

# Digital Scoping and Mapping of Fiji and Vanuatu

SEPTEMBER 2025

## **Acknowledgment**

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## **Disclaimer**

This research was produced with support from Google.org and The Asia Foundation. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Google.org or The Asia Foundation.

# Acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>APTC</b>	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
<b>BPO</b>	Business process outsourcing
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>DCDT</b>	Department of Communication & Digital Transformation (Vanuatu)
<b>DFAT</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FNU</b>	Fiji National University
<b>GEDSI</b>	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>ISP</b>	Internet service provider
<b>IT</b>	Information technology
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union (United Nations agency)
<b>MOET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training (Vanuatu)
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>NUV</b>	National University of Vanuatu
<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental organization
<b>NTPC</b>	National Training and Productivity Centre (Fiji)
<b>OGCIO</b>	Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, renamed DCDT (Vanuatu)
<b>PIFS</b>	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
<b>PICISOC</b>	The Pacific Islands Chapter of the Internet Society
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>TAF</b>	The Asia Foundation
<b>TVET</b>	Technical vocational education and training
<b>UAP</b>	Universal Access Policy
<b>UNCDF</b>	United Nations Capital Development Fund
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>USP</b>	University of the South Pacific
<b>VSP</b>	Vanuatu Skills Partnership
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprise
<b>SPC</b>	South Pacific Community
<b>VSAT</b>	Very small aperture terminal (satellite internet)

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This final report presents the findings of Catalpa International’s Digital Scoping and Mapping study of Fiji and Vanuatu, conducted in partnership with The Asia Foundation and supported by Google.org. Its primary objective is to generate evidence that informs the effective and inclusive delivery of digital training, ultimately unlocking educational, societal, and economic opportunities for marginalized communities.

Drawing on extensive interviews, focus groups, and surveys conducted in Fiji and Vanuatu, the study highlights both the aspirations and barriers encountered by government staff, community organizations, training providers, and businesses as they transition to more digital ways of working and delivering services. These firsthand insights complement a desk review of national and international reports, policies, academic research, and online resources, resulting in a richer, more contextual understanding of the digital landscape in both countries.

The research finds that while Fiji’s digital infrastructure and economic opportunities are steadily maturing, Vanuatu’s digital ecosystem remains nascent yet promising. Both countries possess policy frameworks aimed at advancing digital infrastructure and skills training; however, insufficient funding, fragmented strategies, and limited political leadership hamper equitable implementation. Without more deliberate, targeted interventions and collaboration, youth and women—especially those in remote areas—risk lagging their urban counterparts in harnessing the advantages of digital technologies.

This report sets the foundation for future country-level planning and training initiatives. The recommendations emphasize building on existing successes, adopting a systems approach that integrates supportive policies with community advocacy, and fostering acceptance of digital approaches. Ultimately, the study’s recommendations aim to ensure that digital skills training—backed by a range of enabling conditions—can help marginalized communities in Fiji and Vanuatu fully participate in and benefit from the evolving digital economy.



## Key Recommendations and Options for Strengthening the Digital Economy

### 1. Enhance Abilities and Capabilities

- Scale up effective training programs for women and youth
- Extend training to rural communities through targeted investments

### 2. Build Up Acceptance and Enabling Conditions

- Bolster networks of support and mentoring to promote awareness and acceptance

### 3. Grow the Space for Change Through Authority and Structures

- Train CSOs and government to become skilled digital agents of change
- Elevate advocacy and systems coordination to enhance the digital ecosystem

The Asia Foundation’s “Go Digital Pacific” program aims to reduce the widening digital divide in two pilot countries, Fiji and Vanuatu. By conducting targeted digital training accessible to young people, women, and other underserved groups, the program aims to improve livelihoods and strengthen local economies in both countries. The Asia Foundation intends to pilot digital skills curriculum and delivery mechanisms in Fiji and Vanuatu in 2025.

The Digital Scoping and Mapping study will develop an evidence base so The Asia Foundation can design and develop a contextualized version of the program for the Pacific. The overarching goal of the study is to:



**Provide evidence-based and actionable recommendations to inform the development of targeted digital training in Vanuatu and Fiji.”**

The data collected was analyzed against the backdrop of the information gathered during the desk review, which provided an overview of the broader digital policy, economic, skills, and access landscape in both countries.

For this report, the definitions of digital skills, digital literacy, and financial literacy are as follows:

- **Digital Skills:** The skills needed to use devices such as computers, smartphones, and the internet to complete tasks like sending emails or creating documents. These skills can range from simple things, like typing, to more complex tasks, like making websites or analyzing data.



Figure 1. Digitally enabled, inclusive classroom Port Vila, Vanuatu

- **Digital Literacy:** The ability to use technology wisely and safely, such as finding reliable information online and understanding privacy risks. It includes understanding how to communicate and behave responsibly using digital tools.
- **Financial Literacy:** Knowing how to manage your money well. It includes understanding how to save, budget, invest, and handle debt. Being financially literate helps you make smart financial decisions and achieve your money goals responsibly.

## 03 Methodology

Using a contextualized mixed methods approach, we collected primary data through tailored surveys, interviews, and focus groups administered online and in person. We gathered data on the factors acting as barriers and enablers to digital skills training uptake among youth, women, and underserved communities. We reviewed different frameworks to ground how we analyze the focus groups and interview data.

The Triple-A Framework developed by the Harvard Kennedy School<sup>1</sup> and adapted by Oxford Policy Management uses the domains of ability, acceptance, and authority to investigate the space for change in reform initiatives.<sup>2</sup> This framework loosely aligns with the World Bank’s digital capabilities and related analytical framework, which

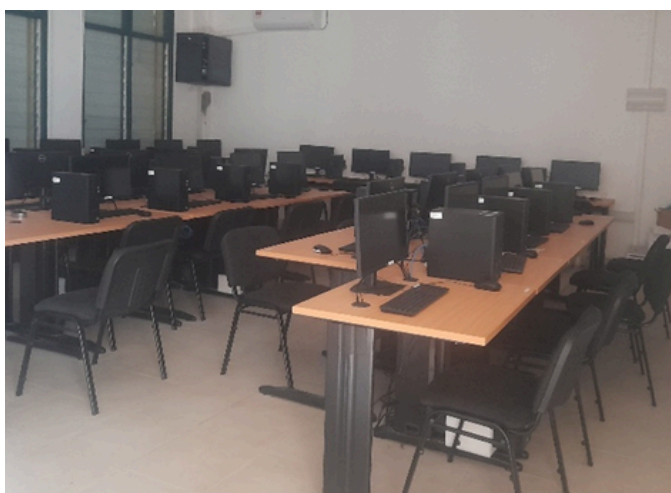


Figure 2. Vanuatu Agriculture College, Santo, Vanuatu

focuses on “digital skills policy (structure), enabling digital infrastructure (enablers), and digital skills training (capabilities).”<sup>3</sup>

We’ve chosen to combine these two frameworks to add contextual, political economy, and social framing to our analysis of what will enable change in Fiji and Vanuatu’s digital economic, social, and education and training contexts. Secondary data collected during the desk review is linked to the primary data to ensure that existing research and reports (regional and national) also inform the recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., and Woolcock, M. 2017. *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. 2015. “Doing Problem-Driven Work,” Center for International Development, Harvard University.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank. *Digital Skills Development in EAP: Key Findings and Recommendations from the Country Studies*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. [Link](#).

### **3.1. Selection of Participants and Data Collection**

Primary data was collected from a targeted set of stakeholders identified via three approaches: our existing knowledge of the digital landscape; the mapping of partners and training institutes through the desk review; and informal pathways such as social media and professional connections. Using social media to reach women and young people was critical to ensure the assessment represents the specific cultural, gender, and socioeconomic factors impacting digital skills development. The survey was administered online to people in Fiji and Vanuatu and was extended to all Pacific Island Countries and Territories and Timor-Leste.

Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted across key groupings, including civil society organizations (CSOs) and advocacy groups, business and private sector, educational institutions, community leaders and traditional authorities (women and youth-focused), and with relevant government agencies.

### **3.2. Indigenous Methods**

Indigenous dialogic methodologies and cultural approaches like talanoa (Fiji) and tok stori (Vanuatu) informed data collection and interview guides, ensuring key informants were respected and comfortable sharing relevant experiences. Where possible, interviews were conducted in person and in a language that people were comfortable using. Virtual interviews were held to ensure participation from stakeholders in remote communities, using platforms most recognizable to interviewees (e.g., Zoom, WhatsApp, and Facebook).

### **3.3. Survey, Interviews, and Focus Group Instruments**

The survey, interviews, and focus group instruments focused on obtaining insights into basic digital literacy, financial literacy, business and financial planning, e-commerce, cybersecurity and safety, entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and green business policies. The instruments were developed based on best practices from the Pacific and emerging research on digital skills.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was undertaken to summarize and describe the main findings, disaggregating primary data (obtained through the Needs Assessment) and secondary data (obtained in the Desk Review) by gender, age group, and location. Using the survey data, we developed data visualizations to help highlight relevant information. The data collected through interviews, documents, and observations was analyzed to find common themes or uniqueness. We integrated the quantitative and qualitative findings, looking for points of convergence or divergence and ways to cross-verify or validate findings and develop actionable recommendations for future curricula regarding digital skills training.

## 4.1. Respondent Summary

Survey participants were recruited using a curated stakeholder list, social media, and snowball sampling, where interviewees were asked to recruit members of their organizations. This resulted in a high degree of diversity across the 172 survey participants representing 17 Pacific Island Countries and Territories and Timor-Leste. Of the 172 survey participants, 170 agreed to participate, 82 (48%) were women, 78 (46%) lived in urban areas, 60 (35%) lived in peri-urban areas, and 32 (19%) lived in rural areas. More than half the respondents were under 40 years old. Survey respondents reported completing a great variety of schooling levels, the top three being bachelor's completed by 59 respondents (35%), master's completed by 33 respondents (19%), and diploma studies completed by 31 respondents (18%).

Participants were asked if they used any assistive technologies at work, with the following responses recorded:

- 16 people: I have trouble seeing, so I use a tool that reads out loud or makes things bigger
- 14 people: I have trouble hearing, so I use devices to make sounds louder or see captions
- 8 people: I find it hard to type, so I use my voice to type.

Survey participants were asked to identify with one category, leading them to a targeted set of questions based on their selection. Of the 170 respondents:

- 77 people selected "Digital Professional: I am currently employed in a role that involves digital expertise."
- 12 people selected "Recent Graduate: I have recently completed a digital skills training program."
- 81 people selected "Other: I have not attended any digital skills or financial literacy program/training."



**172**

**Total Respondents**



**48%**  
Females



**52%**  
Males



**17** Pacific  
Island

**Countries Represented**



**46%**  
live in  
urban areas



**35%**  
live in peri-  
urban areas



**19%**  
live in  
rural areas



**77**

**Digital Professionals**

**36%** from Fiji  
**17%** from Vanuatu  
**47%** from Other Pacific  
Island Countries (PICs)



**12**

**Recent Graduates**

**75%** from Fiji and Vanuatu  
**25%** from Other PICs



**84**

**Broader Community  
Members**

**28%** from Fiji  
**48%** from Vanuatu  
**24%** from Other PICs

**57%** Females **43%** Males

## 4.2. Digital Professionals Survey Analysis

The 77 survey respondents who selected “Digital Professionals” as their primary category work across a broad range of information and communications technology (ICT) sectors and roles, often working in multiple sectors and multiple roles. Forty-one (41) of the respondents are from Fiji and Vanuatu.

Survey respondents selected the size of their company, with more than half in larger companies, including the top three selections of 100-499 people (27%, 21 respondents), 20-99 people (19%, 15 respondents), and 1000-4999 people (13%, 10 respondents). Most respondents were employed full-time (79%, 61 respondents) or part-time (4%, 3 respondents), while (17%, 13 respondents) were independent contractors, business owners, freelancers, or self-employed.

## 4.2.1. Trends in Business and Sector Types

When asked what type of business they run, responses varied, but common themes across locations included Information Technology (IT) and consulting and the use of IT in other sectors like tourism and traditional services.

Survey responses from Fiji (28 respondents), Vanuatu (13 respondents), and other Pacific countries (36 respondents) highlighted a diverse range of business types currently being operated. In Fiji, businesses included information security consultancy, IT and cybersecurity training, cleaning services, retail, accommodation, and real estate. Vanuatu respondents reported businesses in fiber optic materials and technician services, trendy product sales, E-commerce web design, consulting, and tour operations. Respondents from other Pacific Islands noted ventures such as photography and video services, IT and business consulting, media research, data analysis, food vending, and ICT consulting—indicating a strong presence of creative and technology-oriented services.

When asked whether non-business owners planned to start a business, most respondents from all regions answered “No” or “Not at the moment.” However, some Fiji respondents shared specific plans such as launching communications consultancies, IT consulting firms, cybersecurity services, professional cleaning, and online clothing sales. A few were uncertain, responding with “Not sure” or “Maybe.” In Vanuatu, future plans included an education consultancy focused on school finance and planning, a tire shop for import and sales, digital skills ventures in cloud computing and DevOps, and small-scale vegetable farming.

From other regional respondents, business aspirations were even more varied. These included monitoring and evaluation consulting firms, ICT training and E-learning consultation, tech startups, agriculture and livestock, content creation, and E-commerce ventures.



Figure 3. Computer repair shop, Suva, Fiji

Some planned to establish businesses post-retirement, and several expressed a desire for niche services tied to community needs or personal expertise. Collectively, the data reveals both current engagement in, and future interest toward, digital, service-based, and locally relevant entrepreneurship across the Pacific.

## 4.2.2. Digital Skills Use in Current Job

In the aggregated data for all countries regarding the type of digital skills that professionals are using, their top skill is basic computer skills (e.g., email/ word processing), which is used by 90%, followed by data entry and management at 65%, and social media management at 57%. In Vanuatu, 100% of respondents reported having basic computer skills (e.g., email, word processing). This was followed by data entry and management (46%), social media management (31%), graphic design (23%), and coding or programming (0%).

In Fiji, social media management was the most common skill (71%), followed by basic computer skills (86%), data entry and management (64%), graphic design (39%), and coding or programming (18%). These findings suggest that while foundational digital skills are strong in both countries, respondents in Fiji reported broader engagement with intermediate and advanced digital skill areas. The table below shows the disaggregated data for Vanuatu and Fiji.

Table 1: Digital skills use in current job disaggregated (cumulative)

	Vanuatu, 13 respondents	Fiji, 28 respondents
Response	Percentage	Percentage
Coding or programming	0%	18%
Graphic design	23%	39%
Social media management	31%	71%
Data entry and management	46%	64%
Basic computer skills (e.g. email/ word processing)	100%	86%

The responses to the question “On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do your digital skills match what is needed for your job?” reveal distinct patterns across countries and demographics. In Fiji, where 28 respondents participated, 14 rated their skills at the highest level of 5/5, representing 50% of the total. Nine respondents (32%) rated their skills at 4/5, while five respondents (18%) rated their skills at 3/5.

In Vanuatu, of the 13 respondents, seven (54%) rated their skills at 5/5, four respondents (31%) rated their skills at 4/5, one respondent (8%) rated their skills at 3/5, and another one respondent (8%) rated their skills at 1/5. This distribution shows a broader spread in ratings compared to Fiji.

Among all countries, 43 respondents (56%) rated their skills at 5/5, 22 respondents (29%) rated their skills at 4/5, 10 respondents (13%) rated their skills at 3/5, and two respondents (3%) rated their skills at 1/5. These results highlight a generally high level of perceived skill alignment.

Examining the responses by gender, notable trends emerge. Of the 77 respondents, 26 men (34%) rated their skills at 5/5, compared to 17 women (22%). For the 22 respondents who rated their skills at 4/5, 17 were men (22%), while only five were women (7%). These figures indicate that men tended to rate their skills higher than women, contributing significantly to the overall proportion of high scores. This data highlights variations not only between countries but also between genders, with Fiji and Vanuatu displaying similar trends in high skill ratings. However, the gender-based differences in ratings point to a disparity in self-assessment between men and women.

The responses to the question about which institutions provide digital training highlight a diverse range of learning opportunities across Fiji, Vanuatu, and other countries. All 77 survey respondents answered this question, revealing a comprehensive reliance on a mix of local institutions, international organizations, and self-directed online learning. The diversity of responses underscores the evolving nature of digital skill development, with online platforms and global institutions complementing local and regional providers.

In Fiji, most respondents (10 out of 28) identified being trained by the Fiji National University (FNU) and the University of the South Pacific (USP). Additionally, a variety of professional organizations and companies were named, including VT Solutions, CJ Patel, GreyMouse, Kastel, and Sunset Studios. Training initiatives were also linked to international and regional bodies such as the U.S. Government, Microsoft, Datec,<sup>4</sup> Interpol, the Australian Federal Police, and the Hong Kong Police. This mix of academic institutions, local organizations, and international entities showcases Fiji's broad access to both local and global digital training resources.

In Vanuatu, USP emerged as the most frequently mentioned institution (4 out of 13 respondents), implying its significant regional role in providing digital training. Other sources of training included Edward Computer Training Center/Air Vanuatu (through on-the-job training), Yumiwork, Matevulu College, the Vanuatu National Institute of Technology (formerly INTV), and the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). A combination of formal education providers and workplace-based training opportunities contributes to digital skills development in Vanuatu.

Respondents from other countries indicated they received training from a wide array of institutions and platforms, reflecting the global nature of digital education. Some of the institutions include Major League Hacking, the University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology, Woodford International School, and Coursera. Platforms like Udemy, LinkedIn Learning, UN's International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and APNIC also played a significant role, alongside specialized programs such as PacNOG,<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth of Learning, and Cambridge Online Courses. Respondents also mentioned participation in MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) from European and Latin American universities, emphasizing the accessibility and popularity of online learning. Additionally, self-taught initiatives were noted as a key avenue for skill acquisition.

<sup>4</sup> [Datec website](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Pacific Network Operators Group](#)

### 4.2.3. Impacts of Digital on Career Growth and Life Beyond Work

Most respondents believe improving their digital skills will enhance their careers. Overall, 88% felt that better digital skills would boost employability, open doors to better opportunities, or other professional fields. In Fiji, 89% emphasized digital skills for advancement; in Vanuatu, 92% agreed, and among other regional respondents, 92% shared similar views.

The survey question asked respondents to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how much their digital skills improved their ability to access information and learning resources outside of work. The findings highlight significant regional and gender-based differences in perceptions of digital skill impact.

In Fiji, all 28 respondents rated their skills positively, with 57% giving the highest rating of 5. An additional 21% rated 4, and the remaining respondents provided ratings of 3 or 2 (14% and 7%, respectively). This indicates a strong confidence in digital skills among Fijians. In Vanuatu, of the 13 respondents, 62% rated their skills at 5, but only 8% rated 4. The rest of the respondents offered lower ratings. This shows a more polarized perception of digital skills in Vanuatu. For all the other countries, among the 36 respondents, 78% rated their skills at 5, 25% rated 4, and 8% rated 3. Only one respondent gave a rating of 1, showcasing a generally positive view of digital skills.

For ongoing support that would be beneficial for respondents to continue developing their digital skills in their current job, the top needs of all 77 respondents included advanced training 75%, networking opportunities 75% and continued online resources or workshops 71%. See more on the table below:

Table 2: Preferences for ongoing support across all countries

Beneficial Ongoing Support	Count
Access to advanced or specialized digital skills training	58
Networking opportunities	57
Continued online resources or workshops	55
Certification or credentials to verify skills to employers	51
Access to mentorship	42
Access to community forums or peer learning groups	39
Job placement assistance	24

#### 4.2.4. Perceptions of Equity and Common Barriers

The overall trends as to whether access to digital skills training is equitable in workplaces garnered mixed responses, and it reveals diverse perspectives on inclusivity and accessibility. There are 62% yes responses to this question that believe that access to digital skills training is equitable. The other 23% responded with a no, and the remaining 14% did not explicitly indicate yes or no. This could reflect neutrality or a lack of clarity in their experiences.

Most respondents with a “yes” response cited universal opportunities for employees regardless of role, background, or gender. Many of them noted that workplaces are adapting to technological needs, ensuring inclusivity across age groups and seniority levels. Free online platforms and a focus on productivity were also highlighted as key factors enabling equal access.

Those with “no” responses highlighted inequities in access to digital skills training. They noted that opportunities often favor IT staff or specific roles, leaving other employees with limited access. Disparities were also reported between office-based and field workers, with the latter having fewer opportunities.

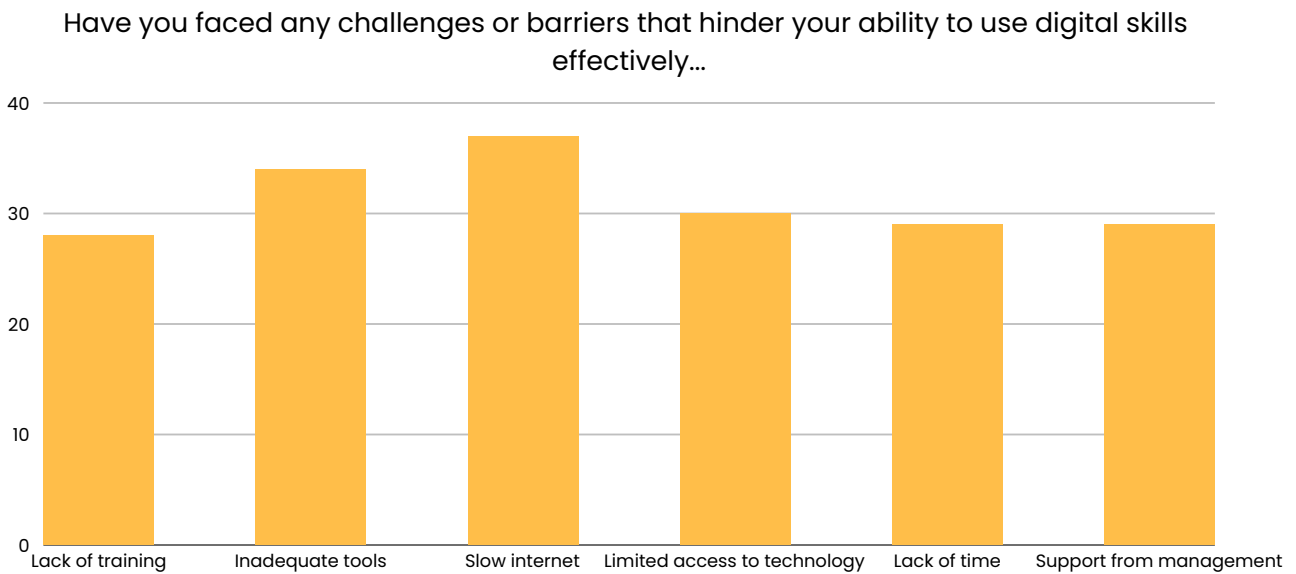


Figure 4. Challenges and barriers that hinder respondents' ability to use digital skills effectively in their job

Barriers such as bandwidth restrictions, lack of IT infrastructure, and payment challenges further exacerbate the gap.

Additionally, prioritization of IT-related tasks over general digital training was seen as limiting broader inclusivity.

## 4.2.5. Financial Literacy Perceptions and Interest

### Financial Literacy or Money Management Training Programs

Participation in financial literacy or money management training programs appears to vary significantly across geographic regions, gender, and living environments. The data shows patterns that reflect both the reach and the perceived utility of such training initiatives.

In Fiji, participation in financial literacy training programs is evenly split among the 28 respondents, with 14 individuals (50%) having participated and the other 14 (50%) having not. Vanuatu, on the other hand, exhibits a slightly higher participation rate, where 8 out of 13 respondents (62%) attended the training, leaving only 5 (39%) without such experience. In other countries, participation drops considerably, with only 14 out of 36 respondents (39%) attending the training programs.

Across all regions, the effectiveness of financial literacy training programs is overwhelmingly positive. Of the 77 respondents who attended training, only 3% reported finding the sessions not useful.

Gender-wise, the data reveals a slightly higher participation rate among women. Of the 29 women surveyed, 52% attended financial literacy training programs. Among men, 20 out of 47 respondents (43%) participated in similar initiatives.

