

# **CERTLINK – WORKING WITH SMALLHOLDER FARMERS TO BRING VANUATU TO THE WORLD**

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**Key words: Organic, Smallholders, Data, Measureable, Livelihoods.**

## **Introduction**

Vanuatu is an archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean comprising 83 islands, and located approximately 1770 km east of Australia and 800 km west of Fiji. It has a population of around 250 000 people, with 80% of people living in rural areas where agriculture is the main source of their livelihoods (Census of Agriculture 2007 – Vanuatu<sup>1</sup>). Agriculture is reported to comprise around 17% of GDP (Census of Agriculture 2007 - Vanuatu<sup>1</sup>), although it has been surmised that the true value of subsistence cropping in the country may actually be much higher (Vanuatu: Opportunity Analysis on Fair Trade and Organic Niche Markets draft report 2012<sup>2</sup>). Agricultural products account for about 73% of total exports by value (Census of Agriculture 2007 – Vanuatu<sup>1</sup>), and the main export commodities are cocoa, copra, coconut oil, kava, coffee and beef. Tourism is also a significant source of income for the country.

As reported in Vanuatu's Overarching Productive Sector Policy Situational Analysis<sup>3</sup> (draft report March 2012) 'At present export marketing of agriculture products is largely focused on primary commodities with limited value adding in country. As a result swings in global commodity prices impact significantly on ... prosperity in the rural areas'. With the mission of 'Measureable improvements in the livelihoods of growers', the CertLink project aims to incorporate third-party certification, to organic and other sustainability standards, as an aspect of value-adding to commodities in-country for increased returns and subsequently improved grower livelihoods.

POETCom (the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community) is the peak industry body for organics in the Pacific region. Their 2012 Annual Report<sup>4</sup> details 8367 organic growers third-party certified, covering 46 334 ha across 9 countries in the region. Historically it has been the grower who has carried the burden of such certification systems and CertLink aims to turn the supply chain pyramid upside-down, increasing transparency for all, and forcing certifiers to compete for the growers' business.

## **Methods and materials / Activities**

Developed as a multi-stakeholder initiative, the CertLink system was conceived as a tool for smallholder organisations to easily and cheaply access and manage multiple certification systems (Organic, Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, UTZ) for increased market opportunities.

The concept was launched as part of a three day organic forum held at Vanuatu Agriculture College in February 2012, attended by a large number of stakeholders

including representatives of smallholder cooperatives, plantation owners, agri-processors, researchers, government officers, and regional trade officials. The event generated significant interest in the potential for organic certification in Vanuatu and led directly to two plantations, one growers group and one processor applying for certification. Many more operators have since come on board and are now undertaking organic auditing procedures.

As part of the process of registering grower and production details onto the CertLink system, it was realised that the data required for certification purposes, particularly where third-party verified, could prove valuable for a range of stakeholders and activities, particularly in formulating and implementing effective policy and delivering grower-driven services.

The platform has since evolved into a powerful tool for agri-systems management, with applicability across a range of business types and organisational structures, and functionality in data gathering, analytics, reporting, price sharing and content management, with the capacity to affect significant change in the lives of Vanuatu smallholders.

Specifically, the system tracks grower profiles on the 5 pillars of sustainability - People, Product, Planet, Process, Profit – and utilises data gathered to create grower Equity through value-adding and third party accreditation of Agri-IP.

The system is accessible online, via mobile app and as a local broker-assisted service, through use of a personalised login & password. It also has a publically accessible web interface which serves to promote Vanuatu, her ‘83 Islands – 100 Cultures – 10 000 Voices’ and provides a direct linkage between farmers and the final customers purchasing their organic products.

