

# SOLOMON ISLANDS

## COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT



Ministry of Women, Youth,  
Children & Family Affairs



**SPC**  
Secretariat  
of the Pacific  
Community



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# Foreword

Gender equality is a stated priority of the Government of Solomon Islands, and all ministries and sectors share the responsibility for achieving gender equality. In this regard, the country gender assessment (CGA) will support our ongoing efforts in promoting equality between women and men, boys and girls.

As permanent secretary for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, my goal is to ensure that our national and international commitments to gender equality are addressed and monitored over time. The compilation of data and analysis in the CGA highlights complexities of gender relations that need to be addressed, while presenting baselines for monitoring our progress toward gender equality.

The assessment illustrates where Solomon Islands has made progress so far, for example, in our framework for gender mainstreaming and in our research on ending violence against women. It also highlights areas where gender inequality is holding back development: rural women clearly have less opportunity to realize their rights to health, education, and justice. Across the country, fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school and the numbers drop significantly in the higher grades. Women are therefore less prepared to engage in the cash economy and secure paid employment. Women's health is a major concern as well: the total fertility rate is still high, use of contraception is low, and access to quality services is inconsistent. To address these challenges, the CGA stresses that we must not only improve the gender responsiveness of legislation and policy, but also strengthen strategic analysis, data collection, and technical capacity. Developing a consistent and comparable set of gender indicators is essential in tracking our progress.

We are fortunate that the Public Service Commission has designated all permanent secretaries as leaders in gender mainstreaming across the government. The multisector nature of the CGA analysis will assist them in their efforts to rationalize allocation of financial and staff resources. It will also assist the central government in preparing and planning national budgets to support more gender-inclusive development strategies and programs.

This assessment could not have been completed without the assistance of my colleagues across different ministries. They have supported the involvement of gender focal points from their ministries in the CGA reference group, which resulted in a richer analysis and a more universally relevant report. I would like to thank the many people who responded to our requests for information, who participated in interviews and consultations, and who reviewed earlier drafts of the document. The production of this report has been a collaborative process and we can all be proud of the achievement.

**Ethel Sigimanu**

Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs

# About This Publication

This country gender assessment (CGA) analyzes the progress of Solomon Islands toward achieving gender equality across different social, economic, and political spheres. The report brings together existing gender-related research, data, and policy documents to present evidence-based information in ways that closely parallel the priorities of the national Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy. The aim of the CGA is to

- report on current disparities between women and men, girls and boys;
- identify gender-related barriers in achieving national development goals in each sector; and
- reinforce ongoing efforts toward gender equality and recommend specific strategies to support the government’s implementation and monitoring of its gender equality commitments.

The development of the CGA has been a collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders. The findings and information of the CGA will be used to raise awareness and support the ongoing gender mainstreaming efforts that have been initiated by the government. As the lead agency, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) will take responsibility to ensure that CGA findings are widely communicated and that recommendations are implemented through relevant mechanisms.

The primary audiences for this report are the Government of Solomon Islands, development partners, and civil society organizations that promote gender equality in their work. All these partners are already collaborating to varying degrees and they have indicated the importance of the CGA in advancing their work.

## Assessment Process

The MWYCFA led this assessment with financial support and technical guidance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), along with collaborative support from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. A CGA team was formed in July 2013 to work on the assessment and consultation processes to prepare the report. MWYCFA staff were actively involved in gathering data and reviewing the assessment, and facilitated consultations with stakeholders.

A reference group comprised of representatives from selected ministries and development agencies provided oversight to the CGA, reviewed drafts of the document, and guided the consultation process. That group met multiple times in various configurations between October 2013 and June 2014. The assessment also had input from other government agencies, civil society, and development partners.



## Acknowledgments

The preparation of this document was guided by Ethel Sigimanu, permanent secretary for the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. Other key contributors from the ministry included Pionie Boso, Vaela Devesi, and Janet Tuhaika of the Women's Development Division.

The CGA was prepared under the guidance of Sunhwa Lee from ADB and Linda Peterson, Brigitte Leduc, and Joanne Lee Kunatuba from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community Human Development Programme. Gayle Nelson was the CGA lead consultant and prepared the initial document. Others provided additional inputs, revisions, and editorial support for the final document: Jessica Gardner and Kim Robertson with data analysis for tables and figures, and Sunhwa Lee with revisions for the final document. Tai'atu Ataata and Nester Nalangu from the ADB Solomon Islands Development Coordination Office provided invaluable guidance and logistical support during the CGA process.

The CGA reference group was chaired by the MWYCFA permanent secretary and its members came from government and international development agencies. For their invaluable contributions, thanks go to gender focal points from the ministries of Agriculture; Commerce, Industry Immigration and Labour; Development Planning and Aid Coordination; Education and Human Resource Development; Finance; Fisheries; Health and Medical Services; Justice and Legal Affairs; Lands; and Public Service. We are also grateful to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the European Union, the New Zealand Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, UN Women, the United States Consular Agency, and the World Bank for their participation in the reference group. Civil society groups were very supportive of the CGA and the following groups participated in consultations and provided data and comments: Solomon Islands National Council of Women, Solomon Islands Women in Business Association, Women's Rights Action Movement, YWCA, Live & Learn, Oxfam, and World Fish.

In addition to the inputs from the reference group, government officials from several ministries welcomed the CGA team into their offices for in-depth consultations. ADB is grateful to all these stakeholders, who contributed hours of their time as well as their extensive knowledge and expertise.

A number of other individuals contributed to this document with in-depth reviews and comments. Uzma Hoque, Imrana Jalal, Shireen Lateef, and Jeremy Stickings from ADB provided detailed guidance for the final document. Two members of the CGA reference group, Louisa Gibbs (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) and Joanne Lee Kunatuba (Secretariat of the Pacific Community), also provided detailed comments and feedback on the document. Penny Shoefel (National University of Samoa) provided extensive reviews and editorial support for the final CGA document.

# Abbreviations and Acronyms

|        |                                                                            |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ADB    | Asian Development Bank                                                     |
| CEDAW  | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women |
| CGA    | country gender assessment                                                  |
| DHS    | Demographic and Health Survey                                              |
| FHSS   | Family Health and Safety Study                                             |
| GEWD   | Gender Equality and Women's Development                                    |
| MEHRD  | Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development                       |
| MHMS   | Ministry of Health and Medical Services                                    |
| MWYCFA | Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs                      |
| RAMSI  | Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands                             |
| STI    | sexually transmitted infection                                             |
| TVET   | technical and vocational education and training                            |
| UN     | United Nations                                                             |
| WHO    | World Health Organization                                                  |
| WISDM  | Women in Shared Decision Making                                            |

# Map

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# Glossary of Key Gender Terminology

This glossary is intended to clarify terminology related to gender. The definitions are sourced from United Nations agencies and are consistent with those used by Pacific regional agencies and Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs.

- **Gender** refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context- and time-specific and they can change. Gender determines what is expected, allowed, and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, and decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader sociocultural context. Other important criteria for sociocultural analysis include age, race, ethnicity, class, and poverty level.<sup>1</sup>
- **Gender equality** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.<sup>2</sup>
- **Gender equity** means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities. In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women.<sup>3</sup>
- **Gender balance** is the equal representation of men and women at various organizational levels. The connection between gender balance and performance has been well documented in the public and private sectors. Studies have found that organizations with a balance of women and men in top management teams considerably outperform their counterparts with a lower representation of women at top levels.<sup>4</sup>
- **Gender analysis** focuses on gender-related social inequalities, discriminatory practices, and power relations. Cross-referencing this information and going beyond sex-disaggregation to consider other factors such as ethnicity, age, and place of residence can help identify additional social issues related to excluded or vulnerable groups.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women. Gender Mainstreaming. Concepts and definitions. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development. Topics We Cover. Gender Glossary. <http://www.ifad.org/gender/glossary.htm>

<sup>4</sup> UN Office of the Focal Point for Women in the United Nations. 2010. *Achieving Gender Balance is Imperative for a Strengthened United Nations*. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/ianwge/Why%20Gender%20Balance%20-%20An%20Institutional%20Case.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Population Fund. 2014. *Methodological Guidelines for the Gender Analysis of National Population and Housing Census Data*. New York. [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico\\_Nov2014/141006-UNFPA-GenderManual2014-02-SCREEN\\_\(1\).pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico_Nov2014/141006-UNFPA-GenderManual2014-02-SCREEN_(1).pdf)

# Executive Summary

## About Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands has been politically independent from Britain since 1978 and is extremely diverse in the number of languages spoken and the cultures of its indigenous population. The total population is 515,870 with approximately 60% of the population under the age of 24.

The country went through a period of political instability and conflict from 1998 to 2003. During this period, the economy was destabilized and social development was disrupted. With active armed conflict in some areas, government services such as health and education were interrupted and the already high levels of violence against women increased.

Solomon Islands has a natural resource base consisting of agricultural land, fisheries, forests, minerals, and geothermal energy. However, creating an enabling environment for sustainable economic growth remains a challenge. Growth slowed to 2.9% in 2013 from 4.8% in the previous year. The key challenges facing the government include high population growth rates, young demographic profile, rural isolation, poor infrastructure, and the effects of fluctuating commodity prices on national revenues. In addition, a weak education system undermines the capacity of Solomon Islanders to meet national human resource needs. High numbers of unemployed and unskilled young people further limit their active participation in development.

Traditional customs are a major part of life in Solomon Islands, including customary land tenure by which the majority of land is owned by matrilineal and patrilineal clans. Traditional norms influence gender relations in different Solomon Island cultures in terms of division of labor, property rights, and decision making.

The summary below provides an overview of key gender concerns in Solomon Islands and some relevant recommendations. Several of these findings parallel the policy priorities and main objectives of the Solomon Islands Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy.

## Access to Legal and Judicial Support

- The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy provides a framework to implement Solomon Islands' international commitment to gender equality.
- Key challenges for access to justice include women's lack of awareness of their own rights, scarce presence of the justice system beyond Honiara, and limited presence of females in the top levels of the judicial system and law enforcement.
- Local courts do not often handle cases of violence against women. Even when they do, women face gender biases since legal and judicial professionals lack understanding of gender equality. As a result, most court rulings do not support survivors of violence against women. Only a very small number of cases are heard by magistrates or the High Court.

- Traditional dispute settlement mechanisms and local courts are the main settings for land disputes. Leadership in the local courts is almost entirely male.
- There are no female judges in the High Court and none of the justice agencies have female leaders.

## Health

- According to the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey, nearly 95% of women sought at least one antenatal care visit during pregnancy, while 65% had made the minimum four visits recommended for pregnancy. A relatively high percentage of women—more than 80%—are assisted by a health professional at birth or give birth at a health facility.
- Despite improvements in overall health indicators, disparities persist across provinces. The national average for infant mortality was only 12.0 per 1,000 live births as of 2012, while the rate ranged from 8.5 in Western Province to 34.8 in Choiseul Province. Similar disparities exist for under-5 child mortality, for which the national average was 15.3.
- According to the 2009 census, the total fertility rate is still high at 4.7 (compared with 4.8 in 1999), and varies widely between urban (3.3) and rural (5.2) areas. Adolescent fertility is also high, with 8%–12% of women aged 15–19 already being mothers. The use of contraception is low, with only about 25% of currently married women (aged 15–49) and 16% among unmarried sexually active women using a modern method.
- Data on the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV/AIDS are limited in Solomon Islands. While the reported prevalence of HIV is low, there is a serious lack of knowledge about the virus among high-risk populations, limited testing facilities for HIV, and a high level of stigma to having an STI or HIV.
- Rural women are likely to face greater challenges in health care due to its poor quality and limited accessibility. Their access to care is constrained by heavy workloads at home, lack of funds for transport, and/or cultural requirements to obtain family permission. About 30% of rural women reported they needed permission from their husband or intimate partner to go for treatment, compared with only 17% of urban women.

