

SPEECH FOR PSC DAY 2024

Theme: "Strengthen Government Decentralize Services through Innovative Approach"

His Excellency Nikenike Vurobaravu, President of the Republic of Vanuatu

Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Matai Seremaiah

Distinguished Ministers

Members of the diplomatic core

Dedicated Public Servants

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to stand before you today as we celebrate Public Service Day. This year's theme is "Strengthen Government Decentralized Services through Innovative Approaches," which aligns beautifully with the United Nations' theme: "Fostering Innovation amidst Global Challenges; Public Sector Perspective."

Today, we come together not just to celebrate but to acknowledge and honour the invaluable contributions of our public servants. This day also serves to inspire our youth to consider careers in the public sector, a vital path for our nation's future.

Our focus this year is clear: we reaffirm our commitment to decentralization, bringing government services closer to the people through innovative and forward-thinking strategies, even in the face of challenges.

Let's take a moment to reflect on our historical journey toward decentralization. This concept has long been a cornerstone of our government's vision for a more inclusive and equitable society. By empowering local authorities and communities, we not only make services more accessible but also foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among the citizens of Vanuatu. Together, through this shared responsibility, we can build a stronger, more resilient nation.

Let's revisit some key milestones in our journey:

First, Article 13 of the Constitution of Vanuatu references decentralization. Then, in 1980, shortly after independence, we introduced the Local Government Act to decentralize services through 11 local governments.

Fast forward to 1990, when the Decentralization Act established Provinces and Area Councils, marking a significant evolution in our decentralized model.

In 2017, the government initiated a Decentralization Consultation throughout Vanuatu, leading to the recruitment of Area Administrators by the Public Service Commission for our Area Councils.

By 2018, we had appointed these Area Administrators as civil servants, ensuring that our 71 Area Councils across Vanuatu had dedicated leadership.

In 2020, we introduced the Regional Planning Concept, aimed at identifying suitable areas within Vanuatu to develop into service and development centres. This initiative is crucial for increasing our tax base through better planning and development.

Then, in 2021, we established 71 Area Council cost centres in SMART STREAM, enhancing financial accountability and access for our local authorities.

And in 2023, we held Vanuatu's First National Planning Summit. This event gathered feedback from our citizens, the National Government, development partners, and stakeholders on the progress of our National Sustainable Development Plan and government service delivery.

Together, let's continue this important journey towards a decentralized future that empowers every citizen of Vanuatu.

Honourable guests, esteemed colleagues, and dedicated public servants,

Today, we gather to address an essential aspect of our governance: decentralization. It is crucial to understand that decentralization transcends the mere transfer of authority. It requires us to reassess how we deliver services to meet the unique needs of our diverse communities. In this rapidly evolving society, innovation must be at the forefront of our approach.

To this end, we must commit to decentralizing and sustaining our human and financial resources. We will adopt new technologies, implement more efficient processes, and develop tailored solutions. It is imperative that we continually seek out and embrace opportunities for improvement.

As we forge ahead, we must recognize that we have a young, growing workforce. Our approach to service delivery must be innovative, especially in the face of economic uncertainty, the impacts of climate change, and social inequalities—issues that demand our immediate attention. However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and resilience. The Public Service Commission is dedicated to leading this charge by fostering a culture of innovation within the public sector. We must empower our public servants with the necessary tools, skills, and mindset to drive change and deliver exceptional service at every level of governance.

Moreover, we have a responsibility to coach and nurture our young graduates, instilling in them a spirit of patriotism and loyalty to serve the citizens of this great country. Let us collectively refocus our values on service delivery that is oriented toward our citizens rather than profit-driven motives.

In upholding our Constitution, we must reflect deeply on Article 57 (1), which states that “Public Servants owe their allegiance to the Constitution and to the People of Vanuatu.” What does this mean for us as individuals and as public servants? I urge you to take time to consider the significance of this pledge in your day-to-day work.

We must embrace innovation in every aspect of our practices. One area where innovation can greatly impact is in the utilization of technology. The digital transformation of government services is not a distant aspiration; it is a present reality. By leveraging digital platforms, we can streamline processes, reduce costs, and enhance the efficiency of service delivery. Importantly, this ensures we reach even the most remote communities in Vanuatu, leaving no one behind.

Yet, innovation extends beyond technology. It involves rethinking our engagement with communities, the design of our programs, and the metrics we use to measure success. It necessitates a collaborative effort, uniting the public, private, and civil society sectors to co-create practical and sustainable solutions.

As we advance, let us remember that the success of decentralization and innovation is contingent upon our ability to collaborate. Together, through partnership, we can overcome the challenges ahead and realize our vision of a more decentralized, innovative, and responsive government.

Now, I appeal to the Heads of Agencies—Director Generals, Directors, Equivalent Positions, Provincial Secretaries General, and Town Clerks—to strengthen your leadership roles. We must meet the expectations of the citizens of Vanuatu by fostering a safe and respectful working environment. Let us embody and promote the shared values of service in our interactions with colleagues and the communities we serve.

I am pleased to announce the government's key areas of focus regarding decentralization for the upcoming year:

First, in 2024, we have created the Northern Economic Corridor task force. This initiative will divide Vanuatu into two distinct service development and economic corridors, enhancing our provincial structure, promoting transparent decision-making, and increasing financial accountability to revenue.

Second, we will review Public Servi Act and implement a fit-for-purpose Provincial Corporate Services Unit (PCSU). This structure will strengthen the office of the Provincial Secretary General, empowering our provincial framework to effect bottom-up planning, budgeting, reporting, and coordination of program activities.

Third, we will develop a Decentralization Policy Framework. This year, the Department of Local Authorities will work diligently on this framework to support our government's Decentralization Reform Program.

In closing, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all public servants whose dedication and hard work make the dream of a decentralized and innovative Vanuatu a reality. Your unwavering commitment to the people of Vanuatu is the solid foundation upon which we will build a brighter future. Additionally, I extend my sincere thanks to all the members of the organizing committee and sponsors of this event from Port Vila to Luganville, Torba, Penama, Malampa, and Tafea, and all Government Ministries—your efforts have been invaluable. Special acknowledgment goes to our main sponsors [insert main sponsors here]. Your contributions

have made this celebration possible, showcasing the spirit of collaboration and commitment that drives our public service.

Finally, I would like to thank each one of you for your presence here today and for your continued support of the Public Service Commission's vision and mission. Together, let us push boundaries, embrace innovation, and strengthen our government's ability to serve our people, wherever they may be.

Thank you, and happy Public Service Day celebration to everyone!

God bless Vanuatu.