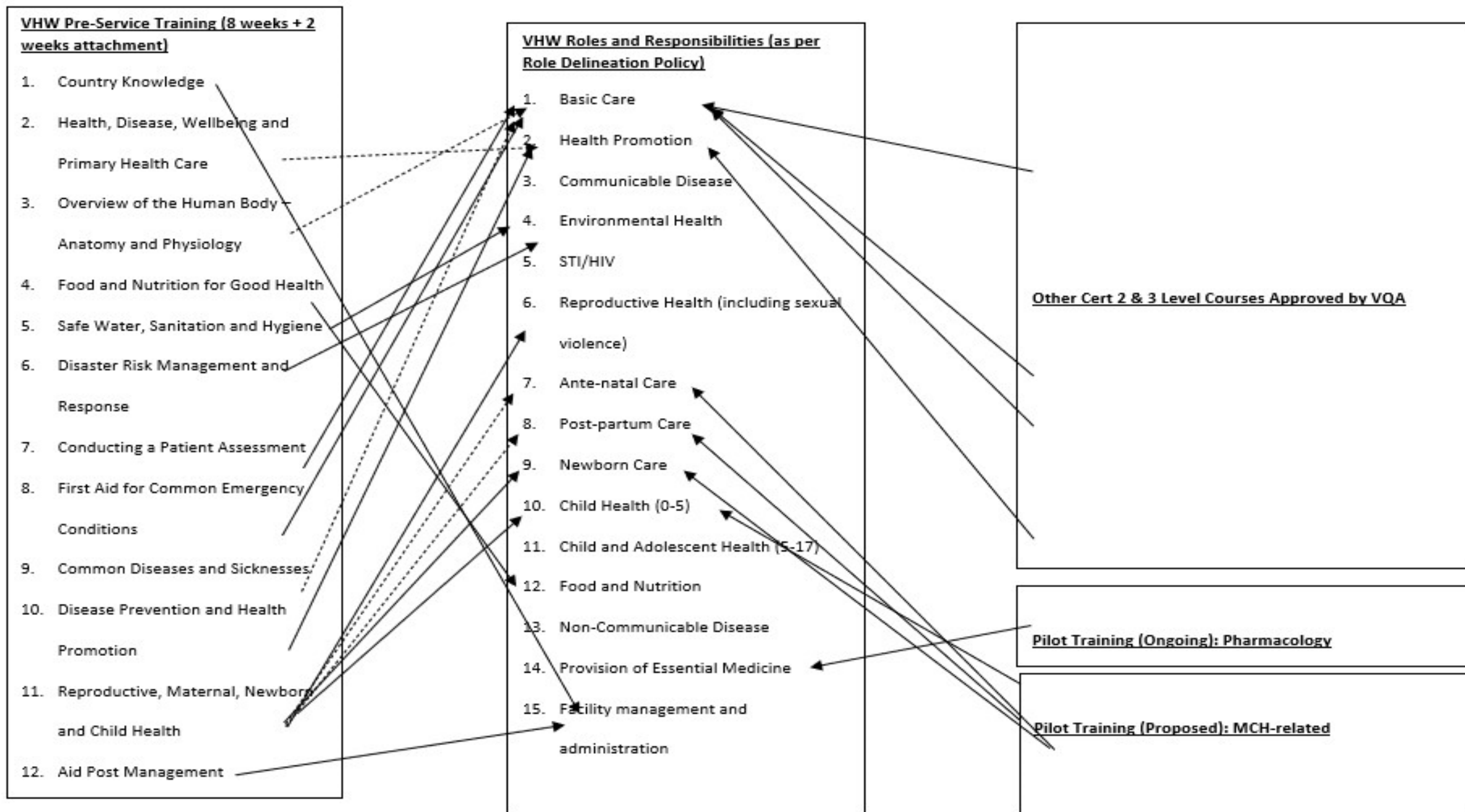
VHW Program Framework



- Career pathways (for VHWs and the wider health sector)
- Qualifications



MATCHING (AND GAPS) EXISTING SKILLS/TRAINING/ROLES OF VHWS



DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS (2)

■ VHW Training Curriculum

Develop a Cert II or III VHW course that integrates the Pre-Service Training Program and other relevant training programs based on the identified skill gaps that are run by development partners

■ Training Delivery: findings from the pilot training

A significant difference between the pre-test and post-test identified:

- capacities of the current VHWs, b) effectiveness of the modality of the training, and
- template and estimated costs for further training sessions

■ Non-financial incentives

Provide the VHW uniforms which help VHWs to be well recognized/respected in their communities



MOVE FORWARD

- **Course Development and Certificate for the VHW Training**
- **Strengthen Coordination and Supervision of the VHW Program**
Close collaboration with Area Councils and Area Administrators
- **Policy Development**



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