



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24



'Challenging Conditions'  
TANBOK Primary School build,  
August 2023

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## OUR MISSION

The Tanbok Project is a charitable organisation, based in London UK, fostering community-led sustainable development in Vanuatu.



### COMMUNITY LED

We work directly with communities in Vanuatu on the development projects they choose.



### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

We work in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



### DISASTER RELIEF

We're on hand to assist with short and long-term relief when natural disasters strike.

TANBOK  
PROJECT



REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1162050  
[WWW.TANBOKPROJECT.ORG](https://www.tanbokproject.org)

## 2023-24 IN REVIEW

In a nutshell: one school build, a category 4 cyclone, two category 5 cyclones, a departing trustee, and a global cost of living crisis. Suffice to say it's been a bumper year, and one that has tested the mettle of our small organisation. It has been a stark reminder of the importance of smaller, community focussed charities like ours, and what the limitless potential for positive impact is if we can continue, and indeed scale our work. Read on if you find that a scintillating prospect!

We were of course delighted that after countless years of delays, we finally broke ground at Tanbok School. Design and build partners CAUKIN Studio conceded that the combination of a complex brief, skyrocketing project costs (due to global economic factors) and hostile weather conditions made this the trickiest project they had ever been involved with. So we are proud and delighted to be able to sign off on our first (perhaps not last) project at Tanbok School - at long last. Read about all the trials and tribulations, as well as many successes, in the project report included in the final section.

This success came against a backdrop of unprecedented challenges faced by the nation of Vanuatu. 4 months before we arrived, the dual cyclones of Judy (cat 4) and Kevin (cat 5) ravaged the country, compounding the recovery from 2020's mid-pandemic Cyclone Harold. Once again, communities were plunged back into a cycle of emergency survival and recovery, despite still being surrounded by scars from Harold. Then, on 19th October 2023, just a few weeks after our build team waved goodbye to newly forged lifelong relationships with the families of Tanbok, yet another disaster struck: Category 5 Cyclone Lola.

Meanwhile in the UK, our wonderful founding Trustee, Tom Stevenette, made the difficult decision to stand down from the board on account of family and work pressures. And with time pressures taking a toll for all of us, the viability of continuing our work continues to weigh heavy on our minds. Without a doubt, 'recruitment' will be the name of the game for the next year! (Know someone suitable? Get in touch!)

## OUTLOOK FOR NEXT YEAR 24-25

- Recruitment of new trustees, volunteers, advisors
- Secure funding and consider alternative financing mechanisms for future projects
- Further develop processes for community consultation, ensuring openness, accessibility and continuous input mechanisms are in place
- Maintain continuous dialogue with Vanuatu's people and communities



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## Weathering the Storm:

### Return to Ranwas

[left] Ranwas Primary School, Aug '23

[right] Library Books, meticulously stored, Aug '23



## FUNDRAISING REPORT

In the first part of the year, our attention was focussed on the Tanbok build and working within the budget we had. Things got tight, though, and we were delighted to receive - mid-build - donations from CAUKIN participants' friends and family, as well as long-term supporters that kept us afloat. After the build, when Cyclone Lola hit, we tried to organise online fundraising campaigns as we have in the past, but a combination of social media algorithm changes, the global cost of living crisis, and perhaps other factors limited the success of this campaign to £1,500. We are reviewing how to disburse these funds fairly and impactfully.

## GOODBYE TOM

Founding Trustee Tom Stevenette has given notice of his intention to step down in the next period as he juggles new parenthood with pressures at work, but has kindly agreed to stay on while a few loose ends are tied up. Tom joined the board in 2015 following on from his own great adventure in Vanuatu a few years before, and has always been motivated by a genuine passion for Vanuatu's culture and people. It's been a joy working with him over the years, and sharing in his delight for Vanuatu. We will greatly miss his keen knowledge and understanding of sustainable development, and his calm, pragmatic and inclusive approach to tackling difficult decisions. Big boots to fill! Thank you, Tom, for your years of service.

