



Report Solomon Islands National Review

On the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action &
The outcomes of the twenty third special session of the General Assembly

**Honiara
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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CBSI	Central Bank of Solomon Islands
CCC	Christian Care Centre
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSP	Community Sector Program
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EVAW	Elimination of Violence against Women
FSC	Family Support Centre
G4C	Girls for Change
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEPG	Gender Equality in Political Governance
GEWD	Solomon Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Development
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights
IMCI	Integrated management of childhood illness
KGA	Kastom Gaden Association
M4C	Markets for Change
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MNURP	Ministry of National Unity Reconciliation and Peace
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
NAP WPS	National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security
NHSP	National Health Strategic Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
PEIN	Pacific Environment Information Network
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PIPSO	Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation
PWDO	Provincial Women's Development Officer
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RRRT	Regional Rights Resource Team
SBD	Solomon Dollar
SCA	Save the Children Australia
SIDT	Solomon Islands Development Trust
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SINCW	Solomon Islands National Council of Women
SINDS	Solomon Islands National Development Strategy
SIWIBA	Solomon Islands Women in Business Association
SPBD	South Pacific Business Development Microfinance (Solomon Islands) Ltd
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TSM	Temporary Special Measures
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UN	United Nations
VBMS	Vois Blong Mere Solomon
WIL	Women in Leadership
WISDM	Women in Shared Decision Making
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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Section One: Overview Analysis of Achievements and Challenges since 1995

- A. What are the country's three to five major achievements in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly?

The three major achievements for Solomon Islands are:

- a) Increased recognition of gender equality
- b) Increased economic empowerment of women;
- c) Increased national awareness on gender based violence.

Why are these considered to be the major achievements? Please provide evidence that supports this assessment.

The reasons for selecting these three are discussed below according to the three achievements.

i) Increased recognition of gender equality

Twenty years on from the inception of the Beijing Conference, the biggest achievement for the Solomon Islands Government is the increased recognition of gender equality within the government structures and in terms of policy especially in the formulation of gender policies and institutional mechanisms to coordinate the implementation of these policies. The development of draft legislation for the promotion of gender equality¹ was also a result of this increased recognition of gender equality within the government and among the public.

A major catalyst for this increased recognition was the establishment of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) in 2007. It was the national women's machinery, the hub from which these gender policies were generated; policies such as the 2010 Solomon Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) and the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) policy.

Gender equality was not a common term in Solomon Islands in the last twenty years due to well defined segregation of women and men's roles, from the tasks they do to their specific areas of responsibilities as determined by cultural norms. The concept was only introduced in the mid 90's by the Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW) after its establishment in the 1980's.²

The ratification of several UN Human Rights Conventions³ and the CEDAW in 2002 by the Solomon Islands Government, provided a conducive environment for the SINCW to continue its awareness of gender equality in and out of the government sector, resulting in better understanding of gender equality and the endorsement of the first Solomon Islands National Women's Policy by the government.⁴

However it took a while for these positive outcomes to happen due to constant shifting of the women's development portfolio from one government ministry to another,⁵ with most women's

¹ Drafting of legislation such as the Family Protection Bill

² SIG, Beijing + 5 Report, *Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century*, Honiara, June 2000

³ The Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

⁴ An example is that although the Solomon Islands National Women's Policy was endorsed by the SIG in early 2000 its implementation was not seriously pursued as the belief in gender equality was seen as a foreign concept which was not a priority.

⁵ E.g. the Women's Division was placed under the Ministry of Home Affairs until early 2007

programmes restricted to traditional women's activities such as cooking and sewing and with little understanding on women's development issues.

It is also fair to say that women too were coming to terms with these new concepts so it took a while for women to not only understand the concept of gender equality but also to be convinced that it was 'right' for Solomon Islands.

Addressing issues that restrict gender equality such as violence against women was also difficult in those days due to the lack of awareness and the belief that there was nothing wrong with men beating their wives or brothers beating their sisters. Hence women continued to be marginalised in all aspects of development, at home, in their communities and at the national and provincial levels.

The endorsement of GEWD was a major achievement on its own for Solomon Islands women. It complemented the 'unfinished' business of previous work to strengthen national machineries within government to promote gender equality in ministerial policies, programmes and activities.

Positive results were becoming visible such as the setting up of gender focal points and gender policies by the Ministry of Women within all the twenty four (24) government ministries.

With the GEWD in place the Ministry of Women was able to organise strategic women's developmental programmes and activities which were highly visible within communities thus raising awareness among the public on gender issues such as domestic violence and women's political leadership.

Other contributing factors to the increased recognition of gender equality among the public included the conducting of public launches to mark women's achievements such as the launch of the Solomon Islands Family Health & Safety Study (2009); the launch of the GEWD & EVAW Policies (2010); the launch of the CEDAW Report (2012) and launch of a CEDAW Resource publication, on Protecting Women's Human Rights in SI Law launched in 2010.

The publication is based on SI CEDAW obligations to work towards the modification of its legislation in accordance with the articles of the Convention. The publication translates CEDAW into plain language and in a Solomon Islands context to expand knowledge of government on women's human rights and to give civil society organisations a tool to lobby for CEDAW implementation into domestic legislations; and the launch of the CEDAW Report (2012).⁶

Furthermore, annual celebrations such as the International Women's Day and 16 Days of Activism on Violence against Women which were celebrated at the national and provincial levels, attracted many people to the events enabling increased awareness of gender equality in the country. Currently the Ministry of Women is planning to launch the International Rural Women's Day and the Women's Economic Strategy in July 2014.

Another positive initiative was the mandating of the Public Service Commission (PSC) was by the Government to place under the Service Agreement of all Permanent Secretaries (PS) several gender tasks. These included gender equality indicators; the identification and establishment of gender focal points in each PSS' respective ministries; identifying a gender implementation strategy as part of the ministries' corporate plans; evidence of gender profiles and statistics collected and disseminated; zero tolerance on work place harassment including sexual harassment; and a gender report to be part of PS's monthly and annual reporting

⁶ Information from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, May, 2014

responsibilities. Such measures enabled the understanding of decision makers such as the Permanent Secretaries on gender equality hence opening up opportunities for meaningful contributions and participation by decision makers (PS's) in addressing gender issues in the Public Service.

The 'ripple' effect created by the increased awareness of gender equality included the promotion of the need for the introduction of Special Temporary Measures or TSM, a subject raised by the Women in Shared Decision Making (WISDM) Coalition, led by the Ministry of Women and collaborated on by other women's organisations, government and non-government stakeholders and donors, to reserve 10 seats in Parliament for women. This move resulted in the inclusion of a clause in the Political Parties Integrity Bill (PPIB) for all parties to ensure that 10% of their election candidates must be women.⁷ The passing of the PPIB this month (May 2014) meant that women now have the opportunity to contest the next coming National General Elections in November this year (2014) under the banner of any political party of their affiliation.

Apart from the GEWD and the EVAW, which emphasized zero tolerance to violence against women, the Ministry has also successfully developed the Family Protection Bill (FPB) to address domestic violence and all other forms of violence against women.

Another major achievement for the Government has been the endorsement of the FPB by Cabinet this month (May 2014) ready for its submission to the Parliament sitting in July/August this year.

One other positive outcome has been the establishment of 'Safenet' a network of service providers created by the Ministry of Women to collaborate to assist victims of domestic violence.⁸

All these initiatives, continue to increase the awareness of gender equality in the country and anecdotal evidence has it that they have led to increased female leadership within the government ministries e.g. a female now heads the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force as Acting Police Commissioner; another is now the first Solomon Islands female ever to be appointed as a High Commissioner and the current Solomon Islands High Commissioner to New Zealand with another Solomon Islands female as her First Secretary.

Other examples of increased women in leadership positions include a new female Deputy Director of the Policy, Planning and Project management division of the Ministry of Fisheries; and until 2011 there were 5 female permanent secretaries within five government ministries and 3 female undersecretaries. Currently the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has increased the number of females for their international desks and divisions⁹ as well. A woman is also the Clerk to the National Parliament of Solomon Islands and a woman also heads one of the successful provincial shipping businesses in the country.

These may be small steps but for a very traditional and strong male dominated country such as Solomon Islands, they are great achievements that confirms increased awareness and understanding of gender equality in the country.

⁷ The Political Parties Integrity Bill 2014

⁸ There is also the strengthening of Safenet through an MOU signed between 5 service providers including the RSIPF, SWD, PubSol, FSC & CCC. Funding by govt now extended to NGO VAW service providers on an annual basis e.g CCC and FSC

⁹ e.g.; 1 female head of the Legal Division, another the Assistant Secretary of the Europe Branch and one more Assistant Secretary of the Pacific Branch.

ii) Increased economic empowerment of women;

The last Solomon Islands Beijing +5 Report,¹⁰ showed few Solomon Islands women entrepreneurs whose small businesses were traditional and low income earning who lacked business management skills and access to credit. Although a Solomon Islands Women's Business Association (SIWBA) was in existence then there were no coordinating and networking mechanisms in place or qualified women leaders to assist its female business members to access training, funds and credit facilities to boost their business efforts.

Twenty years on, the Solomon Islands Government is pleased to see a noticeable rise in the creation of women's business groups and individual women's small enterprises both in Honiara and in the rural communities.

Factors that contribute to this increase in women's entrepreneurship efforts includes efforts by financial institutions such as the Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI), the local Banks (ANZ and Westpac) and certain locally based international organisations such as the Oxfam Australia and World Vision International all developing financial inclusion programmes in the country.¹¹

The lack of employment opportunities for women in the country¹² and effects of the global financial crisis has 'forced' women to find ways to generate income and it is not rare anymore to see women selling betelnut and cigarettes on roadside stalls for that extra cash.

Another factor for the increased engagement of women in entrepreneurship can be attributed to easier access of women to training, credit facilities and opportunities to market and sell their goods and another factor is that more Solomon Islands women are academically trained in the field of business and accountancy; are forming women's business associations and opening up their doors, knowledge and skills to other less fortunate women entrepreneurs.

One such women's business association is the long-time established SIWBA which now has a membership that extends 500 and which is led by qualified business women. For example the former SIWBA President who is still an active member has a Master of Commerce (Accountancy) from the University of Queensland and is also a woman entrepreneur, doing general consultancy and capacity building work in the business field since 2006. Other SIWBA executive members are also recipients of short courses, certificates, diplomas, bachelors and masters and own their own businesses, earning income from their personal business endeavours.¹³

These women have enhanced SIWBA to develop better organisational strategies that focuses on gender equality in business, promoting and developing and empowering women's participation in the private sector. SIWBA now has a following of around 500 women and is registered with national entities such as the Chamber of Commerce. This opens up opportunities for SIWBA to participate in national and regional business forums and trainings, for example linking the Association with the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO) allowing them to be represented at a Trade Pasifika event.

¹⁰ Beijing +5 UN Special Session: Report, Gender, Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century; Country Report on the Solomon Islands Government's Implementation of the UN Women's Global Platform for Action, Honiara, June 2000

¹¹ The Central Bank of Solomon Islands financial inclusion programme is aiming to give 70,000 people access to banking and to provide access to 30,000 women. That target has been reached.

¹² The numbers of women in the formal sector is very low with the public service only having 9% female employees and the formal private sector only 14%.

¹³ Information from Rose Isukana, former President of SIWBA

Although SIWBA does not provide credit to its members it facilitates members' access to private credit entities such as the Micro Credit Scheme since 2013 which charges 20% weekly interest repayments.

SIWBA has provided its members with training to improve their businesses which ranges from dress making, food and catering, accommodation and real estate, newspaper and media, trading stores, bakery, transportation, consultancies in business skills, business advice and book keeping and results are happening for example there is a noticeable difference in the quality of apparel that the members of SIWBA are now producing for sale.

Once a quarter, SIWBA stages its 'Mere Market' (women's market) opening up the opportunity for its members and any busy mothers who do not necessarily own a business or are not members of SIWBA to sell their goods at a central location in Honiara City. One of their executive members say that the initiative is about a complete value chain and economic empowerment, so having a market outlet is crucial.

Another business initiative that has taken place in Honiara and rural communities which Solomon Islands women are successfully accessing, is the South Pacific Business Development Microfinance (Solomon Islands) Ltd. The SPBD is a network of microfinance organizations working in Solomon Islands, dedicated to eradicating poverty by empowering women in poor rural villages with the opportunity to start, grow and maintain sustainable, income generating micro-enterprises.

The SPBD SI started setting up operations in November 2012 and disbursed its first loans in January 2013. As of 31 December 2013, US\$820,000 and 2,100 loans have been disbursed to women since inception with 1,900 savings accounts and US\$150,000 of savings.¹⁴ A female recipient ¹⁵ of the SPBD SI expressed her gratitude for being part of the SPBD SI programme saying how fortunate she is to benefit from its training and the credit facilities.

At the village level women entrepreneurs are also increasing. The 'Rokotanikeni' is a village credit and savings scheme established in the West Are Are Parliamentary Constituency of Malaita Province.

It has a membership of nearly one thousand rural women who are provided from \$500 to start a business initiative such as selling food, household items such as pots, food containers and community items such as kerosene, petrol and building tools which are much needed but not available in the rural areas.

The women are providing a service for village people who do not have funds to travel to Honiara. The money they earn is used to pay for their children's school fees and basic family needs such as soap, beverages, kerosene etc. and the rest is saved in their savings scheme. One success story is about a Rokotanikeni member building her home from money she saved from selling petrol in her village.

The Central Bank of Solomon Islands has opened up Savings Clubs for women in rural Solomon Islands. An example of which is the Jorio Java Dovele Women's Association which was formed in 2012. By June 2013, the Association had saved \$200,000 making it the fastest savings club in the country.¹⁶ This money has helped mothers pay for their children's school fees, medical bills as well as for their household and family needs. Their Member of Parliament also assisted the

¹⁴ www.spbdmicrofinance.com

¹⁵ Ms Arasu Oge a member of the programme

¹⁶ CBSI, Tavau Newsletter, Quarterly Newsletter No.4.13, 31st December 2013

Association with a canoe and a motorised engine for their transportation needs as well as providing them with an office space with computers.

Another women's saving group was formed in Gizo, Western Province by the Gizo Environment, Livelihood and Conservation Association (GELCA) in January this year. The focus of the group is on dependency on small activities to generate income and savings for the future. The Club now has about 400 women members and after only two months, the club now has a saving of \$20,000.

Similar Savings Clubs have also been created by the World Vision International, Solomon Islands Office and the Live and Learn, an environment organisation in Solomon Islands which rural women are benefitting from.

The above are major achievements for these village women who have been economically empowered by earning an income. They are also getting into the habit of saving, a practice which is very hard for Solomon Islands women due to the constant monetary needs of family and tribal obligations. Their involvement in the saving clubs has boosted their confidence and they are now taking a stand in refusing to lend money to their husbands by honestly saying that any extra funds generated had been banked.

An exciting women's economic initiative which has been launched this month (May) by the UN Women Office in Honiara is the Markets for Change or M4C project which aims to increase women's economic empowerment through their participation in economic activities to bring about positive changes in their lives. The project is targeted at market women vendors as marketplaces are key sites for women's economic empowerment through the sale of produce and other foods and goods that will contribute to poverty reduction within families.

This six years project will be implemented in Honiara and Auki, the capital of Malaita Province and targeted at market women vendors due to the belief that marketplaces are key sites for women's economic empowerment that will contribute to poverty reduction and providing more opportunities for urban Honiara women and rural Guadalcanal and Malaita women to engage in income generating and earning money leading to their economic empowerment.

The M4C will also facilitate the cooperation of market authorities with women vendors to discuss about the running of the markets to ensure women contribute their views and are part of the decision making process of markets. The project will further women's knowledge and skills through training, the first of which is now in progress in Honiara to enable the female vendors to grasp a sound understanding of the M4C project.

These examples show increased women's economic empowerment which is a major achievement for Solomon Islands women.

iii) Increased national awareness and initiatives to counteract gender based violence.

Violence against women especially domestic violence, promotes gender inequality and is still a critical problem in Solomon Islands.

The concept of violence against women being a crime was relatively new in the country in the mid-1990s. Domestic violence was being tolerated and condoned by the majority of Solomon Islanders' who believed that it is a man's right to beat his wife.

Awareness that violence against women is a crime, began with media programmes and workshops conducted by the Solomon Islands National Council of Women in the late 1990s. This

awareness was later taken on by Vois Blong Mere (VBMS) Solomon Islands¹⁷ and the Family Support Centre (FSC), a local non-government women's organisation that was established to provide counselling and legal services to abused women.¹⁸

A third major local stakeholder in addressing violence against women is the Christian Care Centre (CCC), an initiative of the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), operated by the Sisters (nuns) of the Church. It was established with help from the government of New Zealand to provide care for victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse and their children. It is the only women's refuge in Solomon Islands. Currently the ACOM provides the CCC with an annual budget and it also receives an annual subvention grant of \$150,000 from the Solomon Islands Government.

The Ministry of Women, the Solomon Islands National Council of Women and other members of women's organisations including churches, have continuously campaigned against violence against women since the beginnings of the National Council of Women in the early 80's.

The Ministry for Women's initiatives such as a Gender Based Violence research, the Eliminating Violence against Women Policy and activities such as the 16 days of activism on Violence against Women, enhanced the work of the civil society organisations and awareness on gender based violence.

A breakthrough for these women's organisation occurred in 2009 when the Ministry for Women completed and launched the Eliminating Violence against Women (EVAW) Policy in 2009. This was a timely compliments and a great result for the work that the women's organisation and the Ministry of Women had engaged in for many years.¹⁹

The Ministry of Women continued lobbying for the issue of gender based violence beyond its shores and joined forces with other countries and regional women's organisations to lobby for gender based violence to be addressed by Pacific leaders. The result was that sexual and gender based violence appeared on the agenda of the Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting in 2009 in Cairns, Australia and the leaders made a commitment to meaningfully address sexual and gender based violence.

