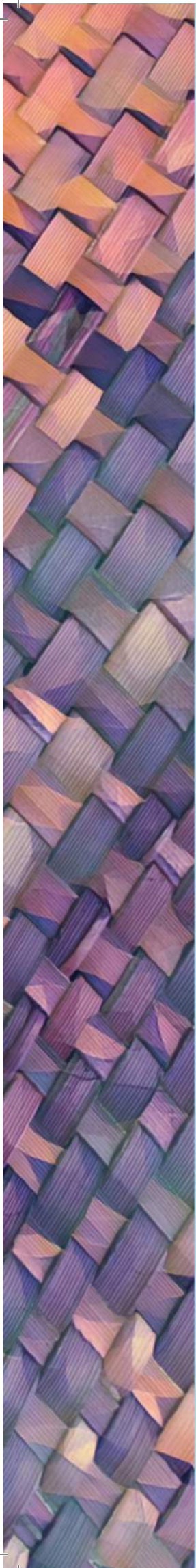
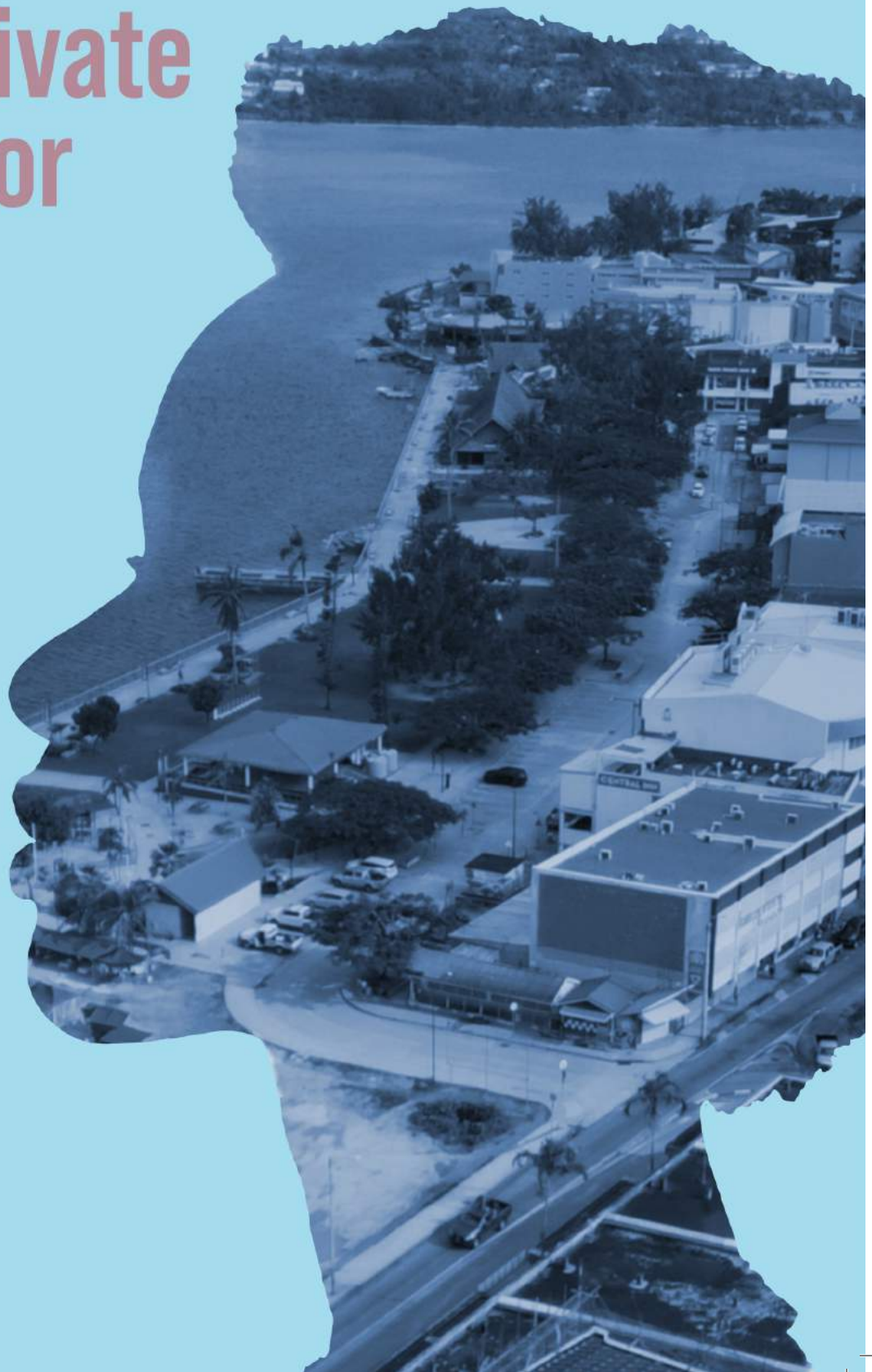


# NATION BUILDERS

## Celebrating Women in Private Sector





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# INTRODUCTION

**N**ation Builders: Celebrating Women in the Private Sector follows the success of the first publication celebrating women's leadership and contributions in the public sector. This new project aims to demonstrate the pivotal role that competent women play in leading and contributing to Vanuatu's economic development.

Through a collaboration with private sector members, key women senior managers and 'first' pioneer women in technical fields of expertise in the private sector were identified and nominated for inclusion in this publication. An independent task force was set up to ensure objectivity in the validation of the nominations. Significant effort was also made to ensure that a wide cross-section of women representing various parts of the private sector was included to minimize any risk of perceptions of bias.

There is a focus on displaying the lives and journeys of these women in overcoming barriers around social norms in their fields of expertise. Discriminatory social norms and societal expectations of the place and role of women are still prevalent in Vanuatu and are key barriers expressed through these stories. In addition, the financial resources required to start a business is often prohibitive for many women, as are the constraints of the policy and legislative environment and the lack of tailored support services for women in business.

A key theme running through the grains of the stories in this booklet is the place of role models, people who inspire you, and those who believe in you. Reflecting on their journeys, many of the women spoke about the importance of being surrounded by these people. The role of the family structure and support system is also critical, especially that of husbands. Many women reflected on the influence of parents, including adoptive parents, who stepped in when needed. Self-care and prioritising one's own mental health and well-being is also seen as critical, especially to be able to take care of those for whom one is responsible. The pivotal role of faith and practicing gratitude is integral to the well-being of many of these women. Putting in the time and energy to exercise and finding those small moments to 'breathe' are touted as being vital.

Indeed many women pointed to the centrality of their faith and culture to ground them, while simultaneously recognising that this can be a double-edged sword to support or hinder progress. The stories demonstrate the multiple hats women wear and the expectation to perform equally well across different domains. In many cases, these women were not only persevering in the face of challenges but were trailblazers, which comes with the added difficulty of not having others from whom one can learn. Women recognised that being in managerial and leadership roles, they are often under more intense pressure and scrutiny than their male counterparts in similar positions. However, rather than seeing this as off-putting, many women see this as providing even more justification for them to be at the discussion and decision-making table.

Ultimately, these are stories of strong, passionate women playing pivotal roles within the private sector to shape and contribute to Vanuatu's development agenda with pride and dignity. May the stories inspire the next generation of girls and boys to see what is possible.

# FOREWORD

I am proud to introduce the second book in a series on Nation Builders and this time celebrating women in the private sector. Women play a crucial role in Vanuatu's economy, especially in their contribution to the private sector. Globally, women's contributions to poverty reduction, economic growth, and private sector development are increasingly recognized.

Women grapple with many challenges as they participate in the private sector. Vanuatu still has a traditional view of the role of women and in a lot of cases, it's not common for a woman to be an entrepreneur. But women are challenging the status quo. A common thread through these stories is that entrepreneurship is a journey for many of these women. Along the way, through trial-and-error lessons are learned and changes are made.

One does not need to look far to find these women. In my own family and community circle, I know of women who have started their businesses, are breadwinners in their families, employ people who have children and families to feed and are hardworking and committed to building our country. I continue to be inspired by these women who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the men in this country to build our nation. They are leaders. They are changemakers.

I believe that when you empower one woman, you empower an entire community. The stories in this collection demonstrate this, as indeed does a growing body of research that demonstrates linkages between women's empowerment and the well-being of society. However, studies also indicate that women's economic contributions continue to lag behind their achievements in health and education, and there are barriers that prevent women in many parts of the world from fully contributing to the economy.

The government recognizes and has made policy commitments to supporting women in the private sector and women entrepreneurs. There are still institutional, legal, regulatory, and attitudinal barriers that need to be addressed for women to fully participate in the economy in Vanuatu. The government must work closely with the private sector to have these conversations and chart the way forward.

The stories showcase women in senior management and leadership in the private sector and their journeys there. While there is a slow but steady rise in women's representation achieving equal representation of men and women in leadership requires continued effort and dedicated action.

The stories in this collection demonstrate the possibilities. They recognise and celebrate women's contribution to the private sector to develop and grow Vanuatu's economy. You will read stories that ring with familiarity because these women are around us: they are our sisters, mothers, aunties, bubus, and neighbours. You will read stories about women who are firsts in their field, high achievers who achieved significant milestones in their fields, and who are passionate about developing their businesses and community.

May God bless our beautiful country, Vanuatu.



Antoine Boudier  
President of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry

# ALICE ANNIES ATHY

*Emao*

Founder and Owner of Vanuatu  
Ocean Products



in different workspaces, Alice has built a name for herself, making, and selling seaweed products across Vanuatu. She believes her confidence and self-reliance are vital to where she is today.

“My career in sea vegetables began in 1998 when I studied at the University of the South Pacific School of Marine Studies in Fiji, and later was offered an attachment to work in Japan. I then returned home to Vanuatu and became the change I wanted to see in my community.

**T**wenty-three years after starting Vanuatu Ocean Products, Alice continues to be the change she wants to see in her community. With many years of enriching experiences

Starting up my business was not as challenging as I had expected. Yes, it had its days, but I am proud to have a team of incredible women from my community who are always

willing to learn and want to see this business grow as much as I do. I am fortunate that these women have this mindset, as I am continuously running training for them to ensure my business runs smoothly and there are no setbacks.

I believe my biggest accomplishment so far is this business. It is truly a testament to my hard work and determination and has meant that I can provide for my kids without worry and make an income from the comfort of my home. I feel connected to God through my work; He has given us these plants to help us heal, and I now must help to heal people who need it.

My journey with this business has been arduous yet worthwhile, as I am constantly learning new things with my business while working in different spaces. I wear many hats, as the president of an association for women in Shefa Province and a member of Wainemate, a Fijian organisation whose motto is “Save plants that save lives” - this aligns with my values and what I do. In addition, I am a member of VIPAM and the Mamas Handicraft Association.

I am proud to be doing what I do. I am pleased to be a ni-Vanuatu woman, with skin the colour of the ground that gives us life. I am grateful that my mother and father raised





*" I hope more Ni-Vanuatu women start their own businesses and see how freeing it can be. You become independent, self-reliant and most importantly, you're doing something that you're passionate about. "*

me the way they did and supported me throughout my journey. My parents instilled self-reliance in me from as early as I can remember – they are my biggest inspiration, always

encouraging me never to give up.

I hope more ni-Vanuatu women start their businesses and see how freeing it can be. You

become independent, self-reliant, and most importantly, are doing something you are passionate about."

# ANN KARIE

*Tonga*

CEO and Co-Owner of Belair Airways



**A**nn, 61 years old, is the CEO and co-owner of Belair Airways, a locally owned airline, with her husband since its establishment in 2013. She has seven children.

Ann completed her primary education in 1975, then continued her studies through the Presbyterian Church by attending church-organized training. Ann was the national president of the Presbyterian Women Missionary Union from 2006 to 2012, where she helped with outreach programs specifically targeting women in Presbyterian churches throughout Vanuatu. Ann had been involved in writing books for the Scripture Union, including a book on women in leadership for the Presbyterian Church, and is currently assisting in translating the Bible to the Namakura language, one of the languages spoken by the people from the Shepherds Islands.

“My husband and I started

the airline in 2013 by leasing a plane from Air Taxi to provide a quality and safe service to the outer islands of Vanuatu, where airline services were inconsistent. Two years later, we managed to get our first plane, and now the airline has two planes.

My experience of being the CEO of an airline company is that you must have discipline in everything you do, as the culture of an airline is the safety of passengers and the aircraft. We provide a service to paying passengers, so how we take care of the passengers is delicate, and safe operations are always a priority. At work, I try to create a safe environment that allows for and encourages all my staff to be open and share any concerns or issues they have so we can help address and solve these issues.

My parents are my biggest inspiration. The quote I love and try to live by is from my father, which stems from our motto, “Aelan we hemi strong, ol pikinini blong hem tu oli strong”. Our motto implies that since we stand with God, we are strong. Combined with the meaning of our country’s name, it translates to the people of Vanuatu being strong and resilient people who can overcome anything.

I encourage women in Vanuatu to believe in themselves: they need to love and accept themselves for who they are and appreciate their journey, past, and where they are now. God created you differently



*" Be humble and listen to people who are trying to help you. Grasp as much knowledge as you can. Your knowledge is a diamond, guard it well. "*

from anyone else with unique strengths and abilities. Identify these abilities and use them to your advantage.