## RETURNING TO RANWAS

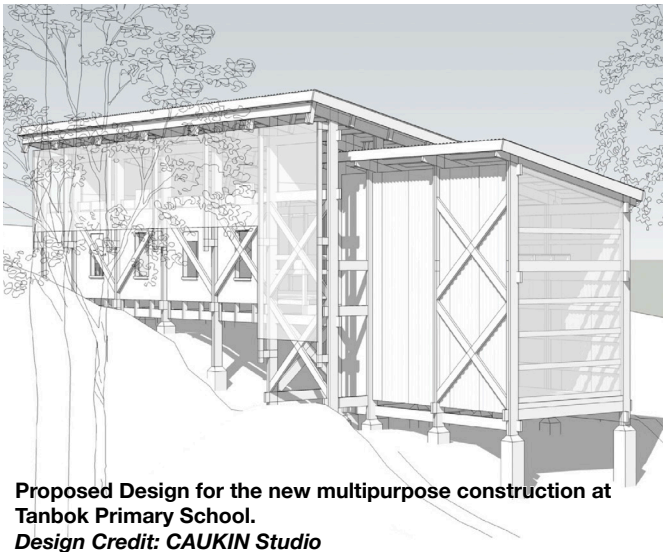
The summer 2023 visit to Pentecost provided an invaluable opportunity to re-visit our previous project at Ranwas. We were aware that the structure had withstood all three major cyclones that struck since we left, but even so, we weren't sure what we'd find in person.

The building looked to be holding up remarkably well, and lush greenery now framed the building beautifully. There was very little evidence of the severity of the cyclones that had passed, save a little damage to some decorative timbers, and paintwork didn't 'pop' as much as it used to. Signs of use were everywhere - from the new guttering and water tank, to literal signs signifying things like 'office'. Some feedback that we captured touched on things like the lack of roof overhang (a cyclone-proofing measure) allowing the elements in through the windows when unshuttered, as well as the slope of the roof being so great that maintenance teams were too scared to climb up for maintenance - and too steep to accommodate solar panels. All this feedback will be taken into consideration for future projects, as well as future maintenance programmes.

## PIPELINE PROJECTS

On the one hand, we are utterly buoyed by our successes in Ranwas and Tanbok - proving that it is possible to build inspiring and cyclone-proof buildings on a small budget; on the other, our trustees have very limited capacity to give the work the time it requires. We are aware that the need for such projects has never been greater, and that there is great potential to improve the ways we work with communities at all stages of the design and build - meaning our work is truly cut out for us. The board of trustees has pledged to try to carry at least one more project over the line: a prototype residential cyclone-proof 'safe house', for which we have some hope of securing funding. But succeeding in this will be subject to increasing the capacity of the board - and that means recruiting more trustees and volunteers. And so, this is what we look to next.

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## PROJECT REPORT: TANBOK SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION 2023

The goal of building a library for Tanbok Primary School that could enable books to withstand the omnipresent haze of mist and damp that cloaks the village of Tanbok for most months of the year has been the *raison d'être* of the Tanbok Project since before we even officially became the Tanbok Project. But it all changed when in 2015 Category 5 Cyclone Pam seemingly opened a floodgate of disaster, unleashing a slew of record-breaking cyclones that have born down upon Vanuatu's islands almost every year since. These unrelenting challenges had changed the priorities of the Tanbok School community, and we evolved alongside: having lost the majority of its classrooms and infrastructure, Tanbok primary school needed far more than a place to store books. Nevertheless, we had a finite budget of just £30,000 - hard fought over many years of fundraising - which we would need to stretch across the many needs of the school.

CAUKIN Studio did not snub this budget, instead pledging to tackle the challenge of the book storage, whilst also providing a classroom, a teachers' office, and play space for the children - all of which would be designed with support from academics and engineers to ensure as much resistance to cyclones as is possible to achieve. And they would also oversee the construction, utilizing international students right alongside community builders and volunteers, disseminating as much information about the design and build process as possible - including vital techniques and strategies for cyclone-proofing buildings.

In this way, CAUKIN make the most outstanding partners for small charities like us, vastly amplifying the impacts of our limited spending power. Our second project together, it was truly a delight to work with them again.