Living environments also play an important role in influencing participation rates. Urban and peri-urban residents are more likely to attend training programs than their rural counterparts. Data show that 8 out of 22 peri-urban respondents (36%) and 24 out of 46 urban respondents (52%) participated in financial literacy initiatives. 4 out of 9 rural residents (44%) reported attending these programs.

### **Confidence in Personal Finances**

The survey results also reveal patterns in personal finance confidence across Fiji, Vanuatu, other countries. In Fiji, of the 28 responses, 46% rated their skills at 3, 32% at 4, and 11% at 5. This indicates a majority with average to above-average confidence. In Vanuatu, of the 13 responses, 31% rated their skills at 5, another 31% at 4, 23% at 3, and 8% each at 2 and 1. Over 60% rated their confidence as high (4 or 5). For other countries, of the 36 responses, 47% rated their skills at 4 or 5, 39% at 3, and 14% at 2. This group shows a mix of moderate and high confidence.

Gender differences are stark among respondents from Fiji, Vanuatu, and other countries. Of the 47 men respondents, 55% rated their skills at 4 or 5, compared to just 37% of women, indicating a gender gap in financial confidence.

### **Knowledge of Financial Concepts:**

- Fiji: 71% (20 out of 28 respondents) rated good knowledge levels, from scale 3 to 5
- Vanuatu: 85% (11 out of 13 respondents) felt similarly knowledgeable as Fijians.
- Other regions: 72% (26 out of 36 respondents) also reported good understanding.

Table 3: Topics of interest that respondents would like to learn more about

Topics of interest	Percentage and Count
Banking services and choosing financial products	45%, 35
Tax planning and filing	53%, 41
Debt management	54%, 42
Budgeting and saving	67.5%, 52
Financial technology (e.g. using online banking/ digital wallets)	67.5%, 52

## 4.2.6. Other Comments

Fourteen out of 77 survey respondents shared additional comments about their experiences as digital professionals in an open-ended field. These respondents provided a variety of insights and experiences related to their roles. A key theme emerged around the importance of digital literacy, particularly for youth and rural communities.

In **Fiji**, a respondent emphasized the need to involve youth and teens in digital literacy programs, focusing on safe social media practices and protecting personal information from hackers and viruses. In **Vanuatu**, the focus extended to supporting schools and rural communities with broadband and ICT facilities, basic ICT training, and promoting the use of online services such as internet banking and mobile wallets. Awareness of safe online practices was also highlighted. One Vanuatu respondent shared their professional journey as a mathematics teacher trainer, now transitioning into IT consulting, web design, and development.

Other respondents shared their personal growth and experiences in the digital space. A Papua New Guinean professional noted their passion for using AI technologies in education programs and workshops, emphasizing the importance of introducing young adults to emerging technologies to ensure they stay in tune with new opportunities. Access to digital learning resources and practical application of acquired skills were highlighted as key factors enabling personal and professional development.

The value of international forums and groups was also acknowledged, as they provide updates on new software and tools used in the workplace. One IT trainer shared their experience delivering current ICT industry-aligned units, such as managing incident response plans, evaluating emerging technologies, and operating small enterprise branch networks. Through teaching, research, and self-directed learning, they stay updated with technological advancements while striving to empower non-technical teams by dedicating time to simplify complex concepts.

### **4.3. Digital Skills Training Recent Graduates**

#### **Survey Analysis**

Nine respondents in Fiji and Vanuatu identified as recent graduates of a digital skills training program. Most were female (5), and they lived in urban (4), peri-urban (2), and rural (3) areas. Ages mostly ranged from 18 to 49, with several in the 30–39 bracket. Education levels varied, from certificates and diplomas to bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Due to the small sample, these findings are not disaggregated and should be interpreted with caution.

The most common training areas included data entry/management (7), basic computer skills (6), and social media management (3). Participants generally had access to computers or laptops (5) and smartphones (5), but fewer had tablets (3). Internet quality varied: excellent (3), good (3), and okay (2). About half (4) reported no technical issues, while three cited poor connectivity or difficulty accessing digital tools.

#### **4.3.1. Quality and Impact of Skills Training**

The majority of survey respondents (4) named FNU as their primary training provider, with one each naming the School of Education Vanuatu and the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). These institutions provide various training opportunities, from formal education to vocational training. Training graduates reported hearing about the digital skills training programs through social media (5), school/college (3), and word of mouth (1).

Several survey participants suggested areas where digital skills training could be improved. Their responses highlight common themes of increasing practical and hands-on components, early exposure in K-12 school, and specific software training to make the learning experience more comprehensive and applicable. There was also a suggestion to enhance the use of online labs in virtual environments, such as VMware, which would allow learners to practice in simulated real-world environments and gain a deeper understanding of digital tools.

### **4.3.2. Perceptions of Equity and Common Barriers**

Training graduates identified key barriers to accessing digital skills training, including high costs (5), limited technology access (4), lack of awareness (3), and cultural pressures (2). Most did not find gender or age a major factor, though one mentioned financial struggles, and another noted childcare responsibilities as a significant challenge.

Regarding inclusivity, most respondents considered programs inclusive (5), somewhat inclusive (2), or not fully inclusive (1). To improve access, they recommended scholarships or financial aid, delivering training online or through mobile apps, and offering blended learning approaches. They also suggested partnering with community centers for in-person support and providing offline materials to help those with limited internet access.

### **4.3.3. Opportunities and Impacts of Training on Career Growth and Professional Development**

Most participants felt that their digital skills training enhanced their ability to access online courses, research materials, e-books, and instructional videos, with most giving the highest or second-highest ratings for the improvement they experienced (7).

These responses indicate a strong desire for continued learning, networking, mentorship, and job support, highlighting that participants value personal growth opportunities and resources that connect them to career paths.

Respondents emphasized ongoing training, mentorship, networking, and job support for personal growth and stronger career connections. They identified key digital skills for women, youth, and marginalized communities: using smartphones (6), online banking (6), e-commerce (6), safe social media navigation (6), basic computer literacy (6), digital marketing (6), cyber safety (6), and digital financial literacy (6). Other valuable skills included accessing e-government (5), digital healthcare (5), online learning (5), remote work tools (5), and coding basics (5).

Table 4: Types of ongoing support helpful after completing a digital skills training program

Responses	Count
Access to community forums or peer learning groups	4
Certification or credentials to verify skills to employers	4
Access to mentorship	5
Continued online resources or workshops	5
Job placement assistance	5
Networking opportunities	6
Access to advanced or specialized digital skills training	6

Several respondents highlighted direct economic benefits from these skills. Some improved family access to online resources, started their own businesses, or leveraged tourism opportunities in Vanuatu. Others noted that increased IT awareness and basic computer training in schools improved community skill levels and job prospects.

When asked to select from a list of options, most respondents selected all options, detailed in the table below:

Table 5: Changes to improve access to digital skills training for marginalized groups

Responses	Count
Better access to technology (such as affordable devices and internet)	5
Learning materials that are more appealing and relevant	5
More flexible learning options (such as online or part-time classes)	6
Partnerships with local communities to spread the word about training opportunities	6
Policies that make digital skills a priority in schools	6
Scholarships or financial help for those who need it	7

The data shows strong needs for financial support, flexible learning formats, community involvement, education prioritization, better technology access, and engaging materials to improve access for marginalized groups.

Impacts of digital skills training include:

- Easier daily tasks and studies
- Greater awareness of current events
- Upskilling, reskilling, and increased confidence
- Better access to information and improved efficiency.

Overall, respondents gained confidence, awareness, and ease in managing work and personal tasks.

Some respondents also reported getting more involved in community activities after improving their digital skills, such as volunteering at schools or joining local initiatives. Others did not increase their community involvement.

Business-related findings include:

- A few already run online clothing or tourism-related businesses using digital tools
- Many are not yet business owners, but some plan to start ventures like catering or pastry sales, relying on social media for marketing
- Others do not plan to start a business.

Overall, many see entrepreneurship potential and intend to use digital skills to launch and promote their businesses.

### 4.3.4. Financial Literacy Perceptions and Interest

Participation in financial literacy training varied: 4 found it helpful, 2 did not, and 2 did not participate. Most respondents felt very confident (5) or confident (1) managing their personal finances. Understanding of financial concepts was generally good (4) or moderate (2), with a few at the highest level (2), and one participant having only basic knowledge. Respondents showed strong interest in practical skills like debt management, budgeting, financial technology, tax planning, and banking services.

Financial Literacy Topics of Interest

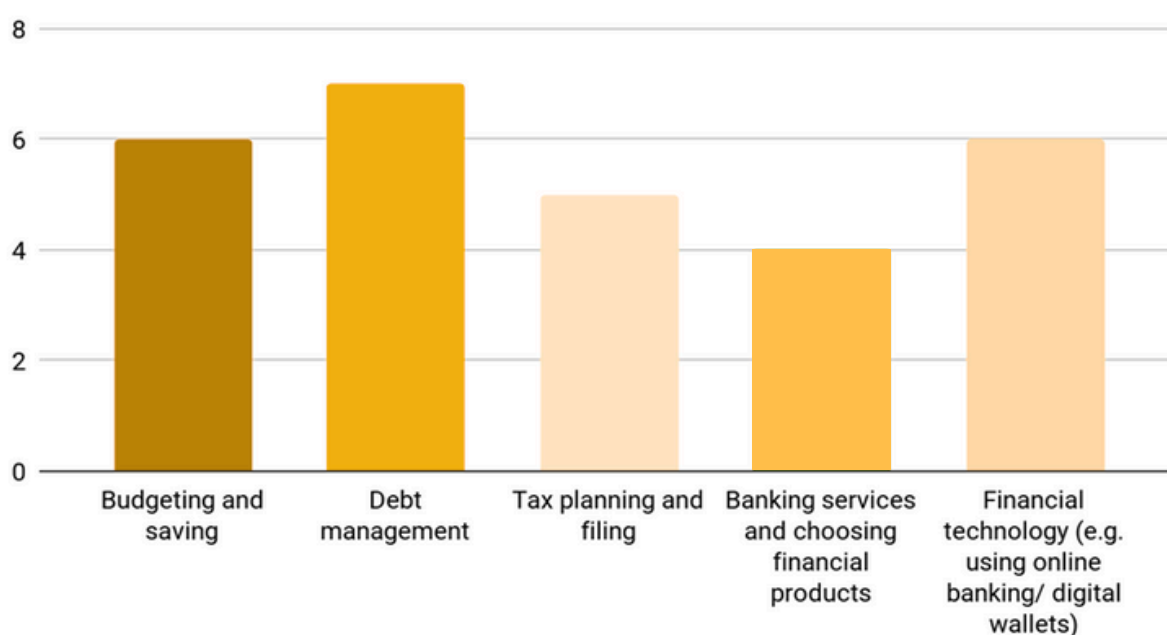


Figure 5. What financial topics would you like to learn more about?

### 4.3.5. Recognition of Learning

Most respondents (5) had heard of microcredentials and digital badges, while two had not. When asked about preferred recognition, certificates (4) were most valued, followed by digital badges (2) and letters of recommendation (1), indicating a strong preference for traditional credentials. In terms of who should confirm acquired skills, most respondents (6) felt training providers should do so, while only two favored educational institutions, suggesting a slight move away from traditional validators.

### 4.3.6. Other Comments

Respondents had the space to share final open-ended comments and insights about their experiences with digital skills training. One respondent expressed a need for more training on financial literacy, particularly in practical topics such as budgeting and saving. Another respondent mentioned that gaining digital skills had a profound impact, providing them with new opportunities they did not previously have. One respondent highlighted the personal progress they experienced, emphasizing how training programs helped them acquire essential skills for their journey as a digital professional. Additionally, one respondent emphasized the profound impact of digital skills training for marginalized communities, noting how access to digital tools has enabled greater economic and educational opportunities, helping bridge existing gaps. Overall, respondents highlighted the positive impacts of digital skills training, such as increased opportunities, skill development, and a desire for further training in specific areas like financial literacy, with special emphasis on the benefits for marginalized groups.

## 4.4. Broader Community Survey Analysis

There were eighty-four (84) survey respondents who identified as the “other” category, meaning they had not attended any digital skills training, nor were they an ICT professional. Of these responses, 57% were female, and most were primarily younger, with 65% of those surveyed under 39 years of age.

Most respondents lived in peri-urban communities (42%), and a majority, 48%, from Vanuatu, 28% from Fiji, and 24% from other nations across the Pacific, with more than 50% of other Pacific respondents from Melanesian nations.

Only 14 respondents identified that they used tools to support their work or study. Of these, 10 used tools to read out text due to trouble seeing, three used a device to support them to hear, and one used a tool to support them to type.



Figure 6. School-based digital training for teachers in Vanuatu.

A majority of these respondents (49%) were employed full-time, with 19% currently enrolled in education. A majority of the students who responded (62%) were based in Vanuatu. Most respondents were educated to a bachelor's degree level (29%), with another 36% having a certificate, professional, or diploma certification. 14% had received master's degrees, and 18% had a high school education, with most of these respondents based in Vanuatu (over 60% of high school-educated respondents were based in Vanuatu).

Overall, these respondents had reliable access to the internet and technology through which to access it, with 45% having regular access to a smartphone and 30% having access to a laptop computer. Only two respondents did not have regular access to any device, and only one respondent reported that they did not have reliable access to the internet. A clear majority (70%) accessed the internet through a mobile data plan, and a further 26% accessed the internet through Wi-Fi at home,

with data being more popular in Vanuatu and home WIFI more accessible for those who live in Pacific countries outside of Fiji or Vanuatu.

While access was not reported as an issue overall, challenges to access (either devices or the internet) were mixed. Most respondents (59%) reported that they encountered challenges rarely or occasionally; however, 36% reported that they encountered challenges to access on a daily or weekly basis.

This group, whilst not formally trained in digital skills, overwhelmingly reported that they were very comfortable using the internet and digital devices, with 79% rating their comfort levels 4 or 5 on a Likert scale. Of the six respondents who were not comfortable using the internet or devices, 5 were female.

### 4.4.1. Perceptions of Equity and Common Barriers

As outlined in the graph below, most of the barriers to increasing their digital skills respondents identified were attributed to cost and lack of awareness of training programs, as well as availability to attend training. Only 4% identified a lack of confidence as a barrier to participation in digital skills development, and 5% identified a lack of access to technology/devices. This aligns with the proportion of respondents in full-time employment or study in terms of their availability and confidence in their digital capacity.

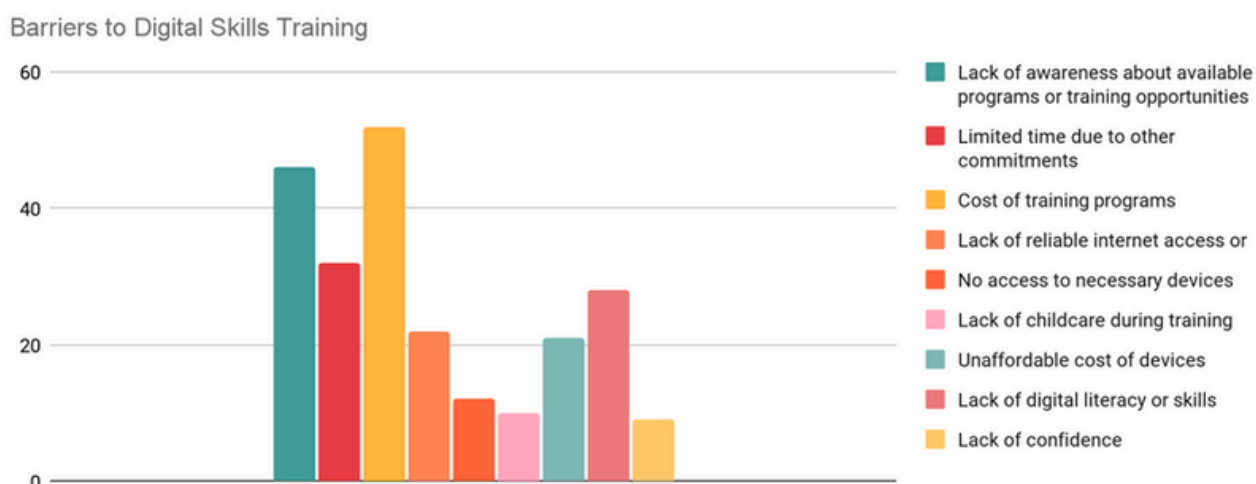


Figure 7. What barriers, if any, prevent you from learning digital skills?

Respondents were mixed in identifying barriers to applying the digital skills they have learned. Lack of advanced skill training had the highest response rate at 30%, but rapid changes in technology was highlighted by 25% of respondents, and both lack of support/mentorship and insufficient practice opportunities were identified by 22% of respondents respectively.

## 4.4.2. Digital and Financial Literacy Perceptions and Interest

While confidence in digital literacy is high across this group of respondents, there is still an overwhelmingly high appetite for further training with 97% keen to engage in further digital or financial literacy training in their communities, and 78% of participants across the region somewhat too confident of their ability to effectively implement any skills acquired through additional training. Of the small number of respondents who were not confident in implementing any new skills acquired through training, most (3 of 4 respondents) lived in rural settings.

As seen in the graph below, an analysis of what respondents consider would make additional digital and financial literacy training more effective to their needs shows that hands-on and practical training was important to 30% of respondents, with ongoing mentoring, flexible scheduling and better access to the internet following closely (20%, 20% and 18% respectively).

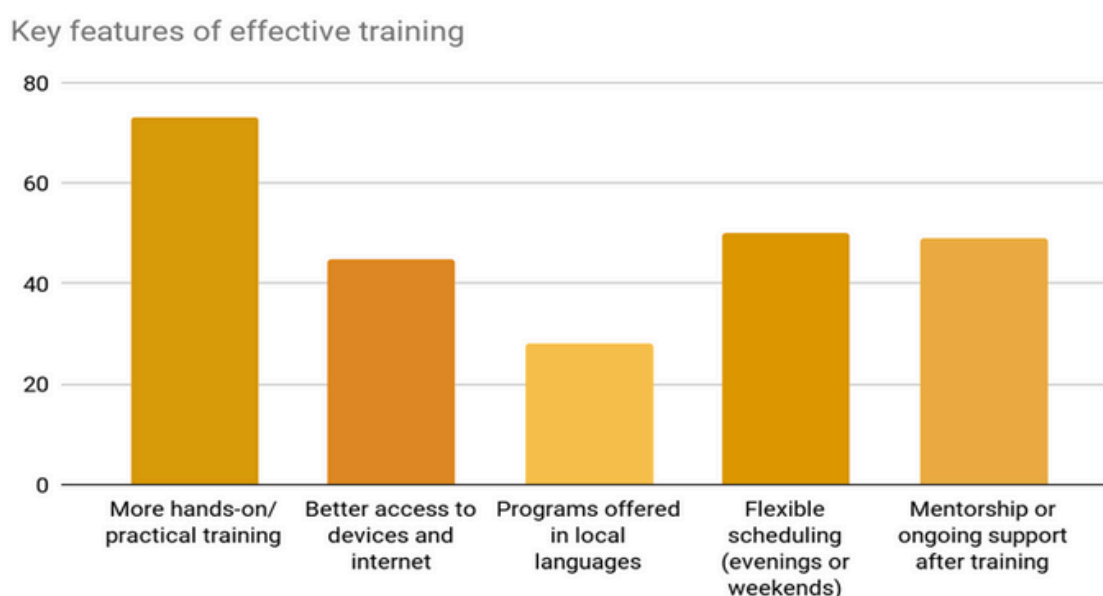


Figure 8. What would make digital skills or financial literacy programs more effective for you?

As with factors impacting the effectiveness of training, the usefulness of topics for future training received a mixed response. As outlined in the table below, responses to the question “What topic(s) would you be interested in?” had a high response rate (with respondents largely selecting multiple options) with limited variability across responses with the highest rated option receiving 9% of all responses and the lowest receiving 4%. Most topics in the higher-ranked response rates were focused on financial literacy and business management, with ICT engineering and media communications marginally less valued.

Table 6: Topics of interest for digital training

Topic	Count
Budgeting and saving	52
Advanced digital skills (e.g. cybersecurity/ AI)	48
Starting a small business	47
Entrepreneurship and online business tools	47
Basics of investing	46
Using digital payment platforms (e.g. mobile wallets/ online banking)	42
Financial coaching or small business loans	42
Internet safety and privacy	40
Coding or programming	36
Debt management and loans	36
Basic computer skills (e.g. Microsoft Office/ email)	34
Social media skills	33
Content creation (e.g. YouTube/ podcasts)	31
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>554</b>

### 4.4.3. Financial Literacy Perceptions and Interest

When surveyed specifically on financial literacy, this group were, in general, more conservative regarding their assessment of financial literacy in comparison to digital literacy skills with 45% respondents rating their skills as “average’, 26% rating their understanding as good and 19% as very good. Those living in rural locations were less likely to rate their financial literacy as “good’. When asked to identify challenges faced in managing personal finances, lack of knowledge on budgeting and insufficient finances were rated most highly, with 28% and 28% of respondents respectively.

Overall, those who had not attended digital skills training and were not ICT professionals were clear that the impact of increased digital skills and access to financial literacy training would be an increase in their personal finances. Aligning with findings regarding challenges faced in managing finances, 32% of respondents thought increasing skills in this area would increase wealth. As outlined in the graph below, a further 25% and 24% identified the capacity to manage a household budget and the ability to establish or grow a business as their greatest perceived impact. Less than three percent (5 respondents) thought additional training would have no impact on their lives, and interestingly, 16% thought that it would increase opportunities for formal employment.

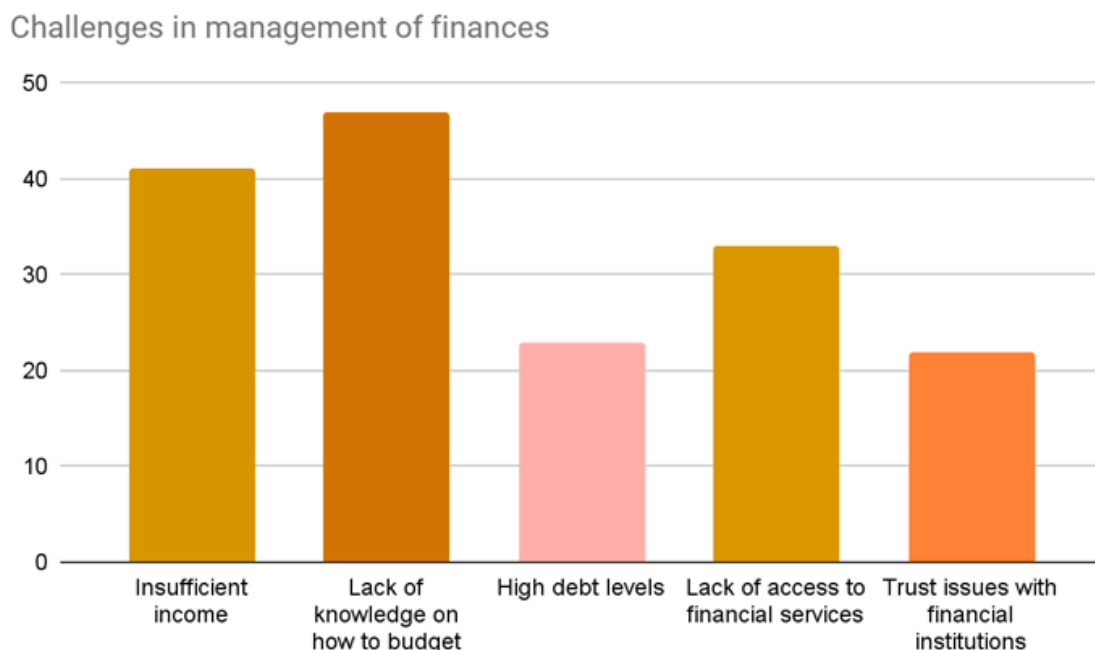


Figure 9. What challenges do you face in managing your finances?

#### 4.4.4. Other Comments

When asked to provide further comments or suggestions on the provision of digital skills or financial literacy programs in their community, 28% of the respondents who had suggestions commented on the importance of providing training in-situ (within communities). Some also emphasized the importance of facilitation in local languages and ensuring the curriculum took into account the operating context.

One respondent highlighted that training should: “Facilitate peer-learning groups, where individuals with higher digital literacy can mentor others. This approach leverages community relationships and promotes collaborative learning.”