For young girls, I would like for them to learn as much as they can. Be humble and listen to people who are trying to help

you. Grasp as much knowledge as you can: your knowledge is a diamond; guard it well. I encourage you to get your knowledge from the Bible and church. Take care of yourself and value your life.

I am where I am today because

of my family's support and help with the business. There were hard times during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we overcame that collectively, and I am thankful for it".

# ANTHEA ARNHAMBAT

*Malekula / Ambae*

General Manager of Ahapi  
Stationary



space and inspire other young women who see themselves starting and managing a business of their own. She has learned many things on her journey, especially balancing her work and family life.

“My parents started Ahapi Stationary in 2007 from their home – this was one of many different businesses they managed then. It was only in 2018 that I decided to join the family business. In 2019, we set up the Ahapi Stationary Shop in Port Vila. We then branched out to Luganville, Santo, in 2020 and are now setting up another branch in Lenakel, Tanna.

Working in a family business can be challenging, but it can also be exciting, and I feel grateful because we are a family who

are constantly learning and growing together. The team I head in the primary shop in Port Vila comprises young ni-Vanuatu who have just finished high school and are looking to gain work experience. I try to create a safe learning space for my team to work and grow together where they are exposed to and understand critical skills so that when they choose to work elsewhere, they have basic skills and experiences to build from.

As the General Manager, I have good and bad days, like any other job. There are some days when I have had to be out of the office helping my team offload boxes of supplies in the pouring rain, and there are days when I have received feedback from a happy customer thanking us for getting them the office supplies they needed. Looking back, I understand it’s all part of my learning journey here. Learning is what I enjoy the most - learning new ways to improve how we work at Ahapi Stationary.

Not a day goes by when I am not thankful for my job and the people I work with. My parents are my role models, which may sound cliché, but they started this business from their homes, and today have two fully functional offices that they head and run. What inspires me the most from their story is that they created this business to make an income, but it was also something their children could fall back on. And this is the type of example I would like to set for my son. I want to teach him the importance of self-reliance and being part of this business, and hopefully,



*" I believe everyone should start envisioning what they want in their future, particularly for their children and the next generation to come. And setting up your own business is one way to do exactly that. "*

setting one up of my own will help teach him that.

The courage and persistence of my parents have set the bar for me and shaped who I am today. I understand that I

can enjoy and be present with everything happening, but I also need to start thinking ahead for my son – what do I need to do to ensure he has what he needs for his journey as a young adult?

Everyone should start envisioning what they want in their future, particularly for their children and the next generation. Setting up your own business is one way to do that."

# ASNATH GIDEON

*Efate*

Chef and Housekeeper, Eco Lodge



growing their family and business since. While her husband is the business owner, Asnnath is the cornerstone of the day-to-day operations of the lodge, mobilising her family toward caring for it and its visitors. At 55 years old, she is a bustling ‘do-it-all’ kind of woman who loves to cook.

“I was raised by a single mother until Donald Kalpokas and his wife adopted me, and I lived with them until I got married. My husband owns the business, and I work alongside our three children.

**A**snnath knows what it means to dedicate oneself to a business. She and her husband started their establishment about 20 years ago and have been

Many people like our food and so they come here to eat. My son serves at the bar, and I am the chef. It is a good workspace where all things flow. I do not recall the exact time we started

our business, but I remember that a man from Banks had taught me how to cook, and I learned from there.

I cook for people to come and eat, and sometimes I am afraid that people may not like the food. But many tourists have come by to thank me and compliment me on my food or ask me how I make a sauce for a dish they have eaten and to tell me they enjoyed their food. I openly share my recipes when asked to by visitors. I have had to learn how to accept negative reviews about my cooking and take that as a challenge that comes with my job.

Sometimes, I will be in the kitchen, serving guests and on the move, and when I see that the work is too much, I will get outside help. Because we are a family-run business, it is just me, my husband, and one of our sons. At times, I remind my children that this business is theirs. The future is theirs, so we must work as a team to secure something for them.

My husband and I did not have much of an education, but our hard work in this small business has put all my children through school, and we ensure that the money the lodge makes reaches our community as well.

The business has changed over the years. We have expanded



*" My advice to the next generation of women is to believe you are capable of running your own business. Self-doubt is a state of mind, so keep pushing forward and focus on how the business can support you in the future. "*

from just bungalows to adding a restaurant, and I see more people coming to stay with us now. Now we have plans to expand, add a conference room and more bungalows.

I am proud to say, "Yes, my husband is the business owner, but I built it up for him". He has always supported me and recognises my work here. That is important. Men should

acknowledge us as women because we are the main power behind the work in our families, so women need representation in different organizations to help build our country".

# BENEE NAMEN

*Malekula*

Founder and Director of NBK  
Financial Assistance Company Ltd



faith in God, the support she gets from her husband, the trust she and her clients have, and her company's working environment with her team. Benee considers starting her company and dedicating herself fully to it, the best decision and her greatest accomplishment. She does not see past career decisions in a negative light. Instead, she views them as building blocks to help her set up and run her company. Benee graduated with a certificate in accounting and worked at various companies before deciding to focus solely on her business in 2017.

"In the mid to late 90s, living and working in Port Vila became challenging, and it was a struggle to survive solely on our salaries. In late 1999, I decided to start something to generate extra income, so I set up my business. It started very

small.

My husband is supportive and always provides sound and constructive advice, which motivates me to move beyond life's challenges. He is my best friend, partner, confidant, and helper. We make decisions together and seek God in all our business dealings.

I believe in creating a good and friendly working environment that encourages open discussion and deliberations on issues. Providing feedback and evaluating the performance of my team is critical. We pray together as a family and as a team.

Time management is vital. I have a list of priorities each day that I work to complete. I draw a clear line between my relationships with my family, friends, and business associates. It ensures that individuals understand why things must be a certain way.

Community service is at the heart of what I do. With my sisters, we founded a church ministry called Christophine Ministry that visits and prays with church leaders and families in need. The ministry also donates food, groceries, and household utensils during visits.

I encourage young women to be proactive and take risks to achieve their goals. To see change, young women need to be the change. Representation of women on private sector boards is vital to ensure balanced and collective decision-making.

**B**enee believes her company, a registered lending company, could last for 23 years with now over 500 customers because of her





*"When I face challenges, I see them as a part of my life journey. Challenges are blessings to help me think smarter and plan better."*

Women face many challenges; however, I do not see these as barriers but as enablers. Coming from Northwest Malekula, I encountered tough times throughout my childhood to complete my education. I always believe in self-determination and trust God will lead me where I need to be.

# CAROLYN MARGARET ERNST

*New Zealand / Vanuatu*

Founder and Owner, Eden on the River



**C**arolyn Margret Ernst moved to Vanuatu from New Zealand in 1979 at 23 years old. Carolyn worked on the cattle and copra properties that were her home for several

years until her children were due to start school. Knowing Port Vila always needs accountants, she studied part-time at USP, eventually starting her own accounting business that she enjoyed for many years. When she was thinking about her future and providing financial security for her and her husband's later years, Carolyn decided to buy the land now known as Eden on the River, an award-winning destination providing nature-based and cultural activities.

The creation of Eden on the River took many years, driven by Carolyn's eye for detail and hard work, planning and designing what she envisioned to be a sustainable business model. Carolyn has suffered hardships throughout her life, including

child loss, but her tenacity has continued to push her toward her dreams and aspirations. As one of the founders of Port Vila International School, Carolyn has always sought to give back to her community. She has also served as chairwoman of the Livestock Industry Working Group, served three terms as a councillor for the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has been involved with Kiwanis and the Rotary Club, and currently supports the Rodeo. Carolyn explains, "Give back; you've always got to give back".

"My advice to the next generation is that you can achieve anything through hard work. Have a positive attitude and believe in yourself. Don't let negative thoughts take hold and stop you from achieving something you want.

To any women doubting their capabilities, I say don't listen to those thoughts. Your mind is more powerful than we sometimes think, so tell yourself you CAN do it.

One of the most important lessons I have learned throughout my career is not to be afraid to make mistakes. I've learned from them.

My hope for the women of Vanuatu is unity. I want to see



*" One of the most important lessons I have learned throughout my career is don't be afraid to make mistakes. I've learned from them. "*

women unite irrespective of their differences. If women unify and come together, we can do whatever we want.

A quote that I live by is to treat others as you wish to be treated. This applies to my personal and professional life,

liaising with businesspeople, my staff, and everything".

# CHARLOTTE TRAVERSO

*Fourth Generation French  
Vietnamese*

Influence Bio Concept, Piccolo  
Jouets & Cadeaux, Etam, Retail Store  
Owner



retail management, Charlotte is exemplary in constantly innovating, expanding, and on the hunt for new ideas.

As a girl, being an only child, Charlotte's dream was to be a stay-at-home mum and have a large family. Having her first child was a grounding experience as Charlotte quickly realised being a mother is not like what you see in magazines. She soon learned that having children not only guarantees sleepless nights but that children bring so much love. For Charlotte, juggling being a mum while successfully running her businesses and being a wife to her first love and devoted husband gives her the greatest joy.

"I was born in Noumea and

grew up in Port Vila. I went to school at Colardeau, and after graduating, I moved to Australia to pursue my studies. I started a business management degree, which I disliked, and switched to beauty therapy. I started my first beauty salon at home, then a salon at the Havannah Resort, and one at the Grand Hotel. I ran the three salons concurrently for over ten years, but then I had my second baby and wanted to re-prioritise. I changed careers and started my first retail store.

I started Influence Bio Concept in 2018, a store that sold healthy items not readily available in Port Vila. It started small, and we have now expanded to two sections. When COVID hit in 2020, I opened a clothing store for women called Etam, and in 2021, I opened Piccolo, a toy shop. So now I have three businesses, and I have been in retail for five years now.

Overcoming the fear of opening a business without retailing experience proved to be a good decision. I was initially more interested in services and looking after people. So, when I first made the transition, it was an emotional jump and took some getting used to. Additionally, doing business in Vanuatu is difficult due to the small market.

Initially, I was afraid of competition, but now I have decided to embrace and do my own thing and stop limiting myself. I have learned that this town is big enough to provide for everyone. When I notice people starting to do similar things to what I am doing, I move on to new ideas.

Charlotte is an inspiring businesswoman who successfully runs three retail shops in Tana Russet. Effectively switching career paths from beauty therapy to



*" Gratitude is my mantra. When you start practicing gratitude, it becomes a mindset, you think about it every day and then you change completely. "*

In my work experience, I have managed many staff and know how to create a good team of staff who love the work. The work structure is good with all my staff having benefits. I look after my staff well. In return, they look after me.

Gratitude is my mantra. When you start practicing gratitude, it becomes a mindset. You think

about it daily, and the practice changes you completely.

As women, it is sometimes hard to be kind to ourselves, but sometimes women must be selfish and do the things that make us happy. My advice to women who experience self-doubt is to talk to yourself as if you are your best friend and speak kindly to yourself.

Reconnect to your inner child, to who you are. Surround yourself with good people and focus on doing good deeds.

If you want to work in the private sector, be honest, be on time, and be reliable. These qualities make you trustworthy, and you can achieve many things".

# CORNELIA WYLLIE

*New Zealand / Vanuatu*

CEO, Majority shareholder of Fine  
Foods Limited



**C**ornelia Wyllie, or Cornelia, the Chameleon, as she jokingly calls herself, based on her ability to adapt and adjust to anything, is a businesswoman with a passion for mentoring and developing value-added

products from resources already around us. Cornelia is a huge advocate for letting the Earth nourish us, and with her vision, adaptability, and passion, she has brought us Fine Foods Limited.

“Growing up, my childhood was marked by constant movement and change. My parents were nomadic immigrants; as a result, I attended a total of 14 different schools. Adapting to new environments became second nature, and I became adept at navigating these transitions. Although I do not have a formal degree, I did undergo nurse training.

After working as a nurse in a university hospital in Germany, I embarked on a sea voyage back to New Zealand. During

this journey, I worked as a translator on the ship and met a couple who introduced me to the concept of self-sufficiency. I became passionate about the art of making everything from scratch.

Over three decades ago, I migrated to Vanuatu and built a life with Bob, my husband, and nine children. In New Zealand, I was involved in the exportation of fresh produce. I quickly realized that this business model was not sustainable in Vanuatu and required a different approach – one involving value-adding. Combining traditional foods with cutting-edge scientific techniques became the focus of Fine Foods.

Fine Foods is a brand that operates with a deep understanding of Vanuatu’s growing industry and its unique needs. Every aspect of the brand is carefully crafted to ensure its viability and contribution to the country’s overall health. This aligns perfectly with my belief in the power of food as a medicine. My source of support and encouragement came from my late husband and continues with close friends.

Initially, I was known as “Misis blong Bob” – not recognized by my name. Then, after I built Vanuatu’s quarantine house and introduced numerous plant species through Rainbow Gardens, I earned a new title – “Mama blong ol flawa”. After Bob passed away in 2019, people wondered what my next steps would be. I have always been Cornelia, and I will always be pursuing my passions. Over the years, I have actively



*"I want more Vanuatu women to start value adding businesses and if you have doubts about your ability to, find a mentor, and as you grow always maintain integrity."*

participated in various Governmental committees representing the manufacturers of Vanuatu on behalf of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce. I am a member of Rotary International, which promotes "service before self". My goal is to empower more women in Vanuatu to establish

value-adding businesses. If any doubts arise regarding their abilities, I encourage them to seek out mentors who can guide them. As they grow, it is crucial to maintain unwavering integrity in all their endeavors.