After so many years in the pipeline, at 5.30am on Monday 10th July 2023, a bleary-eyed consortium of CAUKIN students assembled at the domestic terminal of Port Vila's Bauerfield Airport to board their Twin Otter (on loan from Solomon Airways) for their flight out of the world they knew, to the island Pentecost. The large group totally filled the plane, meaning that awkwardly, CAUKIN leaders Harry and Alden as well as Rachel - chaperone on behalf of Tanbok Project, 1 year old daughter affixed to her back - were unable to fit and had to wait for a seat to become available on a subsequent Air Vanuatu flight (this turned out to be the same day for Harry and Alden, a plane that broke down midway and deposited them on a different island, and a full 4 weeks later for Rachel - who, fortuitously could spend the intervening time in Vila chasing down missing materials and paying invoices). Now without leaders or a chaperone, the team found themselves landing on Pentecost alone. Not to worry: enter Joda Bule, the jovial and charismatic chair of the Tanbok School Committee, who met the team at Lonorore airport, and almost single-handedly (or on the other end of the phone to Rachel) handled all of the island logistics hereon in.

A swim in the waterfall, lunch at Ranwadi (the sprawling secondary boarding school), a nap on the beach, some further time-killing as they awaited news of diverted flight carrying Harry and Alden (now arriving the next day by boat), then the bumpy road up to Tanbok (the road improvement works would not be reaching



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Tanbok for another 2 years) filled the day, daylight starting to fade by the time the vehicles pulled up into the trademark mist of Tanbok village. Henceforth, the students would have new families, new names even, to carry them through their time in Tanbok – alongside their new closest companions: kava, and mud. Welcome to Central Pentecost. Of course, there was dancing too.

We learnt from our previous project in Ranwas, and this time, the first tranches of materials began arriving the very next day (and so did Harry and Alden, phew). So it was straight to work! Very quickly, the challenges of the sloping school site, the rain, the mud and the cool temperatures (not what you might expect from your summer holiday on a South Pacific island) started to make themselves known. Muddy clothes were washed daily, but would take days to dry. The smell of damp was omnipotent. Work was slow going as the rain asserted its supremacy. Frustration grew as the metal footings needed to complete the foundations were still stuck on a ship on their way to Port Vila. Fresh fruit and vegetables were in short supply following the damage to fruit trees by cyclones Kevin and Judy earlier in the year. Local root vegetables and laplap were not wholly popular. It was by no means an easy project, not in the preparation, and not in the delivery.

But there was a great swell of kinship from the community, kava was free-flowing throughout the night – every night, there were kastom ceremonies and kastom dancing, and that rare opportunity to be totally immersed in a place and culture so other from ones' own. Indeed, the cultural exchange went two ways, with the diverse group of students able to bring something of their own cultures and places to this quiet corner of Central Pentecost. When your heart is full, you don't mind the mildew half so much.

After 4 weeks, the dirty work of going into the ground, building and erecting the frames of the structure was near complete, and it was time for a change of the guard. Amid tears of sorrow for the departing first team, jubilation as team two arrived (along with Rachel and some missing materials), unlocking the next suite of tasks: the final frames, flooring, roofing, cladding, landscaping, and fitting out. The sun even came out for a day.

The question of cladding for the building was long-contemplated during the design phase, with various options being weighed up for their suitability to withstand damp, rot, cyclones and earthquakes, sustainability, price, aesthetic, and so on, without requiring ongoing expensive maintenance. In the end, a mosaic of options were selected, which will be monitored over subsequent years to understand how the different materials perform and age. These included different types of treated timber imported from New Zealand, as well as a hardwood extracted from the nearby forest and milled on site with a chainsaw!

Sadly, one casualty of the weather-induced delays (combined with delivery delays on a few key items including the blowtorch) was that the charred section of the cladding never came to fruition – the idea being that charring the surface of wood in a hot flame creates a protective layer that is resistant to rot, and would slow down the



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decomposition. We hope to have the opportunity to return one day to see this through, as it remains one of the most viable and low-cost strategies for combatting Tanbok's problems with damp and wood rot.

As the sounds of squelching mud, hammering and power tools echoed out from the construction site, a major behind-the-scenes task was the excavation of dozens of boxes of books that the school had received in donations from various NGOs over the years. The lack of a suitable storage place meant that these boxes had remained untouched till now. Even though they had been sat on shelves in a bunker-like concrete office, the moisture had still penetrated, and many layers of mulch had to be sacrificed in order to access a core of serviceable books with turnable pages. A keen reminder of our 'origin story' and the series of events leading to that moment. Then came the meticulous task of indexing and labelling, categorizing, logging, and eventually, once the shelf construction had been completed, of transferring the still sizeable number of books to their new homes.

