

Vanuatu, UN partner to test drones for vaccines delivery to inaccessible communities

14 June 2017 – The Government of Vanuatu and the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) are partnering to launch what may be the Pacific’s first-ever trial of drones to deliver life-saving vaccines to inaccessible remote communities in the island nation.

“UNICEF is excited to work with the Government of Vanuatu to support this initiative,” [said](#) the UN agency’s Pacific Representative, Sheldon Yett, in a news release. “Ensuring vaccines are consistently available in isolated and remote communities is one of the keys to sustaining high rates of immunisation. We welcome innovative measures to ensure that every child is reached.”

The Government is [inviting applications](#) from companies to test their Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems (RPAS) technology for transportation of cargo in the Pacific. Successful applicants will be assessed for a long-term engagement with the Government.

Increasing availability, performance and declining cost of drones offer innovative opportunities in challenging environments such as Vanuatu.

An archipelago of 83 islands that run 1,600 kilometres north to south, 65 of which are inhabited and around 20 of which have airfields and established roads, Vanuatu faces considerable logistical challenges to reach, engage with and support remote communities.



Aerial shot of Emae Island in Vanuatu with Cooks Reef in the foreground.
Photo:Vanuatu Helicopters/2017/Andy Martin

This initiative explores options that allow the Government to enhance service delivery and significantly reduce costs as it does not require massive investment in infrastructure and transport.

“This is a milestone for Vanuatu,” [said](#) Director General of the Ministry of Health, George Taleo. “If the trial shows that vaccine delivery using drones can work, and that it can be integrated into our existing national and provincial systems, then it will change the way we operate forever. If it works, we will allow us to better ensure availability of health supplies to our people even at community aid post levels.”