In summary, my life was shaped by a nomadic upbringing

and a deep passion for self-sufficiency and value-adding. Through Fine Foods, I strive to contribute to Vanuatu's growth and well-being while advocating for women's empowerment and integrity in business".

# DALSIE GREENROSE KALNA BANIALA TOLANG

*Maewo*

Founder and Managing Director,  
SP Exec Compliance & Solutions  
(SPECS)



Vanuatu regulator in the ICT industry. Dalsie is passionate about helping the people of Vanuatu realise their potential and use technology to help address their needs and reach their dreams.

While the field Dalsie works in is male-dominated and technical, she loves how technology-oriented it is and the way the evolution of the sector can transform mindsets. Working in this field has given Dalsie a wealth of knowledge and enriching experiences. She travels widely and contributes to developing her home island, like what she is doing in the south of Malekula, a program known as Smart Island.

"I was among the first students of Navuturiki on Ambae Island

when the school opened. I then studied at INTV and somehow ended up in the Solomon Islands. While I now hold an MBA, a BA, and a Diploma, my work experience is ever more valuable. My education is the ticket to garnering work experience. Today, in the career world, the focus is on work experience rather than qualification; a qualification comes in to reinforce your work experience.

I wear many hats. I am one of the Vanuatu Post Limited Board of Directors, the Telecommunications Regulatory Advisor to the Palau Bureau of Communications, the Telecommunications Regulatory Advisor to Nauru Communications Authority, and the ICT National Project Manager for the Smart Island Project.

Even though the work makes me feel fulfilled, I feel apprehensive sometimes. For instance, when I must stand in front of over 5000 global experts from across the world discussing internet governance and regulatory experiences for Vanuatu, I find that when faced with such situations, all I can do is calm down, rethink, and accept what is beyond my capabilities.

The hardest part of doing my job as a woman would have to be getting community leaders to understand the full potential and benefits of ICT development across Vanuatu and the Pacific region. My mother and father are my role models. Although they didn't go to school, their wisdom brought me where I am today,

**D**alsie is a woman who wears many hats in the male-dominated ICT field. With over 14 years of experience in the field, she is the first female and first ni-





*" I hope Vanuatu women know their representation in all fields is important because we balance views and perspectives, helping the country make informed decisions where all people are considered. "*

and that has taught me about being kind and sacrificing for others, that no matter how busy I get, I should make time for my family and friends despite being a career woman.

I hope Vanuatu women know their representation in all fields is crucial because we balance views and perspectives, helping the country make informed decisions for the benefit of all

people. I want more women to be part of developing Vanuatu at all levels of development, taking our country to the next level."

# DORIN ARU

*Maewo*

Owner and Manager of Tamari Shop



**D**orin is the proud owner and manager of the Tamari shop in Gaiowo Village, North Maewo. 53-year-old Dorin is married and shares five children with her husband.

Dorin and her husband have a boat that they use to provide transportation to the people in their village. Dorin is involved in voluntary work in the community through the church and traditional community activities and was responsible for the mother's savings group at one point.

“My uncle is my biggest inspiration; he started the Tamari shop and handed the shop to me after I got married to help me financially. I am grateful for the retail shop as it has helped me and my family for over 20 years, especially with school fees.

“Hemia nao mi kivim long yu, sipos yu ko yu lukaotem gud bae ol ting blong bisnis ia bae lukaotem gud yu long fiuja

blong yu”, said my uncle in handing over the shop. I have held this thought close to my heart over the years, and it has motivated me to operate the Tamari shop during challenging times.

Representation of women in decision-making places is essential. Women are carers: in our homes, women care for the family and house, and being carers enables us to give inputs necessary for our communities, villages, and country.

I encourage women to think about starting a business. Running a business like mine that has been in operation for so long is challenging. It has allowed me to be creative and think outside the box, especially about what is best for my business, family, and myself. Women must think outside the box and use the money they spend on daily leisure activities to save and start a business.

The most important virtue I have learned and encourage everyone to have is respect. I have respect for my father, uncle, and family and even respect for my retail shop. Respecting my Tamari shop allowed me to take care of it.

In my view, young girls and women who were not



*"I think it is very important to have representation of women in decision making places. Being carers enables us to give inputs that are necessary for our communities, villages, and country."*

fortunate to obtain a higher level of education should not be discouraged; there are opportunities for them to find a

job or create a business.

If it was my last day on earth, I would encourage my children

and everyone else to take care of themselves and the responsibilities they now have."

# DORIS MIGOTTI

*Italy / Santo*

Manager of Migotty Motel and  
Owner of Migotty Cake



A full-time mother of three sons, a manager of an upcoming motel, and an adored baker, Doris balances these commitments with support from her partner and mother. Growing up, she had the opportunity to see and learn how to run what had once been her father's motel, which made things easy for her when she took over. She then fell in love with baking and has been taking orders ever since. Inspiration and joy have been markers of her journey.

"I officially took over and started managing Migotty Motel in 2012. It was due to an unfortunate circumstance, but I'm glad my father and mother opened the space for me to watch them run the business. So, when I did take over, it

wasn't difficult because I had grown up watching them run the show – my mother also supports me with everything today.

Taking over the business was a given, considering I am the only child. However, my baking business, Migotty Cake, grew from my love for baking. I initially baked treats for my family and close friends, not wanting anyone else to know about this secret talent. But one day, my sister took a cake that I made at home to her colleagues at work, and they loved it! From there, I only allowed people to order from me in person because I wanted to hear their feedback and see how I could improve for my business to grow. I created a Facebook page specifically for my baking once I started getting more and more orders from customers. I've been on my baking journey for three years, and I love it!

Balancing being a mother, manager, and baker isn't easy, but it isn't difficult for me either because I have a great support system and prioritise my time. I always plan what I have for the day and use my time wisely. If I must be at the motel, then I'm there. If I have an order to make, I do it. I don't procrastinate but ensure that I complete my tasks properly and efficiently – I'm also teaching my sons this skill just as my father taught me.



*" I believe women of all diversities, are strong and capable to do what they want and what they are passionate about. No matter the circumstances, don't give up on what you want! "*

I am so grateful to be on the journey that I am on. I hope to see more women enter these business spaces, as there's room for everyone to grow and be successful. I believe women of all diversities are strong and capable of doing what they want and what they are passionate about. Regardless of the circumstances, don't give up on what you want!"

# EDDIS NGWERA

*Maewo*

Owner of Warembulu Shop

I was fortunate to attend training on how to make oils and chips. Even though I do not have good educational background, these trainings have allowed me to produce products I sell to make a living.

My husband is my biggest motivator and helper, as well as my children. I find teamwork essential and the answer for my business to be successful. Working with my family helps me balance my work and personal life well because they know what I am going through and support me where needed.

When I get stressed or overwhelmed with the work, I find spending time with my friends helpful. I take some time off to spend with my friends to help release my stress.

An important lesson is to respect people in my community, especially the leaders.

I hope for women in Vanuatu to follow their goals. If they want to start a business, they need to look at their strengths, find what they can make or learn to make, and work hard for it. It's important for women to start businesses to support themselves and their families.

I would advise the next generation of women to take their education seriously, help their parents, and think carefully

**E**ddis is a 50-year-old businesswoman and owner of Warembulu Shop. She produces Warembulu ginger oil and Warembulu banana and taro chips. Eddis lives on Maewo Island, is married, and shares four children with her husband. Eddis has been selling her ginger oil and banana and taro chips since 2016. Her products are selling on shelves on the islands of Maewo, Ambae, Efate, and Santo.

“My advice for anyone going through a challenge in their life is to be strong and believe in themselves, that they can overcome that challenge. Having a healthy and strong mind can help you overcome whatever challenges you face.





*" I hope for women in Vanuatu to follow their goals, if they want to start a business, they need to look at their strengths and work hard for it. "*

and properly about their goals. They must work hard to achieve these goals to benefit their families and themselves.

If I am working on something or doing something that benefits my community and seen as inspirational, I would want my

children and community to carry on that legacy and make it grow or replicate it."

# EDNA PAOLO

## Malekula

Manager, Malekula Holiday Villas



**E**dna is from the village of Tisma in Malekula. She lives with her husband and three children in Lakatoro town in Malekula. Edna completed her primary education in Uripiv and Amelvet, then junior secondary schooling at Matevulu College, and senior secondary at Malapoa

College. Before managing Malekula Holiday Villas, she worked as a sales and tour guide for an adventure center for two years until 2004, then at Poppies on the Lagoon for another two years before moving to Malekula to work at the Department of Tourism until 2018. Since then, Edna has been the co-owner and manager of Malekula Holiday Villas.

“Malekula Holiday Villas started with one bungalow, then an additional two after the first year, and we currently have twelve rooms that our guests use. I was the sole employee until we began to get more guests, and we now employ six people and bring in additional men to help with construction work and general maintenance

when needed.

To help sustain our business operations and keep our employees, we have other business ventures due to the unpredictable nature of the tourism industry. For instance, we are agents of Vancare Insurance Ltd and South Seas Cargo and run a travel agency, Island Experience Vanuatu, that allows us to keep our workers employed and bring on more people when the demand is high.

What I like about my job is that it advertises my beautiful island, Malekula, domestically and contributes to marketing Vanuatu internationally. I aim to have a clean, comfortable, and peaceful space for my guests. I can also see how our business is helping my employees financially support their families; it brings me joy.

It is human nature, unfortunately, to be insecure about starting a business or engaging in a project. But I would tell women currently employed that their job will not be automatically handed to their child when they retire; start thinking about starting a business. For unemployed women, my advice is to seek guidance about what you can do to help your family financially; institutions like the Department of Cooperatives are there to help us - talk to them.

Starting a business is not easy. I am thankful that my husband is open to my suggestions and ideas, and how well we cooperate helps us and our business grow and be successful.





*" I would like to encourage women to believe in themselves. I am proud to see other women excel, seeing them motivates me, so I always tell myself 'If she can do it, I can do it'. I am aware not all women have the capacity or necessary resources to be equally successful, but believing in themselves and what they know they can achieve can be a steppingstone to achieving their goals. "*

I encourage women to believe in themselves. I am proud to see other women excel; seeing that motivates me, and I always tell myself, 'If she can do it, I can do it'. I am aware that not all women have the

capacity or resources to be equally successful; believing in themselves and what they know they can achieve can be a stepping stone to achieving their goals.

Ni-Vanuatu women are blessed and capable of leading and being successful. I admire women farmers who support their families and contribute to the economy when they sell their produce".

# EVELYNE LISTER

*Tanolu / Efate*

Founder, Chef and Manager of  
Evelyne Lister's Catering



**E**velyne Lister has been operating 'Evelyne Lister's Catering', a local catering business, for thirteen years. From Tanoliu Village, she is married with four daughters

and seven grandchildren. Evelyne comes from a family of ten children and did her primary education in Pauvatu French primary school in her home village.

Evelyne discontinued her education at the age of fourteen and has been working since. She started as a babysitter, then a cleaner, and had her first child at the age of sixteen. Evelyne then got married and travelled to England where she worked as a carer at an elderly care home. While in England, Evelyne took up cooking, sewing, and caregiving classes and training.

When Evelyne moved back to Port Vila, she started her catering business. With two staff, the company began by

preparing and delivering work lunches for two companies in Port Vila. The company now has over seven permanent staff and operates full-time from Monday to Saturday with over six catering orders a day and 280 to 300 serves to execute.

"A normal day for me consists of doing five to six catering jobs, so my morning routine is to wake up at 3:30 am to prep my food, pick up my staff, and do all the necessary work until 6:30 am. At 6:30 am I will spend a couple of hours exercising then continue with my work until late at night. This has been my routine for eight years since starting the business. Even when I travel for holidays I am constantly on Facetime speaking to my staff, there is no rest day for me.

My husband is my greatest inspiration. He came to Vanuatu to work as a volunteer and during his time here, he started up two businesses that are successful to date. Seeing how he managed to do that motivated me to start my own business.

I create working relationships with my staff and customers by being direct, kind, and not afraid to speak my mind. I find it easy to build a relationship with anyone by starting a simple conversation with them. Being a woman from Naraside (north Efate) helps because we love to talk.

Women in long-term relationships need to have a source of income, we are more aware of household needs, especially mothers. By having your own source



*"Your mind is powerful: when you think it, do it. Do not doubt yourself and your ability."*

of income, you can better manage your household with fewer arguments. In England, I applied to be a carer without my husband's knowledge. After I was offered the job, I went back home and told him I was starting work the next day."

I encourage women in Vanuatu to believe in themselves and speak up more. To start something new from the bottom up is always hard, but once you move past that starting point and keep going forward, you will only go up from there.

Try your best to achieve your goals. It's hard to be successful but it's even easier to fail. So, keep failing until you succeed."

# FLORENCE MACKENZIE LONSDALE

*Rah*

Manager of the Dori Bungalow,  
Torba Province



**F**lorence is a resourceful woman who lives on Raa Island, Torba Province, and has managed the beautiful Dori Bungalows for the last 10 years. She is a woman who is

no stranger to the struggles and challenges of managing a small home-grown family business but her story is one of facing challenges with prayer and faith, and enduring with the support of friends, family, and community.

“I made it to grade 10 at Arep Junior Secondary School in my formal education but I came back to Raa Island after that to stay with my family. When I returned, I taught Kindergarten because I wanted to help children on the island learn, and also helped at our small bungalow business here.