## Education

- School enrollments have increased steadily, with primary net enrollments reaching nearly 90% for both girls and boys since 2009. While the gender gap has been narrowing overall, disparities remain at all levels of education as of 2013.
- Considerably fewer students attend secondary schools: net enrollment rates at junior secondary level are still below 40% and the rates at senior secondary level are below 30%. Girls have been catching up with boys in school attendance, but the gender gap persists. The gap is particularly significant at the senior secondary level, with gross enrollment rates of 28% for girls and 32% for boys.
- Available data indicate an increasing dropout rate for higher levels of schooling. At primary and junior secondary levels, the dropout rate is slightly higher for girls than for boys. Yet, the rate reverses at senior secondary level, with more boys dropping out than girls.
- For tertiary education, which includes degree and nondegree programs, women made up 38% of total estimated enrollment in 2012. Women are concentrated in traditional female subject areas such as

education, tourism, and hospitality. Women are especially underserved by technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs, as most TVET programs are oriented toward young men with technical courses.

- Educational attainment of the adult population (aged 15 and above) is relatively low, with only 20% of women and 29% of men having at least some secondary schooling. Women are nearly twice as likely as men to have no schooling at all (21% versus 12%), whereas men are twice as likely as women to have tertiary education (6% versus 3%).
- The 2009 census shows reasonably high literacy rates, although women (79%) are less likely to be literate than men (89%). However, studies at the provincial level indicate very low levels of functional literacy, ranging from 7% to 28%. Functional literacy is also significantly lower for women (14%) than for men (21%). Functional literacy improves for those completing higher levels of schooling.

## Economic Empowerment

- According to the 2009 census, 62% of women and 64% of men aged 12 and older were in the labor force, including those who produce goods for own consumption (subsistence work). Both labor force participation and employment rates are higher in rural than urban areas, given the largely agricultural and subsistence nature of work. Gender differences are very small for overall labor force participation or employment rates.
- Of those employed, women were only half as likely as men to be in paid work (26% of women and 51% of men). Even in urban areas where paid work is much more common, women were significantly less likely than men to be in paid work (62% of women and 88% of men). In rural areas, only 19% of women and 42% of men were engaged in paid work.
- Within paid work, men are much more likely than women to hold a wage job, particularly in the private sector. Women hold only 25% of private sector wage jobs, while they account for a greater share of public sector wage jobs at 36%.
- When subsistence work, self-employment, and unpaid family work are categorized as vulnerable employment, 75% of women and 54% of men are in vulnerable employment. Vulnerable employment is significantly less in urban areas, but women are still more likely to be in vulnerable employment (41% of urban women versus 21% of urban men).
- Despite efforts to remove discriminatory barriers to starting a business through reforms of business legislation and regulations, women continue to face challenges in starting a business due to their lower levels of education, limited functional literacy, or distance from government offices.
- Women are highly active in small-scale income generation and agriculture but their economic participation and control of productive resources are constrained by lack of education, sociocultural discrimination, and lack of access to key resources such as transport and market infrastructure.

## Decision Making and Leadership

- Women's participation in leadership and decision making at senior levels is significantly low. Women fill only 5% of senior public service positions and 22% of mid-level positions. Overall, 40% of public service employees are female and 60% of these are in junior positions.
- Key constraints for women to enter leadership positions include low levels of education, high burden of family care responsibility, high levels of violence, and underlying discriminatory social attitudes.

- The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy creates a framework to promote women's greater participation in decision making roles. Yet, the government lacks technical capacity, skilled staff, and adequate resources to implement major policy changes.
- While a temporary special measure task force was established, the actual proposal on temporary special measures was not included in the 2014 Political Parties Integrity Act. The revised Public Service Act prohibits sexual harassment through general orders but there is no sexual harassment legislation to protect women in the formal or informal private sector.

## Violence Against Women

- According to the 2009 Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study, of women who had ever been in an intimate relationship, 64% reported having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by an intimate partner.
- More than one-third of women (37%) reported being sexually abused before the age of 15, most often by a male acquaintance or a male family member.
- Social acceptance of violence and high levels of stigma against those who try to break away from a violent relationship make it extremely difficult to break cycles of violence.
- Rural survivors of violence are more disadvantaged than urban ones, because they have less access to trained care providers and counseling. Also, police are less likely to be trained to handle domestic disputes and there are few formal justice options.

## Strategic Recommendations

Below is a summary of key recommendations from the report. Detailed recommendations are presented in each chapter.

### Access to Justice

- Increase the representation of women in judicial bodies and law enforcement.
- Ensure nondiscrimination based on sex, including in justices' interpretations of customary and constitutional laws.
- Enact and implement family protection bill and child protection bill.

### Health

- Incorporate gender analysis and gendered costing of health issues into Ministry of Health and Medical Services budgeting, strategic planning, and programming.
- Strengthen regular data collection, monitoring, and evaluation for key health indicators including service delivery measures.
- Improve health sector capacity to respond to violence against women.
- Enhance public health promotion campaigns on contraception and safe sex to reduce unintended pregnancies, decrease risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV, and improve confidentiality in testing.
- Promote awareness of the benefits of antenatal and postpartum care in rural areas.



## Education

- Endorse and implement gender in education policy.
- Improve education curriculum to avoid gender stereotypes and provide awareness training to all stakeholders on eliminating gender stereotypes.
- Identify specific barriers to girls' schools attendance by province and implement actions to reduce gender disparities, including improvements of school infrastructure to provide safe water and sanitation facilities and increased allocation of dormitory spaces for girls.
- Improve collection of sex-disaggregated data on enrollment, dropouts, transition, and completion.
- Integrate leadership and management course in teachers' trainings; increase the number of female teachers in senior secondary level.
- Expand and diversify TVET programs for women with strong labor market relevance and greater flexibility, and develop incentive schemes to increase women's skills training in nontraditional areas.

## Economic Empowerment

- Remove legislative, regulatory, and policy barriers to women's engagement in the formal private sector and wage employment.
- Introduce special measures, in both the public and private sectors, to support gender equality and women's empowerment. Special measures could include hiring quotas for women, incentive schemes for employers to take on female apprentices, and targeted support for training women in business.
- Ensure rural and urban women have access to finance and marketing opportunities through the government's Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME) Policy and Strategy.
- Improve market infrastructure and operating conditions, as well as transport infrastructure, to stimulate women's engagement in paid work and economic empowerment, especially in rural areas.

## Decision Making and Leadership

- Introduce appropriate temporary special measures in Parliament, political parties, and the public service to encourage more women to join in senior decision-making positions.
- Partner with media and civil society to promote gender awareness and challenge stereotypes about women in decision-making positions.

## Violence against Women

- Coordinate funding and capacity building activities to strengthen implementation of the National Policy for Eliminating Violence against Women.
- Improve coordination among service providers to ensure survivors of violence have safe and confidential access to response services (medical, psychosocial, safe space, legal support).
- Implement recommendations from the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study.
- Undertake strategic campaigns to engage men at all levels, from rural communities to Parliament, in ending violence against women.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Development Context

Solomon Islands is located approximately 1,800 kilometers (km) northeast of Australia. It consists of 6 large islands; 20 medium-size islands; and hundreds of small islets, reefs, and outcroppings. The country has a land area of 28,369 km<sup>2</sup> that includes high-value natural resources, such as forests, minerals, and geothermal energy potential.<sup>1</sup> Solomon Islands has an exclusive economic zone of 1.6 million km<sup>2</sup> with substantial fisheries resources.

The country has been politically independent from Britain since 1978. It is a constitutional monarchy with a Westminster parliamentary system. There are 50 seats in Parliament and elections are held every 4 years. Parliamentary representation is based on single-member constituencies, political parties are numerous and generally weak, and Parliament is characterized by shifting coalitions.<sup>2</sup> Since independence there have been only three female members of Parliament. At lower levels of government, there are 9 provincial jurisdictions and an urban local government in the capital of Honiara.<sup>3</sup>

The total population is estimated at 515,870 as of 2009, with approximately 60% of the population under age 24. Current government systems and facilities are challenged by the fast-growing population, especially those in rural and remote areas. The population is also culturally and linguistically diverse with 87 distinct languages.<sup>4</sup> English is the official language of Solomon Islands, but a Melanesian Pidgin is the general lingua franca. Ethnically the population is made up of 94% Melanesians, 4% Polynesians, and 2% other races including Asians, Micronesians, and Caucasians. There are five small populations of Polynesian ethnicity, as well as a number of Micronesian Gilbertese (i-Kiribati) communities that were resettled in Solomon Islands from the 1950s under British colonial rule. There are significant cultural variations in gender norms although gender equality indicators are low across all groups.

**Development challenges** facing Solomon Islands include geographic barriers, complex cultures, fast population growth, land tenure issues, lack of economic development, poor transport infrastructure, inadequate delivery of education and health services, and lingering post-conflict tensions between island groups. More than 80% of Solomon Islands' population lives in rural areas, many on remote islands or in mountainous terrain. Because of the difficulty of travel to remote areas, it is a challenge to attract and keep civil servants as staff in health posts, schools, and government offices across isolated communities. These factors entrench rural disadvantage and motivate rural to urban migration.

<sup>1</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2010. *Good Leadership Report: Solomon Islands*. [http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/PIFS\\_Good\\_Leadership\\_Report\\_Solomons.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/PIFS_Good_Leadership_Report_Solomons.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> T. Wood. 2014. *Understanding Electoral Politics in the Solomon Islands*. Centre for Democratic Institutions Discussion Paper 2014/02. Canberra: Australian National University. [http://cdi.ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/CDI%20DP%202014\\_2%20Web.pdf](http://cdi.ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/CDI%20DP%202014_2%20Web.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The nine provinces of Solomon Islands are Central, Choisel, Guadalcanal, Makira, Malaita, Isabel, Rennel and Bellona, Temotu, and Western.

<sup>4</sup> Solomon Islands Statistics Office website. <http://www.spc.int/prism/solomons> (accessed 9 June 2015)

**Rural populations** lack economic opportunities both at home and when they migrate to urban areas. It is difficult for them to find cash resources to meet expenses for health and education. Statistics and in-depth qualitative research indicate that scarcity of cash income often has more detrimental effects on the education of girls and on the health of women.<sup>5</sup> Such disadvantage for women is particularly salient for those who are in abusive relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Rural to urban migration has been historical and remains problematic due to lack of employment and housing for migrants among other factors. Finding housing is extremely challenging for migrants due to restrictive land tenure systems, and migrants often have no other option than to move in with relatives who are already working or squatting in town. Due to the strength of traditional obligation, or *wantok* systems, those relatives generally feel they have little choice but to accept all extended family members who need housing. This can result in serious overcrowding and stress within households.