Suggested key areas of focus included targeting the upskilling of women and young people, with several suggestions that digital skills should be mainstreamed into the curriculum of education facilities. Several respondents mentioned that service providers should be more innovative in their engagement with communities, with digital services and training on how to use them, and an opportunity to make health and banking services more responsive and inclusive.

One respondent also noted that any training should include teaching people how to access digital services securely.

# Interview and Focus Group Findings

Focus groups and interview questions were designed to comprehensively assess stakeholder needs, including identifying gaps, challenges, and opportunities related to digital skills development across multiple sectors and demographics. Stakeholders included representatives from community organizations, government departments, educational institutions, advocacy groups, and private-sector businesses across Fiji and Vanuatu.

In Fiji, 29 interviews and three focus group discussions were conducted, while in Vanuatu, 16 interviews and one focus group were held, ensuring a balanced representation of perspectives from various sectors and communities. (See Annex 1 for a full list of interviewed organizations). Interview and focus group questions were developed around key themes that were consistent across all interview groups, but questions were contextualized to ensure relevance for each group and their specific experiences. The table below presents a summary of the participants of the interviews and FGDs

The analysis of the interviews is structured across the Triple-A Framework and the World Bank's digital analytical framework, which combines 1) Ability and Capability, 2) Acceptance and Enablers, and 3) Authority and Structure.

Data Collection Tool	Country	Sessions	Stakeholder Groups	Total Participants	Gender
Focus Group Discussion	Fiji	3	Community (12), CSOs (9), Education (4)	25	60% Females 40% Males
	Vanuatu	1	CSOs and Advocacy (3)	3	100 % Females
<b>Total FGDs</b>	-	<b>4</b>	-	<b>28</b>	-
Interviews	Fiji		Business & Private (10), Government (7), Education & Research (6), CSOs & Advocacy (5), Community Authorities (1), Financial Literacy (1), Telecom (1)	28	Not specified
	Vanuatu		Government (9), CSOs & Advocacy (5), Education & Research (5), Business & Private (2), Telecom (2), Financial Literacy (1)	24	Not specified
<b>Total Interviews</b>	-	-		<b>52</b>	-

## 5.1. Ability and Capability

“Ability” within the Triple-A Framework focuses on the practical aspects of a reform policy or initiative. It recognizes the need for resources such as time, money, and skills to initiate any intervention. It is essential to assess existing abilities and identify any gaps that need to be addressed to implement change effectively.<sup>6</sup> This is similar to the capabilities domain of the World Bank’s Digital Skills Development Model, which focuses on digital skills training programs and related curriculum, educator training, and support. In analyzing the interview and focus group data, we look at abilities and capabilities at different levels, including systems, organizations, and individuals, especially regarding training delivery and improvement.

<sup>6</sup> <https://thepolicypractice.com/sites/default/files/2023-03/PDIA%20Toolkit.pdf>

## 5.1.1. Fiji: Lessons Learned about Ability and Capability

### Role of Education and Training Institutions

Based on the responses gathered from interviews, there are opportunities to improve Fiji's digital skills ecosystem and address challenges. Some interviewees felt that there is a disconnect between the skills taught in educational institutions and the labor market's needs. Some institutes do consult with industry players, taking on board their suggestions towards improving the currency of their curriculum to remain on par with industry expectations. The National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) does international benchmarking with Australia and the Asia Pacific region for their short courses. However, generally speaking, interviewees mentioned that for most of the educational institutes, curricula are outdated and lack advanced cybersecurity, cloud computing, and data analytics skills.

While the FNU and NTPC regularly consult industry for program development, some programs offered by Fijian institutes fail to address specific sectoral needs, such as digital literacy for caregivers and allied health workers.



Figure 10. Central fruit and vegetable market, Port Vila, Vanuatu

Caregiving for the sick, elderly, new mothers, children, and persons with disabilities is a common service in the Pacific. According to the director of an institute specializing in aged care services, their graduates are in high demand in countries such as New Zealand and Australia. She has developed international MOUs to adapt to these new labor mobility market trends. Also, according to another interview participant, there is a lack of tools for digital literacy skills for small-scale farmers and workers in the tourism sector. A member of a national institute who is involved in vetting the curriculum for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) short courses mentioned that the absence of industry input creates a wider gap between the programs offered and the post-training opportunities that are available to the graduates, particularly in the field of technology.

Collaboration between the education, government, and private sectors remains fragmented, with isolated efforts instead of coordinated strategies. Interviewees suggested a national coordinating body could streamline partnerships and scale successful initiatives, like mentorship programs and internships, into impactful, nationwide efforts.

According to the private sector leaders who were interviewed, educational institutions face a shortage of digitally skilled trainers due to limited professional development, brain drain, and inadequate incentives to retain talent. This impacts their ability to update curricula and integrate digital tools into teaching. Upskilling educators and adopting modern teaching technologies are essential to closing this gap.

As per an interview with the tertiary sector representative, tertiary institutional digital literacy is limited, hindering the adoption of new technologies. Also noted was the vital role of infrastructure investment, such as reliable internet and digital tools, in improving training quality and adapting to evolving technology. Interviewees noted that inclusion remains a critical issue, requiring targeted programs to support women, youth, and marginalized groups. Extending training and resources to remote areas through mobile units and digital hubs can address geographical barriers.

According to an interviewee from the education and training sector:

**“Barriers for women always stem from societal practices. In Fiji though we make efforts promoting women's involvement in digital education. There are inadequate policies for women in rural and low-income areas. Lack of access and internet connectivity limit women's access to digital access. There is a lack of targeted programs for women.”**

Interviewees from the education sector further emphasized the role of education institutions beyond just training and the need for collaborative advocacy for the digital economy, starting with communities and schools.



**There are perhaps just 10% of our people who advocate for a digital economy. The few that are in this journey, we need to continue advocating and continue the work to shift the thinking from traditional to digital transformation.”**

### **Informal and Community Training Programs**

Participants from the business sector identified the need for informal and community training programs in Fiji to prioritize inclusivity, practical relevance, and sustainable funding models to help bridge the digital skills gap, noting the lack of participation of vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and individuals with disabilities. Barriers, including financial constraints, geographic inaccessibility, and cultural norms, limit opportunities for these groups to participate in many or most training programs.

According to an interviewee from an industry body, there needs to be a more targeted approach to address the digital skills needed for women in rural areas, as they are severely affected by the patriarchal societies in which they are a part. They also called for a thorough study on digital disparity in Fiji and how it affects women, but noted their experiences in this area:



**We come from a patriarchal society. We need study to show disproportionality in access to digital resources. This is my observation from my fieldwork. We need to know about the gaps which exist to be able to address them. Women by far are the most affected due to the disparity.”**

The interview data from the business and private sector, as well as the education sector, indicate a clear need to align training with local employment opportunities by focusing on practical, market-relevant skills, including digital marketing, e-commerce, social media marketing, and cybersecurity. This issue was mainly highlighted by a technology company that hires recent graduates who suggested educational institutes have an opportunity to realize the need to introduce programs to address the growing demand for skills while incorporating shorter, focused micro-credentials that are useful for the job market.

## Box 1: Build a Website Workshop

The **“Build a Website” workshop by Sunset Studios** aims to guide participants, especially beginners, through the process of creating a simple yet professional website using the user-friendly Softr platform. It provides a step-by-step approach to website development, focusing on practical skills like designing a homepage, adding key sections (e.g., menus, testimonials, and service summaries), and creating an effective online presence for businesses or personal projects. The workshop emphasizes accessibility and quick deployment, making it ideal for startups and small business owners.

According to a businesswoman interviewee, quoted below, to sustain these efforts, funding models must be diversified, leveraging support from donor agencies, government grants, private sector partnerships, and community fundraising:



**Donor agencies are investing heavily in curriculum development which, when made, will last for more than one year. However, they do not include industries in the development process. There has to be platforms where we can discuss in a common fora regarding the needs for training and education. There needs to be an understanding of the data in terms of access to digital spaces; then businesses can look into different aspects of reducing the digital divide.”**

The interview data suggest that policymakers should review existing funding mechanisms, including tertiary loan schemes, to better align with the demand for informal training and micro-credentials. Accommodations for marginalized communities must also be improved, such as offering flexible schedules, financial assistance, and accessible learning environments tailored to their needs. By implementing these strategies, informal and community training programs can play a transformative role in equipping Fiji’s population with the digital skills necessary to thrive in the digital economy.

## Private Sector and Internet Service Provider Engagement

Interview data suggests that private sector involvement in digital skills development in Fiji has significant potential to bridge existing gaps, particularly through partnerships, improved accessibility, and alignment of training with industry needs. While the data provides limited examples of specific initiatives by internet service providers (ISPs) in skills development, it highlights the critical role of technology access as a foundation for enabling training programs.

Interviews with stakeholders from the private sector, for example, the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, and international organizations highlighted that collaboration between the private sector, educational institutions, and government is essential for creating effective training programs. They suggested that private companies can co-design curricula with educational institutions, ensuring that training aligns with industry needs. Interviewees thought there were opportunities for the private sector to also provide hands-on learning opportunities through internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs. The interview data indicate that models like shared or rotational internships, where participants gain exposure to multiple organizations, offer a cost-effective way to enhance skills and diversify experiences. The data suggests that pooling of mentoring resources across businesses could expand the support network for trainees, particularly women and youth in technology.

According to an interviewee who was instrumental in pioneering Fiji's BPO sector:

**“Businesses can play a critical role in improving access to technology for digital skills training by providing devices like laptops or tablets, subsidizing or sponsoring internet access, and even supporting innovative solutions like Starlink kits to bring reliable connectivity to remote areas. Setting up digital hubs with modern tools, collaborating with educational institutions to ensure access to essential software, and funding connectivity programs can help bridge the digital divide. These efforts not only empower individuals to participate in training but also create equitable opportunities for them to thrive in the digital economy.”**

Through the interviews, we learned that the private sector already plays a role in equipping employees with industry-specific skills through on-the-job training, particularly in the outsourcing services industry. However, according to the industry representatives' interviews, there is an ongoing need to bridge the gap between formal education and workplace requirements. The participants interviewed highlighted that businesses can address this gap by investing in long-term career pathways, including leadership development programs and continued professional development opportunities for employees. According to a representative from the ISP and business sector:

**“In my view, there needs to be a consultative arrangement by a working group to first decide what training is needed and in which area. Then we can see what level of accreditation might be required as well as cost, which may attract donor funding from abroad. Then such [training] could be accessed through the already established networks.”**

The interviewees from the business and ISP/telecom sector suggested that initiatives should integrate soft skills like communication, adaptability, and teamwork alongside technical expertise to prepare individuals for success in the modern workforce.

Another critical challenge is the mismatch between government funding mechanisms and the demand for micro-credentials and informal training. Interviews suggest that policymakers need to adapt funding strategies to better support these alternative pathways. Increased dialogue between the government, the private sector, and training providers is essential to ensure coordinated efforts in digital skills development. By embracing these strategies, the private sector can play a pivotal role in preparing Fiji's workforce for the demands of the digital economy.

According to an interviewee from the BPO industry:

**“Setting up digital hubs with modern tools, collaborating with educational institutions to ensure access to essential software, and funding connectivity programs can help bridge the digital divide.”**

According to an interviewee from an international organization:

**“Businesses can collaborate with governments, CSOs, and training institutions by creating shared or rotational internship programs, where participants gain exposure to multiple organizations, building diverse skills and industry insights. They can also pool mentoring resources, allowing experienced professionals from various sectors to guide and support women and youth in their career journeys.”**

### **Current Digital Skill Gaps Across Sectors**

Fiji's digital skills ecosystem faces significant challenges in aligning training programs with industry needs, addressing labor market gaps, and ensuring inclusive participation in the digital economy.



Figure 11. South Pacific Community Education Training Center, Fiji

Current training programs provide some basic skills but need more sector-specific focus for industries like e-commerce, government, and outsourcing services. While the outsourcing services industry demonstrates a responsive approach by tailoring in-house training to client demands, most curricula offered by tertiary institutes often fail to meet private sector requirements, creating a persistent skills gap that limits workforce readiness. One founder and CEO interviewee suggested that tailored solutions that address the specific digital literacy needs of various sectors are essential to ensure training programs remain relevant and effective.

The responses from the private sector highlight a recurring issue of the disconnect between formal education and industry requirements. The CEO of an ICT business mentioned that graduates often lack the practical expertise and hands-on experience needed for seamless employment transitions.

Limited access to advanced training in critical areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and data analytics further exacerbates this problem, restricting opportunities for upskilling and leaving a shortage of skilled professionals. Additionally, a variety of private sector businesses highlighted the need to include soft skills in training, suggesting that the omission of soft skills development in existing programs hinders individuals from meeting the collaborative and problem-solving demands of modern workplaces. According to the CEO of a technology solutions company:

**“Digital Skills (all are in demand), across the entire ICT sector, all skill sets are not readily available. People come out of the education system, but they do not know how to align the education to industry needs. Particularly the next generation skill set—the workforce has acquired credentials but lack industry exposure.”**

The interview data suggest that geographic and gender disparities also contribute to the digital divide in Fiji. Rural and maritime areas face significant challenges in accessing training, while women encounter barriers related to cultural norms, family responsibilities, and gender stereotypes. These disparities limit the talent pool available to industries, slowing economic growth and restricting opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. According to the CEO of an educational institute:

**“There are trainings available but there is a lack of advocacy to promote women's participation particularly for women in rural areas. There are free programs which they do not know about, therefore they cannot access those trainings. Training opportunities are limited for rural and maritime populations.”**

The interview data sourced from the ICT industry shows there is a lack of skilled workers, particularly in advanced digital fields. Interviewees suggested that this is a constraint to industry growth, innovation, and competitiveness in the global digital economy. Local businesses struggle to attract and retain talent due to migration, remote work opportunities, and competition from global companies. This talent drain limits the potential for local startups and stifles entrepreneurial ventures, further undermining Fiji's economic resilience and ability to capitalize on digital opportunities.

Interview participants from international organizations and the outsourcing industry noted that there are challenges pertaining to the alignment of training needs with the available digital solutions. They suggest that Fiji must focus on aligning training programs with industry demands by integrating sector-specific and advanced digital skills, such as AI and cybersecurity. Incorporating soft skills development, improving access to training in underserved areas, and fostering gender inclusivity are critical steps toward bridging the digital divide. One interviewee noted:

**“The private sector can collaborate with educational institutions to co-design curricula that include in-demand skills like AI, cybersecurity, data analytics, and digital marketing.”**

### **Curriculum**

Fiji's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) increasingly recognize the importance of digital tools, particularly in e-commerce and digital marketing, to enhance operations and competitiveness. Skills in areas like payment gateways, social media marketing, video editing, and AI integration are in high demand. Website development is also emerging as a key capability as businesses realize the value of social media in driving traffic to their websites. However, according to an interview with a digital marketplace platform, it is noted the shift from traditional business practices to digitalization remains slow, partly due to a lack of local expertise in programming, graphics, coding, and web design. This interviewee noted:

**“I believe when it comes to the digital space, programming, graphics, coding, web-designing are some skills that are essential, and many businesses do find it difficult sourcing these services locally. It is difficult to find these services because the business environment in Fiji has not fully identified the shift in business from the usual norm to digitalization.”**

The interview data further highlights that digital skills training curricula should include hands-on learning with relevant e-commerce and digital marketing tools.

## Government and CSO staff

Equipping government and CSO staff in Fiji with the necessary digital skills is essential for driving effective digital transformation. While the interview data provides limited direct insights, it highlights key opportunities and challenges in engaging these groups. Government staff play a crucial role in advocacy and policy development, particularly in creating robust legal frameworks and guidelines for responsible digital technology implementation. This includes addressing data privacy, cybersecurity, and occupational health and safety concerns in digital spaces. CSO staff, alongside the government, can act as facilitators in aligning training programs with industry needs and fostering communication among stakeholders to ensure the relevance and sustainability of digital initiatives.

According to the interviews, critical digital skills for government and CSO staff include data literacy and analysis, which are vital for data-driven decision-making to address the digital divide. Policy and regulatory expertise is also crucial for navigating the ethical and legal implications of digital technologies while fostering innovation.



Figure 12. Vanuatu Agriculture College, Vanuatu

Additionally, partnership-building skills are necessary to align stakeholder interests and coordinate efforts across sectors. For staff involved in public service delivery, foundational digital literacy is essential to enhance accessibility, efficiency, and responsiveness to citizens' needs.

The insights from the interviews emphasize the importance of collaboration and a multi-stakeholder approach. Beyond training for community beneficiaries, equipping government and CSO staff with the skills to lead and support digital transformation is highlighted as vital for ensuring equitable access and fostering a thriving digital ecosystem in Fiji.

## 5.1.2. Vanuatu: Lessons Learned About Ability and Capability

### Role of Education and Training Institutions

Insights from interviews indicate that formal education institutions in Vanuatu offer digital skills training, but their alignment with labor market needs varies. The focus is primarily on basic computer skills to prepare students for the workforce with limited industry-specific training. However, focus group discussions and interviews highlighted an increasing need for more targeted digital skills training, such as coding, digital literacy, social media management, and e-commerce, which can be attributed to the growth and popularity of social media, digital platforms, and direct-to-consumer marketing. Some institutions are planning to expand their offerings. For instance, the National University of Vanuatu (NUV) aims to introduce a practical ICT diploma program in early 2025, while others indicate a shift toward more specialized digital skills. However, there is limited clarity on how often curricula are updated or aligned with evolving digital trends.

Interviewees emphasized collaboration between educational institutions, government, and private sector organizations in advancing digital skills. For example, they highlighted plans by NUV to partner with Vodafone for subsidized technology packages and internships and noted the Ministry of Education and Training's (MoET's) efforts to work with telecom companies to provide VSAT (satellite internet) connectivity to remote schools. Interviewees also pointed to the Agriculture College's collaboration with NUV and Vanuatu Skills Partnership to integrate Moodle into its curriculum as a positive step toward institutional support for digital approaches.

However, interview participants identified significant challenges. They cited financial and resource constraints and insufficient training as key barriers. Interviewees also raised concerns about limited digital literacy within institutions, such as reliance on IT support for basic tasks, and highlighted the absence of a dedicated ICT training center as a major obstacle.

## **Informal and Community Training Programs**

Interviewees highlighted several barriers to digital skills training for women, youth, and persons with disabilities, including cost, location, time constraints, and cultural norms prioritizing boys' education over girls' and restricting women's participation. Programs praised for promoting inclusivity included the Girls in ICT initiative (led by the ITU) which encourages young women and girls to pursue careers in ICT, as were efforts by the Department of Women's Affairs to help Women's Handicraft Centres adopt e-business platforms, and the Smart Sistas initiative that empowers girls aged 13-17 with ICT skills including robotics and coding. Interview participants also emphasized the importance of mobile technology and community tech hubs in improving access, particularly for persons with disabilities and women, who tend to have caregiving responsibilities.

Participants identified funding sustainability as a key issue, with programs like Smart Sistas and initiatives run by education institutions relying heavily on external support, which can be unpredictable and inconsistent. They called for increased government involvement to ensure long-term viability. The interview data does not explicitly address a potential mismatch between government funding and the skills people want to learn. However, the lack of government funding for certain programs and the reliance on external funding sources suggest that this could be an area for further investigation.

An emerging topic is the value of micro-credentials and informal training. The interviews highlight community-based and informal training programs as crucial for addressing local digital skills needs. There are mentions of using online programs like Facebook Premier and Tableau courses, and the need for specific skills training like coding, digital literacy, social media management, e-commerce, and cybersecurity. The interview data emphasizes the need for training programs to focus on practical, market-relevant skills, and programs like the planned ICT diploma at NUV aim to address this need by incorporating practical skills in their courses. There is a general recognition of the need for a national digital skills framework that recognizes and validates micro-credentials and digital badges to ensure they are valued by employers and workers alike.

## Private Sector and ISP Engagement

Telecommunications companies in Vanuatu support digital skills training initiatives through consumer protection regulations and awareness programs about their services. The interview data identified potential for public-private partnerships to improve access to affordable digital tools, particularly for women and youth. Key opportunities include partnerships between telecom providers and training institutions to enhance program quality through initiatives like subsidized technology packages for digital training and internship opportunities. Interview participants also emphasized the importance of private sector involvement in developing a national digital skill framework to align with labor market demands. Furthermore, they stressed the need for government funding and support to expand digital access in remote areas, ensuring inclusive participation.

To enhance private sector contributions, businesses can support internships, mentorships, and industry-aligned training, while also investing in technology access and programs for underserved communities. Collaboration with government and civil society is key to expanding access and creating sustainable career pathways for women and youth. Although current private sector involvement appears limited, there is strong interest in increasing partnerships to align training with market needs and promote employment and entrepreneurship pathways.

## Current Digital Skill Gaps Across Sectors

The interview data indicates that existing training programs in Vanuatu are starting to address sector-specific needs, but significant gaps persist.

- **E-commerce opportunities and challenges:** E-commerce is recognized as an important area for economic growth, especially for women and youth in rural areas. However, interview data highlights a lack of training programs targeting e-commerce skills. Focus groups emphasize the need for digital skills in business and marketing and recommend integrating e-commerce training into financial literacy and entrepreneurship programs. Participants also call for stronger collaboration between government and the private sector to enhance e-commerce opportunities and digital payment systems.

- **Cybersecurity Training and Awareness:** Cybersecurity is increasingly important in Vanuatu, yet training initiatives remain limited. The Smart Sistas program promotes cyber safety awareness among young girls and women. Focus groups highlight the need for digital literacy, safety, and security training to protect against cyberattacks. The Department of Communication and Digital Transformation (DCDT), formerly OGCI, provides cybersecurity training for government officials, while one ministry partners with Youth Challenge and World Vision to offer additional training opportunities. More widespread and comprehensive cybersecurity training programs are needed to protect individuals, businesses, and government agencies from cyber threats.
  
- **Training and Labor Market Gaps in Vanuatu's Digital Economy:** Persistent gaps were highlighted in the interview data showing key areas that hinder Vanuatu's ability to thrive in the digital economy:
  - **Advanced Digital Skills:** While basic digital literacy is available, there is a shortage of advanced skills training (e.g., coding, data analytics, and app development), limiting innovation and high-skilled job opportunities.
  - **Technology and Connectivity Access:** The high costs of devices and internet, especially in rural areas, create barriers to digital participation. Starlink is seen as a potential solution for remote connectivity.
  - **Trainer and Resource Shortages:** A lack of qualified trainers and resources reduces the effectiveness of training programs and creates skill mismatches with market demands.
  - **Curriculum Misalignment:** Training programs need regular updates to align with industry needs and ensure graduates are job ready.
  - **Awareness Deficit:** Many, particularly in rural areas, are unaware of existing digital skills programs, limiting their participation.

These persistent gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive national digital skills strategy in Vanuatu, focusing on affordable technology, high-quality training, trainer upskilling, awareness campaigns, and multi-sector collaboration to build a sustainable digital skills ecosystem.

## Curriculum

The interview data suggests a strong consensus on the potential of using digital tools, particularly e-commerce and digital marketing platforms, to enhance SME operations. Participants emphasized the need for training and awareness programs to empower communities to effectively leverage online platforms, utilize social media for marketing, and protect their digital agency through digital literacy initiatives. However, addressing the digital divide—especially in rural and remote areas—remains a significant challenge, limiting access to digital skills training and adopting these tools. Despite this, participants expressed optimism about the possibility of government and private sector collaboration to provide the necessary resources, infrastructure, and training to support SMEs in adopting digital technologies. One interviewee said:

**“E-commerce skills are needed for conducting business online. If we can provide training in this area, it would empower the community to leverage online platforms for business opportunities.”**

## Government and CSO staff

The interview data reveal significant opportunities to enhance the digital skills of government and CSO staff, addressing critical gaps in digital literacy, data management, communication, and cybersecurity. These challenges mirror those faced in Fiji, where digital transformation is essential for improving service delivery and program outcomes. In Vanuatu, Ministries and CSOs recognize the transformative potential of digital tools, but face obstacles such as limited internal expertise, infrastructure constraints, and uneven access to technology across the islands. Examples like the adoption of platforms like Kobo for data collection underscore the growing interest in digitalization, but institutional capacity remains a barrier.