Initially I helped my parents run the Dori Bungalow as a cleaner but now that they are no longer here, I manage the bungalow. Dori Bungalows

was established in 2010 by my parents, and in 2015 I started managing it. Initially there was only one bungalow, but since then we are seeing more guests, and now have three bungalows. One of my proudest achievements is being able to change the bungalow designs and upgrade the amenities. Now we are looking to expand the bungalows further.

To me both education and experience are important. What little education I have, paired with my experience has helped me manage the business. I didn't study to be a manager so there have been challenges when dealing with guests and delivering quality service. There are complaints about fire ants biting guest and transport for guests, but I always find a way to make it better for my guests. Hospitality is something I value having and giving.

Decision-making is a big part of my job and sometimes I still feel frightened to step up and make these decisions. My mother always told me to pray when I was fearful, and I make it a point to always pray over my decisions, so I know I am making the right decision at the right time.

My mother was my biggest inspiration; she always guided me and encouraged me. She was a woman who helped everyone and when she passed in 2019, it was difficult for me but my partner continues to be supportive of me and the business.

Women are advisers of all, they consider the families, the church, and parents. So, they



*"Women are advisers of all, they consider the families, the church, parents. So they speak to help everyone."*

speak to help everyone. We are helpers. Women in Vanuatu have changed so much, we are now leaders, workers in the private sector, seasonal workers, and leaders. That

makes me feel so much pride in our country and our women. My hope for the women of Vanuatu is that we learn to trust ourselves more and see that we can do things that men

can too. We go through a lot of challenges but as women we endure and we stand strong, with that we need to learn to trust ourselves."

# GRACE UNITY VANVA

*Mere Lava*

Air Navigation Service  
Administration Officer, Airports  
Vanuatu Ltd



an Air Navigation Service Administration Officer with Airports Vanuatu Ltd, Grace is a professional woman in the aviation sector responsible for enforcing standards, policies, and procedures within her work environment.

Grace serves on the Pacific Trade Invest Australia via the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce (VCCI) and assists with the Pacific Island Women in Business program. Alongside this, Grace is a member of V-lab, which fosters innovation, idea development, and social entrepreneurship to continue her professional growth.

“An important lesson I have learned throughout my career is to do the best to your ability and have integrity. When situations

are unstable, challenge the decisions to pave the way forward.

My hope for the women of Vanuatu is that there is more emphasis on educating women. This way, women can take ownership, become leaders, and get into decision-making roles.

A quote that motivates me is ‘Respect yourself so that others have respect for you’.

The most inspirational person in my life would be my adoptive mother. She cared for me after my parents passed away and has always encouraged women in business when I was growing up and this has stuck with me. A Bible verse that rings true for me is Proverbs 22:6, which says, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it”.

My advice to women who may face self-doubt when chasing their dreams is to have courage,

**G**race Unity Vanva originates from Mere Lava in the Torba Province and now resides in Port Vila alongside her partner and children. As



*"An important lesson I have learnt throughout my career is to do the best to your ability and have integrity. When situations are not stable, challenge the decisions being made to pave a way forward."*

trust, and believe in yourself. When I go through hardships, I identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to help me develop

strategies to overcome the obstacles. Have faith and be obedient to the Lord. Show your honesty

and submit to your profession the same way you would your family".

# HELEN JIMMY IARAPIA

*Tanna*

Owner and Manager, Sunset  
Bungalows



One of the bungalows is dormitory style with six rooms and shared bathroom and toilet facilities. Helen completed her primary education at Isini Village, Tanna Island, and at 18 years old she moved to Lenakel where she got married and worked in sales at the Tafea Cooperative. While doing this, Helen also oversaw logistics, stocktake, and orders, and generally took care of the cooperative.

“TAFEA Cooperative was the only and biggest shop in Tanna when I started working there. Everyone from across Tanna would shop there. The Cooperative then expanded, and TAFEA Guest House was built. In 2006, I decided to build a bungalow, and that’s when Sunset Bungalows was born.

My husband is my greatest supporter. When I approached him about the idea, he did not question it but encouraged me to give it a go. He is helpful with the business, trusts me, and listens to my ideas.

We started with one bungalow and built the other five later. The bungalows were not built at the same time, it took us a few years. I am grateful that many local ni-Vanuatu men and women love to support us when they travel to Tanna for work or holiday.

For a business to succeed, you must believe strongly in your business, especially if you are a woman and a mother. Don’t settle for less, think big because you can achieve anything you put your mind to. Women should not only rely on their partners to do everything. They can be the breadwinner.

When I face challenges, I find praying helpful. I am very committed to my church, especially my God. I know that I can overcome any challenge I face with God by my side.

As a class six leaver, I believe education may help, but it isn’t the only avenue. If you have a goal in your heart and mind, and you try your best to achieve





*" For a business to succeed, you must believe strongly in your business, especially if you are a woman and a mother. Don't settle for less, think big because you can achieve anything you put your mind to. "*

your goal by going through the challenges that come with it, you will achieve that goal.

I think that all men and women are the same, we can do anything we put our mind to.

Women are now drivers, and mechanics and doing jobs that were not common for women to do in the past. This should mean something.

I try to help my family, community, church, and village

where and when necessary. It enables me to create and maintain a lasting positive relationship with those around me."

# HON. GLORIA JULIA KING (MP)

*Efate*

Marketing Manager, Kava House



school, then went to Onesua for four years and to New Zealand for two for her secondary education. Passionate about tourism, Gloria found her first job as a tour guide at the Evergreen Tours, then later became involved in sales and marketing until 2017. Gloria then became the marketing manager for Kava House. She worked there full-time until 2022 when she was elected Member of Parliament for Efate Rural.

**G**loria Julia King is the marketing manager of Kava House, a locally owned kava packaging and exporting business based in Mele, Port Vila. Gloria completed her primary education at Melemaat primary

“I went into depression after Evergreen went into receivership as I was attached to the company and had a strong bond with staff. In 2015, when the business started facing difficulties after Cyclone Pam, I was pregnant with my fourth child and was emotionally and

mentally vulnerable.

I am thankful to my husband, my best friend and confidant, who helped me overcome the mental and emotional battle. My husband believed in me and convinced me to join Kava House, which provided me with the opportunity for personal growth. It gave me the confidence to run for elections and become a member of parliament.

When I joined Kava House, I strongly advocated for women’s representation, and I am pleased to say that 40 percent of staff are women. I wanted women to oversee packaging because women have better attention to detail and will produce a quality output.

Kava House has impacted many ni-Vanuatu women and men, including kava farmers and staff. Kava House is about empowering people and their goals, especially locals.

Because I was not a kava drinker, I had to be innovative in product promotion to appeal to everyone, not just kava drinkers. For instance, in collaboration with Lapita Café, we created Kava House merchandise, kava cookies, kava chocolate, and kava flavoured drinks. We have partnered with a company to produce kava strips that we will launch soon.

I am the woman I am today because of my parents and the upbringing they gave me. Having left school in year 13, my drive and passion for how far I’ve come is because of their teaching. A good attitude



*" I want to encourage women to identify their values and stay true to their values. My values have always been church, community, work and family, so I try my best to always keep them stable and have a good balance. "*

is vital and has helped me approach life, work, and my goals and dreams.

A vision board is essential to help me plan what I want for the future and the business's future. I encourage my children to create their vision boards and work to achieve the goals they've created.

I have a 'happy space' routine where every morning, for an

hour, I go for a walk. During the walk, I listen to preaching sermons and empowering messages and pick up rubbish along the coastline. I find this helpful to set my mood for the day.

I want to encourage women to identify what values are important to them and to stay true to these. My values have always been church, community, work, and family,

so I work hard to maintain a balance.

For the future of this country, I want to see a female Prime Minister and a minister, a female president, and a female speaker of parliament. Whoever is contemplating becoming a politician, I hope you are inspired to go for it, run for elections, and become the next leader of our country."

# JANET SINE

## *Pentecost*

Acting Manager, Sanma Creative Industry Community Company Limited



Janet has over 22 years of experience working in different positions in the private and public sectors, including the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources,

the Citizenship Office, the Council of Ministers in the Lini Government since 1980, and the Anglican Church's head office in Santo since 1992 before retiring in 2001. Janet remains proactive in her work with the Anglican Church. In 2015, her association with the Dolasa Handicraft, a Vanuatu church and partnership program under the Anglican Church, resulted in the position of Acting Manager of Sanma Creative Industry Community Company Limited.

A mother of three grown children and a grandmother to six grandchildren whom she adores, Janet did not imagine that life after retirement would involve her still doing such impactful work. To her surprise, at the 2023 International

Women's Day celebrations, Janet received the Andy Lynch Award for excellence in the community sector, one of the most significant life achievements she was honored to accept.

"I moved to Santo with my parents in 1966. I studied at the Anglican Church at the early primary level, moved to the British primary for grade 6, passed to Onesua High School, and then from 1977 to 1978, I studied at Malapoa College for two years before attending the Honiara Technical Institute in 1979 to take shorthand courses in administration.

Despite being retired, I helped with the consultations to help establish the creative community company. From there, I saw that women who weave, sew, and make a living from handicrafts needed this community organization, so I accepted the role of Acting Manager because I wanted to help.

I maintain a good relationship with my community by building trust with people and mobilise the women around me by showing up for them in whatever way I can. When there is work to do for development in my community, I stand with the women to get it done.

When I get daunted by new tasks, I face my hardships standing on Philippians 4:13 - We cannot do what we do without Christ; He gives us strength - we stand in Him.

The voice of women is needed in all areas of life because women bring balance to



*"Women are needed in all areas of life because we provide balance to decision making."*

decisions. In this world, we co-exist as men and women; we all think differently, but we share this country, and having a shared responsibility and trust between women and men is crucial. Women need to be part of the Parliament of the Republic of Vanuatu, where the decision-making happens. While there has been

an ongoing fight for this, we must work together to make it happen. I hope that the women of Vanuatu band together for a common cause.

If I could change one thing from my past, I would have invested in a business to keep generating income after I had retired. My advice to women

with big dreams and ideas is not to look down on themselves but to be strong and look around for help to achieve their goals. If you have a business, seek advice from those who have businesses. Do not worry about your educational level; know that skills and hard work have value too and can bring an income".

# JOELLE KAMATA

*Big Bay, Santo*

Owner and Manager of Vanua Soap



Joelle is the proud owner of Vanua Soap. She officially started her business in 2020, and despite the challenges she faced, particularly during the aftermath

of Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2022, she is glad that her business is becoming widely recognized. Joelle is positive that with the right support and networking, she will encourage more people to invest in local products and inspire other entrepreneurs to take the same leap of faith she did three years ago.

“I love the work that I do! The products I make are sourced purely from Vanuatu, which is what I am most proud of.

My business officially started in 2020, after I completed an online course dedicated to making soap. From there, I brought in family, friends, and people I could trust and rely on to help grow my business and join me on this new journey.

There have been many achievements. For instance, I won a tender with World Vision Vanuatu in 2020, where I provided soap for their COVID-19 response program, and this helped to kickstart my business.

And, of course, there have been a lot of challenges, which I like to look at as learning experiences. For instance, my current learning experience is how I can encourage ni-Vanuatu to support more local businesses like mine. In Port Vila, people are more open to buying from and supporting local businesses, which is great. But I still come across situations where people prefer buying an imported bar of soap than a bar of locally made Vanua soap for the same price. This is one of the many learning experiences I’m always trying to find strategies to overcome. I think a big part of that persistence comes from the education and work experiences I have had. When you pair your education with work experience, you’re unstoppable! Of course, you can have either of them and be and create remarkable things, but having both is a game changer and has significantly helped me grow this business. I draw strength and inspiration from the many wonderful people in my life, especially my grandmother. At an early age, my grandmother has had to be independent due to losing her parents. Growing up, she gave me so much advice, but the one thing that has stuck with me until today is this, ‘Be happy and remember to help others who aren’t as fortunate as you’.



*"When you pair your education with work experience, you're unstoppable! Of course, you can have either of them and be and create remarkable things, but having both is a game changer and has significantly helped me grow this business."*

It means helping others out of the goodness of your heart and not expecting anything in return. This has been a fond reminder for me since starting up my business.

There are many goals and accomplishments I have yet to

achieve, and the overall goal is to see Vanua Soap sold in stores across Vanuatu.

I am so proud of how far we have come as a country. There are more and more local businesses starting up and growing. I know that with the

right support and tools, we'll be able to expand our industries and develop our country's economy, all while using our local resources.

My journey with Vanua Soap has only just begun."

# LINROSE McDONALD BISIWEI

*Motalava*

Manager of Torba Handicraft  
Market



Linrose has been the manager of Torba Handicraft Market since 2015. 38-year-old Linrose has lived on Mota Lava Island since 2003 after leaving Port Vila.

From 2003, Linrose engaged in voluntary work with the Vanuatu Red Cross Society until 2008, when she worked as a salesperson and manager of a shop in Mota Lava. She then worked for the Vanuatu Post in the money transfer section until she became the Handicraft Market Manager in 2015.

“Yes, the work I do is sometimes scary and challenging. Especially when I had to travel between the Islands of Torba Province on a banana boat for long hours in unpredictable waters. I can overcome these challenges through God’s protection and faith in Him.