This commitment translated into the formation of the Pacific Islands Forum Reference Group on Sexual and Gender Based Violence. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women was appointed a member of the Reference Group. The Permanent Secretary is also in the Advisory Group for Women Peace and Security for Asia and the Pacific as well as an advisor to the Pacific Women Peace and Security Reference Group.

The Ministry of Police and Justice also stepped up its work with the stakeholders to address violence against women by strengthening its Sexual Assault Unit to deal with female victims of sexual assault and all forms of violence; a SafeNet project was formed consisting of a network of the Police, the Family Support Centre, the Christian Care Centre, the courts and the health services to assist victims of domestic violence and ensure that perpetrators are dealt with. Community awareness raising on violence against women also increased through workshops and drama and activities such as the Sixteen Days of Activism on Violence against Women which the Ministry of Women is taking the lead in supported by all the partners.

¹⁷ VBMS is the only women's media and communication's organisation in Solomon Islands

¹⁸ The FSC also sourced funding from various donors and conducted awareness raising workshops and drama on violence against women in all the provinces of Solomon Islands.

¹⁹ Ministry of Women, the Solomon Islands National Council of Women, Vois Blong Mere, the Family Support Centre, Christian Care Centre (CCC), the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), Oxfam and World Vision Solomon Island

Solomon Islanders witnessed major rallies, marches and vigils in Honiara, supported by the Police, the Correctional Services and members of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The public listened to anti-gender violence messages relayed on the radio from Vois Blong Mere's radio spots and saw many men support these initiatives by their participation.

More rural and urban women are now taking on activities that highlights the evils of violence against women, condemn violence and promote zero tolerance to violence against women. This is displayed by the following examples: a group of women from Isabel Province held a memorial service for a young Isabel woman who was murdered by her father just because he disagreed with her choice of a boyfriend. Additionally during the Ms Solomon Islands Queen Pageant, one of the 'queens' raised funds for the Christian Care Centre and made a presentation on the CCC and its work on assisting victims of domestic violence to an audience of around 2000.

All these initiatives happening as part of the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy and the Eliminating Violence against Women Policy, opened up opportunities for legislative reforms and the initiating of gender equality legislation to happen.

The endorsement of the draft Family Protection Bill by Cabinet this week and awaiting submission to the Solomon Islands National Parliament means that if passed there will be a national legislation that will protect victims of domestic violence. The Bill is a significant undertaking; a law that will provide for the protection of families from domestic violence and to promote the safety, health and wellbeing of victims of domestic violence and for example when a victim reports a case, a notice is served to the perpetrator and an interim protection order is provided to the victim followed by a final protection order.

With regards to legislation reforms, in June 2013, the LRC launched its second interim report on the review of the penal Code and Criminal procedure Code particularly on sexual offences against women and girls. Recommendations for reform of sexual offences contained in Part XVI of the Penal Code were made and also recommendations for the introduction of some new offences. The list below shows the offences that the LRC recommended to be reformed:

- a) Rape
- b) Sexual Abuse of a person with significant disability
- c) Indecent assault
- d) Incest
- e) Sexual Intercourse with a child
- f) Minimum age of marriage
- g) Indecent touching of child
- h) Sexual abuse of a child aged 15 to 18 years
- i) Persistent sexual abuse of a child
- j) Commercial Sexual exploitation of Children
- k) Child Sexual Exploitation material

It is now the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs to make the necessary reforms (amend laws, develop laws) based on the recommendations. It is useful to note that in reviewing the laws, the LRC used a process that starts with an analysis of the current law and contextual research. For sexual offences, the constitution is looked at as well as international obligations of Solomon Islands such as CEDAW²⁰ & CRC²¹.

²⁰ Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

²¹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Family Health and Safety Study was also used to suit the context and also the policy framework meaning GEWD and EAW policies were also used. The reform process may have been slow, but a significant achievement had been made to review the sexual offences for the benefit of women and girls in Solomon Islands.

Along the same lines, a new Immigration Act has been endorsed which incorporated protection laws in favour of women in human/people smuggling, trafficking, sexual exploitation, deception, abduction and forced labour.²² At the international level, Solomon Islands has ratified the CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)²³

Australia has tendered for its new VAW programme in SI called “**Let’s Make our Families Safe’ Program**. Working to create safe family environments and preventing violence against women and girls is a central priority for both the Australian and Solomon Islands governments. Government, NGOs, communities, churches and donors are working to change attitudes and behaviours to end violence. The programme consists of three components:

- a) Support to existing and new community activities to prevent family violence;
- b) Facilitation of coalition activity at the provincial level; and
- c) Rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

The many activities happening in the country promotes a positive environment for positive changes to happen in the lives of Solomon Islands women to be protected from the evils of domestic violence, sexual violence and all other forms gender based violence.

B: What are the country’s three to five major challenges in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 23rd special session of the UN General Assembly?

Four major challenges have been identified which are listed below in order of priority:

- a) The lack of Political Will
- b) The need for better coordination, implementation and monitoring efforts by all stakeholders
- c) Reaching out to rural women, where the majority of Solomon Islanders live
- d) Getting women into all levels of decision making especially into National Parliament and provincial governments.

c) Increased Political Will

The government of Solomon Islands must be congratulated for the many positive initiatives that it has developed in promoting gender equality in the country and for the many positive results that it has achieved through the work of its Ministry responsible for women’s development.

The government is committed to maintaining the momentum on its good work. Government leaders such as members of Parliament and decision makers within the Public Service will continue to boost gender equality in Solomon Islands and to effectively do so they will need to undergo gender sensitized training. By gaining a better understanding of where women are coming from, MPs and other government decision makers will be able to respond positively to such critical issues as the introduction of Temporary Special Measures (TSM) into Parliament, increasing accommodation for girls in secondary and tertiary institutions; taking up offers from international partners such as the European Union and the Commonwealth Secretariat to develop legal measures to assure the access of women into parliament; putting conducive

²² Information gathered from the 1 day consultation workshop

²³ Convention on the Rights of the Child

structures and resources in place to effectively implement the various gender policies that have been endorsed by the government.

d) The need for better implementation efforts for gender mainstreaming by all stakeholders

As already discussed, institutional structures to ensure the effective mainstreaming of gender equality by all government ministries have been established by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA). Aside from the gender focal points six Task Forces have been formed to address the five Priority areas of the GEWD Policy. The establishment of a National Women's Machinery to coordinate the implementation of the GEWD by the government ministries and civil society have also been initiated.

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women has also been mandated to be the link between the government and the non-government and civil society networks in the GEWD's implementation, monitoring and coordination. This is an ideal structure and the government of Solomon Islands is committed to ensuring its effective implementation, coordination and monitoring.

e) Reaching out to rural women where the majority of Solomon Islands women live

According to the 2009 Census Report, Solomon Islands has a total population of approximately **515,870** (264,455 Males, 251,415 Females). Honiara the capital of Solomon Islands has a population of 64,609 with approximately half of this number being women. This means that the majority of Solomon Islands women live in the rural areas however the majority of government services are centred in Honiara and the urban capitals of the 9 provinces. Likewise most women's gender equality programmes are also Honiara and urban capitals centred.

The promotion of gender equality in the provinces is limited. There are gender based trainings and awareness raisings conducted for women usually in the provincial capitals which are attended by female representatives from the different constituencies and wards of each province. Whether these representatives pass on the information and skills they gained to the rest of their womenfolk on their return to their villages is questionable.

Apart from two provinces, all the other provincial governments have a women's development office headed by a provincial Women's Development Officer (PWDO). The ideal would be for these PWDO's to conduct training and awareness on all aspects of gender equality and women's empowerment with women's groups in the rural areas; but this is not the case for provincial budgets to women's provincial offices are meagre and not sufficient for the running of such activities. Also one PWDO can only do so much according to her/his physical capacity in such big provinces. A PWDO's knowledge too is also restricted in terms of gender equality and other women's development issues which needs to be addressed in the provinces.

Due to the lack of regular interaction by the PWDO and rural women no proper networks and linkages are established in the provinces making it difficult for the PWDO to access rural women so access to the same opportunities and service deliveries that urban women have are not the same for rural women.

Access to basic services by rural women is also a restriction to women's rights to education, health, clean water and sanitation, employment and income generation, communication and transportation. The chances of rural women and men to access information and training to promote gender equality and women's empowerment is insufficient. It is therefore safe to say that attitudes, stereotyping and traditional beliefs towards women have not really changed in the rural areas. Civil society organisations and churches have programmes for women in health

and nutrition and other traditional women's areas such as cooking and sewing however they lack the knowledge themselves to conduct awareness on gender equality and women's empowerment. CEDAW explicitly deals with rural women and their rights as seen in **Text Box 1** below. This validates further the Solomon Islands Government's commitment to assist rural women especially in the areas highlighted by Article 14.²⁴

Text Box 1: CEDAW Article 14

Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetised sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
 - a. to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
 - b. to have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
 - c. to benefit directly from social security programmes;
 - d. to obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;
 - e. to organise self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;
 - f. to participate in all community activities;
 - g. to have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land

f) Getting women into decision making especially into National Parliament and provincial governments.

Although the number of women in leadership and decision making positions in government is increasing, it is a major challenge in Solomon Islands for a woman to be elected into the Solomon Islands National Parliament. Currently there is only one woman parliamentarian.

An effort by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs to introduce Temporary Special Measures (TSM) in the country didn't make it through Cabinet due to the shortage of support but the Ministry of Women is conducting soon a national consultation to gauge support at community level. A challenge is the insufficient understanding of why women's representation should be fast tracked. Many think it's undemocratic but the argument is that results needed to be seen.

This year 2014, will be the National General Election year and women are preparing themselves to contest.

²⁴ <http://www.landcoalition.org/en/global-initiatives/womens-land-rights/rural-women-land-and-cedaw>

Steps taken by the Ministry to address the low numbers of women in parliament are continuing, including the establishment of the Women in Leadership (WIL) Desk in the last five to ten years within the Solomon Islands National Council of Women and the Women in Shared Decision Making (WISDM) group.

The success rates though quite minimal and only at the provincial elections demonstrates a shift in rural people's mindsets to give women the opportunity to be in decision making. Refer to Table 16 in this document.

The MWYCFA has also successfully negotiated into the draft Political Parties Integrity Bill, 2014 at least ten per cent of the total number of candidates each party endorses to contest an election to be women.²⁵

g) What have been the main constitutional, legislative and/or legal developments in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women

- A draft Family Protection Bill has been submitted to Cabinet and endorsed and ready to be submitted to the National Parliament in June/July's sitting.
- A new Immigration Act has been endorsed which incorporated protection laws in favour of women in human/people smuggling, trafficking, sexual exploitation, deception, abduction and forced labour.
- The Political Parties' Integrity Bill which provides for a 10% quota for women in all political parties' total number of candidates running for elections.
- The Law Reform Commission has completed a report on sexual offences against women and girls the findings of which has a high chance of transpiring into a legislation to address these issues.
- The Penal Code and the Criminal Procedures Code are also being reviewed as well as are reviews on infanticide, domestic violence and the battered person's syndrome.

h) What is the approximate share of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women?

The total recurrent budget for the Ministry of Women for 2013 was around 12 million dollars. Of this its Women's Development Division (WDD) had an allocation of 2.6 million which is for its payroll and other charges. There are additional two grants, one for rural women and women's organisations such as CCC, FSC and NCW both in the recurrent budget.

For its Development Budget the following are the allocations: Family Protection Bill (\$500,000); presentation of CEDAW and CRC to Geneva, (one million dollars); and for the work of the WISDM \$250,000.

i) What mechanisms are in place for regular dialogue between Government and civil society?

Solomon Islands NGOs can be members of an organisation called the Development Services Exchange or DSE. The DSE acts as an umbrella/coordinating body for NGOs and is also a 'watchdog' on the government to ensure none of the SIG's policies or developments disadvantages civil society and its members. The DSE also assumes the role of the 'go between' for government and civil society.

g) The Ministry of Women and to an extent, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade plus the other national women's organisations such as the Vois Blong Mere Solomon (VBMS)

²⁵ The Political Parties Integrity Bill 2014

and the Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW) are the local stakeholders that address the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. The local stakeholders and the Ministry of Women are supported by the UN Women Office in Honiara for the monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

h) How and to what extent have the MDGs overall and in particular the gender-related MDGs facilitated or strengthened the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Government has been producing reports on the implementation of the MDGs, the last Solomon Islands country report being submitted in 2010/2011. This means that the government must implement the MDGs and if so then the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action critical areas of concern will also be implemented because they are directly and indirectly addressed by all 8 MDGs.

Section Two: Progress in the implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action since 2009

A. Women and poverty

The current situation: The poverty situation in Solomon Islands is of two kinds. The first is an 'income' rather than an 'asset' poverty and affects all Solomon Islanders both men and women. The second is 'Poverty of Opportunities' which affects women more.

The 2008 Solomon Islands Analysis of the 2005/06 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) explains this 'income' poverty stating that on average, rural Solomon Islands households are capable of providing more of their own food (58.6%) than those in both provincial urban areas (16.7%) and Honiara (8.5%) who have to buy their food. This reflects both the greater subsistence production and the levels of food security of rural households and also signifies the greater need for cash for food purchases in Honiara and the provincial-urban centres.²⁶ But there are also situations when even those in the rural areas, will need cash to meet school fees, food, beverages and household items.

The HIES suggests that there is a high number of people, especially rural people, just above the poverty line due to their access to land and subsistence farming which dwarfs the monetised economy and feeds 80% of the population, provide income and support social and cultural obligations in rural areas.²⁷

Indicators related to income, employment, hunger and related issues do suggest that although the level of extreme poverty using the Basic Needs Poverty Lines methodology is not too high in Solomon Islands (22.7%) for poor families, stark daily choices between competing purchases are made for example, extra food, bus fares, drugs, school fees, personal debts repayment or other purchases.

The Solomon Islands MDG Progress Report 2010, states that there is mixed progress in achieving the first Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and that while the country has not fully achieved this goal, evidence from the HIES and other

²⁶ Solomon Islands ANALYSIS OF THE 2005/06 HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SURVEY; Final report on the estimation of basic needs poverty lines, and the incidence and characteristics of poverty in Solomon Islands; Solomon Islands National Statistics Office and UNDP Pacific Centre Suva, Fiji. July 2008
²⁷ Mataka M; Solomon Islands National Assessment Report Rio+20 Report, Honiara, Solomon Islands December 2011

data relating to health, education and employment; shows that Solomon Islands does not have large proportions of the population living in extreme poverty but that many people are 'cash poor.'

With regards to 'poverty of opportunity' this is seen in the lower number of girls accessing formal education (refer to the education critical area of concern) especially in the higher levels of secondary education and at tertiary institutions. As well, Solomon Islands women aren't participating effectively in decision making in society (refer to women in decision making critical area of concern) and have limited opportunities to voice their concerns to decision makers. Women's access to health services is also limited due to the geographical features of the islands which make up the provinces and on which the majority of Solomon Islands women live. Furthermore violence against women is still a major problem in the country (refer to the violence against women's critical area of concern) which contributes to poverty.

Households that appear to be the least disadvantaged in terms of the poverty line are rural area households followed by provincial-urban centres. Honiara on the other hand displays a much higher incidence of poverty for although Honiara is a source of work and employment for many, there is, nevertheless, many households whose expenditure cannot cover the basic-needs costs of a reasonable minimum standard of living in the urban, cash-based environment.

Gender plays a role in determining the incidence of poverty in Solomon Islands. The HIES analysis suggests that female-headed households are estimated to account for 6.5% of all households but account for around 7.3% of all those households falling below the basic needs poverty line.

What is being done?

The SIG has developed a Solomon Islands National Development Strategy (SINDS) 2011 – 2020 to guide development activities and programmes to build better lives for all Solomon Islanders. Within the SINDS there are eight (8) objectives with their policies, strategies and the relevant implementing Ministry.

Table 1 shows the eight objectives of the SINDS with one policy example. The policy of Objective 2 relates to women as a vulnerable group and the policy states that support will be provided to women. Although the other policies are just as relevant and important for both women and men, often women are sidelined in their implementation especially if the policy focuses on what is considered to be a non-traditional female area of work.

With the Gender Focal Points in place, each GFP plays an important role in monitoring the implementation of these policies in light of gender. They will be able to cooperate closely with the Ministry of Women to effectively coordinate and monitor the activities to ensure effective gender mainstreaming is done in light of the programmes and activities generated from these policies so that women can participate and benefit from these programmes and activities to address their poverty needs.

Table 1: Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2011 – 2020 Objectives

Objective 1	Policy: Alleviate Poverty and improve the Lives of Solomon Islanders in a peaceful and stable society
Objective 2	Policy: To support the vulnerable
Objective 3	Policy: Ensure all Solomon Islanders have access to quality health care and combat malaria, HIV and AIDS and non-communicable diseases and other diseases
Objective 4	Policy: Ensure all Solomon Islanders can access quality education and the Nation's manpower needs/human resources are sustainably met
Objective 5	Policy: Increase Economic Growth and Equitably distribute employment and income benefits
Objective 6	Policy: Develop physical infrastructure and utilities to ensure all Solomon Islanders have access to essential services and markets
Objective 7	Policy: Effectively respond to climate change and manage the environment and risks of natural disasters.
Objective 8	Policy: Improve Governance and Order at national, provincial and community levels and strengthen links at all levels.

Source: Solomon Islands National Development Strategy, 2011 – 2020

Table 2 below contains the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – for Women and Poverty Strategic Objectives. Policies from each of the 8 objectives in Table 1 have been incorporated under their Women and Poverty Strategic Objective in Table 2 to demonstrate steps taken by the Solomon Islands Government in the Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2011-2020 to address the objectives.