To address these challenges, training programs must be tailored to the varying skill levels of staff, with flexible delivery methods such as in-person workshops, online courses, and blended learning options to accommodate diverse needs. This aligns with approaches seen in Fiji and elsewhere in the Pacific, emphasizing adaptation to local contexts. Partnerships between government, CSOs, private organizations, and training institutions can pool resources and ensure alignment with national goals.

Securing buy-in from leadership is essential for sustainability, while incentives like professional development credits and support for internet access can encourage participation. By equipping staff with critical digital skills and fostering collaboration, these initiatives can drive meaningful and sustainable digital transformation across institutions. Another interview said:

**“We see a growing need to ensure people have the skills for remote work. Training programs should also be supported by the ministry to build familiarity with new technologies and ensure readiness.”**

## 5.2. Acceptance and Enablers

‘Acceptance’ within the Triple-A Framework refers to how those impacted by an initiative perceive the need for change and its implications. Different levels of acceptance are required for different types of change. It is important to assess existing acceptance and address gaps to ensure successful implementation. Other enablers included in the World Bank framework, beyond acceptance of the need for change, center on digital infrastructure, including internet access, devices, and software.

When addressing acceptance in the context of this analysis of interview and focus group data, we highlight sociocultural, gender, economic, and other interwoven factors that are impacting or may impact digital skills training and economic opportunities, especially for women and people in remote areas.

### 5.2.1. Fiji: Lessons Learned About Acceptance and Enablers

#### **Applying a Gender Lens to Acceptance**

Interviewees discussed the persistent gender disparities in digital access and participation in Fiji and noted their roots in sociocultural barriers and financial constraints. Participants noted cultural mindsets, such as the perception of technology as a male domain, limit opportunities for women and reinforce stereotypes.

It was also noted that societal expectations around domestic responsibilities and limited mobility further hinder women's engagement in the digital economy. Additionally, there are some, but not many, female role models in ICT; this contributes to the perception of it as a male-dominated field, discouraging women from pursuing digital careers. According to one interviewee who is a woman entrepreneur:

**“Decision makers are predominantly men, so stereotypes still exist. Families are protective towards their girls which prevents them from choosing careers predominated by men. Companies can create more inclusive spaces by recognizing women are equally capable and creating female bathrooms, breastfeeding spaces, and inclusive hiring practices.”**

According to the interview data from other women entrepreneurs, to address financial barriers, scholarships and grants targeted at women and vulnerable entrepreneurs can help bridge the gap by providing access to devices and training. As mentioned in the quote above, an interview participant from a training institute mentions that inclusive workplaces are essential for creating supportive environments, with measures such as breastfeeding spaces, unbiased hiring practices, and gender-sensitive policies. Training programs must be tailored to women's specific needs and contexts, ensuring they are practical and empowering for economic and social goals.



Figure 13. Handicraft market, Port Vila, Vanuatu

Interview data suggests that awareness campaigns and targeted outreach are necessary to inform women, especially in rural areas, of available digital skills training opportunities. An interviewee who works closely with women's and youth groups suggested that programs must avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes, such as implying that women require simplified or specialized approaches. Instead, initiatives should promote gender equality by engaging men and boys as allies, raising awareness about the importance of women's inclusion, and challenging traditional norms.

A participant from an international donor agency noted that empowering women as leaders and decision-makers is critical to addressing the digital divide. Supporting women-led tech initiatives, providing leadership training, and increasing representation in decision-making roles can drive meaningful change.

**“There is a societal norm that ICT is a man’s field, because other barriers are being mitigated. Gender, disability lots of work done in these areas, but the community leaders need to work harder to convince their communities to take up challenges”**

Interview participants who are women in business reported that these efforts not only empower individuals to participate in training but also create equitable opportunities for them to thrive in the digital economy.

### **Remote communities**

According to the interview data from donor agencies and the education sector, expanding digital opportunities in remote communities in Fiji requires addressing significant challenges, including infrastructure gaps, sociocultural perceptions, and the relevance of training programs to local contexts. The digital skills needs of these communities often differ from urban areas, necessitating tailored programs that focus on enhancing livelihoods through employment in agriculture, tourism, or small-scale businesses.

Interview data suggests that training initiatives should also incorporate entrepreneurial skill development, empowering individuals to leverage technology for economic and social progress. Technology's potential in telehealth, online education, and communication further underscores its role in improving community development. However, the telecommunication

representatives who were interviewed stated that the cost of internet services (broadband packages, mobile plans) in Fiji is amongst the lowest in the world.

While the interview participants from the telecommunications sector acknowledge that the digital divide remains a critical barrier, with limited connectivity and access to devices hindering participation in training programs, they also mention the introduction of greater digital solutions to help bridge the digital divide. Inconsistent internet access and unsuitable devices impact not only accessibility but also the effectiveness of training programs, often leading to reduced outcomes and acceptance.

Addressing these gaps requires coordinated efforts, such as government investment in broadband infrastructure, business-led connectivity programs, and innovative solutions like satellite internet.

Building trust and shifting perceptions in remote communities is essential for fostering acceptance. Engaging community leaders and conducting needs assessments can help tailor programs to local priorities while addressing potential resistance. Demonstrating the practical benefits of digital skills, through success stories and their direct impact on livelihoods, is key to showcasing their value. Partnerships with trusted local organizations can further enhance outreach and ensure programs align with cultural norms and customs.

A woman in business who was interviewed focused on the need for decentralizing digital innovation ecosystems by establishing community-based digital hubs equipped with technology and training facilities. These hubs can become focal points for skills training, entrepreneurship support, and community engagement. Mobile training units equipped with internet access and devices can complement these efforts by bringing training directly to remote areas, overcoming transportation barriers.

**“Setting up digital hubs with modern tools, collaborating with educational institutions to ensure access to essential software, and funding connectivity programs can help bridge the digital divide.”**

Interview data from the business sector suggests that collaboration among government, businesses, and CSOs is vital to expanding digital opportunities sustainably. Public-private partnerships can pool resources, provide mentorship, and support infrastructure development. According to businesses who were interviewed, this collective approach can bridge the digital divide, foster local innovation, and empower individuals in remote communities to participate in and benefit from the digital economy. By addressing these challenges holistically, Fiji can create an inclusive digital ecosystem that supports growth and development across all regions.

### **Challenges for Women and Underrepresented Groups**

The responses from the interviews emphasize the need for digital skills programs to adopt tailored approaches that cater to the specific needs of women, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups. As mentioned by a woman entrepreneur in education, understanding the people's context is very important to provide them with the right set of digital literacy tools and knowledge.

The interview responses highlight several key themes and challenges regarding inclusivity in training and participation in the digital economy. Flexible learning options are emphasized as essential, particularly for women balancing household responsibilities. These include online courses, evening and weekend classes, and childcare support. Financial assistance is identified as a critical factor in overcoming cost barriers related to training, devices, and internet access, especially for low-income groups. Geographical challenges also feature prominently, with rural and maritime communities facing limited access to training. Establishing regional training centers, mobile units, and accessible online platforms is seen as a potential means to address these barriers.

 **Trainings are mostly in urban centers, so the rural population misses out. Women are challenged with household duties."**

The need for culturally sensitive, inclusive learning environments emerges as a central theme in the interviews. Mentorship opportunities are recognized for their role in empowering women and youth, helping build confidence and navigate career pathways.

For persons with disabilities, the integration of assistive technologies such as braille, narrations, and accommodations for the visually impaired is highlighted. Furthermore, trainers are expected to be sensitive to the specific challenges faced by vulnerable groups.

Cultural mindsets, societal norms, and traditional gender roles are noted as substantial barriers to participation in the digital economy, alongside biases in hiring practices. A woman entrepreneur who regularly attends ICT conferences noted a stigma around women's competencies in ICT, which she believes further exacerbates the existing challenges. She adds that this was evident in the lower representation of women at ICT-related conferences. Limited access to technology, compounded by the high costs of devices and internet access, is another key barrier, particularly for rural and low-income populations.

**“There are very few women even attending ICT conferences; it is an indication of a deeply rooted stigma around women's competencies in ICT. There are more men in ICT than women. Local organizations need to take responsibility in setting quotas for women represented.”**

The participants from government ministries identified the need for effective communication of policy reforms as crucial for fostering trust among marginalized communities. Collaborative approaches involving businesses, government, CSOs, and training institutions are considered essential to ensure reforms address the needs of these groups. The responses emphasize the importance of outreach campaigns to raise awareness about reforms and their benefits.

### **Financial literacy**

While the interview data in the context of financial literacy touches upon digital skills training, the barriers to accessing digital tools and training, and the importance of digital literacy for economic empowerment, it does not explicitly explore how a lack of financial literacy impacts the use of these tools. For example, one participant from the telecom industry mentions that 75% of women in Fiji own a bank account, but only 11% of Fijians with bank accounts use internet banking. Of those who do use internet banking, 60% are women. Nearly one in five women use mobile money accounts, with 62% using them regularly. These statistics suggest a potential gap between owning financial tools and using them effectively, which could be related to financial literacy.

Similarly, while several interviewees highlight the need for digital skills training to enable individuals to participate in the digital economy, they do not necessarily point out whether these training programs incorporate financial literacy components. The emphasis is primarily on technical skills like coding, web development, and data analytics, particularly for participants who are involved in the technology business.



Figure 14. Koroipita Community Center, Fiji

Participants do not explicitly address the role of financial literacy for economic empowerment. Further research and data collection are needed to understand how a lack of financial literacy affects the adoption and effective use of digital financial tools among different demographic groups in Fiji.

Trust and knowledge gaps are identified as significant barriers to the adoption of digital tools, as mentioned by women entrepreneurs in the technology business. Without a basic understanding of how digital technologies work and confidence in their security and reliability, individuals may be hesitant to engage with digital financial services. According to a representative from the telecommunications sector:

**“I do believe we need a process. As at the moment the discussion is very high level, and different training is required depending on who the relevant recipient might be, and we need to isolate that or else we could have all the capacity in the world without getting a meaningful result.”**

Sociocultural barriers, particularly those affecting women, are also highlighted as significant challenges by ICT entrepreneurs interviewed. Interviews with donor agencies also highlighted traditional gender roles, societal expectations, and biases that can limit women's access to and participation in digital skills training and, subsequently, their ability to utilize digital financial tools effectively.

## Men's Resistance

Data from interviews with women entrepreneurs and regulatory bodies dealing with financial literacy suggest that interviewees believe that the existence of a patriarchal societal structure in Fiji contributes to gender disparities in digital access and participation. For instance, interviews with women in ICT note that decision-makers are predominantly men, perpetuating existing stereotypes. Cultural mindsets often discourage women from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields, while families can be overly protective of their daughters, limiting their choices.

An interview with a government regulator notes the need to study gender disparities in Fiji:

**Fiji is generally more literate than PICs, but we need study to show disproportionality in access to digital resources. This is my observation from my fieldwork. We need to know about the gaps which exist to be able to address them. Women by far are the most affected due to the disparity."**

While these observations imply the existence of societal norms that may contribute to men's resistance to reforms, the sources do not provide explicit evidence or direct quotes from men expressing such resistance.

Concerning women's resistance to reforms, one participant from the business sector points out concerns about maternity leave costs for companies. This indicates that some women might hesitate to support policies that could potentially increase financial burdens on employers.

## 5.2.2. Vanuatu: Lessons Learned About Acceptance and Enablers

### **Applying a Gender Lens to Acceptance**

The interview data suggest a complex interplay of sociocultural, economic, and technological limitations that result in a digital divide across genders in Vanuatu. One interviewee explained that cultural norms and gender biases often mean boys' education is prioritized over girls which limits girls' opportunities to learn digital skills and literacy from a young age. This is paralleled later in life, where cultural beliefs and a lack of understanding of the importance of digital literacy can limit women's access to training and devices. Interviews suggest these beliefs may stem from concerns about the potential negative impacts of technology on women or from more traditional views about women's roles in family, community, and work settings.

While cultural barriers exist, interviewees also provided evidence of how people successfully subverted them. For example, one woman spoke about how access to smartphones and laptops had made women in her community more confident, analytical, and capable of managing businesses. This highlights the empowering potential of technology. Programs can challenge negative stereotypes and inspire greater participation by showcasing successful examples of women leveraging technology for economic and personal growth. Interviewees also noted that a collaborative approach would help their communities start to bridge the gender digital divide—interviewees were hopeful that bringing together government policies and infrastructure with private sector support and civil society's ability to deliver training could be a game changer.

## Box 2: SmartSistas Strive to Close the Gender Gap in ICT

The Smart Sistas program empowers girls aged 13–17 in ICT through basic training, robotics workshops, and coding. By explicitly targeting girls, the program aims to counteract societal biases and create a supportive environment for learning. Smart Sistas' success stems from its collaborative approach, partnering with local private partners, communities, and the Peace Corps. This collaboration ensures community involvement and support, fostering awareness and acceptance of women and girls in ICT.

The program's mentorship component, particularly through Peace Corps Vanuatu staff, provides young women with guidance and support, encouraging them to pursue their interests in STEM fields. Mentorship can also help to break down stereotypes and promote positive role models for girls in the community.

Participation in international events like the Global Robotics Challenge provides Smart Sistas participants with global exposure and recognition, demonstrating the capabilities of girls in STEM to the wider community and beyond. This recognition can contribute to shifting societal perceptions and promoting acceptance of women in traditionally male-dominated fields ([Source](#)). Over 100 girls have participated in the program since its inception, with many of them going on to university engineering programs or jobs related to ICT. Training and networking through Smart Sistas prepare young women for IT work or careers utilizing ICT skills.

### Expanding Opportunities to Remote Communities

While the interviewees acknowledge that initial steps have been taken to extend training to remote communities, the data also highlights the significant concentration of digital innovation ecosystems within urban areas (e.g., workshops, networking events, and co-working spaces). Expanding these ecosystems to rural and remote areas requires a multifaceted approach that addresses infrastructure gaps, shifts perceptions, and fosters sustainable economic opportunities. Participants repeatedly mentioned inadequate internet connectivity, device affordability, and high data costs as significant barriers to digital skills training in remote areas but also expressed hope around emerging technologies. According to an interviewee from a regulatory body:



**People have to walk far or miles to get or catch connectivity - with the introduction of Starlink, there is no issue in connectivity."**

This lack of access limits education, entrepreneurship, and economic growth opportunities. Despite the challenges of access and affordability, the interview data reveal a desire for digital skills training and a recognition of its potential benefits in remote areas. Participants expressed their communities' interest in learning skills like social media management, e-commerce, and online business models to enhance their livelihoods and connect with broader markets. In addition to digital infrastructure, interview data suggests people in remote areas struggle to access sustainable energy solutions, making it hard to power devices and enable internet usage.

One interviewee noted that basic digital literacy is a fundamental area that needs strengthening before focusing on other digital skills. This implies that without a basic level of access and understanding, more advanced training programs might not be well-received or effective, especially in remote contexts.

One suggestion was the creation of digital community spaces that could provide access to essential services like healthcare, education, and government information, bridging the gap between remote communities and urban centers. Interviewees thought this approach could improve quality of life, enhance social inclusion, and promote equitable development while changing perceptions of the importance of digital skills and tools. With the strong community and government focus on Indigenous knowledge and languages in Vanuatu, interviewees also suggested that integrating digital tools into traditional practices and knowledge systems could foster innovation, preserve cultural heritage, and create new avenues for expression and storytelling.

### **Challenges for Women, People with Disabilities and Underrepresented Groups**

The interview data provides valuable insights into the tailored approaches needed to include women, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups in digital skills programs. While acknowledging the positive strides made, the data reveals persisting challenges and calls for a more nuanced understanding of these groups' barriers.

The data suggests a need to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and tailor programs to address the specific needs of diverse groups. For women, this might involve programs offering flexible scheduling, childcare support, or training sessions held at convenient community locations.

Examples from Vanuatu Skills Partnership highlight that for people with disabilities, support could include course materials available in accessible formats, and providing access to assistive technologies can make training more inclusive. Vanuatu Skills Partnership offers resource rooms for people with disabilities, fitted with three computers. It also provides scholarships for people with disabilities and mentoring programs for students with disabilities at the Agriculture College. Some interviewees were concerned that inclusive support and tools were too costly in their current budgets and that additional funding was needed to afford specialized equipment. It was also suggested that trainers needed more skills and knowledge to support learners with disabilities in more inclusive learning environments.

### **Financial Literacy**

While the interview data doesn't explicitly link a lack of financial literacy to difficulties in using digital financial tools, it reveals insights suggesting this connection. For example, one interviewee highlights the need for basic digital literacy to navigate financial apps and platforms effectively. This suggests that individuals with limited financial literacy may struggle to understand and utilize digital financial tools.

Furthermore, interviewees emphasized the importance of digital skills for successful e-commerce engagement. One interviewee stresses the need for e-commerce training to empower communities to leverage online platforms for business. Another notes the difficulty in finding local expertise in e-commerce platforms. These statements suggest that individuals with strong digital skills are better equipped to participate in the digital economy, which implies a potential correlation between financial literacy and successful e-commerce engagement.

The interviewees emphasized the need for cybersecurity and online safety training as part of digital literacy programs. This focus on security suggests an underlying concern about potential risks associated with digital platforms, including financial tools.

One interviewee quoted a statistic that suggests most school children in Vanuatu have experienced cyberbullying. This highlights the need to build trust and confidence in online spaces. Without adequate measures to ensure security and address concerns about data privacy, individuals may hesitate to adopt digital financial tools. Additionally, the interview data points to a need for more practical, hands-on training that equips individuals with skills they can directly apply to managing finances and engaging in e-commerce. Without such training, individuals may struggle to understand and effectively utilize digital financial tools, even if they have access to them.

Resistance to change stemming from a lack of understanding, fear of technology misuse, and limited exposure to its benefits can also hinder adoption. These attitudes are often more prevalent among older generations or communities with limited technology experience.

### **Involving Men and Evolving Their Roles**

While not directly addressing men's views on programs that targeted support to women only, the interview data highlight men's involvement in initiatives aimed at empowering women and youth. For instance, the Smart Sistas program, which focuses on ICT training for young girls, involved men in leadership roles and as mentors. When they wanted to involve their students in international robotics competitions, they also felt pressure to extend the team opportunity to boys. One interviewee also mentioned encountering bias where digital skills, resources, and opportunities were skewed towards boys. This suggests that ingrained gender norms might lead to a perception that targeted support for women and girls is unfair or unnecessary. Some interviewees acknowledged existing gender disparities in access to education and opportunities, particularly in technology-related fields. This recognition of disparities could drive their support for targeted initiatives addressing these imbalances. It's important to note that the interview data primarily focuses on digital skills training and does not explicitly explore men's and women's attitudes towards targeted support for women and youth. Further research addressing these perspectives would be needed to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved.

## 5.3. Authority and Structure

“Authority” within the Triple-A Framework refers to the support required for reform, policy change, or a new initiative to effectively build state capability. This support can manifest in various forms, including political, legal, organizational, or personal endorsements. Assessing the level of existing authority is crucial to identifying any gaps that must be addressed. The World Bank framework looks specifically at the structure for digital reforms through a policy orientation. The following section delves into the various digital policies in each country and will focus on interviewees’ perceptions and experiences within the policy context related to digital skills and the digital economy.

### 5.3.1. Fiji: Lessons Learned About Authority and Structure

#### Access to Technology and Connectivity

Women often face societal pressures and stereotypes that discourage them from pursuing careers in ICT, often perceived as a male-dominated field. This was a common sentiment shared by women entrepreneurs, donor agencies, and government representatives who were interviewed. Families also may be more protective of their daughters, limiting their choices. According to the interview responses, there is also a hidden bias among employers who prefer to hire men for technical roles or discriminate against pregnant women. These deeply rooted stigmas around women’s competence in ICT are reflected in the low number of women attending ICT conferences.

**“There are hidden biases towards women, and it is reflected when employers specifically hire men to do technical work, or when employers refuse to give jobs to pregnant women. Companies need to have GEDSI policies and practice being an equal opportunity employer.”**

Interviews from women-owned businesses, government departments, and donor agencies consistently highlighted the issue of financial constraints.



Figure 15. Internet and gaming advertisement Ovalau, Fiji

The costs of training, devices, and internet access present a significant barrier to many women and youth's participation in the digital economy at almost all levels. According to one interview participant, financial limitations often force families to prioritize basic household needs over digital devices and data costs, despite internet coverage being considered relatively high in Fiji.

Women-owned businesses mentioned a general lack of awareness regarding the training available for women and youth. They reinforced that women often bear a disproportionate burden of household duties and caregiving responsibilities, limiting their time and availability. Other barriers included traditional cultural norms and practices that can sometimes limit women's and youth's participation in training programs, especially those held in urban centers. Women in business reiterated the need to increase awareness and advocacy among women and youth about available digital skills training opportunities and promote the benefits of digital literacy through targeted outreach campaigns and community engagement.

### **Telecoms and Digital Infrastructure**

A telecommunications representative interviewed indicated that despite the high level of internet coverage in Fiji, access to digital devices and the ability to afford data costs remain significant barriers, especially in rural communities.



**Internet coverage is over 90% and pricing is relatively low (especially for Fiji); however, analysis needs to be done on what exactly the digital training should be. And such can be provided over networks to those who require it."**

While government initiatives like the "Look North" program and Telecenters have attempted to bridge the gap by providing satellite installations and school computer setups, the effectiveness and reach of these programs remain unclear from the provided data. The Universal Access Scheme, intended to improve connectivity, has not yet been implemented.

The data suggests a mixed picture of political and organizational support. The Ministry of Education highlights its efforts to connect all schools and ensure teachers are digitally literate. There is also mention of the "GIGA" project. The GIGA project, by UNICEF and ITU, aims to connect all schools in Fiji to the internet, focusing on remote and underserved areas. It promotes equitable education, digital literacy, and disaster resilience while empowering students and educators for a digitally driven future, contributing to Fiji's national development goals.




**In terms of accessibility--technology and infrastructure play a crucial role in enhancing quality in education and building bridges for marginalized communities. We are working on a project called 'GIGA' (UNICEF) where we attempt to meet accessibility needs for all our schools in Fiji. We can see from our computer system the schools which are not picking up network connectivity in real time."**

However, some interviewees express concerns about inadequate funding for digital initiatives, noting declined budget requests and the need for greater allocation to digital platforms. The Ministry of Health points to challenges with connecting devices to the government network and the limited usability of Starlink for the ministry's purposes. There appears to be limited legal or regulatory frameworks addressing infrastructure gaps, which hinders access to digital skills training. One interviewee representing a statutory body suggests that existing policies are inadequate, particularly for women in rural and low-income areas, while highlighting the need for a regulatory center to address policy incentives and advocacy campaigns to avoid duplication of efforts due to resource scarcity.

The interviews highlight the role of partnerships between the Ministry of Education and private companies like Samsung and the Australian government in providing tablets and funding for digital equipment. The Ministry of Health mentions partnerships with Telecom Fiji for network coverage in rural areas.

The data suggests challenges in local governments' and institutions' capacity to implement infrastructure improvements. The Ministry of Health emphasizes the need to prioritize digital skills training for the health workforce before expanding to communities and highlights the lack of assessment in this area. Interviewees note difficulties with training staff on new technologies and integrating digital systems effectively. Financial constraints are also mentioned as a barrier.

 **We do need to prioritize digital skills training for our staff, then communities, then follow up with measurements for effectiveness.”**

Government representatives continue to highlight concerns about limited access in rural and maritime areas. The Ministry of Education emphasizes its commitment to ensuring equal access to quality education, including through initiatives like free education and transport programs, but acknowledges differences in advantages between urban and rural areas. The data suggests that community leaders play a role in advocating for better digital infrastructure. One interviewee emphasizes the importance of community support in finding markets and connecting with mentors. Another interviewee highlights the need for community leaders to encourage and support each other in acquiring digital skills.

### **Ecosystem Enabling**

The interviews across sectors consistently highlight shortages of qualified instructors with digital skills, particularly in rural areas. Interviewees emphasize the need for specialized trainers in areas like online safety and express concerns about the lack of training for existing professionals to keep up with technological advancements. The data points to outdated curricula that do not adequately align with industry needs, particularly in the rapidly evolving field of digital technologies. This misalignment leads to a skills gap where graduates lack the practical experience and specialized knowledge required by employers. Resource gaps in rural training centers are a recurring theme, with interviewees mentioning limited access to computers, internet connectivity, and updated software.