I find inspiration in strong and fearless women, like women in churches who go as far as preaching the word of God. I

find inspiration in our women leaders, who are at the forefront to talk about and debate on issues that affect the women of this country.

For motivation, I always remind myself of the Bible verse Philippians 4:13, which says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. I believe having alone time is vital, so when I am stressed, I sit by myself to plan how I could overcome it.

I work a lot with women, so I try my best to keep our meetings and conversations fun to keep them interested, especially when we talk about the products they will produce, the process it takes to sell, and so forth. Communicating correct information is essential.

I advise women not to give up when they face challenges. We must not be discouraged because we did not achieve a certain level of education or because someone said we are not good enough. Women can do and achieve great things; believe in yourself, and if you think you can achieve your goal, go for it.

Women must be represented in decision-making places because women understand women better and would bring forward the points necessary for a safer work environment in the private sector.

My greatest accomplishment is the Torba Handicraft Market: it allows women in rural areas to earn a living, and some women now have small businesses that they opened from their handicraft earnings.





*" I find inspiration in strong and fearless women because I know they can talk and debate about issues that affect women. "*

I was not fortunate to complete my high school education, but I was lucky to take courses and training that equipped me with the skills to do what I do. I encourage young girls to take

education seriously because it has value.

I dream that one day more women get into Parliament so that they can be our voices

to ensure that the laws and decisions made for the country are representative of our nation".

# LIZ NAUPA PECHAN

*Erromango*

Founder and Co-owner of The  
Havannah Vanuatu



Liz is married with three children and is from the island of Erromango in Tafea province. After completing her primary and secondary education at Central

School and Malapoa College, she completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Sydney.

She commenced her working career with the Vanuatu Government at the Land Use Planning Unit and later moved on to start her own business in environmental and financial management services. She became licensed with accounting software provider MYOB, assisting many local businesses in developing and strengthening their accounting systems. MYOB recognized her decade of service by awarding her for the best sales in the Pacific region (2017).

Liz is a co-owner of The Havannah Vanuatu, a multi-award-winning boutique hotel

well-known in the South Pacific. With great vision for Vanuatu's tourism industry development, Liz and her husband designed, built, and opened The Havannah Vanuatu in August 2009. They had already established Pacific Catering, and these two hospitality enterprises have employed hundreds of ni-Vanuatu across two decades. Catering services have included providing meals for international film production companies, such as "Survivor" franchise shows for the USA, Australia, and France when they were filming in Vanuatu and were the principal caterers for the 2017 South Pacific Mini Games.

Liz is well known for her commitment to voluntary service. She has been proactive in charitable organizations like Kiwanis, the Vanuatu Paralympic Committee, Pack for Purpose, and community landscaping, especially at Vila Central Hospital. She won the Hanson Mataskelekele Women in Leadership Award in 2021 for her work during the COVID-19 pandemic in bringing together the private sector and Government to draft the Safe Business Operations policy and manual.

"I love what I do because I love being close to the action, and I want to make positive differences in my community, workplace, and country.

I do not believe in giving up when confronted with a negative situation; I consider challenges as lessons learned; I learn from them and move on. I am not afraid to take risks - I keep going.



*" Keep striving, do not be afraid of setbacks, use them as learning blocks to build from, and continue to work hard. Always have a plan B and be adaptable to change. "*

When I am stressed, I take a deep breath and work through the stress methodically, step by step. I take a structured approach to any issues and problems I come across. I find praying, exercising, and having a good time with friends and family always help. I consider the ocean as my spiritual place, so I often go for a swim to help me relax and recharge.

I have found inspiration from my

parents' dedication to Vanuatu and the many women I cross paths with who have overcome challenges. They have inspired me to be a better leader and person. To accomplish great things, start with the small tasks.

Women contribute significantly to the home, the community, the Government, and the nation. Women must be represented on Boards and in decision-making in these bodies.

My advice to women is to be brave, don't give up, get all the knowledge you need, be adaptable to change, and always have a Plan B.

My wish for Vanuatu is that she preserves her culture and beauty while allowing modern-day development, including the private and public sectors. Long God Yumi Stanap."

# MAISSA CAROLYNE ALATOA

*Ambae / Efate*

Chief Risk Officer, National Bank of  
Vanuatu



**M**aissa has worked in the banking industry for over 20 years. At 42 years old, she is the Chief Risk Officer at the National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV). After starting her career as a part-

time teller at ANZ bank and rising to the ranks as the first-ever female branch manager based in Santo, Maissa then moved to the National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV) and can now proudly add being a Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist (CAMS) and an affiliate of the Governance Institute of Australia (GIA) to her credentials.

Maissa finds strength, firstly, in God. Her faith is vital to how she lives her life. Vanuatu is a young nation and having its foundation in God is something Maissa is proud of and lives by daily. Secondly, Maissa finds strength in her family. For Maissa, surrounding yourself with people who love you, inspire, challenge, are proud of you, pray and uplift you, and

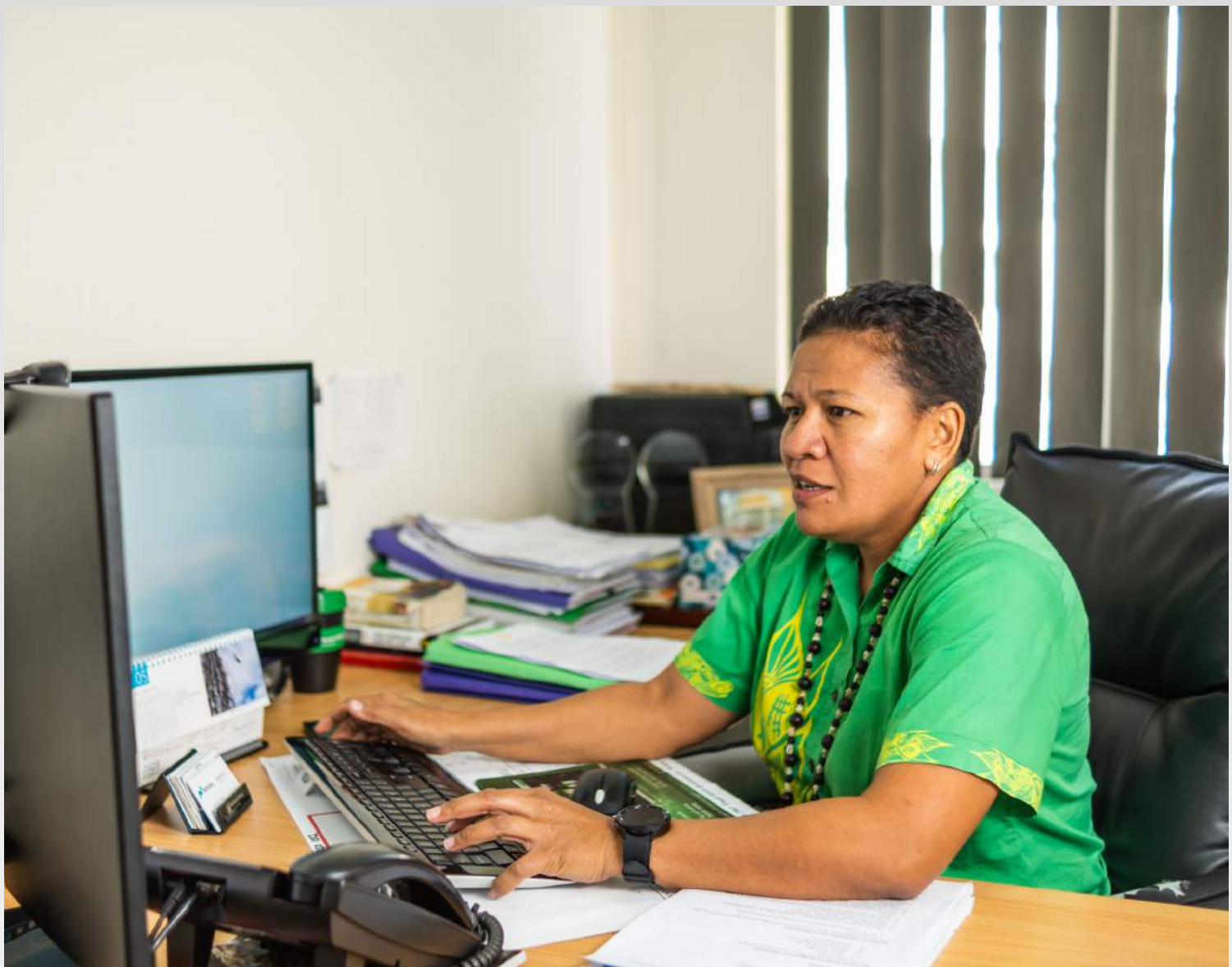
hold you accountable for your actions is crucial.

“I was born in Port Vila, and my family moved to Fiji when I was a young child as my parents were studying university there. They were eventually employed, so my brothers and I did our primary and secondary education in Fiji. I got a scholarship and went to school in New Zealand, then returned to Vanuatu, where I did not do well in year 13. I had to start all over again from scratch.

As I finished my education in secondary, I always strive to upskill myself. I am currently studying for a Master of Business Administration (MBA), and I believe that education and work experience are equally important. I take continuous professional development courses and activities across compliance, governance, and financial crime fields. I hope to get my MBA, upskill myself, and gain experience in other sectors within the banking industry.

Growing up and playing with siblings and friends in the schoolyard, we would always talk about our dreams and what profession we would like to get into when we grow up. Mine was to become a doctor. Now that I look back, it was probably my father’s persistence, enticing me with counting and being in awe of foreign currency coins he collected from his travels, that indirectly influenced me to become a banker.

When I started at NBV in 2017, only two of us made up the Risk & Compliance Department. Considering the ever-



*"There is more pressure on women in leadership roles, meaning we need to be there to change these dynamics."*

changing domestic and global compliance and governance landscape and its demands on governments, countries, and international organizations, there was a need to expand. Now, we have a team of four! We must be conscious of the risks that could happen to a bank and how to manage these. It is crucial to explain this to your team members – there is no point in telling them about policies and the process

of how to avoid risks. You also have to say why! One of my favorite parts of the job is the educational component of sharing this knowledge.

Women need representation because we think differently and have different perspectives and ideas. Vanuatu needs to be an advocate of change for equality and inclusivity. It is a fact that the scrutiny and pressure on women in leadership or society,

in general, is tenfold compared to our male counterparts in the same situation. There is more pressure on women in leadership roles, meaning we need to be there to change these dynamics, change the culture and mindset, and work more collaboratively and effectively with our male counterparts to achieve this".

# MARGARET RUSSET

*Efate*

Owner and Manager, Pacific  
Connection  
Rehabilitation Centre counsellor.



twenty years ago that provides services in Vanuatu and across the Pacific. Originating from Efate and Santo in Vanuatu, Margaret has secured a bachelor and Master's degree in translation and teaching, as well as a post-graduate Diploma in Counselling. For over twenty-five years, Margaret has provided free counseling to inmates, their families and victims. She is married with three children and two grandchildren.

**M**argaret Russet is living proof that regardless of how busy you become, you can always give back to the community. Margaret owns Pacific Connection, a translation agency set up over

“My job has allowed me to create genuine relationships with people of various backgrounds and taught me that learning is never-ending on a personal or professional level. Managing Pacific Connection and working in the rehabilitation centres with inmates and their families

as well as centres officers has taught me the value of genuine relationships.

Humility, mutual trust and a resilient spirit are essential to keep learning as well as giving ourselves and others space to allow growth, mistakes and recognition. Throughout my life people gave me opportunities for second chances, so in turn I reciprocate it when needed. Being a professional woman and a volunteer rehabilitation centre counsellor, I have, on rare occasions, faced barriers with men but this has never deterred me. I believe gender diversity is necessary for balanced decision-making and performance in any organization or group.

How do I face hardships at work, in rehab centres or personally? I remember Psalm 91, which speaks of God's faithfulness in the midst of trouble. My husband is supportive of my work commitments and is also totally involved in our rehabilitation work

Sometimes former inmates, their families or victims will hug us in a shop or on a street and thank us for having been that hand holding the tip of their slipping finger, then I know that it's all worth it.

My biggest inspiration is my mother who originated from Sydney. She met my dad here, and the rest is history. She taught me to be a hard worker and to have compassion on others, if we wanted, in turn, to have compassion from God in the day of distress. Her deep trust in God kept her going. My Dad taught me the importance



*" Being a professional woman, you face a lot of barriers from some men which is why I think board-gender diversity is necessary and will always improve a company's performance and bring balance to its decision making. "*

of keeping your word. If he could not keep it, he wouldn't say it.

Growing-up in an English and French-speaking environment, coupled with Bislama firmly rooted me in a translation context.

I am inspired by the resilience of women in Vanuatu and

the Pacific who in the face of adverse circumstances such as abuse and domestic violence will always find the strength to get-up again and share love around them.

I have been in situations where words alone could not express the distress victims and where

mutual tears, silence and hands-clinging were the only way to survive telling and hearing the story. I often see distress turn into forgiveness, hope and sky-soaring. Vanuatu is unique with its different ethnicities, which should be celebrated and respected.

