

**Press Release - FINAL**

**Universal Access Program Initiative: Undertaking Agreement Signing**

**Tripartite commitment to ICT & Universal Access Programs: Donor, Government and Regulator Initiative**



*L-R: Mr. Ronald Box, Mr. Matthew Harding & Mr. Fred Samuel at the signing of the Tripartite Undertaking*

A tripartite Undertaking between the Australia – Vanuatu Governance for Growth Program (GfG) the Office of the Government Chief Officer (OGCIO) and the Telecommunications & Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR) to implement and fund programs under the Universal Access Policy Fund (UAP Fund) was signed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2014 by the Director of the Australia – Vanuatu GfG Program, Mr. Matthew Harding, the Government

Chief Information Officer, Mr. Fred Samuel and the Telecommunications & Radiocommunications Regulator, Mr. Ronald Box.

The signing signifies the tripartite commitment between the three agencies to work collaboratively in developing the ICT and telecommunications sector in Vanuatu for the benefit of the people of Vanuatu; particularly those that are in unserved or underserved rural areas.

The Undertaking was developed with a focus on the objectives established in the Government's National ICT Policy and its Universal Access Policy to extend ubiquitous access of telecommunications services, including fast speed internet access, to enhance learning and promote ICT as an essential tool and enabler in the provision of education, and to drive economic development.

Funding for this initiative, through the UAP Fund, has been made possible by the financial support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Aid Program, managed in Vanuatu through the GfG Program.

TRR, as the implementing agency, is working closely with OGCIO in achievement of the Universal Access Policy objectives for the benefit of the people of Vanuatu; especially those in parts of the country where there is inadequate access to existing telecommunications services, including internet services. The OGCIO and TRR are also working closely with other Government Departments and Offices/Statutory Bodies, in achievement of the Government's National ICT Policy.

The Undertaking is facilitated by a funding agreement consisting of three major program initiatives: a school based Computer Laboratory & Internet Community Centre (CLICC) program, an Internet Café Support program, and a Tablets for Students program; all with a primary objective to increase the use of ICT by students, teachers, school administrators, the community and small business enterprises, to enhance their learning; particularly through extending access to educational resources, and introducing potential ways to promote new business activities.

Under the CLICC program, public and vocational schools throughout Vanuatu can apply for, and successful applicants will receive, a one-time grant to build a safe computer laboratory within the school, and for community access to that resource. Up to 15 schools will be selected as beneficiaries to the grant. For the internet café program, any interested business can apply. Up to 10 businesses will be selected as the successful grant beneficiaries to set up internet cafes for community access. The target group for ICT access under this program is the community; including residents, farmers, and other small business owners within the community so that they can utilize these cafes for their business or personal activities.

The third program involves the distribution of tablets to facilitate students with their learning. This may also pave the way for appropriate educational and local content to be developed and incorporated to promote this program.

TRR will shortly launch the applications process and will inform the public of details and important dates/milestones so that any interested party may apply. Selection criteria are being established and applications will be reviewed by a Grant Review Committee, consisting of representation from the tripartite Offices, to determine successful applicants.

The GFG program provided AUD3.05m to the Government of Vanuatu in May 2008 as part of its support towards liberalization of the telecommunications sector at the time, and provides seed funding for the Government to undertake activities towards the provision of universal access to telecommunication services around the country. TRR has also made an injection of funding into the UAP Fund to support Universal Access initiatives.

TRR is pleased to discuss these initiatives and the programs with any interested party.