The urge to read is quite incredible. Even as books beyond repair were being cast away, flocks of children would gather around in a hustle for handfuls of discarded pages. Within moments, these morsels of books would be distributed to all corners of the village, where standalone passages from stories would be poured over by teams of young eyes in the firelight of the kitchen. There is considerable joy in knowing these books have now seen the light of day, and that the children at Tanbok will at last have the opportunity to independently explore the magic of reading.

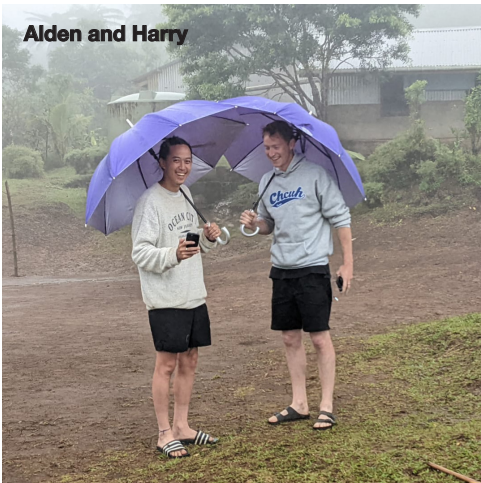
The CAUKIN teams and army of builders that turned out from the community worked tirelessly throughout the 8 week build period, pausing only when the mud and rain made working conditions impossible. Even though we had learned many lessons about how to procure materials to site on time, the unavoidable delays of key materials like the metal footings threatened to derail the entire timeline. A (costly) solution was found at the 11th hour, thanks to an unexpected donation from family and friends of one of the CAUKIN students, which we can genuinely credit with enabling the construction to get back on track. It was an extremely tight schedule to the bitter end, but there was no option but to finish; and, of course, finish they did!

The emotions rode high for all involved, and certainly we can say that 8 weeks after breaking ground, an exhausted yet satisfied cohort of CAUKIN students departed Vanuatu to slowly make their way back to their studies in the UK. The teachers, families and builders of Tanbok could also enjoy some well-earned peace and quiet – but not for long, it turned out, with Category 5 Cyclone Lola arriving just 3 weeks later. The village nakamal, which had hosted many, many kava nights with the CAUKIN team, was flattened, as were so many other buildings and homes throughout the village and island. As our hearts ache for the loss experienced by our friends and family in Tanbok (and across Vanuatu), we take comfort in the fact the new building emerged without so much as a scratch: this is a huge credit to the architects at CAUKIN, and





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Alden and Harry



CAUKIN first cohort of students



CAUKIN second cohort of students



Joda Bule

Ms Emmy

and all those who painstakingly brought that design to life. It shows that cyclone-proof design works, and that we must continue to find ways of making these techniques affordable and accessible to those on the cyclone front line. This work matters, it can and does make a difference. We plan to continuously evaluate the project, including a future return to start to study how the building and its materials are coping, in order to build upon this learning journey and inform future projects. We very much look forward to reporting on those updates when the time comes.

## WITH THANKS

The list of acknowledgements of those without whom this project would not have been possible is almost too long to mention, but here goes:

To **CAUKIN**: thank you for turning our humble budget into something spectacular. The time, energy and skill you brought goes beyond our wildest expectation – thank you for sharing in our belief of the project. To **Harry and Alden**, thank you for the personal commitment and everything you did to get the build finished on time. To the **CAUKIN students**: thank you for your interest, financial contributions, fundraising efforts, and for braving all that mud! The building stands as testament to your skills and hard work. We hope it was a life-affirming experience that will stay with you forever.

To **Joda, Ms Emmy, Mr Harold, Mr Jan and all the host families**: thank you for your hospitality, affection and huge time commitment in hosting the team. To chief Peter, and all the Tanbok Community: thank you too for welcoming the team and making the experience so special, and for the immeasurable hard work put in on site by all.