Interviews from both academia and the private sector suggest a need for improved coordination among government, NGOs, and the private sector to create a more cohesive and effective digital skills training ecosystem. The data highlights existing partnerships between government ministries, such as collaborations on cybersecurity campaigns, procurement, and integration of digital platforms. However, interviewees also point to challenges in aligning training initiatives with national goals and a lack of structured strategies for coordination. The need for stronger engagement from the private sector is also emphasized, particularly in providing hands-on experience through internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs.

The interviews highlight the need for stronger policy frameworks and sustainable funding mechanisms to support digital skills initiatives. Interviewees call for increased investment in digital literacy programs, particularly for marginalized communities. The data suggests challenges in securing adequate funding for digital initiatives, with interviewees mentioning declined budget requests and a reliance on donor funding. The need for policies that address gender disparities and promote inclusivity in digital skills training is also emphasized.

The private sector interview data emphasize the critical role of mentorship and career pathways in supporting workforce integration for women and youth. Interviewees highlight the benefits of mentorship programs in providing guidance, building confidence, and facilitating access to professional networks. Internships, apprenticeships, and co-op programs are also identified as valuable avenues for gaining practical experience and industry connections. However, the data suggest that such opportunities are often limited, particularly for women and youth. According to a woman entrepreneur, coworking spaces like Greenhouse and MyDesk Fiji play a key role in improving technology access by providing internet access, laptops, and subsidized resources for women entrepreneurs.

### **Collaborative Efforts and Partnerships**

From the interview data, the private sector highlighted numerous instances of collaboration between government ministries, private sector entities, NGOs, and educational institutions, including cybersecurity campaigns, digital platform integration, and training programs.

However, specific details regarding the impact of these collaborations on bridging the digital skills gap remain largely absent. While some interviewees acknowledge the positive contributions of partnerships, a lack of robust evaluation frameworks and quantifiable results makes it difficult to understand the true effectiveness of these collaborations.

The effectiveness of social media marketing training for SMEs is highlighted, empowering them to leverage digital platforms for business promotion. However, the sources fall short of providing in-depth information about the specific partnerships or programs driving this training and their overall impact on business outcomes and digital skills acquisition.

**“Our education system is lagging behind in integrating the kind of technology-focused and future-ready skills that are becoming essential in today’s job market.”**

The Universal Access Scheme, intended to enhance internet connectivity, is recognized as a priority, yet delays in the tender process hinder its implementation. Similarly, the GIGA project, a collaboration between the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, aims to improve internet accessibility for all schools in Fiji. While real-time monitoring of schools' network connectivity is mentioned, further details on the project's progress and its ultimate impact on digital skills training are needed.

According to interviews with government stakeholders, resource constraints, particularly within ministries, as well as the lack of a comprehensive national digital skills strategy, limited private sector engagement beyond the outsourcing services industry. The absence of a clear roadmap and limited funding can lead to fragmented initiatives and difficulties in measuring overall progress.

One of the interviewees representing a statutory body said mandating a private sector engagement strategy holds potential for incorporating digital literacy, but its specific provisions and implementation remain unclear. The suggestion for a regulatory center to streamline policy incentives, advocacy campaigns, and regional collaboration highlights the need for more structured approaches to foster impactful partnerships.

## **Government and CSO staff**

Across all the segments interviewed, the participants indicate that government and CSO staff in Fiji would benefit from increased ICT training. This need stems from the increasing digitalization of sectors like health, education, and law enforcement, which demands a workforce with updated digital skills to advocate for and implement policies.

For example, the Ministry of Health is facing challenges implementing digital health initiatives due to a lack of staff training on new technologies and applications. This lack of training has led to difficulties in data management and synchronization, highlighting the link between ICT proficiency and the successful implementation of digital transformation policies.

Similarly, the Fiji Police Force expresses a need for training in digital forensics and the use of advanced technologies for investigation and crime prevention. This highlights the importance of equipping law enforcement agencies with specific ICT skills to align with how crimes are evolving and to be able to effectively enforce digital policies.

## **Men's Resistance**

Most of the participants point to the deeply rooted societal norms and a patriarchal culture that contribute to gender disparities in ICT. One interviewee noted that:

**“In Fiji, though we make efforts promoting women's involvement in digital education, there are inadequate policies for women in rural and low-income areas.”**

Another interviewee from a statutory body highlights the prevailing belief that “ICT is a man's field,” hindering women's participation. These comments suggest that traditional gender roles and expectations may influence men's views and actions regarding gender-inclusive initiatives.

An interviewee shared that men may have greater access to and control over digital resources within households:


**“The digital gadgets are shared sometimes but the first access is male, second to children, and last to women.”**

## Legal Frameworks

While the interview data doesn't focus on online gender-based violence, some interviewees mention the need for stronger digital policies and the role of various stakeholders in promoting online safety.

An interviewee from a regulatory body mentioned working on the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" and the "Fiji Police, Online Safety Commission, Ministry of Education" to address online safety concerns. Their work on these policies suggests an awareness of the need for policy frameworks and collaboration among government agencies to address broader online safety issues, which could include online gender-based violence.

An interviewee from the ICT business sector suggests a way to review and modernize legal frameworks to address the challenges of the digital environment:

 **We lack policies for digital spaces; our policies are archaic. We need a round table discussion with all relevant stakeholders and rewrite policies which are beneficial for Fiji."**

A participant emphasized the importance of data privacy and suggested benchmarking with Australia's ICT policies. This indicates a recognition of the need to learn from other countries' experiences and best practices in developing robust legal frameworks for online safety.

An interviewee from the government acknowledged the importance of incorporating digital literacy and online safety into the education curriculum, stating the need to "inculcate digital literacy into our kids from early childhood to tertiary." This emphasizes the role of education in promoting responsible digital citizenship and potentially mitigating online violence.

Several interviewees mention the role of community leaders and traditional authorities in advocating for and promoting online safety. This highlights the importance of engaging community-level stakeholders in disseminating information and fostering responsible online behavior.

The lack of direct discussion on legal frameworks addressing online gender-based violence specifically suggests a possible gap in awareness or a lack of focused efforts to address this issue.

## 5.3.2. Vanuatu: Lessons Learned about Authority and Structure

### Digital Infrastructure and Access to Technology

Interviewees highlighted that limited internet connectivity significantly impacts digital skills training for women and youth, especially in rural areas. While online platforms have transformative potential, poor connectivity leaves many reliant on in-person training, which is hindered by logistical and financial challenges. Satellite companies like Starlink have improved remote connectivity but remain unaffordable for many, underlining the need for sustained government investment and targeted infrastructure development in underserved areas. One interviewee from a regulatory body said:

**“Based on a recent report on the quality of service for telecommunications and broadcasting, connectivity is still mostly concentrated in major hubs and urban centers. In more remote areas, people often have to travel some distance to access a reliable connection.”**

Participants pointed to existing policies, such as the Universal Access Policy (UAP), as a positive step but noted the lack of concrete initiatives to address rural-urban disparities. They emphasized scaling efforts like the UAP through public-private partnerships and external funding. Respondents also suggested integrating digital skills into early education, offering device subsidies, and establishing community-specific training programs to foster localized solutions.

Interviewees stressed that mentorship, local training hubs, and involving community leaders are key to bridging skill gaps. They called for standardized credentialing frameworks to validate skills across sectors, overseen by bodies like the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority. An interviewee from the government suggested:

**“The government can create a framework for recognizing digital skills through standardized testing and credentialing. This ensures that skills are transferable across sectors and valued by employers. Collaboration with educational institutions and private partners can make these credentials widely recognized and accessible.”**

Participants viewed digital financial inclusion, supported by private-sector partnerships, as essential for increasing access to tools and devices. However, cultural barriers, financial constraints, and urban-centric resource allocation remain persistent challenges. Respondents also underscored the importance of shifting perceptions of digital platforms as productivity tools and addressing gender disparities in leadership to promote equitable access. Community-driven, inclusive strategies were repeatedly highlighted as critical for sustainable progress. One interviewee from a rural training center noted:

**“A common barrier is the fear of new technology. Many participants are accustomed to traditional methods and are initially hesitant to adopt digital tools. However, through demonstration and practice, we’ve seen positive shifts in their mindset.”**

While another community training provider noted:

**“Cultural beliefs about technology, fears about its misuse, and limited exposure also hinder progress. However, through safe and open discussions, participants can overcome initial fears and embrace digital skills.”**

## Political, Policy, and Organizational Support for Digital Access

The interviews not only reveal a combination of political, legal, and organizational support for addressing connectivity disparities but also highlight gaps and resource limitations. Vanuatu has implemented policies promoting equitable technology access, such as the National Gender Equality Policy and the UAP. These policies aim to bridge the digital divide and empower marginalized communities. The government has launched initiatives like the [Smart Islands program](#) and the ICT Digital Strategy (described in the next section) to improve connectivity and digital literacy. These initiatives involve partnerships with the private sector and international organizations. Various organizations, including NGOs like Smart Sistas and the Pacific Islands Chapter of the Internet Society (PICISOC), actively work to provide digital skills training and advocate for policy changes that promote equitable technology access. Despite these efforts, interviewees frequently mention the lack of resources as a major obstacle to expanding digital infrastructure and training programs, especially in rural areas. The pervading theme of limited resources suggests that even with strong policies, financial constraints could hinder their full implementation. One interviewee from a regulatory body noted that:

**“I believe resources are the main limitation. Connectivity is improving, but additional funding or external support would allow us to expand infrastructure to underserved areas.”**

One training provider echoed this sentiment and discussed the impact this had on their program’s effectiveness and scale:

**“For instance, our camps have shown that participants benefit greatly from hands-on, over-the-shoulder support. However, running these programs requires resources such as funding, internet access, and proper facilities, which are often limited... We are working on securing more funding to expand and improve these initiatives. On-site training with direct assistance is still more effective than purely online formats. Unfortunately, resources are scarce, and qualified trainers are not always available. While some institutions have trainers, many sessions are conducted with limited support, which can hinder the overall impact.”**

Adding to this, another interviewee who works on advocacy and implementation noted:

**“The high cost of bringing trainers to remote locations, combined with limited resources, restricts the number of programs we can offer. Addressing these barriers will require financial investment and better logistical planning to reach the most underserved communities.”**

Partnerships between government agencies and telecom companies, such as the UAP and the Smart Islands program, are crucial for expanding digital infrastructure and services. Interviewees stress the need for collaboration across government ministries, including education, finance, agriculture, and trade, to integrate digital skills training into national initiatives and ensure alignment with employment goals.

Lack of awareness among communities about existing policies, limited capacity within government agencies, and limited financial and technological resources to implement regulations could hamper the enforcement of policies, particularly in ensuring equitable access to infrastructure and training in rural areas. Interviewees mention the lack of consistent evaluation frameworks for assessing the effectiveness of digital skills training programs, which could make it difficult to track progress and ensure policies are achieving their intended outcomes.

### **Coordination and Collaboration**

A recurring theme appearing throughout the interviews is the need for better coordination and collaboration between government agencies, the private sector, and CSOs to address infrastructure challenges. This involves translating policy declarations into concrete action plans, ensuring adequate funding, and prioritizing the needs of underserved communities in project implementation. Private sector involvement can bring much-needed financial resources and technical expertise to infrastructure projects. Collaborations with telecom companies can leverage their existing networks and knowledge to expand coverage to underserved areas. One interviewee from a rural training center noted:

**“Collaboration, sustainable partnerships, and community involvement remain critical. With continued effort and innovation, digital skills will empower and transform communities.”**

### Box 3: YumiWork and V-Lab Pilot Program for CSOs<sup>7</sup>

In March 2024, V-Lab, in collaboration with World Vision Vanuatu and with European Union (EU) funding, launched a five-month pilot program to strengthen the capacity of eight selected CSOs. The program includes mentoring, targeted training, and internships with established NGOs, providing participants with hands-on experience in NGO management and organizational functions.

Participants will develop comprehensive project plans during the program and submit grant proposals to V-Lab. After evaluation, 3 to 5 CSOs will receive grants to implement their projects. This initiative not only offers financial support but also promotes collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and partnerships among CSOs and with Vanuatu's leading business incubator and coworking space, contributing to community development.

This example highlights how business and private sector programs may have relevant crossover opportunities for skill sharing with CSOs and NGOs.

### Policy Implementation at the Local Level

While national policies and strategies exist, the interviews suggest that their implementation often faces challenges due to:

- Resource limitations, including financial and technical, by local governments especially for large-scale infrastructure projects.
- Coordination challenges between national agencies, local governments, and private sector partners that can be complex, requiring strong leadership and clear communication channels.
- Limited building capacity within local governments to plan, manage, and oversee infrastructure projects.

The interviews emphasize the need for capacity-building initiatives to empower local governments in managing technology and infrastructure development. This includes training programs on project management, procurement, and technical skills related to infrastructure maintenance.

<sup>7</sup> <https://yumiwork.com/incubator/>

## Systemic Challenges

Across Vanuatu, there is a shortage of qualified trainers to deliver certified training, especially in rural areas, so training providers have to be creative in who they train to lead their programs. One rural training provider noted:

**“We cannot get qualified people to join the team, so we want to show the community, not only academics can be trainers, but trainers can be trained to deliver quality courses.”**

Also, existing training programs often lack continuity, suffer financial constraints, and use curricula not adequately aligned with local economic needs and labor market demands. Even if training and infrastructure are improved, the interviews highlighted the importance of mentorship and career pathways to support workforce integration for women and youth. Successful initiatives often involve partnerships between different stakeholders to deliver training programs, provide access to technology, and align training content with industry needs. For example, interview data highlighted existing collaborations, including:

- The Department of Labor collaborates with APTC to offer micro-credential courses that enhance employability skills
- The Ministry of Education partners with local organizations to provide affordable access to digital tools and targeted training programs
- The DCDT works with Youth Challenge Vanuatu to develop ICT courses that meet ICT job requirements
- NUV collaborates with Vodafone and DCDT to develop its ICT Diploma program and offer subsidized packages to students
- The Vanuatu Christian Council uses Zoom to communicate with Pacific partners, sharing best practices and learning from each other
- Smart Sistas was supported financially by the Department of Communication and Digital Transformation.

## Gaps in Leadership and Authority

The interview data highlights that collaboration across ministries and between the government, private sector, and NGOs is often ad hoc and lacks a clear strategic direction. This lack of coordination hinders the development of a comprehensive national strategy for digital skills training, resulting in fragmented efforts and missed opportunities.

One Ministry interviewee noted:

**“Collaboration across ministries is ongoing but needs strengthening. For example, we work with the Ministry of Education on integrating technology into their systems and the Department of Statistics for data sharing.”**

While another interviewee noted:

**“Collaboration across ministries and with the private sector is vital. Ministries like education, agriculture, and trade must work together to integrate digital skills training into their programs. For example, the Ministry of Trade supports entrepreneurs in using e-commerce platforms, while the Ministry of Agriculture encourages farmers to market their products online. Such efforts ensure skills development aligns with national employment and economic goals.”**

### **Gaps in Knowledge and Advocacy**

The interview data consistently highlight that organizational staff and government employees require training in ICTs to champion and advocate for policy changes successfully. Many interviewees identify a lack of digital skills as a major barrier to effective policy advocacy and implementation. For instance, in an interview with a government department, they acknowledged the need for an information management officer to digitize processes and leverage technology for data collection, reporting, and analysis. Similarly, an interviewee from a different ministry noted the importance of equipping teachers with the skills to use platforms like Google Classroom and other digital tools to enhance teaching and learning, particularly in remote areas. Another interviewee from a third government agency indicated that digital skills training often remains a secondary priority in public service training programs:

**“Collaboration happens with key stakeholders to deliver training. However, while we focus on skills training, digital skills often remain a secondary priority. For example, we’ve supported public service training programs, but the focus was not solely on digital skills.”**

The interview data suggest that weak leadership and unclear organizational structures contribute to the lack of cohesive ICT skill development for staff. There is often a lack of coordination and strategic direction in digital skills training efforts across different ministries and sectors.

### **Male Allyship**

A significant gap in the data is the lack of direct exploration of men's viewpoints on targeted support for women and youth in ICT. Future research could delve into men's perceptions of these policies, identifying potential areas of resistance and understanding the underlying factors influencing their views. This would provide valuable insights for tailoring interventions and communication strategies to address any potential resistance and foster greater male allyship.

## 6.1. Digital Priorities and Policy in the Pacific

Pacific Islands countries are undergoing significant digital transformation, marked by increased internet and mobile adoption driven by government initiatives, international support, and public interest in digital tools. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift as essential services—work, health care, education, and social connections—became reliant on online access. This period underscored the critical importance of digital literacy and access, particularly for underserved groups like youth and women.

Recognizing the role of digital literacy in education, social development, and economic growth, Pacific governments and development partners have launched numerous policies and programs to enhance digital access and foster a robust digital economy. Research linking digital infrastructure improvements with progress toward sustainable development goals (SDGs) bolsters this commitment.<sup>8</sup> Regional policies and programs also focus on overcoming challenges by promoting digital literacy, improving connectivity, advancing e-commerce, and strengthening cybersecurity.

Despite this momentum in policy and prioritization, significant challenges impede the region's digital development. Key barriers include fragmented regulatory frameworks, inconsistent digital literacy initiatives, and a lack of regional coordination.<sup>9</sup> Addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring digital initiatives reach all communities and contribute effectively to SDG achievement.

<sup>8</sup> Kim, T.H. (2023). Strengthening the Digital Economy in the Asia-Pacific Region: Opportunities and Challenges. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Available at: [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/2.1E%20ESCAP\\_Tae%20Hyung%20Kim.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/2.1E%20ESCAP_Tae%20Hyung%20Kim.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Reddy, P., Sharma, B., & Chaudhary, K. (2021). Digital literacy: A review in the South Pacific. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-021-09280-4>;

Callebaut, S., Casswell, J., Horton, S., Mihaylova, T., & Zaman, F. (2024). Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment (DECA): Pacific Islands. USAID [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/USAID\\_PacificIslands\\_DECA.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/USAID_PacificIslands_DECA.pdf); and Zhou, Y.S., Sun, T., Paduraru, A., Bharath, A., Forte, S., Kao, K., Lu, Y., Chacon Rey, M.F., Sodsriwiboon, P., Tan, C. Y., & Zhao, B. (2024). Rise of Digital Money: Implications for Pacific Island Countries. International Monetary Fund. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400263071.087>

## 6.2. Regional Policy Frameworks

Pacific Islands countries are supported by comprehensive regional policy frameworks that promote digital literacy, technological access, and economic growth. Key complementary policies prioritize education and internet access, such as the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF)<sup>10</sup> and the Pacific Regional Digital Strategy.<sup>11</sup> These frameworks are supported by a range of targeted initiatives and collaborative efforts aimed at strengthening digital capabilities and connectivity across the region.

**Regional digital literacy and access to technology policies:** PacREF and the Pacific Regional Digital Strategy drive priorities for the region's digital literacy and internet access. Organizations such as the Commonwealth of Learning, Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, UNESCO, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, and the EU implement programs that enhance digital literacy. UNESCO is particularly influential, contributing frameworks like the 2018 [Digital Literacy Global Framework](#) and the 2024 [Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report on Technology and Education in the Pacific](#).

**Regional infrastructure and access policies:** The [2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent](#) highlights the importance of technology and connectivity for improving Pacific livelihoods, emphasizing affordable, sustainable internet services and regional cooperation. Older policies like the Framework for Action on ICT for Development in the Pacific (2015) build on the Pacific Regional Digital Strategy to promote effective ICT use.<sup>12</sup> The Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy and Roadmap complements these efforts by advocating for robust ICT infrastructure and universal access to boost e-commerce, particularly in underserved areas.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. (2018). Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030: Moving Towards Education 2030. <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Pacific-Regional-Education-Framework-PacREF-2018-2030.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Network Strategies. (2010). Review of Pacific Regional Digital Strategy. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. [https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/49-pifs\\_review\\_of\\_digital\\_strategy\\_parta.pdf](https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/49-pifs_review_of_digital_strategy_parta.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. (2010). Framework for action on ICT for development in the Pacific: [information and communication technology (ICT) for development, governance and sustainable livelihoods] / Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Noumea: Secretariat of the Pacific community

<sup>13</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. (2021). Pacific Regional E-commerce Strategy and Roadmap. <https://pacificcommerce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Regional-Ecommerce-Strategy-Roadmap.pdf>

However, challenges persist in financing and implementing these policies at the national level. In relation to this, the USAID's Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership, launched in August 2023, is a program that aims to improve digital access, connectivity, and the efficient delivery of digital services in 12 Pacific Islands countries, including Fiji and Vanuatu. This program is designed to empower more people in the Pacific region to access reliable and secure internet and participate competitively in the digital economy.<sup>14</sup>

**Regional e-commerce policies:** The Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy and Roadmap aims to double e-commerce participation among Forum Island consumers and businesses by 2025, prompting national strategy developments in countries like Vanuatu and Fiji.<sup>15</sup> Vanuatu's participation in PACER Plus, a trade agreement with Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific nations, reflects efforts to enhance regional trade and support economic growth through e-commerce and MSME development. For smaller Pacific Islands countries, regional programs are most effective when contextualized and backed by national-level funding.

**Regional education and training policies:** In line with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which emphasizes technology and connectivity, the Australian Government supports Pacific Islands countries in strengthening cyber capabilities through projects such as the [eSafety/Online Safety Projects](#). Additionally, Save the Children and Meta partnered to create the "I Am Digital" program in February 2021 to address the need for online safety education for children in seven Pacific Islands nations, including Fiji and Vanuatu.<sup>16</sup> The program uses various methods like creating tip sheets and videos, visiting schools, and sharing information online and via radio to teach young people how to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

<sup>14</sup> USAID. (2023) USAID launches digital connectivity and cybersecurity partnership to enhance secure, interoperable, and resilient digital ecosystem in the Pacific region. Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/pacific-islands/press-releases/aug-17-2023-usaid-launches-digital-connectivity-and-cybersecurity-partnership-enhance-secure-interoperable-and-resilient-digital-ecosystem-pacific-region> (Accessed: 21-Nov-2024)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Save the Children and Meta Launch New Resources: Save the Children Australia. (2023) Save the Children and Meta launch new resources. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/media/media-releases/save-the-children-and-meta-launch-new-resources> (Accessed: 21-Nov-2024).

Regional organizations like USP, the South Pacific Community (SPC), and the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific play pivotal roles in advancing digital literacy and training. Initiatives such as USP's SKILL ME UP app and digital literacy workshops empower Pacific communities, building a more inclusive and skilled digital environment.

**Note:** For a comprehensive breakdown of the main policies and programs shaping the digital landscape in the Asia-Pacific region, including their objectives, key measures, and funding sources, see Annex 2. This annex provides an in-depth table detailing each initiative for further context and understanding

### 6.3. Fiji's Digital Policy Landscape

The Fijian government strongly emphasizes digital literacy as a key driver to bridge the digital divide and stimulate economic growth. Central to this approach are inclusive policies aimed at ensuring equitable access to technology for all citizens. Fiji's commitment to digital advancement is evident in its active participation in discussions and initiatives led by organizations such as UNESCO and USAID, which emphasize using technology to improve livelihoods and foster a digitally inclusive society.<sup>17</sup> This commitment sets the foundation for a series of focused strategies and policies designed to harness technology for socioeconomic development and based on research.<sup>18</sup>

The following summarizes the main areas of focus in Fiji's digital policy landscape, showcasing the government's strategic efforts to enhance digital inclusion and connectivity.

<sup>17</sup> [UNESCO hosts workshops on Internet Universality in South Pacific Islands; USAID Supports Pacific Energy Stakeholders to Accelerate Transition Towards a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific | Press Release.](#)

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2023). Assessing Digital and Financial Literacy in Fiji: A Survey on Knowledge, Skills and Access. [Link.](#)



Figure 16. University of the South Pacific Japan-Pacific ICT Centre

**Fiji's emerging National Digital Strategy:** Fiji's forthcoming National Digital Strategy (2025–2029), aligned with the broader “Transforming Fiji” National Development Plan, reflects the government's ambition for digital inclusion, innovation-led growth, and smart governance. While the National Digital Strategy is still in development, early drafts focus on enhancing digital infrastructure, promoting inclusion, and advancing smart governance.<sup>19</sup> This strategy will involve ISPs and telcos to upgrade telecommunications infrastructure, digitize government services, improve disaster response capabilities, and foster competition among broadband providers. These initiatives highlight Fiji's determination to use digital tools for inclusive socioeconomic progress while enhancing global digital cooperation.