Table 2: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Women and Poverty Strategic Objectives and Policies

<p>Strategic objective A.1. Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.</p> <p>Policy: Develop and implement programs to alleviate poverty based on improved market access and a vibrant smallholder sector through sustainable natural resources use and commercial activities in rural and remote areas.</p> <p>Policy: Improved economic status of women through access to and share of productive resources</p>
<p>Strategic objective A.2. Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources.</p> <p>An Activity: The Ministry of Women has launched a Women and Economic Action Plan which will address entrepreneurial initiatives for women to promote their economic empowerment</p>
<p>Strategic objective A.3. Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions.</p> <p>Policy: Utilise constituency development funds to support poverty alleviation and rural livelihoods through concessionary loans, grants and equity for small business start-ups, including in Growth Centres and through micro-projects implemented by provinces and line ministries.</p>
<p>Strategic Objective A.4: Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty</p> <p>Action: A Family Protection Bill has been endorsed by Cabinet, ready for submission to Parliament for debate and passing. The bill focuses on violence against women and the protection of women's human rights. A national Policy on the Elimination of Violence against Women was endorsed in 2010. It sets out the framework for which violence against women in Solomon Islands will be addressed.</p>

B. Education and Training of Women

Current Situation: Accessing education by girls is relatively equal from Early Childhood Education (ECE) level to junior secondary level. This is an achievement for Solomon Islands as girls and boys at least have basic education to be able to gain numeracy and literacy skill, however Solomon Islands is faced with the challenges of continuation, completion, poor teacher motivation and standards, poor attendance at classes by both students and teachers alike and the lack of financial support for basic education.²⁸ Table 3 shows where access to education by girls is problematic and that there is a drop in girls' enrolment at the senior education level.

Table 3: Enrolment totals by Education levels and Gender

Years → Education Level ↓	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
ECE Total	18248	20,516	19,382	21,045	22,720
ECE (M/F)	9244 (M); 9004 (F)	10,415 (M) 10,101 (F)	9913 (M) 9469 (F)	10,858 (M) 10,187 (F)	11,656 (M) 11,064 (F)
Primary Total	102,167	106,226	110,219	115,728	119,139
Primary (M/F)	53,854 (M) 48,313 (F)	56,075 (M) 50,151 (F)	57,837 (M) 52,382 (F)	110,219 (M) 57,837 (F)	62,336 (M) 56,803 (F)
Junior Secondary Total	18,208	19,432	20,607	24,847	25,642
Junior Secondary (M/F)	10,055 (M) 8,153 (F)	10,628 (M) 8,804 (F)	11,157 (M) 9,450 (F)	13,312 (M) 11,535 (F)	13,618 (M) 12,024 (F)
Senior Secondary Total	10,433	11,387	11,957	13,598	14,436
Senior Secondary (M/F)	6,575 (M) 3,858 (F)	7,360 (M) 4,027 (F)	7,471 (M) 4,486 (F)	8,219 (M) 5,379 (F)	8,711 (M) 5,725 (F)

Source: Solomon Islands CEDAW Combined Initial Report, Second and Third Periodic Report 2012

Table 4 shows the gender enrolments by Forms in 2013 at King George Secondary School Honiara. A distinct widening of the gender enrolment gap is shown from Form 4 up to Form 7.

Table 4: Gender enrolments by Forms at King George Secondary School

Forms	Total	Boys	Girls
1 Blue	42	21	21
1 Red	42	22	20
2 Blue	43	22	21
2 Red	43	21	22
3 Blue	41	17	24
3 Red	41	20	21
4 Blue	43	26	17
4 Red	43	24	19
5 Blue	44	27	17
5 Red	44	28	16
6 Arts	33	27	26
6 Science Blue	30	23	7

²⁸ Ministry of Development Planning & Aid Coordination, *Millennium Development Goals Progress Report for Solomon Islands 2010*, Nov 2010, Honiara.

6 Science Red	30	21	9
7 Arts Blue	37	23	14
7 Arts Red	37	21	16
7 Science Blue	35	22	13
7 SR	35	20	15
Total	663	365	298

Source: King George V1 Secondary School Principal's Report, March 2014

Table 4 confirms that the higher the Form, the lesser the number of girls. For example from Forms 1 to 3 the gender enrolment numbers are relatively equal, but from Form Four upwards the number of girls decrease markedly, recording the lowest in Form 6 Science Blue (only 7 girls compared to 23 boys); and at 6 Science Red (only 9 girls compared to 21 boys). This shows that it is harder for girls to access senior secondary education level in Solomon Islands.

It is interesting to note on Table 4 that the lowest number of girls are recorded in the science forms. Science is stereotyped as a non-traditional female subject and the low numbers of girls may reflect intimidation on the girls' part to study in a classroom of boys who are supposed to be more knowledgeable in science hence discouraging more girls to pursue science.

There are also traditional and structural reasons for the decrease in girls' enrolment into higher education levels including the favouring of boys over girls by parents as boys are viewed to be a better investment by families than girls who will leave their families when they marry.

Structural barriers include improving educational infrastructure such as separate toilet facilities and adequate transportation as well as limited number of dormitories, water and sanitation facilities in rural secondary schools particularly for girls which is one of the causes for low enrolment by girls in the senior secondary education levels.²⁹ International donor partners through the Ministry of Education are working towards collaboration to fund infrastructure in schools to ensure quality education is provided to students in both the rural and urban schools.

The building of more dormitories for boys than girls in secondary schools, results in girls having to score higher than boys and having a different cut off rate to boys during elimination exams at the end of class six (primary school) into Form 1 at the junior secondary level and at Form 3 into Form 4 at the senior secondary levels. All these makes it more challenging for girls as not only are they competing on their academic strengths but also for the limited accommodation spaces at local secondary and tertiary institutions.

At the Form 3 level going onto Form 4, girls can be forced to leave school prematurely by parents so that they can find employment when they are still single to repay the money spent on their education by parents. Financial constraints by parents for school fees will impact more on the girl than the boy. Teenage boy/girl relationships may result in early pregnancies and the expulsion of girls and not the boys and schools do not have specific measures to support girls who are pregnant at school. Other support for students such as counselling services is also lacking.

Legally, the Education Act 1978 is the legal framework of the development, implementation and monitoring of education in the country. This Act however does not allow for free or compulsory education, nor does it guarantee equal access to education in terms of gender and there are no provisions in the legislation for the advancement of women in education.

Illiteracy among Women

²⁹ Global Survey ICPD Beyond 2014, Country Questionnaire, Solomon Islands.

According to the Solomon Islands' 2009 National Census, the literacy rate for females over the age of fifteen years was 79.2% and males was 88.9%. These figures are however questionable because according to a 2007 study only 17 percent of the Solomon Islands population is fully literate and a significant literacy and educational experience survey in Honiara, Malaita, Renbel and Isabel in 2007 and 2010 found rates of assessed functional literacy far lower than census based self-reported rates.

Women need to be literate to be able to secure good employment and other skills and knowledge that will benefit them as individuals and their families. A report by the World Bank³⁰ in 2012 stated that new economic opportunities are available to Solomon Islands, at home and overseas; but a serious skills deficit constrains Solomon Islanders from accessing them and women, youth, and rural Solomon Islanders are disproportionately affected. Functional literacy, not educational attainment alone, is important for employment options for Solomon Islanders beyond subsistence activities.

Vocational and non-formal education opportunities for women

There are vocational and non-formal education opportunities for women especially young women. The total intake for vocational schools for 2010 was 2228, of this 509 were females and in 2011, the total intake was 2600 of which only 576 were females. These non-formal institutions offer training in mechanical skills, agriculture, life skills and basic electrical, carpentry, plumbing, hospitality, eco-tourism and business skills.

In the Education Strategic Framework 2007 – 2015 it is stated that technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to improve the skills base of the country's force and provide alternative pathways for young people will be strengthened. Delivery of TVET is weak in the country and through the Rural Training Centres.

There is no policy targeting women and non-formal training in the Education Strategic Framework 2007 – 2015, however in the Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2011 – 2020, under its Objective 5 to increase economic growth and equitably distribute employment and income benefits one of the strategies there is to 'develop programmes and institutions able to provide comprehensive support to entrepreneurs in the small, medium and micro-enterprise sectors including Economic Growth Centres, covering services in technical training, entrepreneurial training and business planning as well as support in access to credit and relevant government services.

The World Bank Report recommended six (6) skills and economic opportunities for Solomon Islands women which are as follows;

- 1) Actions to reduce push out of girls at secondary level;
- 2) National human resources development training programmes actions and incentives increasing women's education, training and employment;
- 3) Expanded and effective second-chance education and training;
- 4) More non-formal, livelihood and mobile village skills training;
- 5) Reduced barriers to entrepreneurship and business skills; and
- 6) School curriculum integration of gender equity and violence prevention programmes

The Education Act is being reviewed and will be addressing some of the limitations highlighted on women and girls' access to and continuity in education.

30 World Bank Report, *Skills for Solomon Islands women Opening new opportunities*, Stephen Close, World Bank Sydney, October 2012.

How is the government addressing education and the training of women? Several policies, strategies and actions have been developed by the Solomon Islands Government. Table 5 below show how these strategies and actions respond to the Strategic Objectives of the Education and Training of Women's critical area of concern captured below in Table 5.

Table 5: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Education and the Training of Women Strategic Objectives and Policies

Strategic objective B.1. Ensure equal access to education.
Policy: The National Development Strategy 2011 -2020 in its Objective four states, 'Ensure all Solomon Islanders can access quality education and the nation's manpower needs are sustainably met.' This shows the SIG's commitment to provide equal access to education for boys and girls.
Policy: An Education Strategic Framework 2007 – 2015 has been developed by the Ministry of Education which focuses on strategies to achieve equitable access to education for all in Solomon Islands.
Policy: The Ministry of Education has developed and endorsed a Gender Equity Policy which addresses equitable entry of both gender into all levels of education ³¹
Action: Community High Schools have been established to address the issue of gender imbalance and accessibility of girls to secondary schools
Policy: The Policy Statement and Guidelines for Tertiary Education endorsed by Cabinet in 2010 provides as one of its main policy goals, "to provide access to high quality tertiary education and to close the opportunity gap in tertiary participation for marginalised groups." This Policy aims to ensure equitable access for all including students with disabilities and is a good start to address the issue of girls reduced enrolment numbers at the higher secondary levels.
Policy: A Policy Statement and Guidelines for Basic Education in Solomon Islands was endorsed in 2009 by the SIG aiming to provide equitable access for all children to quality basic education and full enrolment opportunity for all children 6 years of age to 15 years and to achieve 100% transition rate for all children in year six to year seven by 2015.
Strategic Objective B.2 Eradicate illiteracy among women
Policy: The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development will review the existing policies on languages, literacy and bilingualism, and the language of instruction, including use of diagnostic instruments at an early stage of primary schooling to identify students with literacy problems. The Policy will include provision for intensive retraining of teachers and development and distribution of learning resources (graded readers and quality books) in both English and Solomon Islands vernacular languages including Pijin.
Strategic Objective B.3. Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education
Policy: Support and set up where needed, skills training schools focussed on employment and targeted at skills relevant to each provinces ³²
Strategic Objective B.4. Develop non-discriminatory education and training
Action: The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development conducted a curriculum review which will also look at teaching materials. In 2011 the Ministry of Education agreed that three chapters on human rights to include rules, laws and the judiciary, the rights and freedoms of individuals and gender inequality. The curriculum review will include gender issues, women in leadership and violence against women in the social studies syllabus. These reviews should have been completed last year.
Strategic objective B.5. Allocate sufficient resources to monitor the implementation of educational reforms.
Action: The education system has undergone significant restructuring and reform in response to needs identified through the Education Sector Investment and Reform Program (ESIRP and the Education Strategic Plan, so much resources are implicated in such reviews and reforms.
Strategic objective B.6. Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women
Policy: Improved and equitable access to education, training and employment for young women and men (youth and career pathways)

³¹ Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Solomon Islands CEDAW Combined Initial, Second and Third Periodic Report 2012

³² Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2011 -2020

A point to note with the policies developed by the Ministry of Education is that they are not gender specific. The ones that address gender are those within the Solomon Islands National Development Strategy. A major responsibility rests on the government to ensure that gender mainstreaming of these policies takes place.

C. Women and health

An advantage for Solomon Islands women is that health and medical services are provided free by the government but private clinics hospitals that operate in Honiara and some provincial capitals charge fees for their services.

The government health services consists of provincial/rural nurse aid posts, health centres and area health centres; and urban clinics and hospitals, the biggest being the National Referral Hospital in Honiara. Two church owned hospitals, one in Malaita Province and the other in the Western Province³³ also operate in the country where outpatient services are offered free of charge but people are expected to provide their own food if they need inpatient services.

The clinics and hospitals provide outpatient services but inpatient services are restricted to the Honiara based National Referral Hospital and the other hospitals based in the provincial capitals. Maternal health care (antenatal, birth and post natal clinics) and child health, including vaccinations and growth monitoring are also offered in both clinics and hospitals and sometimes satellite clinics and health education are conducted. However due to the busy schedules of clinics, nurses only provide advice to mothers on a one on one basis.

Women's access to health services is easier for those living in Honiara and the other provincial capitals in terms of the availability of nurses, doctors, drugs and inpatient services, but urban health services also have their share of challenges.³⁴

For rural women it is harder to access health services. There are several reasons for this including the scattered nature and distant geographical location of villages from health centres, making it hard and far to walk through mountainous terrain, crossing rivers and often travelling by motorised canoes to the clinics which are quite expensive in terms of hiring canoes and paying for fuel. In addition, women's domestic, family and subsistence agricultural commitments and the uncertainty about the availability of health workers and drugs at the clinics also limits their visits to these health centres.

This can result in negligence to attend to their own health needs and can result in fatalities especially for pregnant mothers and their babies or both. The Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2007 showed that 97% of rural women experienced at least one problem in accessing health care, the most common ones being the lack of drugs (91%), the lack of staff (87%), finding money for treatment (65%), and far distances to a health facility (56%).

Solomon Islands is dealing with a "double disease burden" of both communicable and non-communicable diseases which means that the health services is addressing infectious diseases as well as the increasing incidence of non-communicable diseases. Although infectious diseases are still major causes of morbidity and mortality, non-communicable diseases that are heart related i.e. diabetes and obesity are on the increase and affecting more women than men, e.g. high levels of overweight (67% women & 63% men) and obesity (33% women & 26% men).

³³ The United Church owns the Helena Goldie Hospital in Munda and the Seventh Day Adventist Church owns the Atoifi Hospital in east Kwaio, Malaita Province.

³⁴ For example the number of women giving births in a day can outnumber the availability of beds in the labour ward and it is normal to see four to five women squeezed in a room with their newborn babies, the majority of them sleeping on the floor with no proper bedding.

With regards to maternal and child health, the National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP) 2011 – 2015, show that there is a reduction in mortality due to neonatal causes attributed to the improved status of maternal/safe motherhood programmes and services, supported conducted by the Ministry and by much improved paediatric care and the current focus on the integrated management of childhood illness (IMCI) approach.

The maternal mortality rate (MMR) was estimated at 184/100,000 births in the last Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). It is unlikely that it will reduce much more anytime soon as the travel distances and costs will remain significant for some time with such a low density population and poor transport availability. The other indicator of this health system's good performance and good connection with the public is the high rate of ante-natal visits and over 84% of all women giving birth with a skilled birth attendant present – most of these in a MHMS health facility. The overall average population growth rate for the 10-year period since 1999 was 2.3%, considerably down from the previous 10-year period of 2.8%.

In Table 6 below, it is shown that the under 5 child mortality was over half of all deaths only 15 years ago. In another 15 years it is predicted to drop to less than 10% of all deaths. This is a dramatic change in 30 years. Table 6 shows the demographic indicators for Solomon Islands from the period 1995 to 2025. It is anticipated that the growth rate will decrease considerably to 1.1 by 2025. Births per year have also decreased so have infant mortality rate per 1000 births

Table 6: Demographic Indicators for Solomon Islands from 1995 – 2025

Demographic Indicators	1995	2005	2010	2015	2025
Population					
Midyear population (in thousands)	375	496	526	568	647
Growth rate (percent)	3	2.5	2	1.5	1.1
Fertility					
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	5.2	4.1	3.7	3.3	2.7
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	37	32	24	19	15
Births per Year	13,875	15,872	12,624	10,792	9,705
Mortality					
Life expectancy at birth (years)	70	73	74	75	77
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	66	35	30	25	18
Total Infant Deaths	916	556	379	270	175
% of total Deaths	49%	28%	18%	12%	7%
Total Under 5 Deaths (including infant deaths)	1,013	587	454	313	204
% of total Deaths	54%	30%	22%	14%	8%
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	5	4	4	4	4
Deaths per Year	1,875	1,984	2,104	2,272	2,588

Source: National Health Strategic Plan, Solomon Islands Government 2011-2015

Maternal Health: Solomon Islands has met the MDG target for Goal 5 (MMR in 1990 was 550 & the 2010 rate is a 74.5% reduction), according to the NHSP 2011 – 2015 refer to Table 7 below.

Reducing many of the maternal deaths is very time sensitive – of the 5 major causes of maternal deaths, two of them normally require that a mother be transported to emergency obstetric care within a few hours (normally less than 3) in order to save the mother’s life.

Due to the widely disbursed population; the distances many mothers are from any health service; the country’s limited transport infrastructure (most by sea) and the high costs of transport; it is predicted that bringing down the MMR faster will not be feasible due to factors beyond control of the health sector. Only a robust 24/7, helicopter-based medevac Service would be able to provide such a service to reduce MMR to the desired level.