# MARIE KELSIE JAVA

*Efate*

Manager of Blue Galaxy Kava Bar



**M**arie Kelsie Java has managed the Blue Galaxy Kava Bar, a well-known kava bar in Port Vila, since 2010. Coming from the island of Nguna, she is married with three children. Kelsie completed her primary education at Ecole Sainte Jeanne d'Arc and her high school education at Lycée Louis Antoine de Bougainville. Kelsie then worked in various administration and management roles before opening the Blue Galaxy Kava Bar in 2010 with her husband. To begin with, Kelsie would manage the bar after work, and in 2014, she committed herself fully to the family business.

“Right from the start, there were three of us doing everything from preparing and serving the kava to running the shop.

I have faced challenges in this business; however, it has not kept me from doing my best. I ask God to guide me and do my best not to let these challenges affect me so much. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”, is my favourite motivational quote from the Bible that has helped me overcome challenges I have faced in running my business.

My parents are the greatest source of inspiration for me. I am blessed to have parents who cared for and supported me.

I hope all women know they are enough; they can be managers or whoever they want. Women must trust themselves and each other. Self-discipline and





*" Women need to know they are enough and can be whoever they want to be; self-discipline and staying focused are important. We need to have decision-making roles in the country. "*

staying focused are critical and have helped me to run the kava bar for many years.

because they can juggle many roles and wear many hats, especially mothers.

contributions to the business. I especially appreciate my beloved husband and children for their continuous support".

Women must have decision-making roles in the country

I acknowledge my friends and families for their tremendous

# MARIE ROSE ARU MARANGO

*Efate*

Designer and Seamstress



**M**arie Rose Aru Marango, 63, is a proud designer and seamstress who has been sewing and displaying her craft at the Center Point Handicraft Market since 1993.

Marie Rose is married with five children. Before devoting herself to being a seamstress, she taught primary-level students for 27 years. Marie Rose is currently the president of the Handicraft Vanuatu.

“In 1991, while teaching, I decided to start a sewing business. I started it with just 5,000VT, and in 1993, I moved permanently to the Centre Point Handicraft Market, now known as VNPF Handicraft Centre.

I like designing and sewing because I am creating my craft. I like being my boss: I can work when I want to, choose to work from home and prioritize what I need to focus on for work and my personal life.

I find the courage to do what I do

through God. I turn to God for His guidance, protection, and strength. When the pandemic started, I decided that at the Handicraft Market, we would pray every 3 pm to ask God for His guidance, and we have not regretted it since.

I am looking at diversifying my products. I have ordered materials for my designs. My first order will be coming soon, and I look forward to sharing my new designs. I encourage women at the Handicraft Market to start thinking about ordering their materials. I commend Tina, owner of Exotically You, who places fabric orders for her designs.

Many outstanding women in Vanuatu inspire me, like Nicole, the owner of JCK Secondhand Clothing, who has successfully owned multiple shops around Port Vila. I want to see women in Vanuatu own businesses and be independent and determined. My brothers also inspired me as talented artists themselves. Seeing what they do made me venture into painting and designing my clothing.

Representation of women is critical as they are our voices. Women should not be skeptical and envious of other women, especially fellow women running for elections. Women are the best advisors and can be good leaders when given the opportunity.

I encourage young women to listen more and talk less, just



*"Female representation is important as they are our voices. Women are the best advisors and can be very good leaders when given the opportunity."*

like the Bible verse of Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God". This verse reminds us to be good listeners and listen to our children and

those around us.

Women should venture into the private sector and start businesses. Whether their

passion is to grow flowers, bake, sew, or paint - if women do what they love, they can be successful."

# MARILYN KALANGIS

*Efate*

Founder and Owner of Erakor Flea Market and Commissioner of Oaths



**M**arilyn is a 75-year-old single mother of two. She is the founder and owner of Erakor Flea Market, set up in 2013. Currently, she is a Commissioner for Oaths.

Marilyn completed her primary education at Erakor and her secondary education at the British Secondary School (now Malapoa College). She later went to New Zealand in 1971 to complete a year-long training. She worked for Barclays Bank for twelve years between 1973 and 1985, then moved to ANZ Bank, where she worked until her retirement in 2012.

Marilyn was appointed a Commissioner for Oaths for Vanuatu in 1985 while working for ANZ Bank. After retiring in 2012, she continued to provide this service as a Commissioner for Oaths to the public.

One of the best decisions I made after retirement was to set up the Erakor Flea Market in 2013 to help the mamas get

into plants and be able to sell them and make money out of them, especially those who are unemployed. I always have been passionate about plants, and during my working career, I knew that this was an area I would focus on when I retire.

My favourite quote is from Mother Teresa, which says that when I encounter a problem, I do not focus on it but look to the Lord, and He helps me deal with it while I hold on to the strong hand of Jesus. When I have any issues or problems, I will always pray about them and allow God to guide me to solve the problem.

My inspiration is my mother. Her sacrifices have enabled me to become who I am today. She helped my father, a pastor, to support our family financially by selling the root crop she grew in her garden. My father passed away when I was still in school, and my mother financially supported us throughout. Like many ni-Vanuatu, she was resilient and overcame many challenges with a smile.

My biggest regret is how I allowed my work to take me away from my duties as a single mother. It meant I was



*" Look around for someone who inspires you and follows your path. If that person can do it, you can do it too. Believe in yourself and your dream and go achieve it. "*

not present when one of my sons passed away at just 21 years old. I wish I had a good balance of work and life to be there for him. I would encourage everyone to ensure they maintain good work-life balance.

One of the most important life lessons I learned is to listen to people trying to help you overcome life challenges. It may be your parents, teachers, pastors, managers, or supervisors. They only want the best for you.

I would encourage young women to believe in themselves and look around for someone who can inspire them. Believe in yourself and your dream and go achieve it."

# MAYIE FLORAH TIMOTHY

*Nguna*

Head Chef



**M**ayie is a 35-year-old woman from Nguna Island. A mother of three children, Mayie has worked as a head chef for five years. Mayie attended primary school at Nguna Island, then completed her junior secondary education at Vaum Secondary School on

Paama Island, after which she studied cooking at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology (VIT) for a year.

“My father’s oldest brother inspired me to become a chef. He is a chef, so before studying at VIT, I would always help him in the kitchen when he was cooking. I was always fascinated by how he could calculate how many ingredients he needed to cook simply by counting the number of people he was cooking for, especially during family gatherings. That was one of the many reasons I chose to become a chef.

I love what I do because I learn something new daily in the kitchen. I acknowledge that I am still learning, so when I make mistakes, I take it as

an opportunity to learn and grow. Having the right attitude and approach has allowed me to become the head chef, something I never thought I would become.

At my workplace, we love to work as a team and encourage each other. We care about and look out for each other and ensure everyone is happy. I share my knowledge with my staff whenever possible.

I am thankful for my partner who supports me, giving me advice and encouraging me, which allows me to balance my career and personal life.

My goal is to do things to the best of my abilities, whether at work or in my personal life, whether easy or difficult. I do everything with passion and do this properly to achieve the best results.

I believe that the next generation of women can do whatever they set their minds to. If I can do it, any other woman can. I want to remind women that their future does not end when they become a mother or have achieved a higher standard of education.

Women must not underestimate themselves or each other; if you have a goal, believe in yourself and your abilities to achieve it. To me, women are natural leaders. I am still hopeful that we will have more women elected as members of parliament to lead our nation.

Working in the private sector, the most important lesson I have learned is to work as a team. And that communication



*" I want women to not underestimate themselves or each other, if you have a goal, believe in yourself and your abilities to achieve that goal. To me, women are natural leaders. I am still hopeful that we will have more women elected as members of parliament to lead our nation. "*

is vital to great teamwork. When we work as a team, our customers are always satisfied with our service delivery.

I acknowledge God for his blessings in my life. I am fortunate to have the backing of my boss, enabling me to

become a head chef. I am also grateful for the support of my parents".

# MEILEE CHAN (MELLY)

*Hong Kong / Vanuatu*

Owner, Harbour View Restaurant



**M**eilee Chan is a familiar face to many as the long-time owner of Harbour View Restaurant in Port Vila. After finishing her secondary school education in Hong Kong, Meilee moved

to Vanuatu thirty-four years ago with a man whom she married, opened a business with, and had three children. Their separation saw Meilee become a single mother with a business to run, something she has continued successfully for over twenty-seven years.

Alongside wanting to provide a good education for her children, Meilee's dedication and determination towards her business come from her faithful customers.

"My customers watched me build this business. They witnessed the hard times during my divorce while I tried to manage the restaurant by myself, and they genuinely cared. My customers look after me.

As the Manager, I ensure we deliver the best service to our customers. That is the best part of my job. I make sure every customer feels welcomed and well-served. The intriguing part of it is having generations of customers. Many of them are fourth generation, such as the grandmother, mother, son, and grandson. The local market is critical for me.

My approach to running a successful business is consistency. For me, this means the service and products that we deliver. The style of Chinese food served is from Hong Kong, and I do not want to change that. It is what our customers have come to expect. Of course, we constantly review our menu and offer new dishes, but Hong Kong style.

I believe the paramount quality for success is to be hardworking. There will always be testing times, so you must support yourself, go for it, and never give up. Nothing is easy. Life is short, so go after what you want; you are free to do anything. There is no right or wrong way of doing things, and nobody is perfect. If you are willing to work hard, then it is possible.

One thing I respect about the women of Vanuatu is that they are strong. They work hard to provide for their family and look after their kids. I hope that they





*" Nothing is easy. Life is short, so go after what you want; you are free to do anything. There is no right or wrong way of doing things, and nobody is perfect. If you are willing to work hard, then it is possible. "*

can also find time to look after themselves.

I am pleased to see a shift in attitudes towards women in the professional sector. When I first began managing the

restaurant, gaining respect as a woman was difficult, but now I see women holding high positions; this makes me happy. Especially when I see them coming to my restaurant for lunch in their beautiful

business suits. This is a big difference, and I am pleased to see this change occurring".

# MOANA KORIKALO

*Ifira*

Head of Retail, Bank South Pacific  
(BSP)



**M**oana, mother of three sons and powerhouse of the banking industry, is currently the head of the largest team at Bank South Pacific (BSP). Her story is one

of strength and persistence, drawing from different experiences and becoming the best version of herself – for her and her family.

“While starting my 100-level courses at USP’s Emalus campus, I became pregnant with my first son and began working at Holiday Inn to provide for him. I worked as the Executive Assistant to the General Manager for two years before moving to Teouma Holdings. Life moved fast at that point. I became a mother of two sons, juggling many things and simply trying to provide for them. At the end of 2009, I was offered the role of Executive Assistant at the Westpac Bank, given my previous work experience. As a newcomer to the banking industry, I invested time

learning about banking policies and procedures. I asked my colleagues questions, trying to learn from their experiences while drawing from my own.

My new back-office role began proving monotonous, and I quickly realized my interest in customer service – I enjoyed meeting and working with different people, helping to find solutions to their problems. So, when a position opened as branch manager for Port Vila and Santo, I knew I wanted to make a change. I was initially nervous about applying. I was 25, had only been there two years, and had received comments about my age and experience. But I refused to let that stop me because it wasn’t just about me; it was for me and my sons.

I became the branch manager. It brought its challenges but made me a better leader for it. I became head of retail when BSP acquired Westpac. I currently head the largest team, with 59 staff and seven line managers. It’s safe to say I never have a dull day; I am on the go from opening to closing. I oversee four BSP branches – Port Vila, Freshwota, Santo, and Tanna – all ATMs, EFTPOS, and other digital transactions. We’re trained to deal with all kinds of emergencies in banking, such as, break-ins or robberies. Worrying about your team’s safety and being on call 24/7 is stressful. I have an incredible support system. My parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings have supported my sons and me throughout this journey. Netball and coaching are stress outlets, giving me a sense of belonging and purpose



*" I have to be a better person for my sons, I have to be a role model for them, someone they can look up to. "*

in my darkest moments. I have been upfront about my career goals, telling my current boss, "I will take your seat one day." I have proven time and time again that I can achieve whatever I set my mind to. It may not always happen in the time I had set, but the key is not to give up on yourself and

your dream. Imagine how you want your destiny to look and find the people who will help you live it. This is my advice to my sons, showing them, you can reach your goals.

In 2019, we moved into a house I built for us on land I had acquired. I had since opened

a small business by my house, setting up an EFTPOS machine for people in my community and providing a space for my sons to gain business experience. To grow as individuals, we must share our knowledge with our communities - something I continue to do every day."

# NADIA KANEGAI

*Ifira*

Founder of Child Care Centre



**W**ith over 35 years of teaching experience, many of them spent empowering the women around her, Nadia is determined to continue giving back to her

community. She believes in helping others where she can and more importantly, learning from them. From humble beginnings to being the founder and owner of one of the most sought-after schools in the heart of Port Vila, Nadia vividly portrays the quote she lives by, “Serve humanity with dignity”.

“I have had my fair share of jobs within many different industries in the country. I have worked in the tourism and telecommunications industries and, of course, the education sector. There was not a single job I hated because I got to work with and learn from many different people. When I was in the tourism industry, I had the opportunity to travel to Spain. I learned about the importance of working and being part of a

team in the telecommunications industry, and with education – you learn something new every day, especially from the students.

Now, when I started Child Care Centre, I had no intention that it would become a Primary and Junior Secondary School. I established it as a Child Day Care service. It was somewhere parents, specifically, working mothers, could drop off their children to be cared for while they went to work. At that time, there was a push from the Vanuatu Government to encourage and bring more women into the workforce. So, as a woman and a mother, I thought, what better way to support women than by creating a safe space for them to bring their children while they go to work?