“**The Tensions**” is a term used in Solomon Islands to reference the period from late 1998 to 2003 when long-standing ethnic tension linked to interisland migration escalated into armed conflict. People (mainly younger men) on the island of Guadalcanal, where the main township of Honiara is located, resented people from the island of Malaita who moved to Guadalcanal for economic opportunities (Box 1.1); this was a key factor that fueled the conflict. Arms were smuggled into the country from Papua New Guinea and there were violent clashes between rival militants. This undermined the government and delivery of its services. The Tensions also had a serious negative impact on law and order, social stability, and the economy.

Men and women from all cultural and ethnic groups suffered during the Tensions, but women faced specific threats both within and outside their homes all around Guadalcanal. As fighting and killings escalated, violence against women also increased including rape, forced marriage, kidnapping, and domestic violence. The “Tension Trials” that were held to address crimes committed during this period did not include prosecutions for violence against women or sexual violence, although a few cases were heard in the regular Honiara-based courts.<sup>7</sup>

Women were excluded from the decision-making processes at the outset of the Tensions, but became important go-betweens in the informal peace negotiations. Despite their widely acknowledged role as peacemakers, women were excluded from formal peace talks. The Tensions have been documented from a number of perspectives in the five-volume 2012 report produced by the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Committee.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2011. *Barriers to Education*. Honiara; and Ministry of Finance and Treasury. *2009 Population and Housing Census*. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

<sup>6</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2010. *Transforming Power Relations: Equal Status of Women and Men at the Household Level in the Pacific*. Noumea. <http://www.spc.int/en/our-work/education-training-and-human-development/human-development/news/450-transforming-power-relations-equal-status-of-women-and-men-at-the-family-level-in-the-pacific.html>

<sup>7</sup> J. Braithwaite, S. Dinnen, M. Allen, V. Braithwaite, and H. Charlesworth. 2010. *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: ANU ePress. <http://press.anu.edu.au/apps/bookworm/view/Pillars+and+Shadows%3A+Statebuilding+as+peacebuilding+in+Solomon+Islands/5221/upfront.xhtml>

<sup>8</sup> Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). 2012. *Solomon Islands TRC Final Report* (5 volumes). <http://pacificpolitics.com/2013/01/solomon-islands-trc-final-report>

### Box 1.1 Migration from the Colonial Era to the Present

Migration for economic opportunity has been taking place since the beginning of colonization in Solomon Islands and has been the source of considerable tension between island groups, particularly between people from Malaita and Guadalcanal. The 2009 Population and Housing Census figures show that a large proportion of the current Honiara population (64%) were born in other provinces and the majority of those (48%) were born in Malaita.

Malaitan men were a major source of bonded labor for the British and became early internal migrants. They were often more willing to engage in this labor because living and agricultural conditions on much of their island were poor, there was a large population relative to available resources, and there were no whaling stations or pearl industry posts on the island. Many Malaitan men married Guadalcanal women, mixing patrilineal and matrilineal traditions. This complicated land ownership, community relations, and gender dynamics.

After independence, Malaitan women began to migrate more frequently, joining husbands and families for educational and economic opportunities. The Malaitans became a second major population group on Guadalcanal, not only in Honiara but in locations where large plantations had been developed. During the late 1990s, tensions began to escalate in Guadalcanal as resentment was growing against the people from Malaita, who were considered to be taking advantage of jobs, education resources, and government housing benefits that some more radical groups from Guadalcanal felt should be available to them on a priority basis. By that time, close to half the population of Honiara were of Malaitan lineage although many had been born on Guadalcanal and lacked strong connections to their “home” island.

Source: Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). 2012. *Solomon Islands TRC Final Report* (5 volumes). <http://pacificpolitics.com/2013/01/solomon-islands-trc-final-report>

**Poverty** is a critical and complex issue in Solomon Islands. Solomon Islands is ranked 143rd out of 187 countries on the human development index. Household income and expenditure survey data and related research demonstrate that the diversity of the population and life patterns make it very difficult to define a national poverty line and assess living conditions in rural versus urban areas.<sup>9</sup> Additional challenges are related to the fact that poverty analysis based on household data cannot show the relative well-being of different household members, such as differences between men and women, able bodied and disabled, or children and adults.

Land tenure systems in Solomon Islands are clan-based, in which a single individual or nuclear family rarely owns land outright. This customary ownership restricts economic development, but it also serves to limit poverty by ensuring that most people have access to agricultural and fisheries resources. The soil and climate conditions are conducive to food production in most areas and there are rich coastal resources. People rarely go hungry in rural areas, although levels of stunting in children indicate that nutrition and knowledge of dietary requirements is an issue. While food security is not a major concern for rural populations, there is considerable cash poverty in all areas of Solomon Islands, particularly among people who live away from their home areas and do not have access to land. Relative to the population size, there are few employment options in the formal sector, while there are also issues in shortages of professionally and technically skilled workers. The cost of food is high relative to the low pay scales of casual and informal employment.

<sup>9</sup> W. Narsey. 2009. Analysis of Household Income and Expenditure Survey. Paper presented to University of the South Pacific Development Dialogue, 17 September 2009. Suva, Fiji.

## 1.2 Sociocultural and Economic Influences on Gender Relations

**Ethnicity and culture** are significant factors in gender relations in Solomon Islands. There are two main indigenous ethnic groups, Melanesians and a minority of Polynesians. Within these main groups there is considerable cultural and linguistic diversity. In some areas of the country, clan membership is based on matrilineal descent and hence rights of land and other clan assets are inherited from the mother.<sup>10</sup> In matrilineal societies, men usually head clans and inheritance is often from a woman's brother to her son. This is because women normally marry outside their own clans and may not live in their home communities after marriage. Solomon Islands women from matrilineal groups have not traditionally exercised as much political or spiritual authority as men, nor have they formally led decision making about land, yet they often enjoy higher status than women in patrilineal societies.<sup>11</sup>

In patrilineal societies, land rights are inherited through the father and men are recognized as both conduits of inheritance and decision making. This creates a de facto lower status for women because they are neither members of the lineage through which the highly valued land assets are passed, nor do they receive traditional respect that the matrilineal cultures still sometimes support.

**Traditional land rights** are tied to ethnically derived inheritance systems. Research suggests that many modern influences have undermined the status and traditional rights of women in matrilineal societies. These include Christian teaching; introduction of local-level male leadership, cash crops, and forestry and mining leases; and ascribing of commercial value to land and sea resources.<sup>12</sup>

Access to and control of land-based resources varies between patrilineal and matrilineal groups. Differences are reflected in traditional divisions of labor as well as gender-differentiated access to agricultural areas, water sources, and plants and trees for medicinal and handicraft materials. In decision making, women can be influential in "behind the scenes" negotiations, but this is more likely in matrilineal than patrilineal groups. In both kinship systems, however, men generally dominate negotiations with outsiders such as representatives from government, private companies, donors, or civil society organizations.<sup>13</sup>

**Customary and state law**, and the ways they interact, influence the development process and gender relations in Solomon Islands. The Constitution of Solomon Islands recognizes custom (*kastom* in Pidgin) as well as modern law. As Menzies notes:

*Legal pluralism in the Solomon Islands does not simply encompass state law and **kastom**, but includes the interaction between diverse indigenous regimes, the fact that state law itself is the product of outside influence, and the direct manipulation of kastom by forces emanating from outside the state, such as human*

<sup>10</sup> Matrilineal kinship is not to be confused with the concept of matriarchy, where women would have economic resources and decision-making power.

<sup>11</sup> Contributions on anthropological issues in this and the following paragraphs have been provided by Dr. Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea.

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Maetala. 2008. Matrilineal Land Tenure Systems in Solomon Islands: The cases of Guadalcanal, Makira and Isabel Provinces. In Elise Huffer, ed. *Land and Women: The Matrilineal Factor: The Cases of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu*. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Suva.

<sup>13</sup> Maetala. 2008.

*rights norms and “project law.” These interactions play out in both competition and accommodation and at the local level include tensions of generational pluralism. The “tensions” of 1998 to 2003 arose because socio-economic and ethnic disputes were unable to be resolved peacefully within existing legal orders and governance structures.*<sup>14</sup>

Customary norms may be invoked throughout Solomon Islands in relation to issues such as men’s and women’s control over family decisions, land rights, marriage and bride-price, division of labor, and the custody of children. Custom is often used to justify the notion that women are inferior to men, and that men’s oppressive behavior and violence is acceptable. This places Solomon Islands women in a dilemma, as few wish to criticize their traditional culture in defense of their rights, although a few courageous writers have done so.<sup>15</sup>

**Masculinities** are changing over time, affecting women’s status and security. A number of scholars of social change and male roles in Melanesian cultures argue that male roles in traditional governance, ritual, and warfare have been undermined by modern influences. As a result, more negative forms of masculinity, including binge drinking, sexual promiscuity, and denigration of women, have taken their place. This may be exacerbated by the male migration to towns and to logging, plantation, and mining enclaves.<sup>16</sup>

**Gender relations** in Solomon Islands are heavily male dominated and this perpetuates discrimination against women and girls. Inequalities in control of decision making, economic resources, access to health care, education, and leisure time restrict the rights and freedoms of girls and women, resulting in unequal benefits for them from the development process. These inequalities do not stem solely from traditional customs and systems, but have been reinforced to some extent by colonial and religious systems. Male dominance has also been exacerbated by recent conflicts in Solomon Islands when the population was subjected to militarization and violence that fueled hypermasculine behaviors, including violence against women.<sup>17</sup>

**Gendered stereotypes** often portray women as less able than men to lead, make decisions, and achieve high standing in Solomon Islands society. Stereotyping entrenches acceptance of discriminatory behavior and harmful practices such as sexual abuse, keeping girls out of school, early marriage, and using girls as commodities to offset cash poverty. Bride-price systems, and sending young women to work as domestic or sex workers for the financial benefit of their families, are examples of traditional and modern exploitation of young women.<sup>18</sup>

**Violence against women** is one of the biggest challenges to development in Solomon Islands, as discussed in this report by examining the costs and negative impacts it creates across sectors. The impact of violence undermines social stability and prevents women from contributing to and benefiting from the development process. The costs of violence against women to society have not been formally calculated for Solomon

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Menzies. 2007. *Legal Pluralism and the Post-Conflict Transition in the Solomon Islands: Kastom, human rights and international interventions*. Hertie School of Governance. Berlin.

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Jully (Sipolu) Makini. 1997. *Civilized Girl: Poems*. South Pacific Creative Arts Society. Suva.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, R. Eves. 2009. Men, Masculinity and Development in the Pacific. *SSGM Briefing Note 2009/2*; and R. Eves. 2011. Men, Masculinity, and Violence in Papua New Guinea: Towards Developing Culturally Appropriate Responses. *South Pacific Journal of Philosophy and Culture*. Vol. 10. pp. 59–76.

<sup>17</sup> A. Moser. 2006. *Engendering Conflict Early Warning: Lessons from UNIFEM’s Solomon Islands Gendered Conflict Early Warning*. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Suva.