Table 7: Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) 2010 – 2015)

Maternal Mortality Rates MMR	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total Population	525,671	534,769	543,471	551,921	560,128	568,013
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	24	23	22	21	20	19
Births per Year	12,612	12,300	11,956	11,590	11,203	10,792
Maternal Death Rate/Year	140	137	135	130	125	120
How many more per year	1	1	1	1	1	1
How many more 2010 - 2015						5
% Improvement per Year		4.6%	4.2%	6.7%	7.1%	7.5%
% Improvement: 2010-2015						26.7%
% of deaths of all births	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%

Source: National Health Strategic Plan, Solomon Islands Government 2011-2015

To decrease the maternal mortality rate further will require a much wider distribution of emergency obstetric care facilities or much more proactive medivac services – with a combined water, road and air emergency transport system.

These are expensive strategies to implement. While more can be done to expand the medivac system, a fully functional, nationwide system is not considered feasible in the medium term and would be implemented at a major opportunity cost to other basic services. All the rest of the causes among the highest priorities within the disease burden profile are inexpensive to prevent and most are comparatively inexpensive to provide case management, depending on the management strategy.

HIV/AIDS: MDG 6 calls for combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. In 2009 there was a total of 13 Solomon Islanders living with HIV and AIDS. At that time 8 were still alive and 5 were already dead. According to the NHSP 2011 – 2015 there is no data on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country. There has never been any sentinel survey to estimate prevalence in the total population. In addition, the rates of STI cases presented at hospitals and health facilities are very low. A positive initiative is the drafting of a National HIV/AIDS Policy which is about to be completed.

Reproductive Health: The Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Medical Services is conducting much work in the area of reproductive Health for women of Solomon Islands. Some are captured in the Table 8 below under the Strategic Objectives for the Women and Health Strategic Objectives.

Table 8: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Women and Health Strategic Objectives and Policies

Strategic objective C.1. Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services.
Access to antenatal care
Increasing access to STI/HIV prevention, treatment and care services for vulnerable population groups and populations at risk
Providing social protection and medical support for adolescent pregnant women
Breast cancer screening and treatment
Cervical cancer screening and treatment, voluntary testing and awareness programmes
Establishment of Midwifery training program, more midwives trained in identifying risks.
Strategic objective C.2. Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health.
Maternity Care Information about maternity care, including delivery with a skilled attendant; Prenatal care
Provision of adequate food and nutrition to pregnant women (including nutrition supplementation); Essential and emergency obstetric care; Post-natal care including contraceptive services.
Access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, regardless of marital status or age through Evidence based guideline in Family Planning; the National Reproductive health Strategy and Policy
Prevention and management of the consequences of unsafe abortion
Referrals to essential and comprehensive emergency obstetric care (EmOC)
Strategic objective C.3. Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.
Increasing access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents
Increasing access to voluntary and confidential HIV testing HR training, IEC, M&E, development, addressing RHCS, health information, logistics VCT Facility established and separate from integrated approaches
Strategic objective C.4. Promote research and disseminate information on women's health.
Increasing women's accessibility to information and counselling on sexual and reproductive health through HR training, IEC development, RHCS, health information, logistics, M&E
Eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV and treatment for improving the life expectancy of HIV-positive mothers
Services provided to women; counselling, information, access to at least 3 contraceptive methods; access to emergency contraception; access to male and female condoms.
Strategic objective C.5. Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health.
Increasing women's accessibility to information and counselling on sexual and reproductive health through HR training, IEC development, RHCS, health information, logistics and M&E

The National Health Strategic Plan 2011 – 2012: contains the priority strategies of the country. The ones that are directly related to women are captured in Table 9 below.

Table 9: National Health Strategies/Activities/Indicators and Resources

Strategy	Objective	Activities	Indicator	Resources
The health sector and health-related sectors will improve the health status of the age and gender population groups, especially women and children, considered to be the highest priorities				
Do Better EPI operations	Improve the coverage of EPI operations & services	Revision of the supportive supervision check-list; Supervisory follow-up in priority AHCs by the Provincial EPI Coordinator; Update cold chain inventory annually; Improve & monitor stock management at provincial & AHC levels	By 2015 average coverage of all vaccinations varies but most at or close to 90% by 2015 (MDG 4.3) By 2014 average coverage of all vaccinations is above 90% and above 80% for low performing provinces]	\$ 8.8 million or 1.5% of total to increase to about 1.5%
Do Better reproductive health	Provide expanded family planning & other services, particularly for adolescents	Procure & deliver contraceptives & other supplies; train staff in counselling; provide & monitor clients; expand essential obstetric care;	20% increase in CPR by 2015 to 41.5; maternal mortality reduced by 75 % from 1990 (550) to 2015 (last know at 100/100,000 in 2009) (MDG 5.1 is already achieved) Increase % of births attended by skilled health personnel from 86% in 2009 to 92% by 2015 (MDG 5.2)	\$17 million or 3% budget to increase to 4% by 2015 [Includes mother & child nutrition inputs]
Do More & Better domestic violence prevention & enforcement and child protection	Reduce domestic violence and improve child protection	Define up-dated protocols & Carry out staff training; work with justice system to reform practices	Social Welfare Officers, police, health care workers follow operational procedures 90+% of the time ensuring immediate and professional handling of child protection cases	

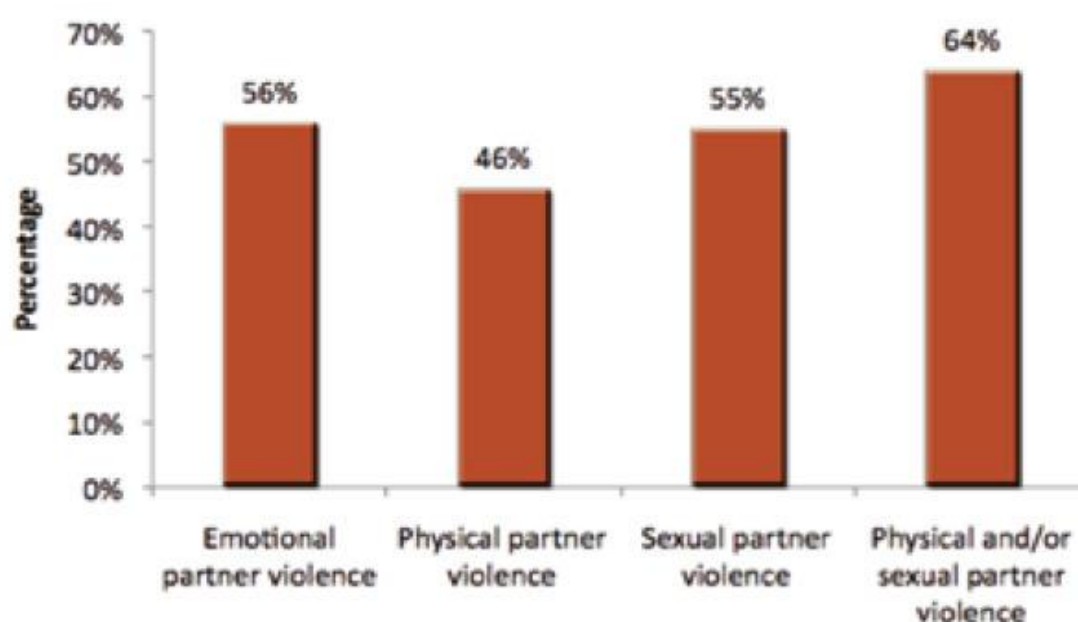
Source: National Health Strategic Plan, Solomon Islands Government 2011-2015

D. Violence against women

One of the most significant consequences of gender inequality for Solomon Islands women is the high level of gender-based violence (GBV) they experience in their lives.

The main forms of violence against women are emotional partner violence, physical partner violence, sexual partner violence and physical and/or sexual partner violence. Table 11 below demonstrates how these various forms of violence rate in Solomon Islands; with physical and/or sexual partner violence ranking 64% and physical partner violence ranking 46% which is still high.

Table 10: Percentage of women aged 15-49, who have ever been in a relationship, reporting different types of intimate partner violence



Source: A Gender-based violence in Solomon Islands: Translating research into action on the social determinants of health (Solomon Islands Family Health and Support Study 2009) page 3

“Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”³⁵

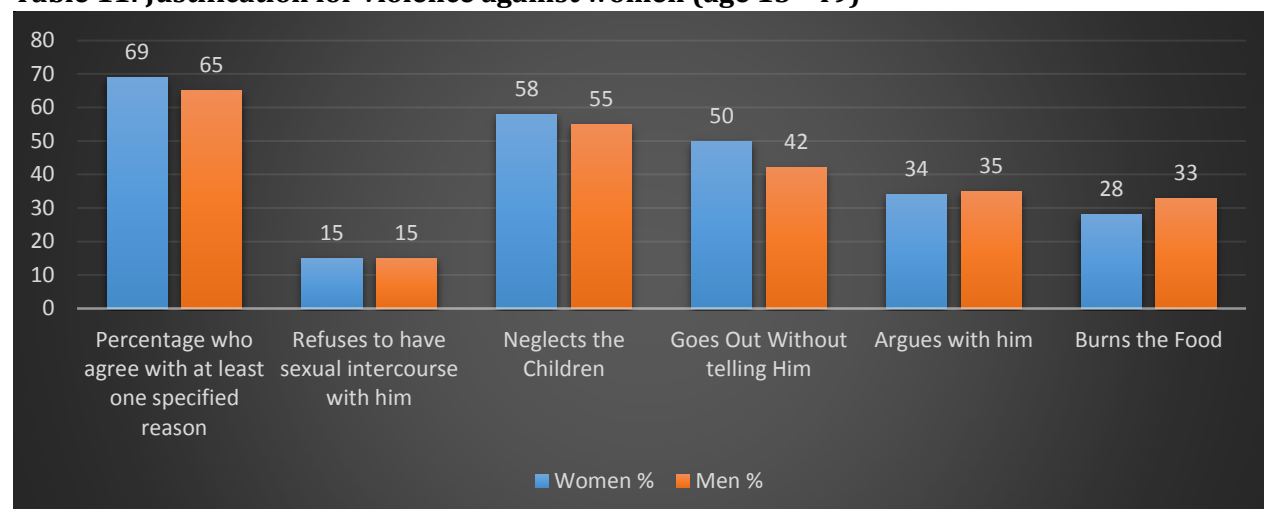
Violence against women still remains a major challenge for many women in Solomon Islands. While there have been increased initiatives to address violence against women such as a recently published report on ‘Domestic violence in Solomon Islands’ efforts are often not comprehensive, consistent, sustained and well-coordinated.

GBV “reflects and reinforces inequality between men and women [compromising] the health, dignity, security and autonomy” of its survivors.”³⁶

35 PRESS RELEASE: World Bank and Solomon Island’s Government to help improve services for survivors of gender-based violence, April 5, 2013

A major concern which was featured in the Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2007 is the acceptance by both women and men of partner violence as being justified depending on the circumstances (69% women and 31% men). Table 12 shows the justification they highlighted for violence against women from age 15 to 49.

Table 11: Justification for violence against women (age 15 - 49)



Source: Millennium Development Goals Progress Report for Solomon Islands 2010 page 69

The Solomon Islands Penal Code does not have any specific legislation for domestic violence, nor is the prosecution of domestic violence offenders mandatory. Charges for domestic violence have had to be placed within Assault Offences of the Penal Code. The following Table 3 shows the Penal Code Sections, their Offence, the extent of the Offence and the Maximum Penalty for perpetrators who are found guilty.

Table12: Penal Code Sections and Offences that address Domestic Violence

Penal Code Section	Offence	Injury or Risk of Injury	Maximum Penalty
244	Common Assault	No injury required	1 year
231	Intimidation or molestation	Injury to a person, reputation or property, or threat of injury	3 years
245	Assault Causing Bodily Harm	Hurt, disease, disorder, but does not have to be permanent	5 years
226	Causing Grievous Harm	Serious or permanent physical injury	14 years

Source: Penal Code Issue Paper, Solomon Islands Law Reform Commission p.99

Most of the stipulated sentences do not reflect the seriousness of the crime and the legislation does not provide for charges that consider the complexity and ongoing nature of the crime.

The penalties system for assault, molestation and grievous harm does not consider that the offence may be committed against a weaker person; or by someone in a position of trust or authority, or by a person with whom the victim is intimately related.

Measures by the Solomon Islands Government to address Violence against Women

The Solomon Islands Government is pleased to report 20 years on from the inception of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 that there is now increased awareness in Solomon Islands communities that gender based violence especially domestic violence is a crime and one that is not to be tolerated by men, women, families and communities.

This awareness is enhanced by the development of the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Policy³⁷ by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs which sets the national mandate of zero-tolerance on violence against women.

The Policy is a welcomed initiative that complemented much work already done in the country to address gender based violence by women's groups such as the Solomon Islands National Council of Women, the Family Support Centre (FSC), the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) and the Christian Care Centre (CCC) to name some.

The FSC and the CCC are local institutions established to address gender based violence. The FSC provides counselling for battered women as well as legal advice and conducts awareness raising in communities through workshops and drama on the issue. It collaborates with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, local women's organisations such as the Solomon Islands YWCA and civil society stakeholders to hold national events such as the 16 Days of Activism on Violence against Women. During these days major rally's, marches and vigils are conducted and anti-gender violence messages are relayed. The Christian Care Centre on the other hand provides a refuge/safe house for women who have been physically abused by their husbands and partners.

A report from the Family Support Centre stated that there has been significant progress in the 'enabling environment' to address issues of GBV since the establishment of FSC in 1995, including the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 2002), launch of the Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS, 2010) [the first significant nationwide research into GBV and evidence base in the country], the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD, 2010)¹ and Eliminating Violence Against Women (EVAW, 2010)² national policies. There have also been changes to legislation affecting issues of GBV, notably the Evidence Act (2009) and the Family Protection Bill which has been endorsed by Cabinet this month (May 2014) ready for submission to the National Parliament of Solomon Islands.³⁸

The Police has stepped up its responses significantly adopting a 'no-drop' policy called the 'Victim Protection Policy' which mandates the police to investigate and follow through cases on domestic violence against women and children and sexual violence complaints through the Magistrates Court process and that only magistrates can approve whether a victim can discontinue a criminal prosecution. They also now have a police clinic for gender based violence called SEIF PLES and is the first clinic in the Solomon Islands to offer comprehensive care to survivors of sexual gender-based violence.

It has been a great opportunity for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS), the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) and the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services (MPNCS) to 'deliver as one'. The centre will facilitate the healing and recovery process of survivors of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV), intimate partner violence (IPV) and family sexual violence (FSV) by offering comprehensive short term crisis intervention by assisting with the referral process and providing medical support. It will work to support and

³⁷ www.solomontimes.com/news/new-policy...violence-against-women/461...

³⁸ Oxfam Australia, Family Support Centre Counselling Services, Capacity Assessment Report, 2013, Honiara.

complement other initiatives operating in the NGO sector and frontline staff at various medical and policing facilities in and around Honiara. The centre will also strengthen the current Ending Violence against Women (EVAW) framework in the Solomons by providing a dedicated space to survivors of SGBV as recommended in the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study (2009). It will offer valuable services such as a:

- 24 hour toll free hotline for entry and on-going referral
- 24 hour access to nurses (offering medical aid, examinations, ECP, STI prevention)
- Psychosocial First Aid
- Advocacy
- Facilitated access to forensics

There is also now a Sexual Assault Unit within the Police which deals with female victims of sexual assault and all forms of violence. The Police also cooperates with the Safenet member organisations to arrest male perpetrators and keep husbands and partners away from their wives and girlfriends while at the Centre.

Local women's groups are initiating actions and activities to condemn violence and promote anti violence messages through the media (footnote: Vois Blong Mere Solomon), through workshops and drama, that gender based violence is not acceptable and is a crime. Recently women from Isabel Province held a memorial church service for a young Isabel woman who was murdered by her father.

At the legislative level, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs have collaborated with other women's organisations as well as government and non-government organisations to form a legislative working group. This working group was assisted by regional organisations such as the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) of the SPC to draft a Family Protection Bill which this month was endorsed by Cabinet ready to be submitted to Parliament and if passed in Parliament will be an Act addressing domestic violence especially the protection of victims of domestic violence in Solomon Islands.

The World Bank and the Solomon Islands Government signed a grant agreement to help improve services for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.³⁹ The US\$130,000.00 grant from the Institutional Development Fund of the World Bank was signed by World Bank Country Director for Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea and Pacific Islands, and the Solomon Islands Minister of Finance and Treasury.

The project aims to support the Solomon Islands Government to improve access to services for victims of Gender-Based Violence in particular Domestic Violence by bringing key organizations that are in the frontline of providing support services to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence together in a forum to discuss and identify gaps and priority actions for continued work in the area of violence against women.

The Solomon Islands Minister of Finance when receiving the grant from the World Bank said,

"There is strong commitment by the Solomon Islands Government to promote gender equality. This project is part of a broad framework to address gender-based violence in Solomon Islands which will be critical for the country's development."

Permanent Secretary for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Mrs Ethel Sigimanu said, "Gender equality and violence against women is an economic issue, a human rights issue, a

³⁹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/04/05/world-bank-and-solomon-island-government-to-help-improve-services-for-survivors-of-gender-based-violence>

family issue and a development issue. We are thankful that the World Bank is helping us to address a very important issue for the country.”

As well as holding the consultative forum, the project will help the Ministry undertake a diagnostic study to identify the capacity constraints of the institutions and women’s organisations that are currently supporting and working with women victims, or vulnerable to gender based violence. The project will also support service deliverers in health, legal and other sectors working in the area of gender based violence to highlight their needs and responses to the work they are doing in violence against women and it is anticipated that people who and organisations which can effectively implement will also be identified to enhance the continuous work on violence against women. A Stakeholders workshop has already been held which brought together all organizations and donor partners that are involved in or support protection and service delivery for women and men affected by domestic violence.