As the years progressed, I integrated the Day Care into the national education system. I started with pre-school, then class 1, which grew to class 6, and finally, Year 8 in Secondary. It was not easy setting up the Child Care Centre, and it still has its challenges, but I can say, without a doubt, that I love my job. I love working with people to create change, and what better way to do that than by working with our future generation?

I still see many of my students who are now grown up, have their own families, and are succeeding in their journeys – and I am always so happy when I see that.

Looking at where I am today, I am so thankful for where I



*"I still have lots more to learn and much more to give on my journey, but I hope more women realise the importance of staying true to your goals and showing up every day to accomplish them."*

started. Unlike my siblings, I grew up under the care of my grandmother, and she was a sweetheart! She would make simboro for us, whether with manioc, taro, yam, or banana - that was my meal daily. Believe me, there were days

when I could not stand to eat it, but looking back, I would not have had it any other way. My grandmother is one of the main reasons I am disciplined, motivated to achieve my goals, and honest with myself and those around me.

I still have lots more to learn and much more to give on my journey, but I hope more women realise the importance of staying true to your goals and showing up every day to accomplish them".

# NADINE HAINES

*New Caledonia*

Owner and Manager, Air and Ice  
Services



**N**adine Haines has been the owner and manager of Air and Ice Services for the last 17 years in Port Vila. She has built a name for herself in this industry while balancing

her duties as a mother and wife. While Nadine is currently the only woman in Vanuatu operating a business in this line of work, she hopes that more women will be inspired by her story and follow in her footsteps.

“I started my company in 2006. While the original business plan didn’t work out the way it was supposed to, it ended up working out exactly the way it was meant to.

When I started the company, I had no idea what I was doing and had no educational background in this line of work. I just saw a great business opportunity and decided to take it. At that time, I was fortunate to have a young ni-Vanuatu man who had some

experience and knowledge of air conditioners to help get my company off the ground and on its feet. Today, I am thankful that he worked with me for 13 years before deciding to pursue his journey.

My journey with this company presented its accomplishments and challenges. I was hands-on with the job, which was great fun because I worked with my team to install air conditioners while working to ensure that we did the job correctly. I learned so much on my journey - the majority was self-taught and predominantly through experience. Looking back, I am glad that I faced the challenges that I did because it’s pushed me to where I am today.

Being a woman in a heavily male-dominated field was a challenge, but this never fazed me because I knew my strengths and, more importantly, what my clients expected - and I’m pleased to say I always exceeded their expectations.

Before this business, I was in managerial and accountant roles at different companies. These experiences helped me when I started Air and Ice Services. I came in already knowing how to provide quotes, ensuring our finances were in order, basically, the admin duties, but this allowed my team to focus on their strengths and what they needed to do.

I’m proud that my eldest son, Chris, is part of the business and has come a long way to be the technician he has become. I’ve also had a young female working as a technician in the



*" Being a woman in a heavily male-dominated field was a challenge but it never phased me because I knew my strengths – and I'm pleased to say I always exceeded their expectations. "*

field. I plan to leave this business to my son, so the remainder of my journey is committed to supporting him and ensuring he understands what it takes to run this business.

I'm thankful for where I am in

my professional and personal life. I have many more people I can go to for support and advice, which is great because that wasn't the case when I started. There used to be a lot of competition, and don't get me wrong, there still is,

but there's more than enough space. And so, I would love to see more young women enter this field of work – if I can do it, so can you".

# NATHALIE DOVAN

*Tongoa / Efate*

Operation and Maintenance Manager,  
Wind Farm, UNELCO ENGIE



**N**athalie has been the wind farm Operation and Maintenance Manager at UNELCO since 2017. Coming from the Island of Efate and Tongoa, Nathalie is 40 years old

and shares three children with her partner. Nathalie completed her primary education at the then Vila North Primary School and her secondary studies at Malapoa College. She

then completed a Bachelor of Engineering Technology (majoring in electrical and electronics) at the University of the South Pacific. Nathalie heads the renewable energy generation department at UNELCO. She is responsible for the 3.4 MW wind farm at Kawene, including operations and maintenance of solar farms at Tagabe, Undine Bay, and Kawene. She is managing a team of three male technicians.

“I have been in the electricity sector for 14 years because I love what I do. I am happy with how we are focussing more on renewable alternatives to electricity generation, and my goal is to manage other renewable energy farms in the future. When I face issues at work and in life, I ask for help or discuss with people who can relate. I know I am not alone, so I look for assistance and guidance when I think it’s necessary, which helps.

An inspirational person I consider a mentor in my life is my father. He is a hard worker who also does what he loves for a living. My father helped me to realize that an important life lesson is to choose a job I enjoy doing, not work for money, and always be open to learning.

I create motivation for my team by encouraging teamwork. When everyone works together, we feel less isolated: we feel more open to engage in our tasks. As a result, the work we needed to do was done, meeting the necessary expectations.

I manage stress by having





*" Be open-minded and keep contributing to the development of our nation. To be successful, women need to be passionate about what they do. "*

a positive attitude. I try to accept that some things are beyond my control, manage my time more effectively, and spend enough time with my loved ones. Taking care of my physical health helps, so I do a few minutes of simple active exercises, eat a balanced and healthy diet, and get enough sleep.

I hope that women in Vanuatu can be proud of our beautiful country and respect each other. Be open-minded and keep contributing to the development of our nation. To be successful, women need to be passionate about what they do and be willing to improve themselves and learn.

My advice for young girls is to believe in themselves. Do not be afraid of trying something different, and don't give up when things do not go as planned. Remember to be kind to yourself in your journey, learn from your mistakes, work hard, and be determined to achieve your personal goals."

# SHERLEY PATA

*Pentecost*

Business Owner of Tiwi Trading



Sherley Pata hails from the island of Pentecost and is the business owner of Tiwi Trading, a cargo and freight company serving the islands of Vanuatu. Sherley, her

husband from Tanna and four children, has run this shipping business for seven years. She is one of few women within this male-dominated industry but is making waves of positive change as a female ambassador throughout the Pacific.

Sherley is heavily involved in the Vanuatu Women in Maritime Association, where she is the Secretary. The purpose of the Association is to promote women in the maritime sector and create an inclusive atmosphere that values the role women play. Through the Association, Sherley has become a spokesperson for a solar panel project implemented throughout the Pacific to reduce carbon emissions. Tiwi Trader is currently the only

ship in Vanuatu to be involved, serving as a model to inform how effective this mode of renewable energy use will be for others interested in the future.

“I grew up in Port Vila, and after completing my year 12 studies, I had different jobs that led to operating timber on the islands. Shipping was in high demand, so one day, we decided as a family to purchase Tiwi Trader and begin shipping.

My profession has taught me that leadership skills are something you can learn. Take risks, be confident, and have courage. Respect those already in the industry so you can continue to learn and grow.

I stay motivated by undertaking new training opportunities and broadening my knowledge in the maritime industry. Through this, I can continue building upon my professional achievements and business.

A quote that I live by is to believe in yourself. You are capable of achieving great things.

I balance my personal and professional life by making the time to exercise and pray. God continues to help me run this business.



*" My profession has taught me that leadership skills are something you can learn. Take risks, be confident, and have courage. Respect those already in the industry so you can continue to learn and grow. "*

My hope for the women of Vanuatu is that every woman can complete their education, regardless of the obstacles. Power is knowledge.

Some advice I would share with any woman who may face self-doubt is that it is better to decide for your future at a young age: work hard and

never give up until you achieve your goals".

# STEPHANIE SENEI MAHUK

*Tanna / Papua New  
Guinea*

Law Partner at Geoffrey Gee &  
Partners



Stephanie is a brilliant force in the legal sector. Recently making partner at Geoffrey Gee and Partners, Stephanie shares in its ownership, participating in management and operational decisions, administering legal services, and managing client

relations. While she is all brain and logic in a courtroom, she is all brawn when it comes to destressing, preferring extreme sports like surfing, free diving, and gym.

Stephanie points to her love for reading as a child growing up as crucial in motivating and shaping her. Her parents directed her toward biographies of influential people who made history, like Nelson Mandela and Hellen Keller, inspiring her love for learning and honing her analytical skills.

While she did not envision herself as a solicitor, fresh out of university, Stephanie's circumstances led her into the private sector, where she has been in the legal profession for over ten years.

"I love how interesting my job is. Each client is different and presents a distinct and intellectually stimulating legal task. I learn something new every day and stepping out of my comfort zone to take on high-profile and legally challenging cases and testing new precedents is exhilarating.

Once, as a young lawyer sitting in the court registry waiting for a hearing, I was nervous. Garry Blake walked in for a different case. We got talking, and I told him how terrified I was. He responded that the correct dose of nerves keeps lawyers on their toes to anticipate opposing counsel and seek the best counterargument.

The fraternity of legal practitioners is small and majority male, especially in litigation. There is a rise in litigating females, which is positive. People have a misconstrued perception of lawyers, thinking lawyers are guns for hire, plotting chaos and mayhem. Nothing could be further from the truth. Lawyers must act honourably towards each other and hold utmost deference for the Court.

Education and experience have created the perfect blend that has complemented my career. A double degree in Law and Commerce opened my pathway into the legal profession. However, experience has enhanced my skill set in advocacy, making me curious to learn and be stimulated by new challenges.

I am proud to be part of the legal team for the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion



*" I want Vanuatu women to be unapologetic and confidently claim their space from the classroom to board rooms, court rooms and parliament. "*

project alongside the Office of the Attorney General. The work put into this resolution was immense and essential to Vanuatu as one of the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world. The ICJ Advisory Opinion could drive ambitious climate action and re-align climate treaties from impotent pledges to vigorous commitments affecting tangible changes.

Vanuatu women are grounded in cultural influences, a double-edged sword. While it teaches

us respect and service to others, it can clip our wings and cage us. The generation before us is a shining beacon of balancing these values and harnessing them to inform their careers, set new standards, be advocates for ambitious girls and women, and redefine ambition. It is not distasteful for girls and women to be ambitious; colloquially put - it is a flex.

Representation of women is critical. Women carry across the female perspective that informs

and implements decisions mindful of these and translates as fully representative of society. Women must unapologetically and confidently claim their space, from classroom to boardrooms, courtrooms, and parliament. You do not have to be perfect to fill a role but must commit to investing effort into performing your best. If you have courage and commitment, that is enough; the rest will take care of itself."

# VASEMACA JUSTINE PIKIOUNE

*Santo*

Finance Manager at Titan FX  
Limited



**V**asemaca Justine Pikioune, a 36-year-old from Port Orly Village in Santo Island, has been the Finance Manager at Titan FX Limited, a fintech specialising in offering leveraged online trading services globally, since

2020. Vasemaca has maternal ties to Levuka Village in Yale province, Kadavu, Fiji Islands, and is happily married with a 16-year-old son.

With nearly a decade of experience in the finance sector, Vasemaca previously held roles as a financial, compliance, and credit analyst. However, feeling a lack of career advancement opportunities, she decided to pursue a Master of Finance at the University of Technology Sydney in 2019, ultimately leading to her current position. Vasemaca actively participates in volunteer work, including assisting her brother, Gaetan Samuel Junior Pikioune, a children's book author, with event management. She also takes pride in her membership with the Kiwanis Club of Port

Vila.

“I am a French-educated individual who chose to pursue a master's degree in Australia at an English-speaking institution because English is the primary business language in Vanuatu. My goal was to set myself apart by earning degrees from two prestigious institutions in two languages, a dream realised with the support of the French Government and Australia Awards scholarships.

As a manager, I believe in the value of constructive feedback, a practice I adopted after my coaching sessions. This approach emphasises one-on-one discussions with team members to promote a culture of feedback that enhances performance. For instance, our conversations focus on the team's objectives, strategies for success, and ways I can improve my leadership. Making mistakes and continuous learning are part of my personal development and dialoguing with the team creates an environment that encourages theirs.

My advice to women facing self-doubt is to prioritise self-awareness and open communication with trusted individuals who can provide support and guidance, seek role models who have overcome self-doubt through their experiences, and find inspiration in their journeys. Remember that you are not alone; countless others, myself included, face similar challenges, and there is strength in sharing and learning from others. I have learned that celebrating small achievements can boost self-confidence and tracking your progress from



*" 'Dream it. Believe it. Achieve it.' When you have a dream, whether small or big, believe in yourself and work hard without second-guessing yourself. "*

yesterday to today can bring a sense of fulfilment.

Another valuable lesson from my professional journey, emphasised by a respected leader in the finance sector whom I admire, is the importance of taking control of your career development. It involves

recognising and confidently communicating your worth and seeking opportunities that align with your career goals. No one else will pave the way to your desired career; it's essential to trust your abilities and actively pursue the job you desire.

My hope is that women in

Vanuatu gain the recognition, respect, and appreciation they deserve. While initiatives like this are a start, we need more significant support from women and men across all sectors to create a shift in mentality."

# VELENIE JACOB

*Ambrym*

Founder and Private Consultant  
of Nasara Consulting and Bella  
Trading Vanuatu



of the South Pacific, Velenie's unwavering commitment to lifelong learning led to her recognition as the first person from Vanuatu to be a certified Business Trainer and Coach through Business Link Pacific. Another significant milestone for Velenie is being the first individual within the Pacific region to obtain certification as a Coach through the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC).