**Internet connectivity and access strategy:** A data warehousing service called Kepios estimated internet penetration in Fiji at 75% of the total population in 2022.<sup>20</sup> Recognizing the vital role of internet access in socioeconomic development, the Fijian government is committed to expanding connectivity to underrepresented groups, including rural and maritime communities and persons with disabilities. This growth is set to continue with the introduction of 5G networks, expansion of satellite internet services connections, including Starlink, and the anticipated launch of the National Digital Strategy.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Economy. (2017). 5-Year & 20-Year National Development Plan: Transforming Fiji. [Link](#).

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Capital Development Fund. (2023). Assessing Digital and Financial Literacy in Fiji: A Survey on Knowledge, Skills and Access. [Link](#).

**Fiji's e-commerce, startups, and green business policies:** Fiji government policies focus on developing e-commerce, tech startups, and green businesses to diversify its economy and create opportunities for women and youth. The government supports e-commerce growth by improving infrastructure and regulatory frameworks for SMEs. It also aims to foster tech startups by establishing innovation hubs, providing funding, and building capacity. Promoting green businesses through sustainable practices aligns with economic growth and environmental goals.

- **Government support for e-commerce:** In 2021, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat's (PIFS) e-commerce assessment helped encourage the development of [Fiji's National E-Commerce Strategy](#), which aims to boost economic growth, employment, and regional trade. Although still in development, this strategy aligns with the [Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy](#), focusing on digital access, particularly for women, in response to lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Government support for startups and ICT sector:** The 2023–2024 government budget in Fiji introduced amendments to enhance ICT sector incentives, focusing on BPO, knowledge process outsourcing, IT outsourcing, shared services, and global business services. Many appealing tax incentives and business promotion schemes were introduced through the national budget to assist ICT startups and businesses, including tax holidays for ICT investments, tax deductions for research and development, training institutions, and app design and software development companies, as well as infrastructure and customs concessions for investments in ICT infrastructure, ICT parks, and network cabling.<sup>21</sup>
- **Green business policies:** Fiji's Renewable Energy Integration Investment Plan seeks funding and technical support to improve the energy system's flexibility, enabling better integration of renewable energy, especially in underserved areas, while supporting green tech startups.<sup>22</sup> The plan aligns with Fiji's [National Energy Policy](#) (2023–2030) and focuses on achieving 100% renewable electricity by 2030, net-zero emissions by 2050, and decarbonizing the transport sector.

<sup>21</sup> [ICT - Investment Fiji](#)

<sup>22</sup> Climate Investment Funds (CIF). (2023). Fiji Renewable Energy Investment Plan. [Link](#).

**Fiji's Digital Skills Policies:** Fiji prioritizes digital skills development through its [National Framework for Digital Literacy](#), which integrates digital literacy into the school curriculum. This initiative aims to equip students with essential digital competencies, including industry-recognized certifications, particularly in Microsoft software, by graduation. The program is part of broader educational plans, such as the [2019–2023 Education Sector Strategic Development Plan](#). The [Fiji National Curriculum Framework](#) is an earlier policy from 2007 that incorporated 21st-century skills into the curriculum and paved the way for Fiji to be a regional leader in school-based technology initiatives.

**Tertiary and informal education:** Fiji's TVET Strategy, underpinned by the Fiji Qualifications Framework, is designed to develop a skilled workforce aligned with industry demands. The National Development Plan also emphasizes revitalizing TVET to boost employability, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy. It stresses the importance of aligning TVET programs with current industry needs to ensure that graduates are equipped with relevant skills.<sup>23</sup> FNU is key in offering TVET programs that integrate digital skills and industry-focused training, help students prepare for a dynamic job market, and contribute to Fiji's economic growth.

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO-UNEVOC. (2022). TVET Country Profile: Fiji. Bonn, Germany: UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Available at: [UNESCO-UNEVOC](#)

## 6.4. Vanuatu's Digital Policy Landscape

Vanuatu's National Information and Communication Technology Policy and complementary policies articulate a clear vision for increasing internet access and developing digital skills nationwide and are detailed below.<sup>24</sup> These policies recognize the transformative potential of ICT for achieving economic growth, social inclusion, and good governance.

**Internet access and digital skills policies:** The [Vanuatu Digital Transformation Masterplan 2030](#), launched in October 2024, is the government's strategic roadmap (with support from international and local partners) that aligns with Vanuatu's broader development goals.<sup>25</sup> The Masterplan's primary objectives are digital infrastructure development, e-government services, capacity building, digital literacy, digital economy promotion, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience. It reflects Vanuatu's ambition to harness digital transformation to overcome geographic and economic challenges and build a resilient and inclusive digital economy.

**National Information and Communications Technology Policy 2013:** The [National ICT Policy 2013](#) focuses on equipping citizens with digital skills for the 21st-century workforce, particularly in education and ICT-related business development. It emphasizes increasing teacher digital literacy, promoting ICT use in schools, and developing digital skills across all age groups, including marginalized communities. A key part of the policy is the UAP, aimed at ensuring equitable access to ICT infrastructure and services, particularly in rural areas.

**E-commerce and startup policies:** Vanuatu's E-Commerce Strategy and Roadmap aims to significantly increase the number of ni-Vanuatu consumers and businesses engaging in online transactions by 2026.<sup>26</sup> The strategy focuses on key initiatives, including embedding e-commerce in national development policies, expanding internet connectivity, improving the legal framework, promoting digital payments, and enhancing e-commerce skills.

<sup>24</sup> Republic of Vanuatu. National Information and Communication Technology Policy. (2023). [Link](#).

<sup>25</sup> [Digital Transformation Masterplan 2030](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Vanuatu E-Commerce Strategy and Roadmap](#)

Additionally, the government is committed to fostering a digital entrepreneurial ecosystem, encouraging youth involvement in digital entrepreneurship, supporting business incubators, and attracting foreign investment. These efforts are designed to drive economic growth, job creation, and increased foreign investment.

**Digital skills in education policies:** A commitment to fostering a digitally skilled population is encapsulated in the [Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan 2020-2030](#) and the National ICT Policy. These frameworks emphasize integrating digital literacy across all education levels as a cornerstone for the nation's development in the digital era. The Strategic Plan prioritizes embedding digital skills within primary and secondary education, enhancing ICT access in schools, and modernizing tertiary programs to align with global digital standards. Complementing this, the National ICT Policy advocates for informal learning opportunities, active community engagement, and inclusive access to technology, especially for marginalized groups such as rural populations and individuals with disabilities. Both strategies underscore the importance of local content creation in vernacular languages, aiming to build an inclusive, digitally literate society capable of competing and thriving in the global digital economy.



Figure 17. Secondary school computer lab and library, Port Vila, Vanuatu

## 6.5. Comparison of Digital Priorities in Fiji and Vanuatu

### 6.5.1. Common Priorities

Fiji and Vanuatu prioritize ICT infrastructure, digital and financial literacy, and digital entrepreneurship as essential for promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth. These shared priorities aim to boost resilience, equity, and economic prosperity through digital transformation.

**ICT Infrastructure Access:** Fiji and Vanuatu recognize that robust ICT infrastructure is foundational for achieving digital inclusion and economic development. They have significantly invested in expanding internet access and telecommunications networks to improve connectivity, especially in rural and underserved areas. For example, both nations are leveraging satellite technologies like Starlink to bridge the digital divide and reach remote communities, ensuring broader and more reliable internet access.

**Digital and Financial Literacy:** Enhancing digital and financial literacy is a shared priority for both countries. These efforts are essential for empowering citizens to participate effectively in the digital economy and improve their livelihoods. Fiji and Vanuatu have integrated digital skills training into their educational systems, emphasizing reaching marginalized groups, including women, youth, and people with disabilities. By embedding digital competencies into their education and training strategies, both nations aim to create an educated citizenry and workforce capable of adapting to and thriving in an increasingly technology-driven world.

**Digital Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Both countries have policies and programs encouraging digital entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic diversification and job creation. They support the development of tech startups and promote the use of digital tools to enhance business operations. By fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems that include funding opportunities, innovation hubs, and business incubation programs, Fiji and Vanuatu seek to cultivate a generation of digital innovators who can contribute to economic resilience and sustainable growth.

## 6.5.2. Contrasting Priorities

While Fiji and Vanuatu share overarching goals in their digital policies, their specific priorities and approaches differ due to their unique socioeconomic contexts and developmental needs:

**Financial Inclusion:** Fiji is advancing toward a cashless society, supported by an increasing focus on digital financial products and services. Initiatives include mobile banking solutions, digital payment platforms, and financial technology services that enable seamless transactions. However, cash remains prevalent in many areas, and ongoing efforts are aimed at fostering greater trust and adoption of digital financial tools. On the other hand, Vanuatu has a more nascent financial infrastructure. It is focused on expanding access to basic financial services, such as mobile money and microfinance, to promote economic inclusion. The introduction of alternative financing methods, such as crowdfunding and cooperative banking models, is seen as a way to provide financial access to remote and underserved communities.

**E-commerce development:** In Vanuatu, e-commerce strategies are closely tied to the tourism industry, a major contributor to the nation's GDP. The government prioritizes building the necessary digital infrastructure and regulatory frameworks to support online business transactions, focusing on skill development and expanding access to digital tools for vulnerable populations. Fiji's approach to e-commerce is more comprehensive, encompassing not only SME growth and regulatory improvements but also the development of e-government services and large-scale economic digitization. This broader scope reflects Fiji's relatively advanced stage of digital infrastructure and readiness to pursue a multifaceted digital economy strategy.

**Local Language Content:** Vanuatu places significant importance on developing and promoting digital content in local languages, such as Bislama, to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. This focus recognizes the nation's linguistic diversity and aims to make digital tools and resources more user-friendly and relevant to the local population. By contrast, Fiji, which has a higher national literacy rate and greater exposure to English-language content, does not prioritize local language content development to the same extent. This difference underscores Vanuatu's emphasis on cultural preservation and inclusivity as part of its digital strategy.

**Digital Skills and Education Focus:** Both countries integrate digital skills training into their education systems, but the scope and scale vary. Fiji's digital education policies are extensive, including primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, supported by partnerships with global technology companies. The aim is to build a digitally proficient workforce equipped with industry-recognized certifications. Vanuatu's approach also incorporates digital literacy at all educational levels but places additional emphasis on informal learning and community engagement, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This approach ensures that digital skills reach all segments of the population, not just those within formal education systems.

These differences reflect how each country tailors its digital strategy to meet its unique challenges and leverage its strengths. Fiji's policies take a more extensive, infrastructure-driven approach, while Vanuatu's strategies are more localized, emphasizing inclusivity, cultural relevance, and community-focused initiatives.

# Digital Economy and Labor Opportunities

This section explores the digital economy and how digital technologies impact entrepreneurs, startups, the government, and other growth sectors in Fiji and Vanuatu. Fiji is recognized as the Pacific region's technological hub, with a strong ICT infrastructure and a skilled workforce driven by its universities and training institutes. Vanuatu is emerging in digital entrepreneurship, particularly in e-commerce, mobile services, and digital tourism, supported by local innovation and a focus on Indigenous knowledge. Both countries are tapping into regional collaborations to foster resilient digital ecosystems and unlock new technological opportunities.

## 7.1. Fiji's Digital Economy and Emerging Technology Sectors

The Fijian government's Digital Transformation Programme, also known as [digitalFIJI](#), is a four-year initiative designed to implement various government applications, upgrade ICT infrastructure, and build capacity in digital transformation within the Fijian government. The digitalFIJI program aims to drive developments and improvements in the areas that will enable the strong and sustainable development of Fiji's digital economy. This includes developing ICT capacity and building overall competence through training programs for civil servants. DigitalFIJI aims to cultivate an FJD 1 billion digital economy by 2030, a growth supported by strategies to enhance digital infrastructure and promote digital literacy among the population.<sup>27</sup> Many sectors and technologies are driving this growth across key areas, such as:

**Mobile banking and financial technology:** Given Fiji's high access to devices and the internet, almost all smartphone users use mobile banking apps such as [M-PAiSA](#) (Vodafone), digital wallets such as [MyCash](#) (Digicel), and [Sole](#), an app to plan and track spending.

<sup>27</sup> [Fiji Sets Sights on a Billion-Dollar Digital Transformation by 2030 - Tech in Pacific](#)

These tools have transformed financial transactions, with over 632,000 users engaging in person-to-person transfers amounting to USD 352 million (FJD 82.4 million) in 2022.<sup>28</sup> With the introduction of mobile wallets, cashless transactions are being widely adopted in most parts of Fiji. It is now integrated with most banking institutions. Previously, only ANZ and Westpac could transfer to MPaisa, which was mainly a one-way transfer. However, recently, BSP and other banks have also allowed two-way transfers to and from MPAISA.

**Business Process Outsourcing:** Fiji's BPO industry is growing due to Fiji's skilled workforce, advanced ICT infrastructure, and widespread use of English. The government, through initiatives like the [BPO Council of Fiji](#), actively supports the sector, aiming to boost Fiji's global competitiveness. BPO services in Fiji include customer support, technical assistance, and backend processing for industries like banking, airlines, and tourism. With state-of-the-art facilities like [Telecom ICT Park](#) and growing international partnerships, the industry employs over 8,000 people, contributing about AUD 160 million annually to the economy.

**Green businesses:** Fiji is increasingly focused on sustainable and eco-friendly enterprises. Organizations like FNU, alongside the Asian Productivity Organization, are developing training programs to support green entrepreneurship and sustainability. Research at FNU includes smart agriculture, precision farming, and Agriculture 4.0. The [Global Green Growth Institute](#) offers incubation programs for green entrepreneurs, encouraging innovation in sustainable business practices. TAF also partnered with the Women Entrepreneurs Business Council and its 250 members in 2022 to design and adopt a Green Policy, fostering environmentally sustainable business practices and building a green entrepreneurship community to revitalize Fiji's economy in the wake of COVID-19 and climate-related challenges.<sup>29</sup>

**Digital Marketing and E-Commerce:** Fiji's e-commerce landscape is witnessing massive growth, leading to more business startups. According to a report by the International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, in 2022, Fiji's e-commerce market was projected to reach approximately USD 203.9 million, with further projections to an estimated USD 350.4 million by 2025, an increase of 19.78%.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> [Fiji - Information and Communication Technology](#)

<sup>29</sup> [TAF Annual Report, 2023](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Fiji eCommerce](#)

It further reports that Fijian consumers spend a lot on electronics and food, accounting for 32% and 18% of total e-commerce revenue, respectively. In the local context, domestic e-commerce platforms such as [Post Fiji e-Shop](#) and [Vitikart](#) and various social media online stores have emerged. TAF supported an initiative to digitize the ROC Market (Fiji's longest running street market), assisting women vendors during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic by creating a digital marketplace on Facebook to sell their products online.<sup>31</sup> Vendors received training on accessing and using their online business portals, processing payments through MPAiSA or MyCASH, and business coaching, culminating in the formal registration of the ROC Market.

**Startups and Entrepreneurs:** Fiji's startup and entrepreneurship ecosystem is growing and is supported by government policies and digital advancements. The rise of small home-based businesses, especially among women during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights this trend.<sup>32</sup> However, challenges still need to be solved, as poor digital infrastructure and low digital skills, particularly in rural areas, hinder women's participation in e-commerce.<sup>33</sup> Other government support includes the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme ([YES](#)), which provides grants of up to FJD 30,000 to support innovative business ideas from young entrepreneurs aged 18 to 40, fostering job creation and economic growth, particularly in the wake of COVID-19.

**Tourism Technology:** Innovations in the tourism sector include the development of travel apps and platforms that enhance visitor experiences and streamline services, contributing to the industry's modernization. In 2024, Fiji hosted its first [National Hospitality Conference](#), where representatives engaged in multi-stakeholder discussions to strategize on improving the tourism sector in Fiji, with digital transformation being identified as one of the key catalysts.

**Blockchain Technology:** Some new areas of the digital economy include harnessing technology such as blockchain for farming, fisheries, and agriculture. A Fijian company called [Traseable Solutions](#) offers this kind of blockchain technology service in the Pacific.

<sup>31</sup> [ROC Market-Fiji Facebook page; A "Green Wave" for Fiji and the Pacific - The Asia Foundation](#)

<sup>32</sup> UN ESCAP (2023). Policy approaches for financial inclusion: an examination of approaches across Asia and the Pacific and Latin America. Retrieved from: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/6340>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## 7.2. Vanuatu's Digital Economy and Emerging Technology Sectors

The [Vanuatu Foreign Investment Promotion Agency](#) supports foreign investment, particularly in services like tourism, finance, and IT, which could provide skilled job opportunities. However, challenges such as limited skilled labor and geographical constraints still need to be addressed. Government initiatives to expand 4G and fiber-optic internet and digital literacy programs aim to address these issues, making growth in the following areas possible:

**Mobile Banking and Telecommunications:** The National Bank of Vanuatu and mobile platforms like [MyCash](#) (Digicel), [M-Vatu](#) (Vodafone), and [WanTok Money](#) are making strides in promoting digital financial inclusion. These services offer basic functions like peer-to-peer transfers, bill payments, and mobile money, helping MSMEs manage transactions and access credit. However, uptake is hindered by high fees, regulatory challenges, and limited integration with the formal banking system, which makes transfers between mobile wallets and bank accounts difficult. Despite these challenges, efforts to improve the regulatory framework and infrastructure are ongoing, aiming to expand financial inclusion across Vanuatu.

**E-Commerce and Digital Marketing:** As internet penetration increases, businesses in Vanuatu are leveraging digital marketing tools on platforms like Facebook and Instagram and have become increasingly effective in reaching Vanuatu's online population.



Figure 18. Mobile banking advertisement, Suva, Fiji

Facebook, for example, has an advertising reach that covers over 50% of the country's internet users, providing businesses with a powerful tool to connect with consumers and promote products.<sup>34</sup> This has spurred growth in the e-commerce sector, especially in tourism and retail. The [Maua App](#) and [Shop Vanuatu](#) (e-commerce web projects) are key tools, promoting local products and boosting economic empowerment for small vendors, including women and rural entrepreneurs. Government initiatives, such as the Vanuatu E-Commerce Strategy and Roadmap, focus on infrastructure, affordable digital access, and regulatory improvements to support this growth.<sup>35</sup> However, challenges such as logistics, high transport costs, and limited delivery networks remain. There are also opportunities to enhance digital payment services and improve logistics for inter-island trade, positioning Vanuatu's e-commerce sector as a promising area for investment.<sup>36</sup>

**Green Businesses and Sustainable Practices:** Vanuatu is advancing environmental sustainability with green technology and eco-tourism initiatives. Key efforts include solar energy programs reducing rural reliance on diesel through partnerships like Vanuatu Solar; Green BPOs such as [YumiWork](#) and Pacific Assist are using remote work models to cut energy consumption; Sustainable local businesses, like [Vanuatu Direct](#), export organic products, focusing on fair trade and sustainable sourcing. These efforts highlight Vanuatu's commitment to a green economy, supported by international partnerships and local innovation.<sup>37</sup>

**Government Agencies, Digital Services, and Infrastructure:** Government ICT initiatives are led by the DCDT (formerly [OGCIO](#)). Broadly, the government has invested in infrastructure like submarine fiber-optic cables and e-government services, aiming to make the country a regional ICT hub. Through initiatives like the Smart Islands program in South Malekula,<sup>38</sup> Vanuatu is improving digital connectivity and providing training in digital skills. The Financial Management Information System helps streamline public fund management while integrating digital skills training for government employees.

<sup>34</sup> [Digital 2024: Vanuatu—DataReportal – Global Digital Insights](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Vanuatu E-Commerce Strategy and Roadmap](#)

<sup>36</sup> <https://vbr.vu/news/pifs-e-biz-plus-backs-e-commerce-businesses-in-vanuatu/>

<sup>37</sup> [Success Story: Vanuatu's Investment Landscape—Opportunities, Challenges and Pathways to Prosperity](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Transforming a Small Island into a Smart Island: Southern Malekula, Vanuatu | Joint SDG Fund](#)

The Department of Women's Affairs supports women entrepreneurs through initiatives like the [Phoenix Project](#), led by UN Women, and the Vanuatu Women's Centre, which offers business training, networking, and grants. These efforts align with broader investment goals for digital transformation and inclusive development.<sup>39</sup>

**Digital Identity and Blockchain:** Vanuatu is exploring blockchain-powered digital identification to improve access to services and streamline compliance processes for financial services. This effort aligns with regional trends to enhance secure, efficient digital identity systems for better access to public and private services.<sup>40</sup>

**Startups and Entrepreneurs:** Vanuatu is strengthening its innovation and startup ecosystem with various local and international programs supporting MSMEs and entrepreneurs. The [Pacific Digital Economy Programme](#) enhances digital skills, and [V-LAB](#) provides mentoring, facilities, and support for social entrepreneurs and digital innovators. The Global Green Growth Institute's [Pacific Greenpreneurs](#) program also assists entrepreneurs in developing sustainable business ideas. Women are particularly active in agribusiness, eco-tourism, and arts and crafts. The [Vanuatu Innovation and Digital Economy Association](#), established in 2021, promotes skill-building in areas like 3D printing, e-commerce, and digital marketing, and collaborates with co-working spaces like [Yumiwork](#) to provide digital training and incubation for startups.<sup>41</sup>

**Outsourcing Industry:** Vanuatu's outsourcing industry is developing, with growth potential in BPO, IT services, and remote business support, thanks to its strategic location and improving ICT infrastructure. As remote services grow globally, Vanuatu has opportunities in back-office support, customer service, and software development, positioning it as a cost-effective outsourcing destination.<sup>42</sup>

**CSOs and Advocacy:** In 2014, [SMART Sistas](#) was created with local private partners, communities, and the Peace Corps. In 2023, other core actors in this space launched the V-LAB mentoring program, working together with Yumiwork, impacting 108 local entrepreneurs, 65% of whom are women.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> [ICT - Vanuatu Foreign Investment Promotion Agency](#).

<sup>40</sup> [Going digital: What's next for Vanuatu](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Business Opportunities for Women in Vanuatu: A Growing Landscape of Potential – Welcome to Darling Keyz Blog](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Invest Vanuatu: Service Sector Industries](#); Judge, P. Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Vanuatu Private Sector Economic Update (2021). [Link](#).

<sup>43</sup> [V-Lab, our impact](#)

# Existing Digital Training Opportunities

This section gives an overview of digital training programs and initiatives across the education sector segments. Tables 8 and 9 below provide an overview of digital training opportunities in Fiji and Vanuatu, unearthed by this study. The programs and initiatives listed span primary and secondary education (K-13 in Fiji and K-12 in Vanuatu), employability skills training, TVET, tertiary education, and workplace training. For more detailed information on some of these opportunities in both countries, see the Desk Report.

## 8.1. Training Opportunities in Fiji

Table 8: Digital training opportunities in Fiji

Education Level	Organization	Program Name	Facilities and Infrastructure	Details
K-13	Ministry of Education (in partnership with Save the Children and Meta)	<a href="#">I am Digital</a>	Available throughout 177 schools Fiji-wide	An online safety program launched in March 2023, currently rolled out to seven Pacific Islands countries: Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Vanuatu, PNG and the Solomon Islands.
K-13	UNCDF	<a href="#">Pacific Financial Inclusion Program</a>	Deployed through various UN partnered programs all over Fiji and the Pacific	Integrating financial literacy within the Fijian school curriculum for primary and secondary schools
K-13	Ministry of Education	<a href="#">Student employment exposure program</a>	177 schools Fiji wide (operated via schools)	Launched in May 2024, this Program provides Year 11 students with work placements during school holidays, giving them hands-on experience and practical skills that help prepare them for the job market.