A positive outcome of the workshop was the formation of the Safenet a formal referral system made up of both government and non-government organizations/agencies to provide coordinated, frontline services and support to survivors/victims of gender based violence (GBV)/violence against women (VAW). During the workshop, the needs of the Safenet to conduct its role effectively were highlighted. These needs and actions to address them were documented in a Safenet Plan of Action which will be implemented with assistance from the project. Table 13 shows the organisations involved in the Safenet and their roles and responsibilities towards victims of domestic violence.

Table 13: Names of Safenet members and the roles they play in the Safenet referral network.

Name of Safenet Member	Roles of the member/party
The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force	<p>The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), pursuant to the Police Act and as specified by the RSIPF Family Violence Policy and Sexual Violence Investigation Interim Policy is responsible for the provision of Police services to victims of violence incidents as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide security for victims from immediate harm as per RSIPF Family Violence Policy and Sexual Violence Investigation Interim Policy • Arrest of perpetrators as per RSIPF Family Violence Policy and Sexual Violence Investigation Interim Policy • Investigate reports of violence and collect evidence as per RSIPF Family Violence Policy and Sexual Violence Investigation Interim Policy • Prosecute complaints according to SI Law as per RSIPF Family Violence Policy and Sexual Violence Investigation Interim Policy • Enforce protection orders • Follow SAFENET procedures as per agreed guide card using standardized SAFENET referral form, record keeping, follow up • Refer survivor to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Escort survivor where at all possible to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Advocate prevention of GBV and support development and implementation of prevention strategies • Maintain up to date register of all cases and report quarterly on number and nature of cases seen as agreed in MOU

Family Support Centre:	<p>The Family Support Centre is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapeutic counselling of survivors and referrals • Pre-legal information • Mediation • Follow SAFENET procedures as per agreed guide card using standardized SAFENET form for referral, record keeping and follow up • Refer survivor to appropriate service provider within the SAFENET and according to the needs of the survivor • Escort survivor where at all possible to appropriate service provider within the SAFENET • Advocate prevention of GBV and support development and implementation of prevention strategies • Conduct awareness on GBV issues in communities and schools throughout the country • Maintain up to date register of all cases and report quarterly on number and nature of cases seen as agreed in MOU
The Ministry of Health and Medical Services	<p>The Ministry of Health and Medical Services, is responsible under its three key sections involved, for:</p> <p><i>National Referral Hospital, Honiara clinics (to be adapted to and rolled out to provinces at a later stage)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate treatment of injuries or possible consequences of the abuse experienced (STI and HIV prevention and pregnancy prevention due to sexual abuse by providing information and immediate access to PEP/rape kits and emergency contraceptives • Collection of evidence for documentation in medical reports that would be admissible in court. • Medical reports for all GBV cases as standard practice <p><i>Integrated Mental Health Services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of psychological treatment through Mental Health Team if trauma case • Collection of evidence for documentation in medical reports that would be admissible in court. • Medical reports for all GBV cases as standard practice <p><i>Social Welfare</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as coordinating mechanism for all SAFENET reported cases to enter the NET and be tracked through the net, and data recorded from common form • Immediately address any child welfare protection needs as arise, in regard to child physical or sexual abuse through Child Protection Officer • Families in destitute • Reporting to Cabinet upon the advice of CARECOM • Reporting to National Task Force on EVAW • Facilitate media statement and press releases if and when require by CARECOM <p><i>All 3 sectors within MHMS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow SAFENET procedures as per agreed guide card using standardized SAFENET form for referral, record keeping, follow up • Refer survivor to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Escort survivor where at all possible to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Advocate prevention of GBV and support development and implementation of prevention strategies • Maintain up to date register of all cases and report quarterly on number and nature of cases seen as agreed in MOU
The Public Solicitor's Office:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent cases: Immediate response to provision of protection orders and return of child • Assistance with other legal services as required by the client, e.g.: custody, maintenance, removal from home, access, and other follow up as per availability of

	PSO officers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow SAFENET procedures as per agreed guidecard using standardized SAFENET form for referral, record keeping, follow up • Refer survivor to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Escort survivor where at all possible to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Advocate for the prevention of GBV and support development and implementation of prevention strategies
Christian Care Centre:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide temporary shelter to clients and their children for as long as possible as needed, as determined on a case by case basis. • Provide basic faith-based/pastoral counselling to clients and children as needed • Follow SAFENET procedures as per agreed guide card using standardized SAFENET form for referral, record keeping and follow up • Refer survivor to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Escort survivor where at all possible to appropriate service within SAFENET and according to need of the survivor • Advocate prevention of GBV and support development and implementation of prevention strategies • Maintain up to date register of all cases and report quarterly on number and nature of cases seen as agreed in MOU

The Safenet has a governance body called the Technical Advisory Monitoring Committee (CARECOM), the role of which is to advice, monitor and act as the voice of the Referral SAFENET. Members of the CARECOME include the following:

- Director of A & E (Accident and Emergency)
- Director of SWD (Social Welfare)
- Director of IMHS (Mental Health)
- Director of HPD (Health Promotion Division)
- Dep. Comm. RSIPF
- CCC Coordinator (Christian Care Centre)
- FSC Coordinator (Family Support Centre)
- Public Solicitor
- Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs – EVAW Officer
- Invitees of the committees as appropriate

The Secretariat of the Referral SAFENET is jointly administered by the Social Welfare and Family Support Centre, and supported by each party on a rotational basis. The effective implementation of the Safenet and its Plan of Action will be piloted in Honiara as an initiative to strengthen frontline response as well as coordinating referral services and training in responding sensitively and in a timely fashion to the needs of victims.

Table 14 below demonstrates the **actions** already mentioned plus others and **policies** that the SIG and other organisations have developed as responses to combating Violence against Women in Solomon Islands.

Table 14: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Violence Against Women Strategic Objectives and Policies

Strategic objective D.1. Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against
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women.
Action: The Ministry of Women have put in place a policy ⁴⁰ to address violence against women in Solomon Islands. This provides a framework for all stakeholders including the Police, non-government women's organisations such as the Family Support Centre (FSC) and the Christian Care Centre (CCC) and the Ministry of Health and the Churches to collaborate in addressing violence against women.
Action: The World Bank and the Solomon Islands Government signed a grant agreement to help improve services for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. ⁴¹ The US\$130,000.00 grant project aims to support the Solomon Islands Government to improve access to services for victims of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and in particular Domestic Violence (DV) by bringing together key organizations that are in the frontline of providing support services to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence in a forum that allows them to identify gaps and priority actions.
Strategic objective D.2. Study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures.
Action: The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders meeting in Cairns, Australia in 2009 committed to addressing sexual and gender based violence in the Pacific, Solomon Islands included. This was followed by a National Study undertaken on gender based violence. The establishment of the PIFs Reference Group on Sexual and Gender Based Violence ensued which conducted a consultation on GBV in the country in 2011 the result of which has been the EVAW Policy on GBV.
<p>A Violence Against Women costing study is in progress VAW costing study in progress. Two Ministry of Women staff have been trained and now involved as a team on VAW costing. The overall objectives of VAW costing are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build understanding and capacity of local teams and key actors in differentiating types of violence against women (VAW) and several approaches for costing it, with emphasis in 2 approaches: i) Gender responsive budgeting (GRB) and ii) costing the socio-economic impact of violence against women (VAW) • To develop capacity and technical skills in gender responsive budgeting analysis for costing violence against women through training, mentoring and practical assignments across the participants. • To receive feed-back of a draft questionnaire for costing VAW (module expected to be attached in any upcoming survey in both countries, in order to collect household information needed for the impact-costing studies) • To build relationships between government, civil society and academia in Kiribati and Solomon Islands and to share information by setting up a Joint Task force on research on costing VAW • To share and agree a work-plan to undertake the GRB and Impact-costing studies in both countries <p>The expected outcomes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and understanding on costing approaches, gender responsive budgeting and the socio-economic impact of violence against women in participating ministries, civil society and academia • Understanding of data availability in the country and discussion about methods to collect and analyse data for conducting the studies • Approved work-plan for performing the costing VAW studies • Links established between government, civil society and academia on gender responsive budgeting • Links established between both countries to share information
Action: The World Bank and Solomon Islands US\$130,000.00 grant project will help the Ministry of Women to undertake a diagnostic study on capacity constraints in the institutions and services which aim to protect and support women who are victims of, or vulnerable to gender based violence. It will also support service deliverers in health, legal and other social services to help identify needs, responses and implementers. It has hosted a workshop during which the Safenet was established which is going to be a pilot project to strengthen frontline response and help co-ordinate referral services and training responders in responding sensitively and in a timely fashion to the needs of the victims.
Action: Minister of Finance and Treasury Mr Hou said, "There is strong commitment by the Solomon Islands Government to promote gender equality. This project is part of a broad framework to address

⁴⁰ Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Policy

⁴¹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/04/05/world-bank-and-solomon-island-government-to-help-improve-services-for-survivors-of-gender-based-violence>

gender-based violence in Solomon Islands which will be critical for the country's development."
Permanent Secretary for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Mrs Ethel Sigimanu said, "Gender equality and violence against women is an economic issue, a human rights issue, a family issue and a development issue. We are thankful that the World Bank is helping us to address a very important issue for the country."
Strategic objective D.3. Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.
Legislation: A new Immigration Act is now in place which has incorporated protection laws in favour of women and against human/people smuggling, trafficking, sexual exploitation, deception, abduction and forced labour. ⁴²
At the international level, Solomon Islands has ratified the CEDAW, the CRC ⁴³ convention on the Rights which addresses the protection of women and children from trafficking in women and assists victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.
A National Advisory Committee on Children has been in existence for a number of years now in the country which is now looking at SI ratification of the Optional protocol on commercial sexual exploitation of children

E. Women and armed conflict

From 1998 to 2003 the country went through an 'ethnic tension known as the 'tensions' when two provincial warring factions engaged in armed conflict resulting in loses of lives, economic, social and political loses and hardships. During this conflict period, women and girls' movements were limited for fear of their safety; they experienced physical, sexual and emotional violence as well as hardship due to the closure of basic services such as medical clinics and schools.

This was the first major conflict that Solomon Islands experienced and women and girls did not have any means of protection from the state as members of the Force were also part of the warring parties.

Despite their suffering women were resilient and strived to find ways to end the violence and restore peace. One such group, Women for Peace, made significant contributions to brokering peace during the tensions. They would take to the military camps of the two sides, food and other comforts from home. The women prayed, sang and cried with the men pleading with them to put their guns down and make peace. Combined peace services were also organised by Women for Peace attended by women and men alike to pray for the return of peace to Solomon Islands

During the two or so weeks of conflict, Honiara ran out of vegetables as the Guadalcanal women market vendors couldn't travel to town to sell their produce. An arrangement by Women for Peace saw an 'exchange of baskets' where by the Honiara women would swop their baskets of 'town' food and items such as kerosene and soap, for vegetables and fresh fruits from the Guadalcanal women at the border of Honiara and Guadalcanal Province.

But regardless of their role as peacemakers, women's contributions were not acknowledged by the SIG an example of which was their non-inclusion in the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement⁴⁴ by the government and the warring factions in October 2000.

⁴² Information gathered from the 1 day consultation workshop

⁴³ Convention on the Rights of the Child

⁴⁴ the initial breakthrough for the return of peace to the country

Women's exclusion impacted negatively on the safety and security of women and girls. Male decision makers need to hear from women and to understand that women experience conflict differently to men and their views must be heard and addressed by governments during peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction efforts.

After Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) intervened and law and order was restored, many Solomon Islands women were traumatized by the ordeals that they had experienced. Counselling services in Solomon Islands is restricted to the churches and recently formed organisations such as the Family Support Centre and the Christian Care Centre.

Currently a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP WPS) is being developed by the Ministry of Women. It is the SIGs response to the call of the UN Security Council to implement the Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960 in Solomon Islands for the prevention, protection, participation and promotion of women's peace and security issues.

It will be the first of its kind that will guide the implementation of the different sections of the GEWD and the EVAW to create a unique framework and a conducive implementation environment for Solomon Islands women's views and concerns on peace and security to be effectively addressed. The NAP WPS is the road map that directs everyone, individual Solomon Islanders, the government and non-government organizations, development partners, traditional and faith based stakeholders to play their part in implementing the NAP WPS to create peaceful environments for women and girls; for peace does not only mean the absence of war and armed conflict but also the absence of all forms of violence inflicted on women and girls in their homes, their communities, work places and at school.⁴⁵

When completed, the NAP WPS will address violence experienced by women in armed conflict as well as violence women experience in non-armed conflict situations in their everyday life be it at home, workplace or at school.

Vois Blong Mere Solomon (VBMS) a local women's media organisation, took the lead with other civil society groups in advocating for the SIGs implementation of these UN Security Council Resolutions. This resulted in the SIGs commitment to the development of the NAP WPS through the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs.

The implementation of the NAP WPS when completed will be done alongside the GEWD and the EVAW) Policies as these policies address violence against women in their everyday life and contain principles related to the UN Security Council Resolutions such as: zero tolerance of violence against women; recognition of women's rights, sharing responsibility for elimination of violence against women, and achieving gender equality.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the NAP WPS must also be implemented alongside the National Peace building Policy Framework (NPPF) of the Ministry of National Unity Reconciliation and Peace (MNURP) which is the Solomon Islands overall national peace building framework and contains principles related to the UN Security Council Resolutions such as: inclusive participation; pursuit of fairness; local ownership; blending traditional and modern worlds; and long-term orientation and exchange⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs document

⁴⁶ For further elaboration of these principles see the EVAW NAP.

⁴⁷ Note, the NPPF was still in draft form at the time of completion of the NAP WPS but should there be any change of emphasis in the final version of the NPPF, the NAP WPS will be amended to align accordingly. For further elaboration of the principles set out above, see DRAFT NPPF Framework.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): The importance of women to peace and security of Solomon Islands has now been formally recognized. Of the five commissioners appointed in 2008 to the TRC, two were women, one a local and the other from Central America.

The establishment of the TRC demonstrated the SIG's concern to address the atrocities and hardships that affected Solomon Islanders during the tension; and to provide them with an opportunity to express their views to bring about a closure to their experiences to move on with their lives. The TRC also provided the opportunity for the voices of women to be heard. Women made oral as well as a written submission to the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)⁴⁸

The written submission was the result of a nationwide consultation and workshops with women which brought out their stories that described their roles throughout history, their struggles, the violation they suffered during the 'tension' and their survival. Women made recommendations in the submission for steps to be taken by the SIG to bring about justice, healing and closure to allow them to move on with their lives. Their oral submissions were on the atrocities they suffered during the tension and the loss of their family members.

The workshops, consultations and the ensuing report created a safe space and process for women to consider and present their needs to the TRC.

A National Peace building Policy

The Solomon Islands Government has progressed the development of a National Peace Building Policy with the convening of a two-day peace stake-holders consultation workshop in Honiara from 26 – 27 November 2013.⁴⁹ The workshop, coordinated by the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, brought together representatives from several provinces, Government Ministries, civil society organizations, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The aim of the policy, the first to be developed by the Solomon Islands Government, is to coordinate all the peace initiatives being organized in the country after the social unrest.

The SIG at the policy level had undertaken major reforms in trying to address the underlying issues of the tensions. The establishment of the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace was also in response to the ethnic tension."

Table 15 shows national initiatives by the SIG and other civil society groups in addressing women in conflict situations according to the Women and Armed Conflict Strategic Objectives and Policies.

Table 15: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Women and Armed Conflict Strategic Objectives and Policies

Strategic objective E.1. Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation.
Action: A nationwide consultation was conducted as well as workshops to gather women's views on the atrocities and hardships experienced by them and their families. Both an oral

⁴⁸ Fangalasu J, Maetala R, Rodi P, Vota A & Wickham E, Herem kam: Stori blong mifala olketa mere; Women's submission to the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 28 September, 2011, Honiara, Solomon Islands

⁴⁹ Solomon Times press release; Government Progresses Development of National Peace building Policy, Wednesday, 4 December 2013

and written submission was developed which had recommendations for steps to be taken by the SIG to bring about justice, healing and closure to allow them to move on with their lives. Action: development of the WPS NAP Action: In ref. group which developed the regional action plan on WPS and now plays advisory role to ref group Action: represented on Asia Pacific Regional Advisory Group on WPS
Strategic objective E.2. Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments. Solomon Islands does not have a military force
Strategic objective E.3. Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations. Action: The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Strategic objective E.4. Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace. Action: With the establishment of the Ministry of Peace, Unity, Reconciliation and Peace
Strategic objective E.5. Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women. Action: Recently Honiara and certain parts of Guadalcanal experienced flash floods, the government responded by accommodating the victims in designated 'centres' and the government also provided food and other daily necessities for the victims.
Strategic objective E.6. Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories Not applicable:

F. Women and the Economy

Economic Situation

Women of Solomon Islands do not feature much in the country's formal sector but they play a major role in the country's rural economy. The rural economy is about subsistence farming, inshore fishing and household related craft work. It also involves the production and marketing of a small number of commodities such as food crops and fresh fruit, coconut, cocoa, timber, fish and marine products, oil palm, and livestock.

The rural economy faces major challenges such as unemployment and declining fisheries resources due to increased population pressure and declining habitat quality, climate change impacts on agricultural crops, including salt water intrusion into coastal gardens. These challenges are worsened by unsustainable land use practices for agriculture and gardens, high market transaction costs, poor access to finance, and gender inequality in development opportunities.

Currently women's participation in the rural economy is very much restricted to their role as producers and as bulk-buyers and retailers at markets. Women make up 90% of the market vendors and are also responsible for about 90 percent of fresh fruit and vegetable marketing.