To the **Tanbok community in Port Vila**: thank you for providing vital logistical support, from airport collections (**John and Mr Agasten** in particular) to chasing down shipping information and hardware deliveries. Thank you to our suppliers, especially **Vila Distribution Hardware** and **Wilko** for making sure deliveries went out on time. And to **Vanuatu Ferry** for your smooth shipping service and making payment easy.

To Bubu **John Bule** (in heaven): thank you for believing in the school and believing in the project. Your steadfast commitment set this whole process in motion. To **Revd Andrew Wakefield** (in heaven): thank you too for believing in the project and believing that the Christian fellowship of a small community in SW London could have a role in making such a project happen.

To the **St Andrews community in Wimbledon**: thank you for backing the project, for humouring Rachel for all those years, and for the huge fundraising efforts. In the end, this made up half the overall budget.

Thank you to our **donors from all over the world**: the entire project was funded by one-off donations through appeals and fundraising events. Look what we can achieve when many contribute a little! And thank you to all those **supporters** (in Vanuatu, the UK, and all over the world) who have personally supported the project in other ways – from organising fundraising events, to running marathons, to providing themoral support needed to drag the project over the line. Thank you to our **Trustees** for overseeing the whole process. Apologies to anyone we've missed: it's been a real team effort, it was only possible through every single person performing their part. **Thank you to everyone for playing their part!**

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## JOIN OUR TEAM

**Would you, or someone you know, be interested in becoming a trustee for the Tanbok Project?**

We are looking for anyone over the age of 18, ideally a UK resident (though not mandatory), with a bit of time and energy to offer in helping us continue to deliver sustainability and disaster relief projects in Vanuatu. Knowledge of Vanuatu is an asset but not essential.

Future projects could include: further cyclone-proof reconstruction, disaster response, developing prototype housing, education programmes, even environmental remediation. The main resource we are lacking is time - so we are happy to consider anyone who feels they have some to offer!

We would also welcome anyone with relevant expertise or skills in the following areas:

**Finance, accounting, fundraising, digital and social media, communication, sustainability, sustainable development, community engagement, architecture, design, engineering, Melanesian culture, project management, governance.**

Who this role might suit: an altruistic person who just wants to make the world a better place(!); a student or young person looking to gain experience; a recent graduate in a relevant field wanting to put your education to action - whilst gaining something unusual to add to the CV; a retired person looking for a rewarding way to put your knowledge and experience to good use; a professional (at any career stage) looking for charitable or 'field' experience; anyone with a particular interest in Vanuatu and/or Melanesia.

Please reach out via social media or [hello@tanbokproject.org](mailto:hello@tanbokproject.org) if this is of interest.







CHARITY COMMISSION  
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Charity Name  
The Tanbok Project

No (if any)  
1162050

## Receipts and payments accounts

CC16a

For the period  
from

Period start date  
4/1/2023

To

Period end date  
3/31/2024

### Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
<b>A1 Receipts</b>					
Donations	3,832	-	-	3,832	1,980
Amazon cashback	21	-	-	21	19
Other	100	-	-	100	-
Fundraising Events		-	-	-	1,098
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub total</b> (Gross income for AR)	3,953	-	-	3,953	3,097
<b>A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).</b>					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub total</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total receipts</b>	3,953	-	-	3,953	3,097
<b>A3 Payments</b>					
Banking fees	62	-	-	62	-
Architect design fees	2,000	-	-	2,000	-
Evaluation field expenses	187	-	-	187	-
Tanbok School Construction expenses	30,963	-	-	30,963	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub total</b>	33,212	-	-	33,212	-
<b>A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)</b>					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub total</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total payments</b>	33,212	-	-	33,212	-
<b>Net of receipts/(payments)</b>	- 29,259	-	-	- 29,259	3,097
<b>A5 Transfers between funds</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>A6 Cash funds last year end</b>	32,423	-	-	32,423	29,326
<b>Cash funds this year end</b>	3,164	-	-	3,164	32,423



## Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Cash funds - banked	3,164	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	<b>Total cash funds</b>	<b>3,164</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK

	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-

	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities	Outstanding Tanbok expense claims	Unrestricted	1,020	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	

Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees

Signature	Print Name	Date of approval
	RACHEL BROOKS	1/31/2025
	ROBERT BROOKS	1/31/2025