<sup>18</sup> Protection Project. 2010. *A Human Rights Report on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. Johns Hopkins University. Washington. <http://www.protectionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Solomon-Islands.pdf>. The Protection Project is a human rights institute based at The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC.

Islands, but a costing study is being planned for 2014–2015. International research has shown that the estimated costs of intimate partner violence are very high (Box 1.2). Other social impacts, which may not directly translate into economic costs, include a severe toll on women’s and children’s mental health, their inability to engage effectively with their families and communities, and their inability to be fully productive in society.<sup>19</sup> The Tensions were not an original trigger for violence against women in Solomon Islands, but that recent history exacerbated and perhaps normalized violence against women at a higher level.

### Box 1.2 Costing Intimate Partner Violence

“Intimate partner violence results in a number of costs that affect the well-being of women, their households and communities. There are both direct costs of intimate partner violence for households and communities as well as the indirect costs of such violence on households. Direct costs consist of the actual expenditures and the value of services used in responding to intimate partner violence. Direct cost calculations broadly include costs of medical and social services as well as services provided by the police and the criminal justice system. At the household level, the expenditures on goods and fees for services constitute the bulk of the direct costs, though transportation costs to access services also may be significant in certain contexts. At the community level, provider costs include but are not limited to human resources expended on intimate partner violence cases as well as the costs of any type of supplies/infrastructure used during service provision.

Injury resulting from intimate partner violence can force women to take time off from paid as well as unpaid work and/or may result in lower productivity. In some instances, other household members also may have to alter their work pattern due to intimate partner violence. The value of lost earnings and productivity at the household level are defined as the indirect costs of intimate partner violence.”

Source: International Center for Research on Women and United Nations Population Fund. 2009. *Intimate Partner Violence—High Costs to Households and Communities*. New York.

## 1.3 Gender Equality Frameworks in Solomon Islands

The Constitution of Solomon Islands, passed in 1978 and amended in 2009, provides for individual rights and freedoms and protection against discrimination based on race, color, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinions. However, while the constitutional Bill of Rights includes statements on nondiscrimination on the basis of sex, there is no comprehensive definition of gender discrimination. The National Development Strategy’s mission statement notes that the government will strive to “create a modern, united and vibrant Solomon Islands founded on mutual respect, trust and peaceful coexistence in a diverse yet secure and prosperous community where tolerance and gender equality are encouraged and natural resources are sustainably managed.” The National Development Strategy further identifies gender equality priorities through detailed reference to the national gender policy, disability strategy, and children’s policy.

Internationally, the Government of Solomon Islands is party to a number of agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognize that (i) women and men have equal rights to participate in and benefit from development and (ii) gender inequality is a barrier to successful development. Regionally, in 2012, Pacific Islands Forum leaders,

<sup>19</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*. Noumea.



including the Solomon Islands Prime Minister, made a comprehensive agreement to implement the gender equality actions identified in the

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
- Millennium Development Goals,
- Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2005 to 2015),
- Pacific Plan,
- 42nd Pacific Islands Forum commitment to increase the representation of women in legislatures and decision making, and
- 40th Pacific Islands Forum commitment to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>20</sup>

The **Solomon Islands Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy** links national and international commitments through policy direction, specific program guidance, and stipulating the need for effective monitoring and evaluation of progress at regular intervals. The passage of legislation for family safety further strengthens that work. The overarching commitment as stated in the policy

*recognizes that women and men are equal partners in the development of Solomon Islands, and places gender equality at the heart of economic and social progress, giving equal value to the roles and responsibilities of Solomon Islands' women and men. It also recognizes that in order to redress gender inequality it is necessary to invest in women's development while women and men work together to address attitudinal and institutional barriers to gender equality.*

The statement is particularly progressive, since it clarifies that gender equality is not about women. It is about relationships, differential opportunities, and power dynamics between groups of people—in this case between men and women and between girls and boys. Clear and high-level recognition of gender issues in the policy highlights that both women and men need to be fully engaged in promoting gender equality and that there are specific benefits to be realized in different ways. Engaging men and boys in gender equality needs to be a priority because their engagement is essential in altering discriminatory gender-based power dynamics. At the household level, gender equality can support improved communication, increase child well-being and psychological health, reduce violence, and support more equal sharing of workloads. At the national level, gender equality results in improved educational outcomes and increased economic activity, while supporting more flexibility in roles and life choices for both men and women.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. 1 September 2012. <http://www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=4535371750416152240ff11f10e cf5>. The full text of this link is provided in Annex 2.

<sup>21</sup> Asian Development Bank. Gender and Development. <http://www.adb.org/themes/gender/main>; and World Bank. Millennium Development Goals: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women by 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/gender.html>

# 2

## Governance

### 2.1 Governance and Legal Frameworks

The **legal framework** for gender equality in Solomon Islands is based, to varying degrees, on international and national norms and standards. Solomon Islands ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995 and acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2002. These two international conventions, along with other guiding frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals, the Pacific Plan and related Pacific island leaders' statements, and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action, have served to raise awareness about gender equality as a national commitment.<sup>22</sup> In January 2013, the cabinet approved the country's combined initial, second, and third CEDAW reports. The reports note that constitutional "rights and freedoms are however subject to the public interest and to the rights and freedoms of others. Consequently, courts have the discretion to deny the rights and freedoms if they consider it in the public interest to do so."<sup>23</sup>

**Customary and constitutional laws** are both recognized in Solomon Islands. This is particularly challenging because the Constitution outlines a complex interrelationship between constitutional and customary law and makes law makers and the courts responsible for ensuring that justice is done and that customary law is not inconsistent with the Constitution. This complexity, the general conservatism of customary law, the remoteness of local court jurisdictions from higher courts, and the associated discretion the Constitution conveys upon the courts have resulted in a number of concerns in the CEDAW report; these include lack of protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation, HIV status, and marital status, and potential conflicts between nondiscrimination and discriminatory customary legal rulings.<sup>24</sup> Exceptions to the right to nondiscrimination listed in subsection 5 of the Constitution leave considerable scope for interpretation, which are potentially discriminatory against women and other marginalized groups.<sup>25</sup>

**Governance systems and violence against women.** Dealing with perpetrators and providing protection for victims of gender-based violence is an issue that is generally dealt with in local communities, although not through the local court system.<sup>26</sup> Very few cases are actually brought into the public eye for mediation or legal rulings. For those that are, whether they come to a magistrate's court or are considered by local leaders, biased custom and tradition often influence decision makers, who are almost universally male. As a consequence, rulings do little to promote a zero tolerance approach to violence against women or to uphold women's and

<sup>22</sup> Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. 1 September 2012. <http://www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=4535371750416152240ff11f10ecf5>

<sup>23</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA). 2012. *Solomon Islands Combined Initial, Second and Third CEDAW Report*. Honiara.

<sup>24</sup> MWYCFA. 2012. *Solomon Islands Combined Initial, Second and Third CEDAW Report*.

<sup>25</sup> UN Women. 2013. *Gender Equality and Constitutions of Asia and Asia Pacific*. <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/2/Asia-and-Asia-Pacific-Constitutions%20pdf.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Local court systems usually handle land issues.

children's human rights. This contravenes the Constitution's direction for nondiscrimination, especially as there is currently no specific legislation on violence against women.<sup>27</sup>

**Gender-responsive legislation** has been drafted to further protect the human rights of women and children. The family protection bill and the child protection bill are currently in draft and if passed will provide protection from many forms of violence. The approval process of these bills has been slow despite support from development partners, but the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services are currently planning to bring both proposed laws before Parliament. Following enactment of the bills, the government will face a number of challenges to roll out awareness of the new laws and work toward implementation. For example, the family protection legislation will introduce a range of orders that will fall under the responsibility of the police. The police have limited capacity and limited presence in many communities due to geographic constraints and cost of transport. It will therefore take considerable time before the legislation can be implemented and support positive change in many rural communities.

**Gaps in legislation** undermine gender equality and women's participation in development in Solomon Islands. As noted earlier, a comprehensive definition of gender discrimination is missing from the Constitution, and no such definition is included in any other legislation. There is no legislation allowing for temporary special measures of any sort. Such legislation would legitimize and facilitate special and targeted programs for women, including proactive gender equality measures such as quotas or targets for women's participation in any aspect of public life.

There are a number of other gaps where legislation fails to uphold gender equality and nondiscrimination on the basis of sex. Examples include differences in men's and women's rights to citizenship under the Citizenship Act, protection of domestic workers under the Labor Act, and restrictions related to maternity leave under the Labor Act. The Divorce Act does not provide criteria for division of marital property and courts rely on common law and custom to allocate resources when marriages are dissolved. Due to stereotyping of women's roles, women's nonfinancial contributions to the marriage are not likely to be recognized, undermining women's financial security. Also, while the Wills, Probate and Administration Act states that males and females have equality regarding inheritance, customary rules may lawfully be applied in conflict with legislation; this can disadvantage women partners in family-run businesses.

In addition to legislative gaps, penal code provisions related to abortion state that women who attempt to, or do, terminate a pregnancy are committing a felony and are subject to life imprisonment unless the termination is to preserve the life of the mother. There is also legal discrimination against adolescent girls above the age of 15 who are subject to incest; they are identified as at fault in the eyes of the law and can face up to 7 years of imprisonment.<sup>28</sup>

**Policy instruments** promoting gender equality and women's and girls' development are being used to uphold women's human rights, and partially address gaps in legislation. These include the overarching national Gender

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<sup>27</sup> Government of Solomon Islands and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). No date. *Protecting Women's Human Rights in Solomon Islands Law*. UNIFEM. Suva. See also C. Forster and V. Jivan. 2007. *Translating CEDAW into Law*. UNIFEM. Suva. <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/go/home&id=54254&type=Document&langID=1>. Also note that the protection from discrimination section of the Constitution is included in Annex 1 for reference.

<sup>28</sup> Forster and Jivan. 2007. *Translating CEDAW into Law*.

Equality and Women’s Development (GEWD) Policy, as well as the related Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women and the Children’s Policy. These policies identify strategic outcome areas that are complementary and reinforcing. The GEWD Policy has a monitoring and evaluation framework that will allow measurement of progress at the end of each planning period. The first planning period for the policy was 2010–2015 but evaluations of progress had not been initiated as of 2014.

The GEWD Policy priorities cover five areas designed to improve human rights, governance, and the sustainability of development initiatives:

- (i) improved and equitable health and education for girls and boys, women and men;
- (ii) improved economic status of women;
- (iii) equal participation of women and men in decision making and leadership;
- (iv) elimination of violence against women; and
- (v) increased capacity for gender mainstreaming.

Recent World Bank studies indicate that governance systems in Solomon Islands are weak at all levels and exhibit bias against women.<sup>29</sup> Indicators, analysis, and reports from all current development initiatives make this very clear. The country is behind in its performance on the Millennium Development Goals, the national report to the CEDAW Committee specifically notes weaknesses in governance and lack of representation of women at all levels of decision making, and the data on violence against women reflects that women are neglected in the delivery of government services and the court systems.