Velenie serves as a council member representing Women in Business within the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), a board member with the Vanuatu Financial Services Commission (VFSC) and contributes as a member of the Vanuatu National Course Development Committee for

Financial Literacy.

Often, it is difficult for people to see past the exterior of success and see the person inside. Velenie is familiar with self-doubt and the experience of negative voices that can be formidable obstacles to overcome. She emphasises the importance of taking an initial step, no matter how daunting, to break free from your comfort zone and ask for help.

"I believe that the pursuit of knowledge knows no bounds, and I remain committed to furthering my education and expertise as I continue my path of personal and professional development.

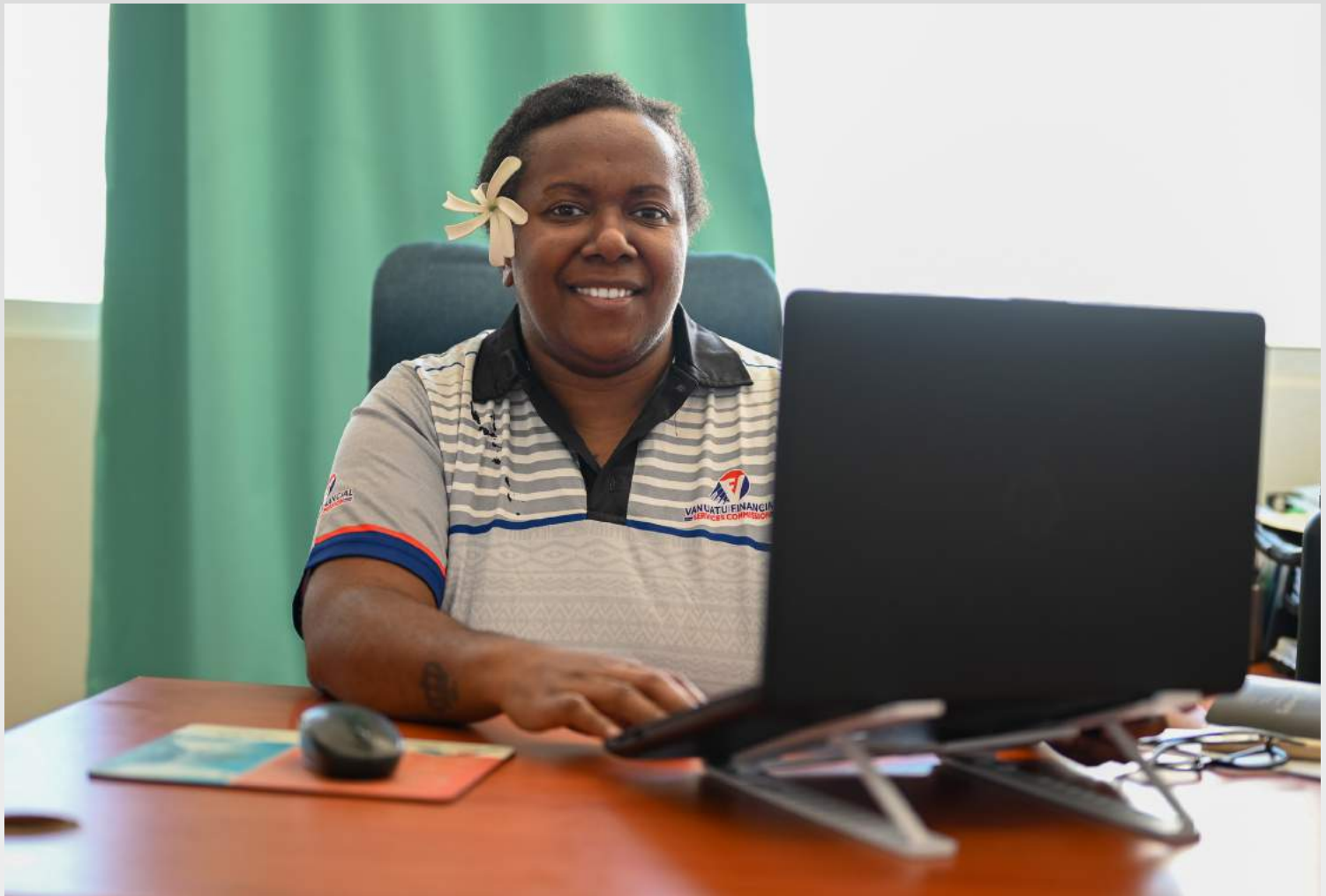
What I find fulfilling about my profession is the opportunity to witness the transformation in the faces of the individuals I educate. There is a profound sense of accomplishment when my clients grasp and internalise the concepts I impart during our sessions.

Above all, providing clients with the tools and knowledge they need to achieve tangible results is rewarding, whether related to small businesses or their families.

I tend to view things from a business perspective. I operate a Virgin Coconut Oil business under the name Bella Trading Vanuatu. I find value in combining my business marketing with providing business training services. This dual role positions me as an educator and an entrepreneur who grapples with the same challenges confronting others in the business world, making

**V**elenie is actively engaged in Vanuatu's financial sector, making significant contributions to business training and coaching in as a private consultant. After graduating from the University





*"Through unity, I envision a future where a substantial number of women are well-represented in the parliament, ensuring that our voices resonate at the national level."*

me relatable.

I find it incredibly inspiring to witness the growing number of women boldly stepping out of their comfort zones and achieving remarkable accomplishments. Many women have paved the way before me, serving as invaluable role models for myself and countless others.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned throughout my career is the importance of

surrounding yourself with a team of individuals who share a common aspiration and are deeply motivated to make a meaningful impact through their work. When you surround yourself with highly effective and driven individuals, their energy, dedication, and enthusiasm rub off on you. It becomes a source of inspiration and motivation, propelling you to achieve greater heights. Conversely, the same principle applies to negative influences—being around pessimism or complacency

can hinder your progress and enthusiasm.

Through unity, I envision a future where many women are well-represented in the parliament, ensuring our voices resonate at the national level. This transformation will not only elevate the status of women but also lead to more comprehensive and inclusive decision-making processes that benefit the entire nation. Together, we can shape a brighter and more equitable future for our country, Vanuatu".

# VIRGINIA ANN LEITARISONG RUBEN (JINNY)

*New Zealand / Tongariki*

Founder and Manager of Jinny Ruben Coaching and Consulting  
Country Coordinator of Children's First Foundation



Originally from the North Island of New Zealand, Jinny married into a family from Tongariki Island, Vanuatu. Growing up in the Manawatu region on a farm, she studied in New Zealand, graduating with a Bachelor of Health Sciences in Occupational Therapy and later a Diploma in Life Coaching. After some time in mental health, Jinny started a private practice in Auckland focused on

rehabilitation of serious injuries and brain injuries, which grew to be a large service provider with a multidisciplinary team. In 2005, at 29 years old, she and her husband packed up their lives and moved to Vanuatu to raise their kids and run their inter-island cargo passenger shipping company, Searoad Services. Over the past 18 years, Jinny has worked in the private sector and with various NGOs including World Vision, and Vanuatu Society for People with Disability, and is currently the Coordinator of Children's First Foundation, a charitable organisation aimed at giving children a second chance through life-changing surgery overseas.

In 2020, Jinny opened her coaching and consulting business and is engaged in consultancy work with various public and private sector organisations, including the

Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vanuatu Police Force, and the Vanuatu Volleyball Federation, to name a few. Jinny's business slogan 'Empower, Equip, Enable' encompasses her passion and focus. A qualified Life Coach, Jinny facilitates workshops to build capacity and skill in a wide range of topics, and her coaching sessions provide life-changing, confidence-building impact, especially in the lives of ni-Vanuatu women. Jinny's passion is building relationships and helping others do the same, which she believes is the key to success in life. God and family are at her heart.

"I've always loved helping people. From a young age, I would notice someone who looked lonely or sad or had a disability, and I would make friends with them and try to help them. It's important to get out there and help people who need it.

My father is my role model, especially in his faith and how he raised me to believe in myself and my calling.

Everyone has qualities, skills, and experiences that they can use. They need to believe in themselves to achieve their goals. One of the best ingredients for motivation is encouragement. When you put a plant in the right soil with nutrients the plant flourishes. Encouragement is nutrients.

Philippians 4:13 says, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'. God is there for you, so use his strength, get out there, and do what he called you for. Believe in yourself and



*" One of the best ingredients for motivation is encouragement. When you put a plant in the right soil with nutrients, the plant flourishes. "*

your voice: it is one of the most powerful things in your life.

I hope that Vanuatu women see their beauty and strength and that they believe in their capabilities and themselves because they are amazing. They are resilient. Women in Vanuatu have overcome so much adversity and hardship. I want them to see their

potential, know their potential, and love their potential: to see themselves for who they are and 'be the best version of themselves'.

Women's perspectives are different from men's. We live in a society with women and men, so we need more representation of women in decision-making processes. Women juggle a

lot of different responsibilities. Women are nurturers: they are capable with practical skills and emotional intelligence and bring many qualities to the table. Representation by women can help build more balanced teams equipped to serve our communities and nation."

# VOTAUSI LUCYANN MACKENZIE REUR

*Malo*

Owner and Director of Lapita Cafe  
Limited



**V**otausi has been running Lapita Cafe for over 25 years. Her love for nutrition and passion to enhance local food crops, is what drove her to start up this

business in 1992. With her accomplishments outweighing her challenges, she continues to come up with new ideas on how to diversify her current product line.

“I am where I am today because of my mother, who has been my role model, and my husband, who has been my main supporter throughout my business journey.

I grew up in a traditional society. People believed that a girl’s only purpose was to have children and look after the home. My mother taught me otherwise. She worked for me to get an education and encouraged me to keep going despite the challenges. This motivated me to complete a Masters in Community Nutrition and start

up and run a locally based nutrition business - Lapita Cafe Limited.

My local cuisine adventure started at the University of the South Pacific. Five years catering for the University, grew my passion for local cuisines and pushed me to launch the Cafe. I initially believed that ni-Vanuatu would embrace the local cuisines I was producing, sadly this was not the case. The first four years were difficult. I quickly realised that passion was not the only thing needed to run a business. So, I took a break and went back to the drawing board.

At times like these my husband’s support played a big role in continuing this journey. People questioned my persistence to use local products as it was seen as “village food”. They questioned my whole business concept and why my husband wasn’t the head of this business. Throughout the challenges, my husband continued to motivate and stand by me.

My biggest accomplishment is using the humble manioc flour as a key ingredient in my products. I remember my first encounter with manioc flour - I was not impressed - but I came across it again and decided to take it as a sign and produced something with it. I’m glad I did. We’ve been able to produce so many great products with it since.

My business, and all the deliciousness we produce, would not be where it is today without my amazing teams



*" I hope that my story inspires the younger generations to be brave and think outside the box. In a fast-changing world where climate change is a threat, we need to learn to adapt. "*

in Luganville and Port Vila. I believe the positive working environments I've created is a key reason Lapita Cafe is still around today. When faced with setbacks, I remind my team members how valuable their roles are.

I look forward to many more amazing years in my local cuisine adventure. I hope that my story inspires the younger generations to be brave and think outside the box. In a fast-changing world where climate change is a threat, we need to

learn to adapt. One of the ways we can do this is to return to what we know and grew up with, 'ol lokol kaka'e blong yumi'.

# YVONNE LEITAMATE MABEL QUALAO

*Ambae / Papua New  
Guinea*

Senior Engineer, Qualao Consulting  
Limited (QCL)



**Y**vonne is a Senior Engineer with over 15 years of experience at the Qualao Consulting Limited (QCL). She is part of the Vanuatu Engineering Association and Australia Engineers.

“My father was an Engineer. He started Qualao Consulting Ltd. My parents encouraged me to study engineering so that I would join my father in the family firm. After grade 13, I got a scholarship to study Engineering in Australia.

My parents are my biggest inspiration. My father inspired me in this field, but my mother is the driving force. She motivates me when it comes to putting in work. Because I am part of my family’s business, I can share what I am going through, which gives me the strength to move forward.

Graduating in 2004, I joined the family business as a junior engineer, where senior engineers mentored me. Nineteen years later, I am now

a Senior Engineer, and I mentor younger engineers who join us. My next step would be taking over the business.

When the business started, I was still in school, and we did domestic projects. It was a one-person operation. Now, we have eight engineers and several different projects running at once. We are doing smaller housing projects but also larger projects like ADB-funded projects.

The work culture is intriguing; there are a lot of men who work at building sites. Many are nice to me. I do not know if it is because of who my father is or if they are just glad to have a woman on site. Sometimes, I come across difficult men on sites. Working with clients I do not know and who do not know me, especially men, can be challenging.

What I like about my work is that it is so varied. I get to design something specific for my clients and watch somebody put that design together and feel proud of the finished product.

Education is important. It’s the foundation that helps you understand why things are a certain way. To learn the progression of things, you need practice. The experience makes all the difference.

Representation is important because women bring a different perspective. When men present their ideas, they think about themselves. It is limited. But, when women think, they think about themselves,



*"Representation is important because women bring a different perspective. When women think, they think about themselves, the children, the family, the home, and the community."*

the children, the family, the home, and the community. It relates to the work I do on community projects.

One of the biggest things I

learned in my career is that open communication between yourself, and your colleagues, clients, and your team makes things run smoothly. My advice

to the women of Vanuatu is

to take one step at a time, just a little bit every day, and eventually you can get there. I hope to see more women in engineering and construction."