Education Level	Organization	Program Name	Facilities and Infrastructure	Details
Informal	Fiji Development Bank (FDB) in collaboration with Visa Worldwide	<a href="#">Digital Financial Literacy Program</a>	FDB website	Financial literacy programs for small business owners on financial management, covering the basics of starting, efficiently managing, and scaling a business.
Informal	FRIEND Fiji in collaboration with the Common-wealth of Learning	Various programs	Usually at FRIEND Fiji workshop in Ba Province	Skills training like soap making, business management, organic farming, and food processing. Program has reached nearly 400 young people including women and those with disabilities, to improve employability and entrepreneurial abilities.
Informal	Almanah Hope Centre	<a href="#">LifeBread Confident Woman Program</a>	Conducted in Lautoka in conjunction with Women's Fund Fiji	Helps marginalized women build confidence and essential life skills as well as technical skills that enhance their personal, social, and economic independence.
Informal	GreenHouse Co-working Space	<a href="#">Greenhouse Business Bootcamp</a> <a href="#">Creative Business Accelerator Program</a> <a href="#">FIJIPRENEUR Membership Plan</a>	Conducted online, in rural settlements and at the GreenHouse Coworking center in Suva.	Trainings for women's empowerment, leadership, coding for girls and women, business incubation for youth, green business bootcamp, pitching, entrepreneurship
Informal	UN Women	<a href="#">Markets for Change</a>	20 market sites across Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu	Supports women market vendors in rural and urban areas, enhancing their financial literacy and leadership in marketplaces and ensuring that marketplaces are safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory environments.

Education Level	Organization	Program Name	Facilities and Infrastructure	Details
TVET	FNU	<a href="#">TVET Pasifika</a>	Campuses across Fiji	Provides centralized access to various technical and vocational programs, enabling students to gain trade skills and improve employability. Most of the training is focused on creating entrepreneurship skills in the areas taught.
TVET	FNU	<a href="#">National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC)</a>	Campuses across Fiji; including community outreach, remote and maritime trainings	As part of FNU, NTPC offers courses in customer service, communication, and workplace ethics to enhance job readiness. This includes the Sustainable Livelihood Project, fully funded by the government and aimed at training and upskilling rural communities with practical skills and knowledge. <sup>44</sup>
TVET	Pacific Polytec	Dept of Computing	Suva: Headquarters Nausori: Tavua Lautoka Nadi Labasa Vunika	A smaller-scale training school created to provide post-K-13 education opportunities. They are offering computing studies in the form of short courses.
TVET	FNU	<a href="#">Short Courses</a>	As above for NTPC	Various courses offered including IT and business management, so learners can obtain micro-credentials that enhance their qualifications.
TVET	USP	<a href="#">Pacific TAFE</a>	Campuses across Fiji and the Pacific Islands	A dedicated college of USP specializing in non-technical undergraduate/TVET courses, including a Diploma of Tourism and Hospitality, as well as ICT Short courses and Diploma
Tertiary	USP	<a href="#">Undergrad and postgrad studies</a>	Campuses across Fiji and the Pacific Islands	8 schools (faculties), with branches across the Pacific islands  Undergraduate, postgraduate, research and consultancies offered; Digital skills and entrepreneurship component is embedded through the faculty course coordinators and through some projects such as UNDP Right to Information

<sup>44</sup> [216 participants graduate from FNU's SLP programme - Fiji National University](#)

## 8.2. Training Opportunities in Vanuatu

Table 9: Digital training opportunities in Vanuatu

Education Level	Organization	Program Name	Facilities and Infrastructure	Details
K-12	<a href="#">Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training</a>	Technology in the Classroom	Schools with varying levels of infrastructure	Provides teachers with digital resources to enhance learning and ensure students acquire foundational digital skills.
Informal	<a href="#">Smart Sistas</a>	ICT Bootcamps	Gets support from sponsors including use of <a href="#">Peace Corps</a> office space (with other support provided) and DCDT office space	Each year, 10-12 young women from various islands attend a 5-day ICT and leadership boot camp to learn key skills for success. Students complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 24 hours technical training</li> <li>- 12 hours leadership and gender empowerment training</li> <li>- 4 hours career exploration in telecommunications, TV, radio broadcasting, computer hardware, software and services and electronic media</li> <li>- 4 hours training on the link between ICT and climate action.</li> </ul>
Informal	UN Women	<a href="#">Markets for Change (PDF)</a>	Improved market facilities in Port Vila and Lugainville including sanitation and hygiene facilities	Key component of UN Women's Economic Empowerment strategy. The 6-year initiative aims to ensure that marketplaces in rural and urban areas in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
Informal	Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, APTC, and VSP	How to Sell Online in Vanuatu (initiative)	VCCI offers fully equipped training rooms	Aims to enhance the digital skills of Pacific entrepreneurs, enabling them to transition to online business models. Provides hands-on training, access to customized e-commerce toolkits, and ongoing support such as coaching and grants to foster digital trade across the region.

Education Level	Organization	Program Name	Facilities and Infrastructure	Details
Informal	Vanuatu Business Resilience Council (VBRC) in partnership with Chamber of Commerce	<a href="#">Project Phoenix</a>	VBRC provided business training and advice, and access to financial resources	Phoenix Project offers business skills training and mentorship for women entrepreneurs.
Informal	The Department of Women's Affairs and Vanuatu Women's Centre	16 Days of Activism	Vanuatu Women's Centre branches and DWA offices	Collaborations designed to create safer digital environments, including cybersecurity awareness training
Informal	V-Lab Vanuatu	<a href="#">Yut Pawa Program</a> <a href="#">Grow Program</a> <a href="#">Yumi Growem Vanuatu Program</a> Bisnis Nakamal	Hosted by Yumiwork, Vanuatu's coworking space	<p>V-Lab, in partnership with YumiWork, is dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship in Vanuatu. Together, they provide young entrepreneurs with access to facilities, services, and mentoring aimed at supporting business development and growth. This collaboration promotes entrepreneurship as a key driver of economic progress in the country.</p> <p>Bisnis Nakamal is a new program for V-Lab targeting talented young entrepreneurs and offering learning opportunities to help them create their own businesses.</p>
Informal	<a href="#">Yumiwork</a>	Incubator and coworking community	Large, bright, fully equipped working space offering: high speed internet, meeting rooms, reception, lounge areas, premium printers.	The first modern coworking space in Vanuatu, with business incubator programs, promoting entrepreneurship, innovation, skills acquisition. Works together with V-Lab.

Education Level	Organization	Program Name	Facilities and Infrastructure	Details
Informal	Save the Children (in collaboration with MoET and Global Partnership for Education)	Inclusive Education Programs	Inclusive Education resource center at NUV	Focus on inclusive education. They train teachers to support students with disabilities and are building an Inclusive Education Resource Center at NUV, which aims to provide tailored educational resources and professional development for teachers.
Informal	Department of Tourism	Produktif Turism Blong Yumi translated as Tourism Business Support Program (TBSP)	N/A	Initiative to help tourism operators adapt and sustain their business and train individuals in agritourism, traditional farming, and local cuisine. These efforts integrate skills development with sustainable and cultural tourism
TVET	<a href="#">Vanuatu Skills Partnership</a> (Co-investment between the Govts of Australia and Vanuatu)	Training work streams include Tourism, Agriculture, Handicraft, and Social Inclusion (and more)  Provincial ICT Training Initiative	Provincial skill centers including Port Vila  Edwards Institute of Technology (EIT) space	Training for the continued development of the national skills system, in line with Vanuatu 2030 – the People’s Plan  Supports professional development through certified training courses, including digital literacy and ICT system management.
TVET	<a href="#">Ituani Centre</a>	ICT Explorers  ICT for Education & Development	Meeting spaces, training rooms and their own infrastructure supports community events, and workshops	Ituani is dedicated to extending ICT services to the 70% population of Vanuatu living in rural and remote areas where ICT knowledge and experience is lacking, targeting girls, women, orphans and people with disability

Education Level	Organization	Program Name	Facilities and Infrastructure	Details
TVET	<a href="#">APTC</a> (TAFE Queensland implements programs on behalf of DFAT)	Australian TVET Qualifications Labour Mobility	APTC center in Port Vila	Collaborates with national governments, development partners, the private sector, organizations for people with disabilities, CSOs, and national TVET institutions to strengthen TVET systems in Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
		GEDSI		Offers a range of Australian accredited and non-accredited vocational courses to assist career development. Scheduled to conclude in March 2025.
		Skills for Infrastructure		
		Skills for Climate and Disaster Resilience		
TVET	<a href="#">Vanuatu Institute of Technology</a>	<a href="#">Certificate II in ICT with other programs/courses</a>	VIT campus in Port Vila	VIT offers a wide range of qualifications with units of competency packaged into modules for ease of enrolment and attendance as short courses
Tertiary	<a href="#">National University of Vanuatu</a>	<a href="#">ICT Diploma</a>	On-campus program delivered at the NUV main campus in Port Vila, beginning in February 2025	This 2-year Diploma in ICT prepares students for careers in IT through technical training, personal development, and ethical practices. The program combines coursework in areas like system design, software development, and networking with a final-semester internship. Graduates are equipped for roles such as IT Support Specialist, Network Technician, and Full Stack Developer.
TVET	APTC (TAFE Queensland implements programs on behalf of DFAT)	Australian TVET Qualifications Labour Mobility	APTC center in Port Vila	Collaborates with national governments, development partners, the private sector, organizations for people with disabilities, CSOs, and national TVET institutions to strengthen TVET systems in Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
		GEDSI		Offers a range of Australian accredited and non-accredited vocational courses to assist career development. Scheduled to conclude in March 2025.
		Skills for Infrastructure		
		Skills for Climate and Disaster Resilience		

# Barriers to Accessing Skills Training

Fiji and Vanuatu have experienced improvements in technology and digital infrastructure, particularly with the expansion of undersea cables, which has enhanced international internet connections. However, both countries still face challenges with local networks, high costs, and the need to improve digital skills for fair access to online services. There are significant disparities in access to technology across the region, with many people lacking internet access or facing high costs and unreliable connections, especially the 75% of Pacific Islanders living in rural areas.<sup>45</sup> These challenges are worsened by a lack of resources for adapting and building resilience, with limited access to global markets and capital.<sup>46</sup> Fiji has significantly better access to technology than Vanuatu, largely due to its more advanced digital infrastructure. Fiji's mobile phone penetration is 144.4%, compared to Vanuatu's 102.8%.<sup>47</sup>

Fiji's government has promoted digitalization through initiatives such as "[Walesi](#)" (a digital application) and mandatory electronic payments for public transport and government benefits. This has boosted overall financial inclusion, with 78% of Fijians using digital wallets.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, many in Vanuatu still lack basic financial services—for example, 37% of adults report that they do not have a bank account or digital financial service to store money or make payments, and only 9% of people use digital/mobile wallets.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Callebaut, S., Casswell, J., Horton, S., Mihaylova, T., & Zaman, F. (2024). Digital Ecosystem Country Assessment (DECA): Pacific Islands. USAID [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/USAID\\_PacificIslands\\_DECA.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/USAID_PacificIslands_DECA.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Reddy, P., Sharma, B., & Chaudhary, K. (2021). Digital literacy: A review in the South Pacific. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-021-09280-4>.

<sup>47</sup> [Assessing Digital and Financial Literacy in Fiji: A Survey on Knowledge, Skills and Access - UN Capital Development Fund \(UNCDF\)](#)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

## 9.1. Connectivity and Access Overview

Table 10: Digital Profiles of Fiji and Vanuatu

Indicators	Fiji	Vanuatu
<b>No. of population (million): 2024</b>	0.94 <sup>50</sup>	0.314 <sup>51</sup>
<b>GDP per capita (USD): 2024</b>	5,524 <sup>52</sup>	3,098 <sup>53</sup>
<b>Internet users (population %): Jan 2024</b>	85.20% <sup>54</sup>	69.90% <sup>55</sup>
<b>Highest use of internet (area/province)</b>	N/A	Shefa Province, more than 40% <sup>56</sup>
<b>Lowest use of internet (area/province)</b>	N/A	Tafea Province, 11% <sup>57</sup>
<b>Mobile penetration rate (population %)</b>	95% <sup>58</sup>	90% (3G), 33% (4G)
<b>Social media use (population %), 2024</b>	57.90% <sup>59</sup>	28% <sup>60</sup>
<b>Most popular social media, 2024</b>	Facebook <sup>61</sup>	Facebook <sup>62</sup>

<sup>50</sup> <https://sdd.spc.int/fj>

<sup>51</sup> <https://sdd.spc.int/vu>

<sup>52</sup> <https://sdd.spc.int/fj>

<sup>53</sup> <https://sdd.spc.int/vu>

<sup>54</sup> Digital 2024: Fiji—DataReportal – Global Digital Insights.

<sup>55</sup> Assessing Internet Development in Vanuatu, UNESCO 2024

<sup>56</sup> Assessing Internet Development in Vanuatu, UNESCO 2024

<sup>57</sup> Assessing Internet Development in Vanuatu, UNESCO 2024

<sup>58</sup> Fiji MICS Survey 2021

<sup>59</sup> Digital 2024: Fiji—DataReportal – Global Digital Insights.

<sup>60</sup> Assessing Internet Development in Vanuatu, UNESCO 2024

<sup>61</sup> Asia Pacific report, 2024

<sup>62</sup> Assessing Internet Development in Vanuatu, UNESCO 2024

## 9.2. Fiji: Connectivity and Access

### 9.2.1. Infrastructure and Cybersecurity

Fiji has enhanced its ICT infrastructure with key investments, including subsea cables like Google's South Pacific Connect and Southern Cross NEXT, improving connectivity across the country.<sup>63</sup> Fiji's National Internet Governance Forum, which includes stakeholders from various sectors, will guide the country's future ICT development to ensure inclusive growth and resilience. The introduction of Starlink services transforms connectivity, particularly in rural and maritime areas. They offer high-speed internet with low latency and low setup costs. However, challenges remain in extending ICT access to remote islands due to limited infrastructure, high costs, and climate risks.

The Australian Government is aiding Fiji's cybersecurity efforts through a National Cybersecurity Strategy and establishing a Computer Emergency Response Team to protect against digital threats.

### 9.2.2. Internet Penetration, Availability, and Reliability

Fiji's internet and mobile connectivity have expanded, with around 95% coverage via 3G and 4G networks from providers like Vodafone and Digicel. The country is also testing 5G on islands such as Rotuma as part of the UN Smart Island Program.<sup>64</sup>

As of January 2024, 85.2% of Fiji's population (approximately 800,000 people) uses the internet, with younger individuals aged 18-34 leading in online activity. Mobile devices are the primary means of access, especially in rural areas, although remote regions still face connectivity issues due to infrastructure limitations.<sup>65</sup> The 2021 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey shows that 76.3% of households have internet access, with men (80.4%) and women (78.6%) using the internet regularly.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> [Honomoana and Tabua subsea cables connect South Pacific | Google Cloud Blog](#)

<sup>64</sup> Fiji leading Pacific Islands in LTE and 5G development - Developing Telecoms; South Pacific Islands Telecoms Market report, Statistics and Forecast 2020-2025; <https://www.mcttt.gov.fj/remarks-by-the-deputy-prime-minister-and-minister-for-trade-co-operatives-and-small-and-medium-enterprises-and-communications-aiia-pacific-islands-digital-capability-uplift-program/>

<sup>65</sup> Digital 2024: Fiji—DataReportal - Global Digital Insights.

<sup>66</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey: Fiji 2021 MICS\_English.pdf

## 9.2.3. Sociocultural Barriers and Safety Considerations

In Fiji, sociocultural norms limit women's engagement with technology. Traditional gender roles prioritize household responsibilities over digital tool access. Societal expectations discourage women from pursuing tech careers, leading to underrepresentation. A study by Saliya (2023) highlights enterprising mothers' challenges in balancing traditional roles with technology use.<sup>67</sup> Cammock et al. (2023) discuss how cultural values restrict iTaukei women's freedom to voice concerns, extending to their online presence.<sup>68</sup>

Despite these challenges, Fiji has made progress in developing policies to protect women and other vulnerable groups online. The [Cybercrime Act 2021](#) addresses cyberbullying, harassment, and identity theft, while the Online Child Protection Act safeguards minors from exploitation. Initiatives like Cyber Safety Fiji raise awareness about online risks, and the [National Gender Policy](#) advocates for women's digital inclusion, encouraging their participation in the digital economy through training programs to bridge the gender gap in digital literacy.

## 9.3. Vanuatu: connectivity and access challenges

### 9.3.1. Infrastructure

Vanuatu's ICT infrastructure has improved with the introduction of Starlink, offering satellite-based high-speed internet that enhances connectivity, especially for remote islands. Starlink's low Earth orbit satellites are more resilient to local disasters than traditional infrastructure, providing reliable communication, particularly during emergencies. The Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator oversees the expansion of access in collaboration with local and international providers under the UAP. However, data privacy and security remain concerns, as satellite data bypasses some local regulations. Starlink's integration is guided by the Regulator and government agencies to improve Vanuatu's connectivity and resilience.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Saliya, C. A. (2023). The Qualitative Report The Qualitative Report A Grounded Theory of Enterprising Mothers: Work-Life Balancing A Grounded Theory of Enterprising Mothers: Work-Life Balancing of Women in Fiji of Women in Fiji. Qualitative Report. 28. 1610-1640. 10.46743/2160-3715/2023.5764.

<sup>68</sup> Cammock, R., Lovell, S., & Vaka, S. (2022). Cultural values influencing iTaukei women's discussion of family planning in the home. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 25(9), 1198-1213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2022.2146204>

<sup>69</sup> [Starlink Secures License to Operate in Vanuatu: Unlocking Economic Opportunities for Rural Communities](#)

## 9.3.2. Cost of Data and Devices

ICT affordability remains a challenge, especially in data costs and device ownership. Recent global indexes indicate that data prices in the region are among the least affordable worldwide, largely due to geographical and logistical constraints. Affordability issues are compounded in rural and underserved communities, limiting consistent digital access and placing an added burden on lower-income individuals, especially youth and women who face additional income disparities and access barriers (to both data and devices). Qualitative and anecdotal evidence suggests families share phones and data across multiple members of the same household to cut down on costs.

## 9.3.3. Internet Penetration, Availability, and Reliability

In Vanuatu, internet penetration is growing, with an estimated 66.3% of the population connected to the internet by 2023, marking substantial progress for a region with significant geographic and economic barriers.<sup>70</sup> Mobile networks, primarily 3G and 4G, are accessible to most of the population, with around 90% coverage for 3G and approximately 33% for 4G. However, coverage is concentrated in urban areas like Port Vila and Luganville. Satellite-based services like Starlink will likely impact the development of 5G infrastructure.<sup>71</sup>

Efforts to improve internet affordability and accessibility in Vanuatu are led by the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator, with support from international partners like USAID. These efforts focus on achieving universal connectivity, particularly in underserved areas, to foster inclusive digital growth. Internet reliability varies, with urban areas like Port Vila and Luganville benefiting from more stable connectivity, largely supported by the 2013 fiber-optic cable. In rural and outer islands, connectivity is more limited and prone to disruptions from weather events like cyclones and earthquakes. Starlink is expected to improve reliability in remote regions, as satellite networks are less vulnerable to terrestrial issues. However, severe weather, common in the Pacific region, can still affect satellite connections. Ensuring consistent connectivity across all areas remains a challenge.

<sup>70</sup> [Data Reportal: Digital 2023 Vanuatu](#)

<sup>71</sup> [ICT, Telecommunication and Development in Vanuatu: An Interview with Fred Samuel Tarisongtamate](#)

### 9.3.4. GEDSI Lens: Sociocultural Barriers and Safety Considerations

In Vanuatu, sociocultural and economic barriers, such as affordability, digital literacy gaps, and restrictive gender norms, limit women's engagement with technology. These norms, along with safety concerns, particularly around online harassment, also hinder women's and youth's digital participation, especially in rural areas where data costs and device access are more limited.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including cyberbullying, is a growing concern, with women and girls often being the primary targets. Vanuatu addresses these issues through its National ICT Policy and UAP, aiming to improve online safety and increase awareness. Regional initiatives supported by UN Women advocate for comprehensive legislation against cybercrime and gender-based violence alongside programs promoting digital literacy and safety education for women and youth.

By improving regulations and digital skills, Vanuatu is working towards creating safer, more inclusive online spaces for marginalized groups.



Figure 17. LTE 4G advertisement, Port Vila, Vanuatu

# Conclusion and Recommendations

The Needs Assessment and Desk Review provide an in-depth look at what is known about digital literacy, the digital economy, and digital access in Fiji and Vanuatu. The interviews and focus groups helped the scoping team develop an understanding of the lived experiences of ICT professionals, community members, and recent graduates, as well as the government, businesses, and institutions that support, employ, and train them. Based on these insights, the following options and recommendations have been developed, outlining how The Asia Foundation might support digital skills training and the broader digital economy and improve the livelihoods of women and youth in Fiji and Vanuatu.

## 10.1. Enhance Abilities and Capabilities

### 10.1.1. Recommendation 1: Scale Up Effective Training Programs for Women and Youth

Strong training providers are already delivering targeted programs for women, youth, and people in remote areas. To amplify their impact, we recommend scaling up these programs through a comprehensive support framework, including a menu of options that training providers can choose that suit their specific needs across:

- **Curriculum Development:** Provide technical assistance to align training provider curriculum with industry needs, global standards, and local job market demands, incorporating advanced digital skills (e.g., cybersecurity, data analytics) and sector-specific training (e.g., agriculture, tourism, SMEs).
- **Dynamic Training Updates:** Support regular updates of training programs through technical assistance that helps programs to reflect evolving digital skills and emerging industry demands, ensuring relevance and practical application.

- **Trainer Upskilling:** Offer professional development and certifications for lecturers and trainers to enhance teaching methods and technical expertise. Introduce incentives to retain highly skilled educators.
- **Targeted Funding:** Invest in programs that focus on high-demand skills, such as e-commerce, entrepreneurship, and advanced digital competencies. Tailor these efforts to benefit women, youth, and individuals in rural and informal sectors.
- **Partnership Building:** Strengthen collaboration between education providers, government, and industry to co-develop practical training, internships, and mentorship programs.
- **Measuring Impact and Iterating:** Track program outcomes through helping providers develop metrics to evaluate success, such as student learning outcomes, employment rates, income increases, and business creation among participants. Use feedback loops to collect regular feedback from participants to adapt programs to emerging needs and challenges. Support organizations to scale success through using lessons learned from pilot projects to replicate and scale successful initiatives across different Pacific countries.

Organizations with a proven track record in delivering such initiatives should be prioritized for funding and partnership opportunities and are detailed in the table below.

Table 11: Organizations to scale up training

Country	Organization Name	Focus of Scale-up of Training
Vanuatu	Ituani Centre	Digital skills and literacy training in rural areas
Vanuatu	Smart Sistas	Digital skills and literacy training for women and girls
Vanuatu	VLab	E-commerce and entrepreneurship training
Vanuatu	Youth Challenge	Digital skills and literacy training for out of school youth, focused on employability
Fiji	Sunset Studios	Website building for market vendors, women in sports, sports clubs, entrepreneurs, local CSOs and village cooperatives in rural areas
Fiji	Greenhouse Coworking	Trainings for women's empowerment, leadership, coding for girls and women, business incubation for youth, green business bootcamp, pitching, entrepreneurship

## Courses for Consideration

**Industry-Specific Digital Skills Micro-Credential:** Equips learners with targeted digital skills and industry-specific knowledge to enhance productivity and innovation in agriculture, tourism, and small business sectors. The course integrates ICT tools, sector-relevant applications, and foundational business principles tailored to the needs of these industries.

- **Agriculture:** Ensures learners can utilize and benefit from digital farm management tools, e-agriculture platforms for accessing and selling produce online, and digital tools that improve sustainability and efficiency.
- **Tourism:** Participants will confidently apply digital tools to their unique business context, including tourism marketing tools, guest management systems, and cultural preservation tools, highlighting cultural knowledge and practices through digital storytelling and virtual tours.
- **MSMEs:** Learners will be able to implement point-of-sales systems, leverage analytics and tracking tools for sales and customer trends, utilize e-commerce tools, and lead social media marketing campaigns. This course will prepare learners to create and manage online stores, integrate payment gateways, and optimize logistics.