Implementation of the GEWD Policy priorities will improve equitable governance in Solomon Islands. The policy specifies modalities for engagement of the whole of government in the promotion of gender equality and the first key steps of this work have been progressing (see Chapter 8). Efforts to improve women’s representation in decision making are progressing much more slowly as they are dependent on significant social change and improvement of the organizational culture of political parties and government. To date, government has resisted implementing equity measures to redress persistent historical patterns of discrimination. More discussion on this issue is included in Chapter 6.

## 2.2 Justice and Rights Mechanisms

The **formal justice system** is supported through the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, which provides oversight to the Attorney General’s Office, the Law Reform Commission, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the Public Solicitor’s Office. The Directorate of Police Prosecutions and the national judiciary, which includes the High Court as well as the magistrates’ courts, are additional justice mechanisms operating separately from the ministry. These mechanisms operate only in Honiara and larger provincial capitals.

**Informal village courts and customary law** are formally recognized and exist in parallel with the formal system. They are the primary source of justice for rural populations. Particularly for rural women, local justice systems and customary mediation processes have a greater impact than the formal justice system. A majority of them

<sup>29</sup> M. Allen, S. Dinnen, D. Evans, and R. Monson. 2013. *Justice Delivered Locally: Systems, Challenges, and Innovations in Solomon Islands*. Justice for the Poor research report. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

do not have the understanding of or access to formal justice services due to lack of information, financial inability, transport barriers, and restrictive social norms.

The constitutional and legal framework of Solomon Islands is a complex blend of western and customary law. In some cases existing national legislation has not been reviewed or updated since colonial times. As a result, some laws are archaic in relation to contemporary realities. Interpretations of customary law will vary depending on the ethnic and linguistic area where it is referenced because different ethnic groups have their own codes for customary arbitration, negotiation, and just decision making. This in turn implies the need for a fusion of local and formal justice mechanisms.

Historically, at the local level, there have been changing structures designed to support social justice, community cohesion, and appropriate conduct. From the 1960s into the post-independence period, but ending in 1998 due to government financial cutbacks, government-funded area councils played a key role in maintaining social order and local justice. The delivery of justice at the local level was supported by area constables or lay police who could refer cases into provincial and national justice systems. It was supplemented with less formal dispute resolution mechanisms provided by local chiefs and religious leaders. Men managed all of these systems; while women may have had some indirect influence at the household level, decisions were based on customs that reinforced male dominance.

The onset of the Tensions in Solomon Islands undermined and exacerbated the weakness and fragmentation of justice systems. After 5 years of tension and conflict, the government's requests for international assistance resulted in a coalition of 15 countries sending the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). As of 1 July 2013, RAMSI completed a major transition process to hand over responsibility for most of its mandate to the government. The current RAMSI program is a regional policing mission focused on strengthening the capacity of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.

As part of its wide-ranging mandate, RAMSI undertook extensive reforms of the justice system, focusing heavily on institutions at the national capital level. However, links between improved Honiara-based mechanisms and rural justice systems remain problematic.<sup>30</sup> With regard to gender issues in the justice sector, the Solomon Islands Justice Program, supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, identifies challenges related to justice, gender equality, and the overall development process:

*Women are likely to be disproportionately affected by degradation in the provision of justice services. Gender equality in Solomon Islands is the country's most challenging development issue and it is going backwards relative to other countries. From the family and community level through to the highest levels of government, women remain largely excluded from decision-making. Within the public service, the last decade or so has seen some encouraging changes, including a sharp increase (from a very low base) in the number of women in senior and mid-level public service positions [as of Sept 2012]. Nevertheless, women still fill only five per cent of senior public service positions and twenty-two per cent of mid-level positions. There are no female High Court Judges and none of the justice agencies have female leaders. More broadly, [Solomon Islands government] officials struggle to translate general advocacy of gender issues into specific policy recommendations that will lead to legislative and policy reform.<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>30</sup> Allen et al. 2013. *Justice Delivered Locally*.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2013. *Solomon Islands Justice Program Delivery Strategy*. Program document. Honiara. p. 3.

The justice sector continues to be heavily reliant on Australia for technical assistance, and there are now some analyses of how gender inequality is undermining and constraining development. There is a continuing need for cross-sector collaboration in development of justice sector policies and mechanisms that will uphold women's right to justice.

**Currently, men hold all of the positions** in the top two levels of each of the four justice bodies overseen by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, as well as in the police and in the top two levels of the High Court and the magistrates' courts.<sup>32</sup> Men also hold the top two positions in the Ministry of Justice itself, and there is only one female magistrate (2nd class) in Honiara. It has been shown globally that unless judges and decision makers in related structures of the justice system are aware of gender-related human rights issues and specifically trained to interpret them in the context of the law, women are at risk of receiving biased judgments. This does not mean that women magistrates and High Court judges will automatically understand gender issues in relation to interpreting law. It does indicate that there is a need to ensure more gender balance in the judicial system and to build technical capacity on gender and law for all members of the judiciary.

#### Box 2.1 Gender Awareness Varies in the Judicial System

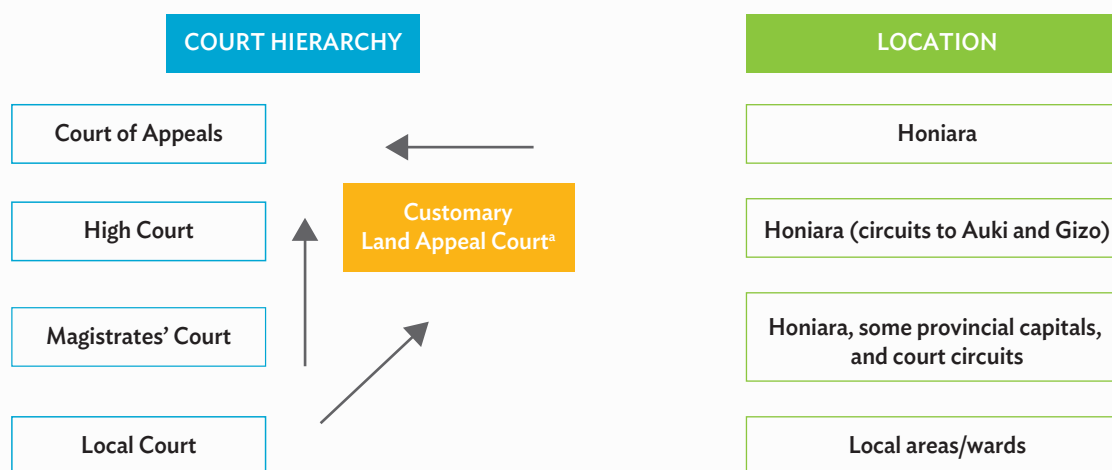
Attitudinal bias by the judiciary was demonstrated in the 2012 case of *R vs MacBerth Gua* when a judge ruled that although archaic common law allowing marital rape was no longer valid, the wife "must also share the blame" for contributing to the "underlying cause" of the act of rape because she had left the marital home due to the poor quality of the relationship. The husband was sentenced to 4 years imprisonment. The sentence was challenged by an appeal court and subsequently increased to 7 years, but the case demonstrates the need to raise awareness and change attitudes among the judiciary to ensure the government fulfills its obligations to uphold women's legal and human rights without prejudice.

Source: Pacific Islands Law Officers Network. [http://www.pilonsec.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=135&Itemid=113](http://www.pilonsec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=135&Itemid=113)

**Justice institutions are primarily sited in Honiara** with some magistrates' courts in provincial capitals (Figure 2.1). This is despite the fact that the Solomon Islands population is 80% rural. Where there are no permanent courts at the provincial level, services are provided through circuit magistrates' courts. The local courts are managed and governed by local leaders appointed by the chief justice. There is a lack of sex-disaggregated data in the Ministry of Justice about local court leadership, and there is limited information about selection criteria. It is anecdotally reported that men lead all local courts. These courts have limited jurisdiction and deal primarily with land issues, but in many cases they are the only component of the justice system that rural men and women have access to. Unfortunately, many of these local courts are not functioning on a regular basis and do not offer the range of services needed by the communities.

Significant investment in strengthening justice systems has been done in Solomon Islands through RAMSI, but it is also apparent that this is only beginning to have an impact on awareness about the complex interconnections between gender, governance, law, justice, and development (Box 2.2). At the beginning of the RAMSI mission, the justice system in Solomon Islands was barely functioning and court cases waited up to 2 years for processing, courts in rural areas were often nonexistent, and the lack of law and order in the county was widespread.

<sup>32</sup> Note that in the High Court there are five judicial positions and in the magistrates' courts there are two first-class magistrate positions, one of which was vacant at the time this report was written.

**Figure 2.1** Hierarchy of Court Systems

<sup>a</sup> Rulings by the Customary Land Appeal Court are binding and can only go to the High Court if based on a point of law.

Source: Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute. Solomon Islands Courts System Information. <http://www.paclii.org/sb/courts.html>

### Box 2.2 Justice and Gender Equality

“Despite RAMSI’s investment in the justice sector in the Solomon Islands, the rule of law continues to mean very little for the vast majority of women and girls. Many women are simply unable to access and navigate their way through formal legal institutions. This can be due to structural as well as cultural barriers, including women’s inadequate knowledge of rights and remedies, illiteracy or poor literacy, and lack of resources and time to participate in justice processes, especially given the heavy burden of labour that women bear. These challenges are likely to be even greater for women who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination based on factors such as being part of an ethnic minority, religious or sexual minorities, or for disabled women.

The law is an essential tool for advancing women’s rights and gender equality. When a society is governed by the rule of law, with an accessible and just legal system, women can thrive, contribute to the system and improve it for future generations. As such, a robust and effective legal system based on the rule of law is central to assisting women to become equal partners in decision-making and development.”

Source: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2013. *Solomon Island Justice Program Delivery Strategy*. Program document. Honiara. pp. 3–4.

**Civil society organizations**, particularly churches, are also active in support of local justice and fill gaps in formal court structures. They reinforce social value systems and provide opportunities for airing of disputes, counseling, and negotiation. The prevalence and integration of Christianity into Solomon Islands culture, and the localization of church hierarchies, means that faith leaders are often the first choice as mediators to address grievances of people seeking justice for antisocial behavior in families and communities. The male dominance of church hierarchies, however, has the potential to create bias against women, particularly on issues of domestic violence. Church teachings often seem to promote reconciliation and interests of family over women’s own

human rights. Where church leaders deliver this message without alternative or additional support to women, they increase the risk of continued harm. To avoid this, male faith leaders must be engaged in awareness training on eliminating violence against women to advocate for solutions that protect women's rights and support family and community cohesion.

This has begun to happen in some areas and in some churches, and many civil society organizations and churches work to promote justice and support women to realize their human rights. A major area of work is in addressing and reducing violence against women through awareness programs, counseling, and provision of legal advice. At the time of writing the Christian Care Centre was the only group operating a shelter for female victims of violence; however, groups in Noro and Gizo in Western Province are trying to secure funding and land to start others. Shelter is also informally provided by a number of churches at the provincial level as well as by extended families.<sup>33</sup> Nongovernment organizations are working to contextualize respect for women and the elimination of violence against women within religious teachings and demonstrate that church doctrine teaches respect and equal treatment of for all people.<sup>34</sup> There has also been work done by civil society to develop “men against violence against women” networks. These groups strive to promote gender equality and change social norms that allow violence against women to be perpetuated. Male advocates can help, particularly in rural areas, by raising awareness of rights and influencing local chiefs, religious leaders, and other opinion leaders.