Work undertaken by the former AusAID's Community Sector Support Program (CSP) some years back⁵⁰ suggests that the turnover at the Honiara Central Market was between SBD 78–129 million per annum (US\$10–16 million approximately)⁵¹. This is an urban example which doesn't reflect the same situation for the majority of Solomon Island women who live in the rural areas.

⁵⁰ AusAid, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development: Solomon Islands Country Plan Summary, March 2013

⁵¹ The high end comes from estimated daily expenditure on fresh fruit and vegetables per head of population multiplied by the estimated population of Honiara. The low estimate is based on the AusAID

Opportunities for rural women to benefit monetarily from the rural economy is limited because development efforts by the government to boost the rural economy and reduce poverty in rural areas are concentrated around big natural resources operations such as logging, minerals and fisheries⁵² which are major developments that are dominated by men and access by women into these developments are limited.

Women's participation is particularly poor in the formal employment. In 2002 only 9% of the female population was employed in the public sector and 65 % in the informal sector. Only 14% were employed in the formal private sector.

There is no law or legislation on equal opportunities and equal pay for women. Microfinance schemes or banking schemes for women are also limited especially for rural women who also have limited access to loans. Efforts by women to operate their businesses is done so in a very male-dominated culture and women face major cultural barriers as entrepreneurs.

In the rural areas where there is less engagement by both women and men in the formal sector, income generating projects and entrepreneurial initiatives seem to be the way forward for women. In the urban areas there are opportunities for women to access the formal sector, although limited as well as the opportunity start their own businesses.

It is therefore of paramount importance that all women Solomon Islands women, both rural and urban are provided the conducive environment to participate effectively in the economy of the country for their economic empowerment.

Developments are progressing well in Honiara and in some provinces where there is now a noticeable rise in the creation of women's business groups and individual women's small enterprises both in Honiara and in the rural communities. What is needed now is a national policy framework within which women entrepreneurs can operate. This will complement the good work and efforts that the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association (SIWIBA) is doing for its members and ensures that more women can be entrepreneurs in their own right.

It is pleasing to note that the Ministry of Women will validate this week, a National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women, to address the priority policy outcome 2 of the GEWD which is the 'improved economic status of women.'⁵³

The Strategy was developed after a study was conducted around 2011/2012 for a stock take analysis of research and activities relevant to women's economic status in Solomon Islands. The outcomes of the Plan has been analysed and the Ministry has developed this National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women to address the GEWD Priority Outcome 2: Improve Women's Economic Status.

The focus on improving the economic status of women is both strategic and timely. Strategic in that the growth of the Solomon Islands economy increases attention to the resource and

Smallholder Study of the gross national value of staples (sweet potato, cassava, banana, taro, kongkong, coconut, pana and yams) pro-rated for Honiara's population with an estimate of purchases of fruit and other vegetables, especially greens.

⁵² Solomon Islands National Situation Analysis conducted by the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (CRP AAS) in July, 2011

⁵³ Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Improving Women's Economic Status in the Solomon Islands: A national strategy for the economic empowerment of women and girls Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, May 2014, Honiara, Solomon Islands

productive sectors, a push for economic growth centres by government and the substantial increases in the amounts of Rural Constituency Development Funds⁵⁴

At the regional level, there also has been focus on economic empowerment of women, culminating with the Economic Ministers' Meeting at Pacific Islands Forum in Kiribati in July 2012 which considered and discussed a paper on the economic empowerment of women.⁵⁵ Regional donors have also given policy focus in this area.

The World Bank 'World Development Report 2012' focused on gender equality and makes the case that gender equality is smart economics.⁵⁶ AusAID launched the 'Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development' initiative in August 2012 which aims to improve the opportunities for political, economic, and social advancement women.⁵⁷ The economic empowerment of women is a key strategy. The UN Women Pacific Sub-Regional Office recently (August 2013) engaged a consultant to develop a Regional Programme Strategy on Women's Economic Empowerment for 2014-2018.⁵ This has yet to be a public document.

Improving the status of women is a policy priority of the Solomon Islands Government (SIG). The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) is mandated by the Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) Policy to coordinate SIG commitment to addressing gender equality and advancing the status of women in the Solomon Islands.

The GEWD policy is the overarching framework for achieving gender equality in the Solomon Islands with five priority policy outcomes. In the first two years (2010-2012) of THE GEWD policy implementation, focus has been on Outcomes 3 and 4,⁵⁸ which have taken shape and have gained momentum. The MWYCFA is now pursuing the focus on Outcome 2 which focuses on the economic empowerment of women. This national strategy focuses on 5 particular strategies:

1. Gender mainstreaming in the resource sector with particular focus on Agricultural and Fisheries activities especially for rural women;
2. Financial Inclusion through financial literacy, savings schemes and access to affordable financial services – especially targeting the informal sector;
3. Support for Women's Business Associations (SIWIBA, Women's Chamber of Commerce) to provide enterprise development and business training –for women in private and public sector;
4. Legislate for equal employment opportunities in the formal labour market;
5. Policies to ensure security of land and property ownership rights for women.

Monitoring and evaluation will be carried out by the RPPID&WDD of MWYCFA under the oversight of the National Taskforce on Policy Outcome. In this regard, Institutional strengthening of WDD/MWYCFA is a priority concern to ensure suitably qualified and skilled human resources are in place to implement and take this strategy forward and provide the necessary policy support to the National Taskforce. Australian Aid/DFAT has committed to engaging a national officer to boost the MWYCFA capacity to implement this strategy.

This National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women will be launched in July 2014.

⁵⁴ Notable increases from SBD 1million to currently SBD 9million per MP

⁵⁵ Pacific Islands' Forum Secretariat. Economic Empowerment of Women Paper, Session I, Forum Economic Ministers Meetings, Kiribati, 2-4 July 2012

⁵⁶ Publications.worldbank.org

⁵⁷ www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/.../pacific-gender-equality-strategy

⁵⁸ 1. Improved and equitable health an education for women, men, girls and boys and Equal participation of women and men in decision making and leadership

Additional positive news for Solomon Islands women is an Australian Aid grant of \$28.9m to be spread over a 10years period to increase economic opportunities for women (three years) and to reduce violence against women (two years).⁵⁹

These two activities are not funded in isolation, but form part of an existing and expanding gender equality program in the Solomon Islands. Australian Aid's gender equality program already includes support for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs; funding a Gender-based Violence Coordinator at the Ministry of Health; projects targeting women's empowerment in natural resource management; support for the Ministry of Education to ensure that the National Education Action Plan has gender performance targets; and support to the Public Solicitor's Office to establish a Family Protection Unit.

This funding is additional to existing gender equality programs funded by the bilateral program and Australian Aid bilateral Solomon Islands program has developed a design for a *Solomon Islands gender program for 2013-2016* which will bring together the current programs, establish a framework to monitor its impact and effectiveness and determine where Australian Aid is best positioned to engage on gender issues and develop a plan for a three year program. The country plan under the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Initiative will be a sub-set of this program. For this reason, the Country Plan is limited to two activities in order to not pre-empt the design of the wider gender response in Australian Aid's Solomon Islands program.

The Ministry of Women is well supported to begin work in addressing women's economic empowerment through initiatives such as this Australian Aid programme and financial assistant and recommendations from the Desk Study will direct it in delivering specific activities to increase women's engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

G. Women in power and decision-making

Female leadership is slowly but steadily gaining momentum in decision making.. In the government, a first ever female is now assuming the position of Acting Commissioner of Police. Yet another first female ever is the Solomon Islands High Commissioner to New Zealand with another Solomon Islands female her First Secretary.

The Deputy Director of the Policy, Planning and Project management of the Ministry of Fisheries is also a woman. She in turn has empowered rural women by enabling them to participate in community based Marine Areas and Marine Resources Management programmes. Through their new found knowledge and skills and from their contributions to discussions and decision, these rural women have developed confidence to manage their own marine resources.

Until 2011 there were 5 female permanent secretaries within five government ministries and 3 female undersecretaries. Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade has increased the number of females heading their international desks with one female at the helm of the Legal Division, another, the Assistant Secretary of the Europe Branch and yet another the Assistant Secretary of the Pacific Branch.

Women's access to the National Parliament of Solomon Islands: Despite these increases, getting women into the National Parliament of Solomon Islands is still a major challenge as can be seen in Table 16 below which shows the country's national elections voting summary in the period between 1980 to 2010 however during a bye-election about two years ago, one female was elected into Parliament.

Table 16: National Elections Voting Summary – 1980 - 2010

⁵⁹ Source: <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/Countries/Pacific/Solomon-Islands.php>.

Year	1980	1984	1989	1993	1997	2001	2006	2010
Women Candidates	1	2	1	10	14	14	26	26
Total Candidates	218	207	255	280	336	339	453	509
% of votes for women candidates	0.1	0.9	1	3	3.2	2.6	3.7	2.7
Votes for women	68	601	777	3,183	4,552	4,824	7,244	6,270
Total Votes	57,874	67,285	81,238	104,954	140,425	184,315	193,495	230,936
Increase in total voters		16	21	29	34	31	5	19
Increase in voters for women		784	29	310	43	6	50	-13

Source: SIG, Solomon Islands CEDAW Combined Initial, Second and Third Periodic Report 2012

Since 2006 five provinces out of nine have elected women to their provincial assemblies. Isabel (2); Renbel (1); Malaita (1); Makira (1); Western Province (1) and Guadalcanal (1). Other examples are shown on Table:

The number of female candidates has continued to increase both in number and quality since 2001 when there were 14 Women Candidates out of a total of 339 Candidates; and in 2006 an increase to 26 females was recorded but with another increase of 427 males. In 2010 there was a total of 509 candidates out of whom were only 26 female Candidates and 483 males; however during a bye election in 2012, a woman did win a seat for the North Malaita Constituency during a bye election.

Decision making is a male domain and a 'first past the post' electoral system disadvantages women. Discrimination against women in education and employment are contributing factors to the lack of women in parliament and at the provincial assemblies' levels

Other factors hindering women from getting elected into parliament include traditional beliefs that only men are legible to be MPs, the \$2000 contesting fee for the national elections and \$1000 for provincial elections; the lack of funds to meet election costs and the lack of confidence by women to contest against men in an area which society views to be for 'men only'.

The Ministry of Women in collaboration with local women's organisations have initiated programmes and activities to push for increased participation of women in decision making especially in Parliament; organisations such as the Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW) and Vois Blong Mere Solomon (VBMS) and other local stakeholders including the UN Women's Solomon Islands Office. This group have now merged into the WISDOM Coalition and have continued to advocate diligently for women's access to Parliament.

An attempt to introduce Temporary Special Measures was rejected by Cabinet in 2009. The notion to proactively encourage the participation of women in policy making at the national parliament became prominent then when the Ministry for Women launched a nationwide campaign for the introduction of Temporary Special Measure (TSM) on reserve seats for women in parliament.

Indeed, the expectation from the nation-wide consultation was for the people to get behind and support the TSM proposal so that Government and Parliament will have little choice but to support the wishes of the people as in the TSM proposal. According to the RAMSI People's Survey carried out in 2013, more than 90% of people surveyed supported reserved seats for women. Since the survey started in 2007, the support for women as leaders has been consistent throughout.

However the 'forces against a TSM bill' were greater than those supporting it. At the political level this was made known by the then Prime Minister in early 2009 that he does not have the number to introduce an effective TSM legislation for reserved seats for women in Parliament.

Even though the CNURA government did not have the numbers in Parliament to support TSM legislation on a quota of seats for women in parliament, the government was committed to the introduction of a TSM approach. This was manifested in the drafting of the Political Party Integrity Bill that the CNURA government introduced into the House in 2010 which was not passed. However the current NCRA Government, which succeeded the CNURA Government in 2010, is equally committed to gender equality including women's representation in Parliament. NCRA Policy Statement Parts 10.3.1(b) and 4.1.2.3 affirmed the NCRA Government's commitment to gender equality.

The Political Parties Integrity Bill (PPIB), 2014 was re submitted to Parliament this month. Again the WISDM Coalition successfully negotiated of the Ministry of Women and the WISDM Coalition to include in the draft at least ten per cent of the total number of candidates each party selects and endorses to contest an election to be women.⁶⁰ There is also a financial incentive of SBD\$10,000 to be given to any Party that fields a successful female candidate.

During the Parliament debate on the Bill the members were favourable of having female representation on the Political Parties Commission. The Commission shall consist of three members who shall be persons selected from among former Governors-General, former Speakers of Parliament, retired judges and retired heads of faith-based organisations, and any other eminent citizens, appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of Opposition.

The Commission's role is to administer the implementation of the bill when it becomes an Act. Other roles of the Commission included formulating, monitoring and reviewing policies relating to the regulation of the political parties etc. These are major responsibilities for any women who may be appointed to the Commission to perform effectively. It is therefore important for women who are on decision making bodies to be trained in the roles of these bodies and how they can contribute meaningfully to discussions and to decision making.

A victory for Solomon Islands women was recently achieved when the PPIB, 2014 was passed by Parliament this month. (May 2014).

The commitment of both the CNURA and NCRA Governments to the concept of a TSM for women in Parliament is consistent with their commitment to the UN Convention against the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was ratified by Solomon Islands in 2002, and CEDAW Article 4 provides justification for the introduction of special measures or affirmative actions by Government to advance gender equality (including

⁶⁰ The Political Parties Integrity Bill 2014

women participation in Parliament). Article 7 of CEDAW also expanded on the need to eliminate the widespread discrimination against women in the area of politics.

A National General Election is going to be held around November 2014 in the country and the WISDM Coalition, is heavily involved in creating programmes to support intending female candidates. A WISDM member, the Vois Blong Mere Solomon is stepping up its engagement with partners' to carry out media awareness through broadcast, print, workshops and drama in the lead up to the Solomon Islands 2014 National Elections in 2014. Several radio spots conveying messages on the importance of voting women are now being developed ready for broadcast.

Another opportunity for women's leadership is the launch of the WISDM's National Campaign Strategy and Plan of Action 2014 – 2015. This election strategy and plan of action has 4 key strategies developed to ensure Women's Campaigns are properly managed and coordinated with all women's key stakeholders, Church Faith Women's Organizations, Non State Actors, Community Leaders, Women and Youth Leaders at the village level to ensure that at least 10 Women are elected to Parliament during this coming National General Election.

The Strategy is intended to support and increase the number of qualified female candidates with quality leadership needed to making a difference in the political arena that will effect development changes for the betterment of the country. The Strategy recognizes that democracy is fundamentally a system and as such is a means and not an end. It is to this that Women will continue their struggle within the legal instruments available to them to pursue their representation in Parliament and of course Provincial Assemblies and the Honiara City Council.

The same strategies can also be used to influence and motivate female candidates in the upcoming Provincial Elections to include Malaita, Central, Ysabel, Guadalcanal, Temotu and Rennell and Bellona Provinces which, are anticipated to be held also towards the end of 2014.

As of April 2014, it was reported in the social media's Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII) that 22 women altogether have registered their interest to contest the upcoming Solomon Islands National General Elections in the majority of the provinces.

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW)'s Women in Leadership (WIL) Desk as part of WISDM is starting off its civic education and Gender Equality awareness raising workshops in West Guadalcanal Constituency from the 7th to the 9th of May followed by a Public Forum in Honiara. Key speakers will be speaking on the theme of the Forum which is "WHY WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT?"

The success rates of women being successful in elections though minimal and only at the provincial elections demonstrates a positive shift in community's mindsets to give women the opportunity to be in decision making. Furthermore the People's Survey in 2010 and 2011 both indicated that generally, the Solomon Islands population are of the view that women make good leaders. Currently WISDM is devoting its efforts on pursuing two streams of actions to ensure women get in as elected members in the parliament and provincial assemblies by the next parliament and provincial elections. One stream focuses on temporary special measures in the form of quotas for women and the other on preparations for open seats elections. Both streams envisage some necessary electoral reforms to provide a more gender responsive election environment and in the light of the NCRA policy on providing some quota seats for women in parliament and the current constitutional reform process, which advocates the same, WISDM is working very closely with these reform programmes .

Table 17 shows the actions that the Solomon Islands Government has undertaken to address the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the Women in Power and Decision Making Critical Area of Concern's Objectives and Policies

Table 17: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Women in Power and Decision Making Objectives and Policies

Strategic objective G.1. Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.
Action: The Gender Equality in Political Governance (GEPG) Programme funded by development partners and working with SIG and civil society organisations has been actively involved in capacity building training workshops using BRIDGE (Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections) to promote understanding of why it is important for women to also be in decision making.
Action: Setting up of the WISDM Coalition is a strategic measure to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making
Action: The conducting of civic education by WISDM in Makira, Malaita and Guadalcanal Provinces.
Strategic objective G.2. Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.
Action: A total of 12 capacity workshops have been conducted with 357 participants (125 men and 232 women).
Action: The establishment of the Parliamentary Strengthening Programme implemented by the SIG with partner assistance which further established the Young Women's Parliamentary Group (YWPG) to ensure that gender messages are the central component of parliamentary education initiatives.
Action: The establishment of a gender focal point within the parliamentary secretariat and supporting women's groups to interact with parliamentary committees, where appropriate.

H. Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women

The establishment of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) was the first step in the right direction for the Solomon Islands Government. It opened up a space dedicated to women's developmental activities to promote gender equality, opening up a range of opportunities in terms of the creation of gender focal points, policies, programmes and activities.

The endorsement in 2010 of the Solomon Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) led to the setting up of gender focal points in different government ministries as well as specific gender policies resulting in the mainstreaming of gender equality within the government ministries⁶¹ and advancing gender equality to ensure that both women and men are actively contributing and participating meaningfully in all spheres and levels of development and decision making.