**Foundational Digital & Financial Literacy for Empowerment Micro-Credential:** Provides essential digital and financial literacy skills tailored to empower youth, rural communities, and women, focusing on inclusion. The course bridges foundational digital skills with practical financial tools, enabling participants to navigate digital platforms confidently, manage finances, and engage in online opportunities for personal and professional growth.

- **Foundational Digital Literacy:** Learners will understand basic digital skills, focusing on using smartphone applications and the internet for daily activities. It also includes online communication tools and cyber safety.
- **Digital Financial Literacy:** Equips learners with the skills to utilize mobile money platforms, digital wallets, and online banking services. It ties in with essential financial literacy basics such as budgeting, saving, and making informed borrowing and lending decisions. Additional focus on e-commerce basics ensures learners can use digital payment systems and online marketplaces.
- **Empowerment & Application:** Practical training on using digital tools for local needs, such as accessing e-government services or online marketplaces. Learners will be able to use social media for advocacy, community building, and resource sharing.

**Digital Skills for CSOs and Government Staff Micro-Credential:** Equips CSOs and government staff with essential digital competencies, emphasizing practical applications, cyber safety, and tools for effective service delivery, remote outreach, and data-driven decision-making. Designed for government and civil society professionals, the course will foster digital proficiency to enhance efficiency, communication, and informed decision-making. The course will prepare participants to be champions of digital transformation and policy advocacy and to appropriately scope, design, manage, and avoid risks in digital programs.

- **Foundational Digital Skills:** Participants will develop a solid foundation in navigating computer systems and the internet, focusing on tools and platforms essential for professional environments. This includes training on e-government services to enhance citizen engagement and streamline public service delivery. Emphasis will be placed on managing files, accessing information online, and leveraging digital tools to improve workflow.
- **Cyber Safety Awareness:** Participants will enhance their understanding of online risks, such as phishing and malware, while learning practical techniques for securing sensitive data and maintaining privacy. By fostering a culture of cyber safety, learners will be better equipped to manage digital risks and protect organizational assets. Note, cyber safety content could be shared across different courses and tailored to each unique learning context.
- **Practical Applications:** Learners will gain proficiency in widely used workplace tools like Microsoft Office Suite, Google Workspace, and collaborative platforms such as Teams and Zoom. Training will also cover social media for public awareness campaigns and stakeholder engagement, alongside basic website maintenance to improve information dissemination and organizational visibility.
- **Remote Work & Outreach:** Participants will be able to effectively use tools and strategies for remote work and community outreach, including project management platforms like Trello and Slack. They will learn techniques for engaging stakeholders virtually, such as email campaigns, webinars, and virtual meetings, to ensure productivity and connectivity in diverse environments.
- **Data Analytics for Decision-Making:** The course introduces analytics tools like Excel, Google Analytics, and Tableau, helping participants understand and analyze data trends. Training will focus on applying data-driven strategies to inform policies and program decisions, enabling participants to make impactful, evidence-based contributions to their organizations.

## 10.1.2. Recommendation 2: Extend Training to Rural Communities Through Targeted Investments

To prevent the digital economy from being concentrated in urban areas, targeted strategies are essential for expanding training in rural and maritime regions. We recommend that The Asia Foundation considers funding foundational training for rural communities through the following potential avenues:

- **Shared Resources:** Consolidate digital learning resources and develop a shared and open curriculum and learning materials tailored to local needs. These can be delivered by community organizations such as church groups, local training centers, and community halls.
- **eLearning Platforms:** Design mobile-friendly, offline-capable courses to overcome connectivity challenges, ensuring access for all, regardless of location.
- **Community Digital Hubs:** Identify and extend digital curricula to existing community hubs and youth organizations. Ensure hubs are inclusive and equipped with solar power, internet, and devices for learning and economic activities. Support hubs to prioritize accessibility and gender inclusivity. Hubs can be leveraged to ensure rural communities have access to essential e-government services such as healthcare, education, and government information. By changing perceptions of the importance of digital skills and tools, these spaces can encourage broader adoption and engagement.
- **Flexible Training Formats:** Provide financial support, such as scholarships and micro-credentials, to increase participation among women, youth, and marginalized groups. Flexible options, including part-time and modular training, can accommodate diverse learning needs.
- **Integrated Training:** Incorporate financial literacy, online safety, and basic digital tools training into workshops and events. These foundational skills can demonstrate tangible economic benefits and foster trust in digital tools. Consider how these trainings might also focus on Indigenous knowledge and languages in Vanuatu by integrating digital tools into traditional practices and knowledge systems. This approach can foster innovation, preserve cultural heritage, and create new avenues for expression and storytelling.

## 10.2. Build Up Acceptance and Enabling Conditions

### 10.2.1. Recommendation 3: Bolster Networks of Support and Mentoring to Promote Awareness and Acceptance of Digital Skills

Coworking spaces play a pivotal role in fostering collaboration and innovation within the emerging digital economy in Fiji and Vanuatu. These spaces provide opportunities for digital professionals to share ideas, network, and support each other. To maximize their impact and promote broader awareness and acceptance of digital tools and approaches, we recommend the following:

- **Expand Coworking Space Roles:** Incentivize and fund coworking spaces to organize workshops, activities, and events targeted at key stakeholder groups, such as women and youth. These spaces can act as hubs for advocacy, helping to spread awareness and foster acceptance of digital approaches beyond their immediate networks.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Leverage active participants in coworking spaces as mentors for women and youth entering the digital economy. Highlight community success stories to inspire and shift perceptions, particularly around the value of digital skills for economic and social empowerment.
- **Community Leadership Engagement:** Involve community leaders and traditional authorities to endorse digital skills training, address cultural concerns, and validate its benefits for families and communities. Their support can help overcome resistance and build trust.
- **Empower Local Champions:** Develop mentorship programs and partner with private firms to provide subsidized access to technology and training for local champions. Showcase their success stories to encourage broader participation.

By strengthening the roles of coworking spaces and integrating these approaches, a robust network of support and mentorship can help accelerate the adoption of digital skills and foster a more inclusive digital economy. Organizations with proven success in these areas should be prioritized for future funding, and collaboration opportunities are detailed in the table on the next page.

Table 12: Organizations to scale up mentoring and support

Country	Organization Name	Areas of Work Centered on Mentoring, Support, Awareness, and Acceptance
Vanuatu	Youth Challenge Vanuatu	Mentoring and support and awareness raising focused on employability for out of school youth
Vanuatu	YumiWork	Utilize coworking space, in partnership with V-LAB, to grow services and mentoring for young entrepreneurs and promote innovation and social entrepreneurship
Vanuatu	Ituani Centre	Create mentoring and support networks that empower the remote and rural populations and create awareness of digital approaches
Fiji	Greenhouse Coworking	Mentoring and training for women entrepreneurs, young girls and women, as well as green entrepreneurship guidance and support through workshops
Fiji	MyDesk	Mentoring and incubation for new entrepreneurs, freelancers and online entrepreneurs with flexible coworking spaces and professional environments
Vanuatu	Youth Challenge Vanuatu	Mentoring and support and awareness raising focused on employability for out of school youth

## 10.3. Grow the Space for Change through Authority and Structures

### 10.3.1. Recommendation 4: Train CSOs and Government to Become Skilled Digital Agents of Change

Scoping study participants from government and CSOs expressed enthusiasm for adopting digital tools and policies but lacked the knowledge and skills to make meaningful progress. A targeted “train-the-influencer” approach is recommended, focusing on equipping policymakers, trainers, and implementers with digital skills relevant to their roles. By integrating digital tools into their work, these individuals can become advocates for digital transformation in the communities they serve.

Tailored training programs should address the specific needs of government and CSO staff, including skills for policy development, program implementation, and public service delivery in a digital environment.

Embedding these programs into professional development frameworks ensures institutional buy-in and sustainability. Strategies may include incorporating digital skills into performance evaluations, offering incentives, and creating continuous learning opportunities to adapt to technological advancements. Leadership training for senior officials is also critical to enable them to champion digital transformation and address its strategic implications.

The lack of specialized ICT training limits the ability of ministries to leverage technology for policy research, analysis, communication, and stakeholder engagement. Addressing these gaps will strengthen digital advocacy, enable effective policy implementation, and enhance stakeholder collaboration. Organizations with a proven track record in these areas should be prioritized for future funding opportunities and are detailed in the table below.

Table 13: Organizations to support the training of government and CSOs

Country	Organization Name	Areas of Training for government and CSOs
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Skills Partnership	Lead training with government and CSOs on digital and soft skills relevant for their work and future advocacy
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Institute of Technology	Lead training with government and CSOs on digital literacy skills relevant for their work and future advocacy
Fiji	TVET Pasifika/ National Training & Productivity Centre	Offer flexible training, while leveraging on digital literacy skills, post training mentoring and support
Fiji	University of the South Pacific-Pacific TAFE	Provide training, post training mentoring and support by leveraging offerings in their current course streams.
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Skills Partnership	Lead training with government and CSOs on digital and soft skills relevant for their work and future advocacy
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Institute of Technology	Lead training with government and CSOs on digital literacy skills relevant for their work and future advocacy

## 10.3.2. Recommendation 5: Elevate Advocacy and Systems Coordination to Enhance the Digital Ecosystem

The digital training landscape is characterized by numerous small-scale projects but lacks the high-level organization and ecosystem support to address systemic challenges. Issues such as shortages of qualified instructors, outdated curricula, limited rural training resources, and coordination gaps among government, NGOs, and the private sector hinder collective progress. To address these barriers, we recommend funding advocacy and coordinating bodies to drive systemic advancements and better align efforts across stakeholders.

- **National Coordination:** Establish a national coordinating body to oversee digital initiatives, enforce standards, and align training programs with industry needs. This body can act as a central hub for collaboration among government, the private sector, and CSOs.
- **Updated Policies and Strategies:** Advocate for the development and regular updates of national digital policies to address outdated frameworks, integrate gender equality considerations, and promote safe online environments. A comprehensive national digital skills strategy should define roles, responsibilities, and clear targets to guide coordinated action.
- **Strengthened Partnerships:** Foster deeper collaboration among government, the private sector, and NGOs to co-create training programs, advocate for inclusive policies, and invest in infrastructure such as resource hubs and rural training centers.
- **Equity-Focused Incentives:** Provide scholarships, affordable device distribution, and connectivity subsidies targeting marginalized groups, particularly women and youth, to ensure equitable participation.
- **Micro-Credentials and Skill Verification:** Promote the adoption of micro-credentials and digital badges to validate learning outcomes, improve accountability, and instill confidence in local training programs.
- **Private Sector Engagement:** Incentivize private sector involvement in training initiatives through subsidized devices, internships, and trusted infrastructure investments.

By addressing systemic challenges through coordinated efforts and strategic investments, the digital training ecosystem can deliver more impactful, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes. Organizations with a history of success in these areas should be considered for funding to help advance this agenda and are detailed in the table below.

Table 14: Organizations to support systems coordination and advocacy

Country	Organization Name	Areas of Advocacy and Systems Coordination
Vanuatu & Fiji	Pacific Island Chapter of the Internet Society (PICISOC)	Plays a crucial role in advocacy and coordination for digital development in the region including policies that promote affordable, secure and reliable internet access.
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Internet Governance Forum	Could leverage existing platforms to exchange information and share good policies and practices that are related to the internet and technologies.
Fiji	National Training and Productivity Center	Could act as a central hub for aligning workforce development with national goals, fostering collaboration among government, private sector, and educational institutions. It could advocate for policies promoting TVET, digital transformation, and workforce inclusivity. Additionally, NTPC could coordinate cross-sector initiatives to address labor market challenges, implement productivity-enhancing technologies, and support underserved communities with training programs.

## 10.4. Areas for Further Research

### 10.4.1. Exploring Legal Protections Against Online Gender-Based Violence in Fiji and Vanuatu

While beyond the scope of this report, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Vanuatu's and Fiji's legal systems address online gender-based violence, further investigation is needed. This could include:

- **Mapping Existing Legal Frameworks:** Identify laws and provisions that specifically address online harassment, cyberbullying, and other forms of gender-based violence.
- **Assessing Enforcement Mechanisms:** Examine procedures for reporting, investigating, and prosecuting online offences targeting women.
- **Evaluating Support Services:** Determine the availability and effectiveness of legal aid, counseling, and other support services for victims.
- **Analyzing Stakeholder Roles:** Understand how government agencies, CSOs, and advocacy groups contribute to ensuring women's online safety.

Given The Asia Foundation's experience and skills in related areas, it may be well-positioned to commission or undertake a thorough analysis of these related policy and enforcement issues. This could help Fiji and Vanuatu strengthen legal protections against online gender-based violence, fostering a safer and more inclusive digital environment for women and girls.

## 10.5. Other Considerations

Based on our research with interview and focus group participants and broader experience in the region, we recommend considering the following when developing training and support opportunities:

- **Multiyear Funding:** Many training providers and government ministries have “pilot fatigue” and find it difficult to participate in short-term funding cycles. Short-term pilots make it challenging for organizations to develop HR capacity and allocate resources efficiently. Where possible, we recommend multiyear funding opportunities to ensure adequate time for organizations to develop and implement projects effectively. We encourage any multiyear projects to include robust measurement and evaluation plans that are appropriate to the context and ensure learning is happening throughout the project lifecycle.
- **Locally Led Efforts:** Fiji and Vanuatu organizations have become increasingly led by national staff, resulting in more contextualized and politically informed approaches to implementation, where staff are encouraged to find ways of working that suit the communities they are serving. The Vanuatu Skills Partnership is a prime example of this approach and is often cited as an exemplar in the region. We encourage any funding for digital skills training and the broader ecosystem to take a local-first approach, prioritizing organizations with local leadership and teams.
- **Donor Coordination and Harmonization:** The donor and development partner context in the Pacific shifts and transforms rapidly. Over the last few years, an increasing number of new partners have entered the region, with increasing budgets. It will be important for The Asia Foundation to coordinate and share emerging practices and highlights of this program and the Go Digital ASEAN program with relevant stakeholders and partners to ensure program successes are passed along and efforts are not duplicated. We’ve noticed frustration amongst partner organizations and governments when development and donor partners are not coordinated, increasing their burden to ensure support is not wasted.

## 11.1. Annex 1: List of Organizations for Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

In Fiji, twenty-nine (28) interviews were conducted, and three (3) focus group discussions were held with the Koroipita Community, the Fiji Disabled Persons Federation, and Rotuma High School. In Vanuatu, sixteen (16) interviews and only one (1) focus group discussion were conducted with the relevant organizations.

The higher number of interviews in both Fiji and Vanuatu was due to the unavailability of some organizations to participate in the focus group discussions, necessitating more interviews to ensure all sectors were represented.

Table 15: List of Organizations and Stakeholders Consulted

Country	Sectors	Organization Name	Engagement Type	Count
Fiji	Business and Private	Digicel	Interview	1
Fiji		Greenhouse Studio (MyDesk)	Interview	1
Fiji		Kastel Technologies	Interview	1
Fiji		Fiji Plaza	Interview	1
Fiji		Sunset Studios	Interview	1
Fiji		Women's Entrepreneurs Business Council	Interview	1
Fiji		Fijian Holdings	Interview	1
Fiji		Prestige Caregivers	Interview	1
Fiji		DATEC	Interview	1
Fiji		BPO/UNDP representative	Interview	1
Fiji	Community or traditional authorities	Village Leaders/Chiefs or Elders/Youth Representatives in Rotuma	Interview	1

Country	Sectors	Organization Name	Engagement Type	Count
Fiji	CSO and Advocacy	National Youth Council of Fiji	Interview	1
Fiji		Femlink Fiji / SPC (Pacific Women Lead)	Interview	1
Fiji		Online Safety Commission	Interview	1
Fiji		USAID	Interview	1
Fiji		Red Cross	Interview	1
Fiji		The Pacific Community (SPC)	Interview	1
Fiji	Education Institute	Fiji National University	Interview	3
Fiji		University of the South Pacific	Interview	2
Fiji	Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship	Pink and Grace	Interview	1
Fiji	Telecom	Internet Service Provider (unnamed)	Interview	1
Fiji	Government	Ministry of Education	Interview	1
Fiji		Fijian Competition & Consumer Commission	Interview	1
Fiji		Ministry of Environment and Climate Change	Interview	1
Fiji		Fiji Police (Ministry of Defence)	Interview	1
Fiji		Ministry of Health	Interview	1
Fiji		Ministry Youth and Sport	Interview	1
Fiji	Research Institution	Fiji Human Resources Institute (FHRI)	Interview	1
Fiji	Youth and Community	Koroipita Community	Focus Group	12
Fiji	CSO and Advocacy	Fiji Disabled Persons Federation & National Council for Persons with Disabilities	Focus Group	9
Fiji	Education	Rotuma High School	Focus Group	4
Vanuatu	Research institution	VARTC (Vanuatu Agricultural Research & Technical Centre)	Interview	2
Vanuatu	Education Institute	Agricultural College	Interview	1

Country	Sectors	Organization Name	Engagement Type	Count
Vanuatu	Government	Department of Finance and Treasury - Financial Management Information System Unit	Interview	2
Vanuatu		Department of Women's Affairs	Interview	1
Vanuatu		Department of Labour	Interview	2
Vanuatu		Ministry of Education and Training	Interview	2
Vanuatu	Private Business	Maua app	Interview	2
Vanuatu	Telecom	TRBR (Telecommunication and Radio Broadcasting Regulator)	Interview	2
Vanuatu	CSO Advocacy	PICISOC/Climate Change	Interview	1
Vanuatu	CSO Advocacy	Youth Challenge Vanuatu	Interview	1
Vanuatu	CSO	Vanuatu Council of Churches	Interview	2
Vanuatu		Sista	Focus Group	3
Vanuatu		Smart Sistas	Interview	1
Vanuatu	Financial Literacy	National Bank of Vanuatu	Interview	1
Vanuatu	Government	The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO/DCDT)	Interview	2
Vanuatu	Education Institute	Ituani Skills Centre	Interview	1
Vanuatu		NUV (National University of Vanuatu)	Interview	1

## 11.2. Annex 2. Key Policies Impacting Digital Access, Skills, and Economic Development

Table 16: Key policies impacting digital access, skills, and economic development

Country	Policies and Programs	Description including Objectives/Key Measures, Funder
Pacific Islands Forum countries (regional framework of 18 member countries and territories, including Fiji and Vanuatu)	<a href="#">Pacific Regional E-commerce Strategy and Roadmap (launched 2021)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A comprehensive plan approved by Forum Trade Ministers aims to develop a transformative "Blue Pacific economy" that encourages active participation in domestic and cross-border e-commerce.</li> <li>● The strategy focuses on increasing e-commerce adoption and includes establishing a regional data collection mechanism and producing regular Digital Economy Reports to guide policymakers.</li> <li>● The plan is designed to create inclusive opportunities for all, specifically targeting women, youth, and marginalized groups, to engage in and benefit from the digital economy.</li> <li>● Specific measures include digital and business skills training for women entrepreneurs (Measure 6.1.5) and promoting digital payment solutions to assist low and moderate-income groups, rural communities, and women with limited access to traditional banking (Measure 5.1.6).</li> <li>● The initiative is funded by DFAT through its E-commerce Aid-for-Trade Fund, with additional support from the Enhance Integrated Framework and the European Development Fund.</li> </ul>
15 Pacific Islands countries, including Fiji & Vanuatu	<a href="#">Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● PacREF is a regional policy guide with the objective of increasing students' digital literacy as part of its broader education goals. It aims to support Pacific countries' education systems in improving their services and achieving their objectives.</li> <li>● PacREF acknowledges the challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including youth, in accessing education and aims to address these through strategies such as developing second chance and alternative pathways, inclusive education programs, and promoting gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities.</li> <li>● PacREF was supported by funding from the Global Partnership on Education through the Asian Development Bank.</li> </ul>
Multiple Pacific Island countries, including Fiji and Vanuatu	<a href="#">eSafety Commissioner (eSafety)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Australia's independent regulator for online safety, running initiatives across Southeast Asia and the Pacific under the Cyber and Critical Technology Program led by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)</li> <li>● eSafety activities and online safety projects are conducted, assisting Pacific Islands governments in exploring local and global online safety strategies, including:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Building Online Safety Capabilities in the Pacific:</b> eSafety works with Fiji's Online Safety Commission to prevent online harm, safeguard individuals by handling complaints, and collaborate with the online industry. Vanuatu is a participant in online safety workshops hosted by the eSafety Commissioner</li> <li><b>2. Training for Frontline Workers in the Pacific:</b> Identify and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence through capacity development and strengthening national and regional policy responses to this issue. These training sessions are piloted in several Pacific Islands countries, with plans for expansion through local partners.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

Country	Policies and Programs	Description including Objectives/Key Measures, Funder
Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu	One Laptop per Child (OLPC) initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● One of the earlier pilots to improve literacy using technology (launched around 2008) but it was not scaled up after the pilot phase.</li> <li>● Collaboration between the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, SPC and Pacific Islands Forum, and Pacific Islands governments.</li> </ul> <a href="#">Source 1</a> , <a href="#">source 2</a> , <a href="#">source 3</a>
Regional	<a href="#">Pacific Digital Economy Programme</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Launched in 2021, the program is funded by DFAT and the EU and implemented by UNDP, UNCDF, and UNCTAD.</li> <li>● The initiative aims to close the digital divide in the region and empower target groups to enhance market participation, contributing to poverty reduction, better livelihoods, and economic growth.</li> <li>● Target groups include seasonal workers, women, MSMEs, youth, and rural communities.</li> <li>● Key activities focus on supporting start-ups and businesses by providing resources and networks for new ventures and innovative digital services, and equipping partners with digital tools for business operations, e-commerce, and digital payments.</li> </ul>
Regional	<a href="#">Pacific Islands Digital Skills Program</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Aims to improve digital skills in the region. (source)</li> <li>● Since 2016, it has offered training and support to teachers, students, and businesses, reaching over 10,000 people with digital skills training. It has also created resources, including online courses and toolkits, to aid digital learning</li> <li>● Funded by the Australian Government</li> </ul>
Regional	<a href="#">Pacific Regional Digital Strategy</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Aims to support economic growth, sustainable development, effective governance, and security in Pacific Forum Countries by promoting robust, market-driven ICT sectors. Includes the Framework for Action on ICT for Development in the Pacific</li> <li>● It is an initiative under the <a href="#">Pacific Plan</a> (endorsed by Forum leaders in 2006) and funded through contributions by Forum Island countries, support from regional organizations, and development partners.</li> <li>● ICT Overview in Fiji and Vanuatu based on the report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fiji: has been moving toward market liberalization, with a focus on e-government strategic plans and policies, and has experienced substantial growth in mobile phone penetration due to competition between service providers</li> <li>○ Vanuatu: has seen progress in ICT accessibility through market liberalization and the entry of a new mobile operator, leading to an expansion of mobile coverage to over 80% of the population</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Country	Policies and Programs	Description including Objectives/Key Measures, Funder
Pacific Islands Forum	Political Leadership and Regionalism, People-Centered Development, Peace and Security, Resource and Economic Development, Climate Change and Disasters, Ocean and Environment, and Technology and Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent</a> is a comprehensive, long-term plan developed to address the unique challenges and opportunities facing the region.</li> <li>● The strategy outlines seven interconnected thematic areas with specific objectives and key measures to promote sustainable development, resilience, and well-being for all Pacific peoples.</li> <li>● The Inclusion and Equity Strategic Pathway aims to guarantee that all Pacific peoples are protected and can participate and prosper in their societies. The strategy underscores the need to listen to and respond to the voices and aspirations of all Pacific peoples, particularly young people and children.</li> <li>● The 2050 Strategy is guided by Pacific values and principles, including respect for national sovereignty, cultural diversity, and traditional knowledge.</li> <li>● The strategy was published in 2022 by the PIFS.</li> </ul>
Pacific Islands Countries	<a href="#">The South Pacific Digital Literacy Framework (SPDLF)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The SPDLF, developed by researchers in the Pacific around 2020, aims to provide a comprehensive framework for assessing and developing digital literacy skills in the Pacific Island region.</li> <li>● It is the foundation for two digital literacy tools: digitlitFJ and DLIP (Digital Literacy Intervention Program).</li> <li>● More information below under 1.1 Digital Literacy and Access to Technology Policies</li> </ul>