Other areas where civil society and churches are working to promote justice include awareness raising about land, natural resource, and royalty rights of men and women, and protection of young women against trafficking. In all of these areas women have historically been excluded from decision making and their rights and entitlements are largely ignored.

Overall there is a need for increased coordination within communities to facilitate local justice. This coordination is needed between churches, civil society, schools, and other government service providers such as health providers or police operating at the local level. There is often tension between the value sets of these different groups and the interests and opinions of women and girls are often not considered. It is critical that development initiatives and government programs proactively engage with all community members to ensure informed decision making and action that will promote equitable justice programs.

## 2.3 Recommendations

**Strengthen justice mechanisms to improve access and gender equity.** In line with recent research and forthcoming justice initiatives, there are specific changes that can increase gender responsiveness of formal and informal judicial systems and promote gender equality; these include the following:

- (i) To support economic empowerment of rural and urban women, work concurrently with communities, local courts, and the national justice system and improve women's access to and control of natural resources, including land and sea resources. Ensure nondiscrimination based on sex, as well as just interpretation and application of customary and constitutional laws.

<sup>33</sup> Louisa Gibbs, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Personal communication, March 2014.

<sup>34</sup> This work is being undertaken by World Vision with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2013. *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development—Solomon Islands Country Plan Summary*.



- (ii) Social and justice ministries should work with regional development partners to deliver gender training to informal and village courts in rural Solomon Islands. Design, methodologies, and implementation approaches should build on lessons learned from other Pacific island countries that have undertaken similar work.
- (iii) Government and development partners should implement existing recommendations from current research on access to justice.<sup>35</sup> Current research indicates a need for innovative approaches involving multiple state and civil society agencies to effectively meet the needs of women, men, children, and adolescents from different ethnic and geographic areas.

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<sup>35</sup> Allen et al. 2013. *Justice Delivered Locally*.

This chapter examines key indicators of women's health, prevalent gender issues in the health sector, and provision of health services for women. Solomon Island's commitment to ensuring physical and mental health to all is enshrined in the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy that specifically states the need to "[e]nsure equitable access by women and men to strengthened health systems that respond to their different needs, especially in maternal care, sexual and reproductive health" (p. 6).

### Key Facts

- According to the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey, nearly 95% of women sought at least one antenatal care visit during pregnancy, while 65% had made the minimum four visits recommended for pregnancy. A relatively high percentage of women—more than 80%—are assisted by a health professional at birth or give birth at a health facility.
- Despite improvements in overall health indicators, disparities persist across provinces. The national average for infant mortality was only 12.0 per 1,000 live births as of 2012, while the rate ranged from 8.5 in Western province to 34.8 in Choiseul province. Similar disparities exist for under-5 child mortality, for which the national average was 15.3.
- According to the 2009 census, the total fertility rate (the average number of children a woman will bear in her lifetime) is still high at 4.7 (compared with 4.8 in 1999), and varies widely between urban (3.3) and rural (5.2) areas. The adolescent fertility rate is also high, with 8%–12% of women aged 15–19 already being mothers. The use of contraception is low, with only about 25% of currently married women (aged 15–49) and 16% of unmarried sexually active women using a modern method.
- Data on the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS are limited in Solomon Islands. While the reported prevalence of HIV is low, there is serious lack of knowledge about the virus among high-risk populations, limited testing facilities for HIV, and a high level of stigma to having an STI or HIV.
- Rural women are likely to face greater challenges in health care due to its poor quality and limited accessibility. Their access to care is more constrained due to heavy workloads at home, lack of funds for transport, and/or cultural requirements to obtain family permission. About 30% of rural women reported they needed permission from their husband or intimate partner to go for treatment, compared with only 17% of urban women.

### 3.1 Health Policy, Programs, and Systems

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) is the key agency responsible for health status improvement in the country. In the National Strategic Plan 2011–2015, the ministry has identified 20 key indicators and set a modest target of 1%–2% improvement by 2015.<sup>36</sup> The plan also emphasizes the need for better management of all services, especially those related to public health. However, the strategic goals are not specifically linked to any of the identified indicators, creating implementation challenges. The ministry's strategy also aims to redress disparities in health outcomes for men and women through cross-sector collaborations, by addressing the social determinants of health and by reducing risk factors such as unhealthy lifestyles, use of harmful substances, and other risk-taking behaviors.

While the health of women and children is an important national priority, gender analysis in most health policy documents is limited. In the MHMS strategic plan, the focus is mostly on addressing the need to reduce domestic violence and improve child protection. Activities listed for such efforts include updating protocols, provision of staff training, and collaboration with the justice system and police. The ministry is also engaged with the Public Service Commission's initiative to mainstream gender across government agencies. The ministry, for instance, is the coordinating agency for SafeNet, a program that aims to provide integrated multisector service provision for survivors of domestic violence. As of 2014, SafeNet was operational only in Honiara and was still developing record-keeping protocols and interagency coordination mechanisms.

**Health information systems** of government are generally weak. The most recent comprehensive sex disaggregated data are from the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). Other supplementary information is provided through administrative data from MHMS, small-scale health surveys, and the 2009 census. Some gender analysis has been done for existing data sources, but the results have not been widely available or used in formulating the MHMS strategic plan. From 2009 to 2011, MHMS did not aggregate or analyze health statistics due to reprogramming of the ministry's database. This lack of regular data collection and analysis makes it difficult to assess trends in health status or the quality of health services for women and men. It also undermines the government's ability to develop targeted interventions addressing specific health issues or concerning specific population groups. This report makes use of existing data from the 2007 DHS and the 2009 census, in the absence of more up-to-date data.<sup>37</sup>

**Health delivery systems** in Solomon Islands include seven provincial hospitals in nine provinces and the National Referral Hospital which also serves the people of Guadalcanal. Rennel-Bellona is the only province with no available hospital. There are also three private hospitals in Choisel, Malaita, and Western provinces. In addition, there are 327 area and rural health centers and nurse aid posts distributed across provinces.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Health and Medical Services. 2011. *National Strategic Health Plan 2011–2015*. Honiara. The World Health Organization has noted that the measurement framework in the national health plan is somewhat problematic due to the lack of data for some indicators; see Ministry of Health and Medical Services. 2012. *Solomon Islands Health Service Delivery Profile*. World Health Organization (WHO). Honiara. [http://www.wpro.who.int/health\\_services/service\\_delivery\\_profile\\_solomon\\_islands.pdf](http://www.wpro.who.int/health_services/service_delivery_profile_solomon_islands.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Results from the 2007 DHS and the 2009 census show somewhat varying statistics for key indicators presented in the current report, given differences in the population covered, the year of survey or census, and specific questions being asked.

<sup>38</sup> WHO. 2011. *Western Pacific Region Health Databank: Solomon Islands Country Health Information Profile*. [http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/slb/31SQLtab2011\\_finaldraft.pdf](http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/slb/31SQLtab2011_finaldraft.pdf)

However, geographic inequity exists in health service delivery, and the number of care providers and services per capita varies from province to province.<sup>39</sup>

Most health services in Solomon Islands are free and public health facilities can waive fees for patients who cannot afford to pay (for specific services like laboratory tests). Hence, the cost of health care itself may not be a factor in a woman's decision to seek health care for herself or her children. Women may face more difficulty in accessing health care if they live in remote areas, if they cannot afford costs for transportation, if they have a heavy workload at home, or if they need permission from their husband or partner to attend a health clinic.<sup>40</sup>

**Provincial variation in health outcomes.** While Solomon Islands has relatively good outcomes for overall health indicators compared with other countries at a similar development level, they tend to vary significantly from province to province. Table 3.1 shows infant and under-5 child mortality rates across provinces, using administrative health data collected by MHMS. While the national average for infant mortality is only 12.0 deaths per 1,000 live births, the rate ranges from 8.5 in Western Province to 34.8 in Choiseul Province. In three provinces (Choiseul, Isabel, and Central), the infant mortality rates are two to three times higher than the national average. Similarly, the average mortality rate for children under age 5 is 15.3 deaths per 1,000 live births; yet six out of ten provinces have much higher rates, ranging from 24.0 in Malaita Province up to 41.4 in Choiseul Province.

**Table 3.1** Infant and Under-5 Mortality Rates by Province

| Area/Province           | Infant Mortality Rate<br>(Per 1,000 live births) | Under-5 Mortality Rate<br>(Per 1,000 live births) |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Solomon Islands average | 12.0                                             | 15.3                                              |
| Guadalcanal             | 18.7                                             | 25.0                                              |
| Western                 | 8.5                                              | 12.1                                              |
| Makira                  | 19.8                                             | 25.2                                              |
| Choiseul                | 34.8                                             | 41.4                                              |
| Isabel                  | 23.2                                             | 24.6                                              |
| Rennell-Bellona         | -                                                | -                                                 |
| Temotu                  | 11.8                                             | 13.7                                              |
| Central                 | 29.7                                             | 31.4                                              |
| Malaita                 | 16.7                                             | 24.0                                              |
| Honiara                 | -                                                | -                                                 |

- = Not available.

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Health and Medical Services. 2013. *MHMS 2012 Statistics Report*. World Health Organization, Western Pacific Region. Honiara.

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Health and Medical Services. 2012. *Solomon Islands Health Service Delivery Profile*.

<sup>40</sup> WHO. 2008. *Health in Asia and the Pacific*. [http://www.wpro.who.int/health\\_research/documents/Health\\_in\\_Asia\\_and\\_the\\_Pacific/en](http://www.wpro.who.int/health_research/documents/Health_in_Asia_and_the_Pacific/en)

## 3.2 Gender and Health Issues

Table 3.2 shows a core set of health indicators related to women's maternal and sexual and reproductive health, based on results from the 2007 DHS (except for maternal mortality). Poor health outcomes among women are linked to many factors, including poor nutrition, gender-based violence, burden of heavy household work, and limited control over financial resources. Women's good health is essential for children's health and education outcomes, as well as for their participation in productive economic activities.

**Table 3.2 Indicators of Maternal and Reproductive Health**

| Indicator                                                          | Total | Urban | Rural | MDG Reference    | Notes                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Total fertility rate (3 years prior to 2007 DHS)                   | 4.6   | 3.4   | 4.8   | Related to MDG5b | 2009 census found total fertility rate for 1 year previous was 4.0 |
| Antenatal care (%)<br>• 4 visits                                   | 64.6  | 58.8  | 65.5  | MDG 5b           | 95% of women had at least one visit                                |
| Births attended by skilled professional (%)                        | 86.0  | 95.0  | 84.0  | MDG 5a           | Provincial variations with low of 69% in Guadalcanal               |
| Women giving birth in health facility (%)                          | 84.5  | 94.4  | 83.1  | MDG5a            | Provincial variations from low of 66% in Western Province          |
| Maternal mortality ratio                                           | 100.0 | –     | –     | MDG5a            | Per 100,000 live births. Note: this is modeled data                |
| Infant mortality rate                                              | 26.1  | 23.0  | 27.0  | MDG 4            | Per 1,000 births                                                   |
| Women age 15–19 already mothers at time of DHS survey (%)          | 11.9  | 9.0   | 12.6  | MDG 5b           | 7% of 15-year-olds reported already having a child                 |
| Current use of modern method contraceptives (%) by married women   | 27.3  | 32.2  | 28.0  | MDG 5b           | Currently married women (15–49)                                    |
| Current use of modern method contraceptives (%) by unmarried women | 16.2  | –     | –     | MDG 5b           | Unmarried sexually active women                                    |
| Unmet need for contraception (%)                                   | 11.0  | 8.2   | 11.6  | MDG 5b           | Total unmet need includes spacing and limiting                     |

– = Not available, DHS = Demographic and Health Survey, MDG = Millennium Development Goal.