The establishment of the gender focal points are great achievements for women's empowerment and gender equality in Solomon Islands. Most policies in government ministries are not gender segregated therefore the gender focal points are strategically placed to monitor the translating of these policies into action and ensure programmes and activities resulting from these policies are developed for women. It is of paramount importance that the Ministry of Women and the gender focal points collaborate effectively to monitor the application of these policies to ensure that gender equality is applied in the implementation of these policies.

⁶¹ The Ministry of Women enabled other government ministries to develop gender policies, e.g. the Ministry of Fisheries and its Gender Strategy, the Ministry of Education and its Gender Equity Policy etc.

An example is raised in the Education section of this report. The majority of the Education Policies are not gender focussed but general. Hence the Ministry of Women needs to work closely with the Ministry of Education's gender focal point to monitor how the policies are being implemented and resourced for the benefit of both women and men. In other words, gender will be mainstreamed in the implementation of these policies.

At the moment the institutional machinery within the government has delivered many positive results for gender equality and women's empowerment in Solomon Islands. For example, the Ministry has been addressing the issue of violence against women and has successfully developed the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Policy which has emphasized zero tolerance to violence against women.

This has been followed with the drafting of legislation such as the Family Protection Bill which is about to be submitted to Cabinet for tabling in Parliament which when passed will be the first legislation in Solomon Islands solely to address violence against women.

Another example is that the Ministry of Women has also successfully negotiated into the draft Political Parties Integrity Bill, 2014 at least ten per cent of the total number of candidates each party selects and endorses to contest an election to be women.⁶²

The incorporation of gender policies into these ministries is resulting in effective gender mainstreaming within the government ministries, for example the Ministry of Education is ensuring fairer accessibility of girls into schools especially to secondary and the tertiary levels where accessibility by girls is more difficult. An example being that of the 663 enrolments at King George V1 Secondary School for 2014, 335 are boys and 298 are girls.⁶³

The Ministry of Women has created the enabling environment for the promotion and recognition of gender equality in Solomon Islands and the improvement in the lives of women. Table 18 below shows the national policies and actions developed to address the strategic objectives for the Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women critical area of concern.

Table 18: National Policies and Actions in response to the Strategic Objectives of the institutional mechanism for the advancement of women critical area of concern.

Strategic objective H.1. Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies.
Policy: The endorsement in 2010 of the Solomon Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) led to the setting up of gender focal points in different

⁶² The Political Parties Integrity Bill 2014

⁶³ King George V1 National Secondary School, Principal's Report, October 2013, Honiara.

government ministries as well as specific gender policies resulting in the mainstreaming of gender equality within the government ministries⁶⁴ and advancing gender equality to ensure that both women and men are actively contributing and participating meaningfully in all spheres and levels of development and decision making.

Strategic objective H.2. Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.

Action: The Ministry of Women leading the WISDM Coalition have successfully negotiated into the draft Political Parties Integrity Bill, 2014 at least ten per cent of the total number of candidates each party selects and endorses to contest an election to be women.⁶⁵

Strategic objective H.3. Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

Action: An Aide Memoire was signed by the Solomon Islands Government with ADB and SPC⁶⁶ for the conducting of a Gender Statistics Initiative (now in progress) in Solomon Islands funded by SPC and a Country Gender Assessment which is now being conducted in the country, funded by ADB.⁶⁷ The Assessment which began in 2013 will be validated in June 2014. Furthermore The UNFPA is also currently working on a project in the country which will use the 2009 Census Report to develop a gender monograph for Solomon Islands. Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women said that based on the findings of all these projects, a home grown National Gender Indicators will be developed for Solomon Islands, taking into account country specific gender data needs to select appropriate indicators for the country's situation which the international gender indicators such as the Minimum Set of Gender Indicators and the nine indicators on violence against women agreed on by the UN Statistical Commission in 2013 could be merged with.

I. Human rights of women

Current situation:

Human Rights' is a word that does not mean much or is never heard of by the majority of women in the rural areas of Solomon Islands. However women's daily lives are always affected by an aspect of human rights for example the food they eat, the water they drink, the attendance of their children at school, going to the clinics and working.

The Solomon Islands Government is committed to the Universal Periodic Review Process now a new process for reporting on progress of Human Rights at the national level. Solomon Islands has reported once and is due again for reporting soon. The process is compulsory for all HRC member countries. All Pacific Islands countries have reported and expected to report every three years.

There are state accountability mechanisms in place in the absence of a HR Commission such as Ombudsman's office, Office of the LCC, Auditor General's Office.

SI's state obligation to report to CEDAW and CRC shd be mentioned as state actions to address HR. CEDAW's initial, 2nd and 3rd periodic reports to be reported on in October in Geneva. CRC report in the process of being finalized

One of the first human rights training for Solomon Islands women happened in the period between 2003 and 2004 for a group of government and civil society women leaders. The training was conducted by the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) based in Suva, Fiji. The

⁶⁴ The Ministry of Women enabled other government ministries to develop gender policies, e.g. the Ministry of Fisheries and its Gender Strategy, the Ministry of Education and its Gender Equity Policy etc.

⁶⁵ The Political Parties Integrity Bill 2014

⁶⁶ Secretariat of the Pacific Community

⁶⁷ According to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs

training was spread just over a one year period. CPT was also carried out for teachers most of whom are women and for the youth so accommodating the need for young women to know their rights and participate in advocating for HR and in particular CEDAW

The anticipated outcome was that the women equipped with the knowledge would return to their villages and raise awareness among their women's groups and the community and advocate for women's rights by addressing woman's rights violation in the community and to develop strategies for change, taking on board likeminded males and church men to form a committee to develop and implement these strategies.

Lack of monitoring makes it difficult for Solomon Islands to ascertain whether or not the knowledge gained from these human rights trainings are actually passed on to people in the rural communities and whether the trainees have been doing human rights advocacy in their communities. However some of the human rights trainees have contested for provincial and national elections. One thing for sure is that the lack of institutional support is hampering the effectiveness of their efforts.

Women's human rights abuses were more visible in the past 10 years when Solomon Islands was affected by the ethnic tension. Women were allegedly raped and experienced other sexual and physical abuses. Those in the areas where the armed conflict occurred were badly affected by the loss of family members and friends at the height of the tension.

Currently there is no national mechanism specifically established to attend to human rights violations except for the courts which are not only too intimidating for women to access but many women's human rights abuses are not legislated for in domestic legislation e.g. domestic violence abuses are charged under common assault or assault causing bodily harm etc.

Solomon Islands Constitution

The protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of Solomon Islanders including women, are contained in Chapter 2 of the Solomon Islands Constitution⁶⁸. They are listed below:

- a) Right to life,
- b) Right to personal liberty
- c) Protection from slavery and forced labour
- d) Protection from inhumane treatment
- e) Protection from deprivation of property
- f) Protection for the privacy of the home and other property
- g) Right to secure the protection of the law
- h) Freedom of conscience
- i) Freedom of expression
- j) Freedom of assembly and association
- k) Freedom of movement
- l) Protection from discrimination on the grounds of race etc

Aside from the Constitution several United Nation's Human Rights Conventions and Covenants have been ratified by the Solomon Islands Government some of which are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW is the most important international human rights convention for women. It addresses gender discrimination and advocates for women's empowerment and a catalyst for gender equality.

⁶⁸ National Parliament Office of Solomon Islands, Constitution of Solomon Islands, Honiara, 2009

The Government is slowly attempting to incorporate aspects of these international instruments e.g. the Family Protection Bill and the Evidence Act. An attempt by RRRT to incorporate the rights contained in the conventions that Solomon Islands had ratified into the Bill of Rights of the proposed Solomon Islands Federal Constitution may suffice if this Federal Constitution is adopted. A review of the Federal Constitution is currently being conducted.

Reports such as the Beijing +20 are 'tools' to highlight women's rights; through the critical areas of concerns which really are violation of women's rights and the disadvantaging and discriminating of women. By highlighting these negatives, women's rights and the violation of their rights are taking centre stage for decision makers to see and ensure that positive measures are taken, to address them. Table 19 has been developed to show the link between the Critical Areas of Concern and Human Rights.

Table 19: The Critical Areas of Concern and Human Rights

Critical Area of Concern	Relation to Human Rights
Women and Poverty	<p>Article 11 (ICESCR): The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. 2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger,</p> <p>Article 6 (ICESCR): The right to work</p>
Education and Training of Women	Article 13 (ICESCR) The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education.
Women and Health	Article 12 (ICESCR) The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
	SI also signed Convention for Disability but yet to ratify. There is a policy now being developed on women with disabilities
Violence against Women	Solomon Islands Constitution: The right to life; Protection from inhumane treatment
Women and armed conflict	Solomon Islands Constitution: The right to life; Right to personal liberty; Protection from inhumane treatment; Protection from inhumane treatment
Women in power and decision making	Article 25: ICCPR: Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
	The inclusion of a 10% quota for women to ran for elections in the Political Parties Integrity Bill
Women and the media	<p>Article 19: ICCPR</p> <p>1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.</p> <p>2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.</p>

Progress on Human Rights of Women: Throughout this Report we have seen examples of the SIG's progress towards improving the lives of Solomon Islands women. There has been significant improvement in the access to education for girls since the Solomon Islands Government acceded to CEDAW and its Operational Protocol. The ratio of girls to boys accessing primary school has closed to almost negligible. Although there remains disparity at the senior level it is clear that receiving primary school education is now becoming accessible for girls. This significant improvement has been achieved through continuous development of education policies and consistent allocation of resources to the education sector and easy access to community high schools in rural areas.

Delivery of services to the rural areas remains a challenge due to the geography of Solomon Islands and the considerable expense to develop infrastructure in rural areas. Despite this, women in the rural areas not only comprise the majority of unpaid subsistence workers but also engage in informal marketing of mostly food produce as the common source of money to feed their families.

Table 20 below contains some of the policies and actions undertaken by the Solomon Islands Government to address the Human Rights of Women in the country.

Table 20: National Policies and Actions in response to the Strategic Objectives of Human Rights and Women.

Strategic objective I.1. Promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
Action: Work on the National Action Plan for women, peace and security is underway.
Policy: The Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2011 – 2020 also contains human rights oriented policies and strategies. In the education ministry efforts are ongoing to progress equal gender access to education especially at the higher education levels.
Action: Women's health have improved with a greater number of women being able to access ante natal and delivery health care.
Strategic objective I.2. Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice.
The Constitution of Solomon Islands protects its citizens from any form of discrimination on the grounds of sex
Strategic objective I.3. Achieve legal literacy.
The Solomon Islands Government is committed to the development of a domestic violence legislation (Family Protection Bill) which has been endorsed by Cabinet ready to be submitted to Parliament for its legislation debate

J Women and the Media

Freedom of expression is a fundamental political human right that is contained in the Solomon Islands Constitution. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which the SIG is a state party to in its Article 19 (2) states that

'Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.'

This means that all Solomon Islanders, including women have the right to express themselves. One very effective avenue to express one's views is through the media. Examples have showed throughout this Report that women have been disadvantaged due to gender biases, sometimes knowingly and other times unknowingly. Women's concerns need to be heard by decision

makers in order for these to be addressed and for women's lives to improve. Furthermore the media also plays the role of informing women of important information to help their lives and that of their families and communities. The media is therefore a very important 'tool' to advocate for women as well as to inform women.

In Solomon Islands however it is harder for women's information to be published in the mainstream media, which in Honiara includes the radio stations, TV and newspapers. Most of them are more interested in 'big' government news than women's issues and concerns. However recently there has been a marked improvement in the coverage of women's events in the mainstream media. This may be due to the few females now taking up reporting work with some of these media organisations⁶⁹ as they are more favourable to women's information needs. An example is some recent reporting on rape cases which appeared in the nation's leading newspapers and all written by a female journalist. There is a need for more women to be in the media.

Some newspapers have allowed for 'women's columns' and expect these to be filled with safe traditional women's information such as cooking recipe's, sewing instructions, health information and so forth. There could be improvements to these columns to include gender and development issues to also be included in such columns. Responding to these constraints to women's freedom of expression, and their right to information a call by women leaders for a women's media organisation to be established to address the information gap that exists for women, an organisation called the Vois Blong Mere Solomon or VBMS was established with the Mission to 'Empower Women through Information Dissemination, Linking and Networking.'

The VBMS experience their own challenges in terms of their capacity in human resources, technical resources and finance to ensure wide coverage of women's stories. However the VBMS adopts empowering strategies such as partnering with national and rural organisations and networking with relevant Stakeholders as it strives to connect and maintain its information dissemination linkages with individual women and women's organizations and groups both in Honiara and the provinces.

The main mediums of dissemination for the VBMS's are its radio programs on the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, quarterly newsletters, radio spots, visits to rural communities to collect interviews and stories (to be shared on the radio programme and newsletter), conducting community advocacy on women's information needs and encouraging discussions through public forums. VBMS also has a resource centre which is accessible and used by women, students, the general public and staff, for school projects, work assignments and research.

The VBMS also offers trainings for women community leaders in communities, and partner organizations on media advocacy knowledge and skills. It has established Women's Focal Points in the provinces which supply news from women in the provinces to the VBMS.

Refer to Table 21 which show the provinces that have a VBMS provincial focal point and the number of coordinators at these focal points by gender.

Table 21: VBMS Focal Point Coordinators, their provinces and gender

Province	Focal Point Coordinator	Female	Male
Malaita	3	1	2
Choiseul	1	1	
Western	3	2	1

⁶⁹ An example was when a female headed a television entity in Honiara and women in the radio and newspapers also advocate for women's information to be published, broadcast or televised.

Renbel	1	1	
Isabel Province	1	1	
Guadalcanal	1 VBMS office/WDD Guadalcanal		1
Honiara	VBMS Office & Honiara City Council		
Temotu	Yet to finalise		
Makira	2	1	1

Source: VBMS Annual Report 2013

One major activity that VBMS has taken the lead in is civic education and media advocacy on Temporary Special Measures for women to enter Parliament in partnership with the WISDM Coalition. Although unsuccessful then, the VBMS as part of the WISDM Coalition is now planning and strategizing with the Ministry of Women and their other partners for the reintroduction of the TSM to Cabinet.

VBMS is now stepping up its engagement with partners' to carry out media awareness through the newspapers, radio and television; through workshops and drama on the importance of voting for women in the lead up to the Solomon Islands 2014 National Elections in 2014. It is also using its strong networks and its provincial focal points to disseminate information for the benefit of women and to ensure women's voices are heard.⁷⁰

VBMS utilises all these different forms of communication to advocate for women's representation in decision making and in parliament; women's economic empowerment; and on gender and leadership to promote the importance of women's participation in leadership and decision making. VBMS has a pool of experts who can be called upon to provide technical and practical information that are used through the media outlets as well as through training for women and non-government organisations in Solomon Islands.

The organisation is resorting to other mediums and modes of communication to adapt to women's information needs and emerging issues faced by women contesting elections. The organisation now has its own drama group made up of selected young women who have undergone 4 weeks intensive training on script writing for theatre and drama and radio plays and stage performances. Table 22 demonstrates national actions to address the Strategic Objectives of Women and the Media's critical areas of concern.

Table 22: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Women and the Media Objectives and Policies

Strategic objective J.1. Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.
Media Advocacy: Training held for VBMS and Stakeholders on Reframing of Messages for Change speaking on positive development by women at home and in the community that highlights women's capacity to lead including leadership in parliament. These messages are broadcast on national radio and FM stations.
Theatre Advocacy: dramatizing the importance of having women in parliament; as well as Gender-based Violence. This approach is effective as the information disseminated is a two-way communication when audiences can ask questions and get their answers instantly. VBMS drama group will have time to collect information and stories from the community to share on the weekly radio program.
Informing and Educating: Promoting information on business activities and programmes to its members on VBMS radio program
Trainings: Hold 2 Media Advocacy Training for National Women's Focal Points and networks

⁷⁰ They are the Solomon Islands National Council of Women, the Ministry for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and the Solomon Islands Christian Association – Women's Desk. It also works directly with Women's Groups and Associations, Community Based Organizations, Strategic Government Ministries and NGOs and the Media Association of Solomon Islands MASI

and 1 Train the Trainer on Media Advocacy and Lobbying for Temporary Special Measures; BRIDGE training on Gender Media and Elections Collaboration with National Women's Machineries and Stakeholders and Women's groups (workshops, interviews with women about their human security issues and concerns)
Media Advocacy: Weekly Radio Programs broadcast on National Radio; Quarterly Newsletter; VBMS Media Advocacy Training Manual
Networking: VBMS is a member of the government task force that is developing a National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security and promoting information on women's peace and security as well as information on violence against women and preventative measures
Strengthen networks and link with national and regional media organizations to advocate Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action – Women in Media and UN Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security
Provincial/rural communities visits: to rural women to cover events, interviews and collect stories to share on radio and newsletter
Affiliation to media organisations: Member of the MASI (Media Association of Solomon Islands) and an influence in women in media in member organizations and its policies and regulations
Strategic objective J.2. Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.
'Combat negative portrayal of women in the media' is one area that the VBMS needs to address. The other emerging areas for VBMS are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in leadership positions in media organizations. • Gender sensitization of media workers and editors. • Train more women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media. • Awareness and training on social media (pros and cons) for rural women. • Management of social media in the workplace. • Human Rights awareness for media workers and professionals. • Facilitate a directory of media women experts. • Civic Education to include media advocacy • Establish a Media Watch Group.
FUTURE VBMS WORK
VBMS will expand into other modes of communication and information dissemination: The following activities will be conducted in the lead up to the elections in November
Coordinate at least 3 trainings for women candidates in 2014; one Gender and Media Training for MASI, one for National Women's Machineries and VBMS Focal Points in preparation for reporting on the election.
Use VBMS Drama group to support Civic Education in communities on the importance of leadership and citizen's responsibilities in the development of Solomon Islands.
Use its weekly radio program to disseminate information, raise awareness about gender-based violence and use drama to advocate against Gender-Based Violence in communities.
Conduct digital stories telling program with communities. Stories will be shared with national and regional media networks to raise awareness on specific issues that will be used as basis for policy formulation.
Publish quarterly newsletters to feature Women Leaders.
Create VBMS Face-book page.