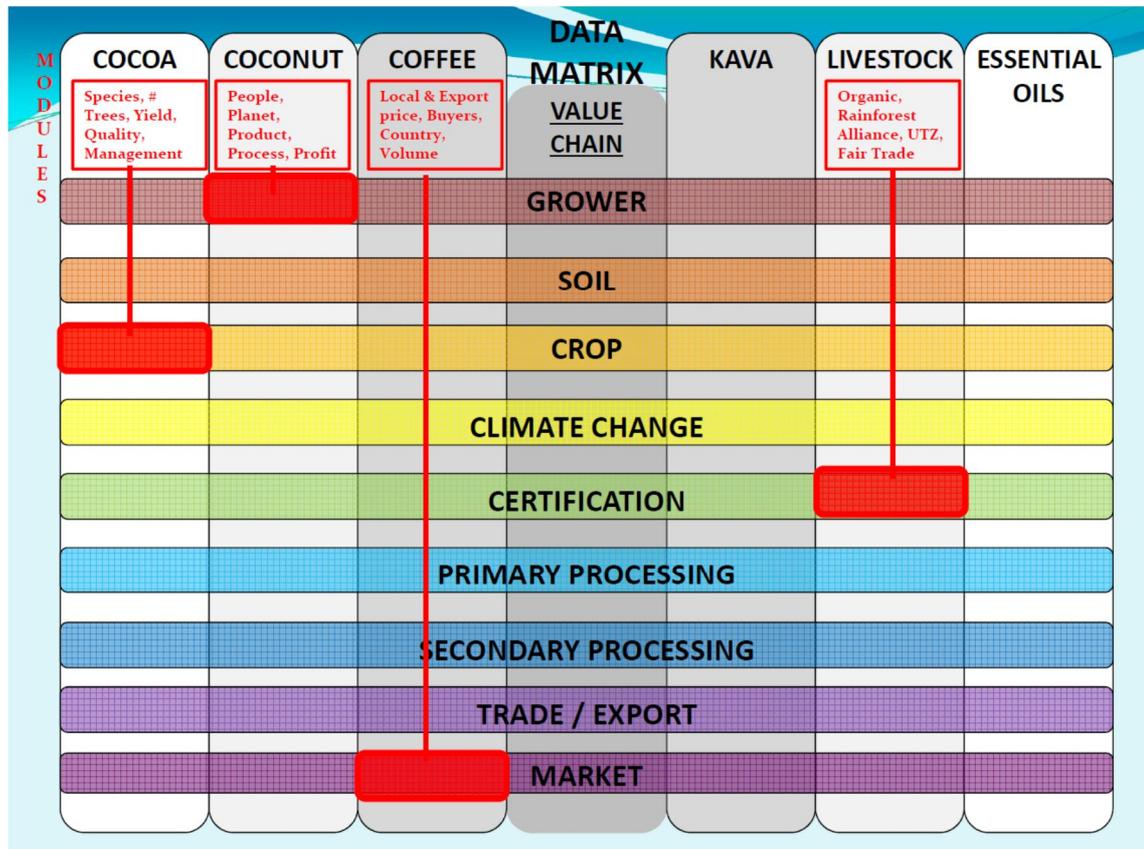
From the data uploaded, and where the grower allows, various parties are able to buy into the information service at marginal costs, contributing to a robust and transparent coordination platform driven primarily by the private sector. Refer Figure 1 – CertLink Data Matrix & Example Modules.

Crucially, CertLink is a means of tracking investment, measuring impact, and collecting feedback in real time. The system is free of charge for registered growers and in the near future remittances will begin to be paid through remuneration from the data subscription services.

Another important aspect of the system is as a communication platform via registered mobile phone numbers. Growers are able to access a range of information and services direct to their handset – weather alerts, market information and pricing, digital extension services, coordinated buying & selling, transport arrangement, mobile banking, mentoring and coaching. The CertLink dashboard allows ‘plug and play’ supplementation with an extensive range of products, and a ‘serious game’ is under development to support development of critical quality standards in primary processing (fermentation) of cocoa.

## Figures and tables

Figure 1 – CertLink Data Matrix & Example Modules



## Results and Conclusions

The CertLink system and related support processes have, during the first twelve month pilot period, directly led to the organic certification of 1958 hectares of coconut and cocoa land, 217 growers and the country's largest agricultural processor, with an additional 479 smallholder farmers and 1135 hectares currently under application.

The system is already being used by various stakeholders in the coconut, cacao, coffee and livestock sectors to assist the value chain and respective government departments in the development and validation of policy. Through partnerships currently under development we foresee this expanding significantly over the coming year, including the establishment of agri-superannuation accounts funded through export levies.

The CertLink mandate is to create online profiles, mentor and accredit 10 000 professional Vanuatu growers (from a pool of 50 000 potential commercial growers) and connect them with international markets & 10 000 customers around the world. The direct linkages and contracts between Vanuatu growers and international markets and customers through a platform structured on ICT for Development (ICT4D) we believe will not only assist in the creation of a foundation bringing stability, transparency and growth to Vanuatu Agriculture, but finally create a stage for the voices of the growers in

Vanuatu. I have no doubt that this is the sincere vision for all who know that farmers remain the backbone of the Vanuatu economy.

Our aim is that by 2015 Vanuatu will be the lead innovator in small-scale agricultural management systems... globally!

‘The grower is the rockstar, CertLink’s the agent, everyone is invited to the party!’

## References

- 1 Census of Agriculture 2007 – Vanuatu, Vanuatu National Statistics Office. [www.spc.int/prism/country/vu/stats](http://www.spc.int/prism/country/vu/stats)
- 2 Vanuatu: Opportunity Analysis on Fair Trade and Organic Niche Markets draft report 2012, Cardno Agrisystems Consortium
- 3 Overarching Productive Sector Policy Situational Analysis draft report March 2012, Prime Minister’s Office, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu
- 4 Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) Annual Report 2012 “Putting Down Roots”, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
- 5 CertLink website [www.certlink.org](http://www.certlink.org)