Sources: Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2009. *Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2006–2007 Final Report*. Noumea; maternal mortality rate is from National Statistics Office MDG report (2008) citing United Nations Statistics Division MDG Indicators Database modeled data.

**Maternal health data** indicate that 95% of women received at least one antenatal care visit, while two-thirds of women (65%) made four or more visits, the minimum recommended during pregnancy. The majority of women received care from nurses and midwives (72%) and about 21% received care from nurse aides; only 2% received care from a doctor. More attention should be paid to improving the quality of care, including education about signs of complications for first-time mothers and older mothers. Earlier antenatal care also needs to be stressed, as the median gestational age at first visit was close to the end of the second trimester.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2007. *Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey Report*. Noumea. [http://www.spc.int/sdd/index.php/en/downloads/cat\\_view/46-dhs/52-solomon-islands-2006-2007-dhs-report](http://www.spc.int/sdd/index.php/en/downloads/cat_view/46-dhs/52-solomon-islands-2006-2007-dhs-report)

A relatively high percentage of women (more than 80%) gave birth assisted by health professionals or in health facilities. Urban-rural variations still exist: about 94%–95% of urban women, compared with 83%–84% of rural women, gave birth with a skilled health professional or in a clinical setting. By province, the highest proportion of births outside of clinical settings was in Guadalcanal Province (29%), whereas the lowest rates were in Western Province (6%) and Honiara District (4%).

Importantly, women's education and wealth were closely associated with the type of care women chose. The higher the level of women's education, the more likely they were to give birth with professional assistance or in health facilities.<sup>42</sup> The 2007 DHS results show that 10% of women with more than secondary education received antenatal care from a doctor and 17% of them also gave birth with a doctor's assistance, whereas only 2%–4% of women with secondary education received care or assistance from a doctor (Table 3.3). Household wealth was also associated with the likelihood of receiving maternal care from a skilled professional. However, education shows a greater impact on women's health-seeking behavior than household wealth, particularly for skilled care, suggesting the importance of women's education in improving the health status of women and their children.

**Table 3.3 Percentage of Women with Birthing Assistance from Skilled Provider**

| Women's Background     | % Women Receiving Antenatal Care from a Doctor | % Women Giving Birth with Attendance by a Skilled Professional <sup>a</sup> | % Women Giving Birth with Attendance by a Doctor |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Education</b>       |                                                |                                                                             |                                                  |
| More than secondary    | 10.4                                           | 92.1                                                                        | 17.1                                             |
| Secondary              | 2.1                                            | 92.2                                                                        | 3.9                                              |
| Primary                | 2.1                                            | 86.6                                                                        | 4.1                                              |
| No education           | 3.2                                            | 68.9                                                                        | 2.2                                              |
| <b>Wealth quintile</b> |                                                |                                                                             |                                                  |
| Highest                | 4.7                                            | 94.5                                                                        | 8.8                                              |
| Fourth                 | 2.9                                            | 91.5                                                                        | 4.6                                              |
| Middle                 | 1.8                                            | 84.6                                                                        | 3.3                                              |
| Second                 | 1.4                                            | 86.9                                                                        | 1.9                                              |
| Lowest                 | 1.6                                            | 73.5                                                                        | 2.7                                              |

<sup>a</sup> Skilled professionals include doctors, nurses, midwives, and other nurse aides.

Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009. *Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2006–2007 Final Report*. Noumea.

While indicators for antenatal care are relatively good overall, many women in the DHS reported problems in the quality of care, including lack of drugs (89%) and unavailability of health care providers (85%). Rural women were more likely to report poor quality of care and constraints in accessing care services (Table 3.4). In particular,

<sup>42</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2007. *Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey Report*.

more than half of rural women indicated concerns with distance or transport to health facilities, compared with less than 40% of urban women. In addition, about 30% of rural women reported they needed permission from their husband or intimate partner to go for treatment, compared with only 17% of urban women. However, these issues vary by province: women in Guadalcanal Province reported the most problems accessing care.

**Table 3.4 Problems Reported by Women in Accessing Health Facilities**

| Problem(s) Reported                      | Rural (%) | Urban (%) |
|------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Concern no drugs will be available       | 91        | 80        |
| Concern no provider will be available    | 87        | 76        |
| Concern there will be no female provider | 60        | 51        |
| Not wanting to go alone                  | 44        | 39        |
| Need to take transport                   | 58        | 36        |
| Distance to health facility              | 56        | 38        |
| Getting money for treatment              | 65        | 48        |
| Getting permission to go for treatment   | 30        | 17        |

Source: Solomon Islands National Statistics Office and Secretariat of the Pacific Community. *Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2006–2007 Fact Sheets*. Honiara.

**Sexual and reproductive health.** The total fertility rate in Solomon Islands—the average number of children that a woman will bear over her lifetime—has changed little, from 4.8 in 1999 to 4.7 in 2009, although it has been steadily decreasing since 1975.<sup>43</sup> The total fertility rate estimated in 2007 DHS was 4.6 (Table 3.2). The total fertility rate, however, varies considerably between urban (3.3) and rural (5.2) areas and by province. The current fertility level of about five children per woman represents a significant burden for women. According to 2007 DHS results, the desired family size for women and men is 3.5 children, which indicates an unmet need for contraception.<sup>44</sup>

Apart from problems of access to family planning services, the use of contraception is low in Solomon Islands. The 2007 DHS indicates that 27% of married women aged 15–49 use some type of modern contraceptive method, and the rate is slightly higher for rural areas (28%) than urban areas (23%). This reflects the higher motivation of health providers in rural areas, even though contraceptives are more readily available in urban areas. Contraception use among unmarried sexually active women was lower at 16%. A greater proportion of unmarried women (14%) use condoms, whereas married women's most commonly used methods included female sterilization, injectable drugs, and traditional methods. The main reason for not using contraception was a fear of side effects (37%), followed by general opposition to the use of contraception (15%).

<sup>43</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2014. *2009 Population and Housing Census Report on Gender*. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

<sup>44</sup> The DHS shows that reported unmet need is only 11%. This does not mesh with the stated desired family size and current contraceptive use figures and may indicate that the question was not well understood, contraception is not well understood, and/or that people have mixed feelings about contraceptive use as a means of family planning. Note that the 2007 DHS did not ask men and women separately about desired numbers of children.

The low use of contraception does not seem due to lack of knowledge, as more than 90% of both men and women in the 2007 DHS reported being aware of at least one modern method. Of women using contraceptives, 90% receive them for free through government clinics.<sup>45</sup> Injectables are the most commonly used modern contraception method, although condoms, sterilization, and pills are also available. For men, non-scalpel vasectomies are available for free in provincial and Honiara health facilities.

There is an obvious need to do more awareness and education about contraception. Improved access to contraceptives would also have substantial benefits for the health of women and children. A survey in 2013 found that approximately one in nine women of reproductive age who are married or in a union want to avoid pregnancy, but are not using any method of family planning. The survey analysis estimated that if all family planning needs were met, over 1,200 deaths of mothers and babies would be averted over the next 16 years, reducing the average number of maternal deaths each year by 12% and infant deaths by 20%. There would also be 14% fewer births to adolescent girls.<sup>46</sup>

**Adolescent fertility.** According to the 2009 census, of the 25,000 women aged 15–19, around 8% already had one or more children.<sup>47</sup> In 1999, the proportion of women aged 15–19 who had given birth was slightly higher at 9.6%. No data were available for girls under age 15 giving birth. Related to the issue of adolescent girls' reproductive health, the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study notes that 38% of sexually active young women reported that they had experienced sexual violence or their first sexual encounter was forced. This in turn indicates a high likelihood of unprotected sex and related high risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy.<sup>48</sup>

Statistics on condom use among young people seem to be improving when we compare the DHS data and the 2012 Solomon Islands Global AIDS Response Survey. In the 2007 DHS, 26% of men aged 15–24 and only 17% of women reported using a condom in their last high-risk sexual encounter. These rates rose to 38% for men and 28% for women in the 2012 study, although the data may not be comparable between the two surveys given different methodologies.<sup>49</sup> Even with the rise in condom use statistics, the rates of use are still low and indicate that young women and men are at a high risk for STIs and HIV.

**Data on STIs and HIV/AIDS** are limited in Solomon Islands. Since 1994 there have been 22 known cases of HIV. Eight of these people have died of AIDS-related illness. According to the Solomon Islands Global AIDS Response Progress Reports, as of 2014 there were 14 people known to be living with HIV or AIDS and 10 of them were women.<sup>50</sup> There were no known pediatric or mother-to-child transmission cases. Currently only

<sup>45</sup> S. Mackesy-Buckley, E. Kennedy, and S. Subramaniam. 2012. *The case for investing in family planning in Solomon Islands; a cost-benefit analysis*. Burnet Institute and Family Planning International on behalf of Compass: the Women's and Children's Health Knowledge Hub. Melbourne, Australia; and Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2007. Demographic and Health Survey Fact Sheet 3. *Fertility and Family Planning*. Noumea. [http://www.spc.int/sdd/index.php/en/downloads/cat\\_view/46-dhs/51-solomon-islands-2006-2007-dhs-fact-sheets](http://www.spc.int/sdd/index.php/en/downloads/cat_view/46-dhs/51-solomon-islands-2006-2007-dhs-fact-sheets)

<sup>46</sup> S. Mackesy-Buckley, E. Kennedy, and S. Subramaniam. 2013. *The case for investing in family planning in Solomon Islands: Estimated costs and benefits of reducing unmet need*. Compass Women and Children's Health Hub.

<sup>47</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 *Population and Housing Census Report on Gender*. National Statistics Office. Honiara. For the 2007 DHS, the estimated rate was 12%.

<sup>48</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*; and SPC. 2007. *Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey Report*.

<sup>49</sup> Government of Solomon Islands and Solomon Islands AIDS Council. 2014. *Global AIDS Response Progress Report*. Honiara. [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/SLB\\_narrative\\_report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/SLB_narrative_report_2014.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Footnote 49.



0.2% of Solomon Islanders know their HIV status and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services considers the number of known infections to be underestimated. In 2010, only 9% of pregnant women had an HIV test and it is unknown how many of these received the results of the testing.<sup>51</sup>

Due to lack of appropriate laboratory testing facilities in most provinces and rural areas, infections are treated based on symptoms with a set selection of antibiotics. Facilities for testing for chlamydia are available only at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara. Only 25 out of 331 health facilities provide HIV-related counseling, testing for prevention of parent-to-child transmission, or voluntary confidential testing for STIs and HIV. However, none of these facilities offer same-visit testing.<sup>52</sup> There is a high level of stigma attached to having a STI, HIV, or AIDS. The likelihood of maintaining confidentiality when returning for multiple visits is also poor, particularly in small communities.