K. Women and the Environment

The environment is very important to all Solomon Islanders including women. It is the land, the forests, the rivers and the seas that the people of this country live off. The 85% Solomon Islanders who live in the rural areas, depend on their environment for food security, family needs such as bush materials to build their houses and herbs and plants for traditional medicines. The rural woman's subsistence farming has been the 'safety net' that has prevented the majority of Solomon Islanders from experiencing extreme poverty.

Unfortunately the majority of Solomon Islanders are not aware that their environment is under threat from invasive species, loss of land and marine habitats, over exploitation of natural resources; destructive harvesting techniques and climate change from sea level rise and more frequent destructive climatic events. The root causes stem from human activity, increasing population, consumption, changing economic circumstances and the need for cash.

Solomon Islands rural communities are beginning to experience the consequences of these changes. Table 23 below highlights some of the consequences which are causes for grave concern for the future of the country's environment and the impacts it will have on the livelihoods of people.

Table 23: Environmental Consequences:

Fresh Water Stress due to soil erosion and sedimentation of stream and river systems from logging operations rivers have become polluted hence clean and safe drinking water is a problem in Solomon Islands communities situated near major logging and mining operations.
Soil Stress and Degradation: Serious soil stress is experienced through low crop yield and high incidence of pest and diseases due to high population growth and/or density uncontrolled large scale forestry; large intensive agriculture developments; introduced agricultural systems and mining. Subsistence gardens are not yielding as much crop as they used to.
Forest Depletion: due to deforestation over large tracts of land and very steep land; serious erosion, siltation, soil structure decline and loss of soil fertility also posing a threat to terrestrial and marine biodiversity; affects the ecological service and functions of local water and coastal systems as well as the production potential of the land and communities finding it increasingly difficult to access forest products and materials for housing, food, and good quality water that is important for village livelihood
Loss of Biodiversity: Agriculture, forestry and mining activities exerted pressure on the terrestrial environment leads to loss of biodiversity, invasive alien species, land degradation, impact inland aquatic. Inappropriate land use, deforestation activities and over harvesting of marine resources results in the loss of biodiversity.
Fish Stock Depletion and Coral Reef Degradation: as well as domestic marine activities, commercial extraction is worsening these effects. Overexploitation for both subsistence and commercial use results in severe depletion of several important food and commercial species; including; green snails, black lip, gold lip shells, coconut crabs, giant clam and sandfish (sea cucumber). Other species such as trochus, crayfish/lobster and turtles under some form of protection (regulation) are also threatened. Fishermen are having to paddle greater distances out to sea to find good fishing grounds.
Natural disasters such as cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tidal waves, impact greatly on coastal environments and can have destruction effect not only physically but by the alteration of the ecosystem. Such phenomena have not been seriously considered before but have the capacity of destroying endangered species and the coral reefs.

Source: Pacific Environment Information Network (PEIN) Country Profiles and Virtual Libraries, Solomon Islands, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)
<https://www.sprep.org/index.php>

Solomon Islands National Climate Change Policy, 2012 – 2017: A major achievement in this area for the government is the development of the **Solomon Islands National Climate Change Policy, 2012 – 2017** by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology.

The Policy is a response to the challenges and opportunities that climate change brings about especially to a least developed country such as Solomon Islands.

It aims to enable better coordination of climate change work in the country and provides opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between the government and people of Solomon Islands and its development partners and national and regional stakeholders.

Women, the Environment and Climate Change: Unfortunately there is nothing specific to gender in the Solomon Islands Climate Change Policy. Furthermore there hasn't been any visible women's involvement in environmental initiatives that deal directly with environment change and climate change and how they affect women's lives.

However with the Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) Policy now in place a framework now exists for increased collaboration between ministries and the ministerial gender focal points' to develop gender specific policies in the area of women and the environment for activities and programmes to be conducted for women especially those in the rural areas.

The bigger framework for such collaboration is also already in place with Objective 7 of the Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2011 – 2020, which is directly addressing environment and climate change issues.

One of its strategies is the mainstreaming of climate change and the environment into all government ministries. And furthermore enhances this collaborative effort among the gender focal points with the Ministry of women to address the environment and climate change challenges.

Refer to Text Box 1 which is a story of climate change and its effects on the remote southern Weather coast of Guadalcanal Province, the largest island in Solomon Islands where Honiara, the capital is also based.

'Life is already difficult for women of Weather Coast for sustaining a livelihood from the land for it is a daily struggle on the steep coastal mountain slopes that plunge to the sea, made worse by the absence of adequate roads, transport and government service and now climate change too is taking its toll on the already precarious food situation there'. Below is the rest of their story by Caroline Wilson of the International Press Service (IPS) but edited to fit into Text Box 2.

Text Box 2: Climate Change and its effects on the remote southern Weather Coast of Guadalcanal

"From mid-March to June it is always raining and whatever crops we grow will not go to harvest," Alice, a member of a farming family on the Weather Coast, told IPS referring to the period locals here call "time hungry".

During these months, most meals consist of rice and one or two other items procured from the shops in the city of Honiara. The climate is hot and humid all year round and people are vulnerable to cyclones, gale force winds and flooding during the wet season, as well as earthquakes and landslides due to the country's proximity to the highly seismic Pacific Rim of Fire. Scientists are now predicting the weather extremes that batter this rugged coast will only get worse as the nation faces the full force of climate change. The sea level near the Solomon Islands has been rising by eight millimetres per year compared to the global average of 2.8 to 3.6 mm, according to the Pacific Climate Change Science Programme.

Residents of Weather Coast villages like Duidui, Reavu and Avuavu use the steep slopes above the coastline to cultivate crops, growing everything from taro, yams and sweet potatoes to cassava and bananas. This region receives heavy rainfall of 5,000 to 8,000 mm a year during two wet seasons, the first from January to April, and the second

L. The girl-child

In traditional Solomon Islands families, the birth of a girl child is welcomed especially if she is the first child, as the responsibility of looking after future siblings, helping her mother with the household chores, subsistence gardening and other woman's role is in the family and the community; is automatically perceived to be borne by her as she grows up. Additionally, for those Solomon Islands communities where bride price is still practiced, a girl child is a future 'investment' for her family.

As an 'asset' the girl child is much protected and taught to work alongside her mother from as early as four to five years old. Furthering her education in those days were slim as there were legitimate concerns and anxiety about her general safety and potential boy/girl relationships that may end in a pregnancy. Nowadays sending the girl child to school is much freer than in the past when she is seen to be more needed at home than going to school.

Despite a more liberated outlook to girls education now a days, some families with financial difficulties especially to pay for school fees will retain girls back home and allow their brothers to continue their education. She may be sent to be a baby sitter for members of the immediate family who are living and working in Honiara or other urban centres in the provinces, hoping that she can earn money and remit it to her parents back in the village.

Other problems the girl child experiences is physical violence by her parents or siblings when she is seen to be disobedient. Sexual abuse is not unknown in the home especially by close male relatives, a stepfather⁷¹ or even a father.

A concern for the girl child is the lack of sex education in her home to prepare her to enter secondary school where she will be interacting with boys. The girl child is not aware of her rights and is taught by society to think that boys are superior to girls. This lack of knowledge can result in teenage pregnancies and in Solomon Islands this will warrant instant expulsion and ending her education opportunities.

Access for the girl child into secondary education level is an obstacle. As discussed in the Education Critical Area of Concern, there are fewer dormitories for girls than boys. This is where most girls are pushed out of the education system as young as 12 years of age with no experience and skills to have a job,⁷² she is disempowered and without proper guidance and training within or outside of the home, the chances of getting into trouble are high.

Some girls migrate to Honiara in the hope of finding a job. While some end up as shop keepers or child minders, many will join the groups of teenagers who engage in substance abuse and sometimes prostitution. There have been fresh reports from the Western Province in December 2013 that families are marrying off young girls to workers in logging companies.⁷³

In an interview with Pacific Beat, the Chairman of the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services said that some of these teenagers are under the age of 18 which in Solomon Islands law need parental consent to marry. He says many families have been marrying off their young daughters in return for food or money.

Community leaders in Solomon Islands are now calling on provincial governments to introduce legislation to prevent families from marrying off young girls to workers at logging camps.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Sexual abuse, incest, early marriage and trafficking remain serious issues for children in the Solomon Islands. A report by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community found that two out of three women aged 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner.

<http://www.savethechildren.org.au/our-work/where-we-work/pacific-islands/solomon-islands>

⁷² A high level of youth unemployment is another major challenge. Many children miss out on a good education due to the poor quality of schools and teachers. <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/our-work/where-we-work/pacific-islands/solomon-islands>

⁷³ An interview by the Radio Australia Programme, Pacific Beat, with the Chairman of the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services

⁷⁴ **Solomon Islands Girls Being Married Off In Logging Camps** Leaders want laws to stop families trading daughters for money, MELBOURNE, Australia (Radio Australia, Dec. 3, 2013)

The sexual exploitation of young girls is also a huge problem in Malaita province according to the provincial women's council there and communities are also calling on the provincial government to address this through legislation.

At the moment there is no organisation that is specifically targeting young women except for the Solomon Islands Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) but the organisation is based in Honiara and programmes run for young women are limited, based on the availability of funding. An informal young women's group, Girls for Change (G4C) was formed to educate young women on different aspects of life and especially their sexuality. Due to lack of capacity the organisation has stopped.

Organisations such as the Save the Children Australia (SCA) Solomon Islands' Office have been working with more than 95,000 children in 2012, focussing on empowering children and young people with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools to create better lives for themselves. SCA conduct programmes that aim at changing communities' behaviour towards children and reduce physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Save the Children also helps young people to create sustainable livelihoods, participate in their communities to stay out of dangerous behaviour such as alcohol consumption and taking drugs.

The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs has a Children's Division with the Strategic Objective of protecting the interest and rights of children. It has a National Children's Policy which it is now implementing with its developmental partners. The Policy focuses on five priority outcomes which are: Child Protection, Child Development, Child Survival, Child Participation and Improving Capacities to implement the Policy. The implementation framework for the National Children's Policy is a National Advisory Committee for Children (NACC) and four sub committees addressing the priority outcomes; protection, development, survival and participation.⁷⁵

NACC is now looking into ratifying the CRC Optional Protocols on sexual exploitation of children and children in armed conflict

A Child and Family Welfare Bill (CFWB) is ready for submission to Cabinet. There is also a law on adoption. CFWB will call for a consequential amendment to the adoption act to properly cater to children's best interest in cases of adoption.

Section 3

No core set of national indicators for monitoring progress in gender equality has been established. Neither has there been indicators developed on the Minimum Set of Gender Indicators or the nine indicators on violence against women as agreed on by the UN Statistical Commission in 2013.

The good news however, is that work is now in progress to develop gender indicators for Solomon Islands.

According to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, an Aide Memoire was signed by the Solomon Islands Government with ADB and SPC⁷⁶ for the conducting of a Gender Statistics Initiative which is now underway in Solomon Islands and funded by SPC and a Country Gender Assessment also being conducted in the country, funded by ADB. The Assessment which began in 2013 will be validated in June 2014.

⁷⁵ Solomon Islands Budget, 2013, Budget Strategy and Outlook, Budget Paper, Volume 1

⁷⁶ Secretariat of the Pacific Community

The UNFPA is also currently working on a project in the country which uses the 2009 Census Report to develop a gender monograph for Solomon Islands.

These projects will progress the implementation of Objective 6 (monitoring and evaluation) of the Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) which is the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the GEWD. Efforts are also underway to run training and develop M&E for the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy (WEES)

The Permanent Secretary said that based on the findings of all these projects, home grown National Gender Indicators will be developed for Solomon Islands, taking into account country specific gender data needs as well as selecting appropriate indicators for the Solomon Islands situation from the already developed international gender indicators such as the Minimum Set of Gender Indicators and the nine indicators on violence against women, both of which were agreed on by the UN Statistical Commission in 2013.

The progress of the GEWD in the country is the biggest achievement for Solomon Islands as already stated in this Report for its introduction and promotion by the Ministry of Women has resulted in the establishment of gender focal points in the government ministries as well as the National Parliament of Solomon Islands.

Section 4: Emerging Priorities

The emerging priority for Solomon Islands has to be **Women and the Environment**. There seems to be an 'environment illiterate and denial' situation among ordinary Solomon Islanders including women and it can be put down to a lack of awareness of the extent of the environmental problems caused by climate change and other human made activities. Development with no consideration for the future welfare of communities and families are happening. It is of paramount importance that Solomon Islands takes on Women and the Environment as an emerging priority area to address and that legislations that are now in place to protect the environment of Solomon Islands be properly implemented. This means providing the necessary resources and administrative support to monitor the implementation of these legislation and to ensure that perpetrators are arrested.

The other priority is **rural women**, however work on women and the environment could be the entry point for the Ministry of Women to begin networking, engaging and reaching out to rural women where the majority of Solomon Islanders live.

b) In terms of the Solomon Islands priorities to strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women, the following areas must be addressed:

Increased Political Will

It is pleasing to note that the Solomon Islands Government has shown support like it never did before for gender equality and women's empowerment in Solomon Islands. It is committed to maintain and increase this support in terms of providing realistic resources both human and financial to maintain the continuous implementation of its gender based policies.

With scarce resources the great work already established by the Ministry of Women in terms of the endorsement of the GEWD will be hampered and effective implementation will not occur.

It is also encouraging to note that work on violence against women is progressing very well. The government through the Ministry of Police needs to maintain the enthusiasm and continue to effectively address the ills of gender based violence. Policy and structural initiatives must continue or be created. The 'no drop' policy must be effectively implemented.

It is also pleasing to note that Violence against women policies are being addressed by stakeholders for example those which are members of the Safenet.

Commitments by the government, to increase the number of dormitories in secondary schools and local tertiary institutions such as the Solomon Islands National University is slowly being implemented, for example at King George V1 Secondary School, two dormitories are now availed to girls hence increasing the number of dormitories for to 7 and increasing girls' attendance at the School.

With the gender focal points established in each government ministries, the will to increase women's participation must be promoted through such initiatives as temporary special measures and the effective implementation of the Political and Integrity Bill now that it has become law.

The need for better coordination, implementation and monitoring efforts by all stakeholders

As already discussed, institutional structures to ensure the effective mainstreaming of gender equality by all government ministries have been established by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA).

Aside from the gender focal points six Task Forces have been formed to address the five Priority areas of the GEWD Policy. The establishment of a National Women's Machinery to coordinate the implementation of the GEWD by the government ministries and civil society has also been initiated and the Solomon Islands National Council of Women has been mandated to be the link between the government and the non-government and civil society networks in the GEWD's implementation, monitoring and coordination.

This is an ideal structure and the Government is committed to ensuring its effectiveness to perform its coordination and monitoring roles successfully.

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People Met/Spoken to

- Mrs Ethel Sigimanu – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
- Mrs Alvina Soaki – Coordinator, UN Women
- Mrs Rose Isukana – Member, Solomon Islands Women's in Business Association
- Ms Josephine Teakeni – Executive Director, Vois Blong Mere, Solomon
- Ms Josephine Kama – Consultant
- Ms Arasu Oge – recipient South Pacific Business Development Microfinance (Solomon Islands) Ltd

Appendix 2: List of Participants attending the Beijing +20 Review: Solomon Islands National Consultation on 24th April 2014

No.	Name	Position & Organisation	Contact
1.	Marni Gilbert	Communication, Monitoring and Project Coordination Officer, UN Women	Marni.gilbert@unwomen.org
2.	Rachel McCarthy	Capacity Development Officer, Vois Blong Mere	mccarthytrach@gmail.com

		Solomon (VBMS)	
3.	Josephine Teakeni	Director, Vois Blong Mere Solomon	vbms@solomon.com.sb
4.	Ruth Ramoifuila	Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation	rramofuila@sibc.com.sb
5.	Lisa Horiwapu	Programme Officer, Vois Blong Mere	vbms@solomon.com.sb lisa.horiwapu@gmail.com
6.	Lanieta Leo	Project Coordinator, Stages of Change and Christian Care Centre Volunteer	SIPPA Office Mobile: 7515677
7.	Moffat Niusanau	Immigration Officer (Immigration Department)	Mobile: 7475552; email: mnsanau@yahoo.com.au
8.	Jolina Tausinga	Senior Desk Officer, UN Desk – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade	Jolina.Tausinga@mfaet.gov.sb
9.	Mark Kamoia	Human Resources Manager, Ministry of Infrastructure and Development	mkamoia@hotmail.com
10.	Siraro Galo	Manageress, CRDD/QA Solomon Islands National University,	mccd@sinu.edu.sb
11.	Jenta T Manu	General Secretary, YWCA	jentamanu@gmail.com
12.	Casper J Fa’asala	WIL/Gender Desk Officer, Solomon Islands National Council of Women	genderalert@gmail.com
13.	Mary D Bollen	President, Guadalcanal Provincial Council of Women	marybollen@yahoo.com 7490015
14.	Josephine Kama	Freelancer	7406959
15.	Rieka Kwalai	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources	7571681
16.	Stella Delaiverata	UNDP	Stella.delaiverata@undp.org
17.	James Cooper	Law Reform Commission	James.david.cooper@gmail.com
18.	Clifton Ruele	Law Reform Commission	cruelle@irc.gov.sb
19.	Janet Tuhaika	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs	janettuhaika@gmail.com
20.	Alvina Ereka	UN Women	Alvina.erekali@unwomen.org
21.	Afu Billy	Consultant	Afubilly59@yahoo.com
22.	Gaylyn Puairana	UN Women	gaylyn.puairana@unwomen.org