Lack of testing among men is a concern because men are more likely to work away from home, for example, in the fishing industry as seafarers, and to engage in risky sexual behavior. There is a relatively high level of interaction between sex workers and seafarers and fishermen working on transshipment vessels in Honiara and Noro.<sup>53</sup> The Western Province of Solomon Islands shares an open border with Papua New Guinea where HIV is epidemic. Women also need to be encouraged to be tested for HIV if their partners are seafarers, or if they experience coercive or engage in transactional sex.

**Disability** is an issue that is beginning to receive national attention. Solomon Islands signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 and is moving toward ratification. In 2009 the government also signed the optional protocol associated with the convention. The National Disability Policy 2005–2010 is undergoing review and revision. In the interim, the draft action plan for the revised policy strengthens the policy linkage with the Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy and the Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women (Box 3.1).

### Box 3.1 Government Services and Benefits for Disabled People

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services runs the Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme throughout the country. The program’s approach includes combined efforts of persons with disabilities themselves; their families and communities; and the relevant government and nongovernment health, educational, vocational, social, and other services. Community-based rehabilitation is delivered within the community using predominantly local resources. The program provides a good platform for training staff to assist disabled women with sexual and reproductive health issues.<sup>a</sup>

Solomon Islands has only one school for children with special needs, which is situated in the capital, Honiara.<sup>b</sup> There is also a vocational program to assist disabled adults to develop skills and find employment.

<sup>a</sup> Lemmi, V. et al. 2013. *Community-Based Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities in Low and Middle-Income Countries: Protocol*. <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/244>

<sup>b</sup> International Disability Alliance. 2013. *Suggestions for Disability-Relevant Questions To Be Included in the List of Issues of the CEDAW Committee 54th Session on the Implementation of the CEDAW in the Solomon Islands*. Submission to the CEDAW Committee. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/IDASolomonIslands54.doc>

<sup>51</sup> Footnote 49.

<sup>52</sup> Footnote 49.

<sup>53</sup> J. Connell and J. Negin. 2010. *Migration, Mobility and HIV: A Rapid Assessment of Risks and Vulnerabilities in the Pacific*. United Nations Development Programme and Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Suva.

The 2009 census provides data on people reporting disabilities at two levels.<sup>54</sup> The first question was whether a person had any difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking, and/or remembering or concentrating regardless of its severity. The second question measured severity by asking whether a person cannot see, hear, walk, or remember or concentrate at all. Overall, 14% of the total population (of all ages) reported a disability of some type, and the rate was higher for women than men (15% versus 13%).<sup>55</sup> Expectedly, disability rates increase with age, especially from age 40 on. Women were more likely than men to report disabilities related to walking and cognitive tasks as they age (Table 3.5). The census report notes that approximately 5,300 people have severe disabilities, taking into account that a single person may have more than one disability. There is little gender difference in the rate of severe disability.

**Table 3.5 Population Reporting a Disability by Type and Severity**

| Type of Disability        | Total  | Males  | Females |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|---------|
| <b>Any Disability</b>     |        |        |         |
| Vision                    | 40,478 | 20,484 | 19,994  |
| Hearing                   | 24,558 | 12,319 | 12,239  |
| Walking                   | 35,157 | 16,769 | 18,388  |
| Remembering/concentrating | 42,225 | 20,460 | 21,765  |
| <b>Severe Disability</b>  |        |        |         |
| Blindness                 | 907    | 411    | 496     |
| Deafness                  | 1,398  | 729    | 669     |
| Lameness                  | 2,975  | 1,491  | 1,484   |
| Senile and/or amnesiac    | 3,293  | 1,635  | 1,658   |

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009. *Population and Housing Census National Report*. Vol. 2. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

Girls with disability are at higher risk of rape and sexual abuse than boys. Specific health services for women with disabilities who are pregnant or who are already mothers are uncommon and few service providers are trained to support those with disability.

*Traditionally, persons with disabilities are generally looked after by the family or close relatives with decisions made for them by a relative. However, as family members migrate to urban areas, persons with disabilities are left behind and face poor treatment from people who are not their close relatives. In many cases, they are forced to beg by their relatives. In particular, women and girls with disabilities are discriminated against; young girls with disabilities are often hidden since disability is seen as a “curse.” If she is capable of doing*

<sup>54</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 *Population and Housing Census National Report*. Vol. 2. National Statistics Office. Honiara. <http://www.spc.int/prism/solomons/index.php/sinso-documents?view=download&fileId=59>

<sup>55</sup> The 2009 census reports the number of people with any type of disability for all age groups. For young children, difficulties reported may be related more to their level of development than ability. For the population up to age 39, the rate of disability reported was relatively low and there was little gender difference.

*housework, then she will be forced to work and often subject to cruel punishment. In many cases, this treatment is accepted by them because they see the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse faced by them as their fault.*

— Savina Nongebatu, *president of People with Disabilities Solomon Islands*<sup>56</sup>

**Noncommunicable diseases (NCD)** are a major health issue in Solomon Islands. The country suffers from the double burden of high levels of both communicable and noncommunicable diseases. Both men and women are vulnerable to heart disease and diabetes due to changes in diet and lifestyles. Yet women are more likely than men to be overweight or obese, as they are less likely to exercise in daily life, work, and recreation.<sup>57</sup> Prevention approaches need to be targeted separately to men and women with appropriate health education messages. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that young women are more likely than older women to drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, and chew betel nut, although women are generally less likely to use these substances than men. These suggest that the health risks of substance use need to be targeted to young women, as well as to men.

**Burdens of caregiving and infrastructure services are linked.** Women are the primary care givers in households in Solomon Islands. They are also responsible for most of the household chores while contributing as active participants in agriculture and community work. In rural areas, household work includes not only cooking, cleaning, and looking after children but also collecting drinking water from communal standpipes or streams, walking to a water source to do laundry, and collecting fuel wood. In many rural areas, there is inadequate water, sanitation, and energy infrastructure to support women in their household and caregiving work. Table 3.6 shows access to drinking water, energy, and toilet facility among households across three different provinces, as well as for the country as a whole as of 2009. In rural areas like Malaita and Isabel, the majority of households still rely on communal water sources, while those in Honiara are likely to have metered water in the household. For the country as a whole, less than 30% of households have a private toilet facility and many in rural areas tend to use shared facilities or have no toilet at all.

**Men's and women's health-seeking behavior is often different.** Women seek health care more often than men because of their reproductive roles and child care responsibilities. Most health promotion in rural areas targets pregnant women and mothers of young children, encouraging them to attend antenatal clinics and to bring their children to health centers for immunizations and checkups. Men tend to seek health care only when they are ill and may avoid checkups for various reasons, which may include not wanting to be seen by a female health professional. And men are not targeted by health promotion programs as frequently as women.

In addition, women may not be able to make their own decisions about health care. According to the 2007 DHS, only 28% of women make independent decisions about their health care while 17% reported that their husbands make decisions for them. This lack of decision-making power coupled with lack of access to economic resources further reduces women's ability to maintain their own health or ensure their children's access to health services.

<sup>56</sup> Disability Rights Fund. 2015. *Strengthening Voices of People with Disabilities*. Boston. [http://www.disabilityrightsfund.org/files/pwdsi\\_solomon\\_islands.pdf](http://www.disabilityrightsfund.org/files/pwdsi_solomon_islands.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Government of Solomon Islands and WHO. 2006. *Solomon Islands NCD Risk Factors: STEPS Report*. Honiara. [http://www.who.int/chp/steps/2006\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_STEPS\\_Report.pdf](http://www.who.int/chp/steps/2006_Solomon_Islands_STEPS_Report.pdf)

**Table 3.6** Water, Sanitation, and Cooking Infrastructure Related to Women's Time and Caregiving Burdens, 2009

|                                           | National     | Honiara      | Malaita      | Isabel       |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Source of Drinking Water</b>           |              |              |              |              |
| Metered water                             | 9.2          | 75.4         | 1.6          | 0.4          |
| Communal standpipe/ protected well        | 37.2         | 4.4          | 47.2         | 65.2         |
| Household tank                            | 12.5         | 9.6          | 5.1          | 10.2         |
| Communal tank/unprotected well            | 12.4         | 4.1          | 8.0          | 11.6         |
| River stream                              | 24.5         | 4.7          | 33.1         | 10.7         |
| Bottled water/other                       | 4.2          | 1.8          | 5.1          | 1.8          |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| <b>Toilet Facility</b>                    |              |              |              |              |
| Flush - private                           | 10.1         | 54.1         | 3.7          | 2.8          |
| Water sealed - private                    | 7.2          | 13.3         | 5.0          | 7.2          |
| Pit latrine - private                     | 11.5         | 11.0         | 15.5         | 23.3         |
| Shared (flush, water sealed, pit latrine) | 13.9         | 18.7         | 29.0         | 8.4          |
| Other                                     | 24.4         | 1.5          | 26.0         | 57.1         |
| None                                      | 32.8         | 1.3          | 20.7         | 1.2          |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>100</b>   | <b>100</b>   | <b>100</b>   | <b>100</b>   |
| <b>Source of Cooking</b>                  |              |              |              |              |
| Electricity - main grid                   | 0.6          | 3.7          | 0.1          | 0.1          |
| Wood/coconut shells                       | 92.5         | 53.0         | 98.3         | 94.5         |
| Gas                                       | 5.4          | 36.5         | 1.0          | 2.0          |
| Kerosene                                  | 0.7          | 2.9          | 0.3          | 0.8          |
| Charcoal/other                            | 0.8          | 3.9          | 0.1          | 2.6          |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>100</b>   | <b>100</b>   | <b>100</b>   | <b>100</b>   |
| (Number of households)                    | (91,251)     | (8,981)      | (24,421)     | (5,143)      |

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 Population and Housing Census. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

### 3.3 Health and Violence against Women

**Violence against women and impacts on health.** The 2009 Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study found that two out of three women have experienced violence from an intimate partner.<sup>58</sup> The study also found that women who have experienced violence are significantly more likely than other women to develop health problems, to suffer from emotional distress, to be hospitalized, or to have surgery (Table 3.7). They have a fourfold higher likelihood of committing suicide than women who have not experienced violence.

<sup>58</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*. Noumea.

**Table 3.7** Percentage of Women Reporting Selected Symptoms of Ill Health by Experience of Violence

| Selected Symptoms of Ill Health | Never Experienced Partner Violence (%) | Experienced Physical and/or Sexual Partner Violence (%) |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Poor/very poor general health   | 22.7                                   | 30.1                                                    |
| Problems walking                | 3.4                                    | 7.4                                                     |
| Difficulties with activities    | 3.6                                    | 9.3                                                     |
| Recent pain                     | 8.5                                    | 14.7                                                    |
| Problems with memory            | 3.8                                    | 55.8                                                    |
| Recent dizziness                | 38.6                                   | 55.8                                                    |
| Vaginal discharge               | 3.9                                    | 7.5                                                     |

Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*. Noumea.

Women often resist seeking health care for serious injuries due to shame. While 12% of women reporting violence said they had been injured so severely as to need health care, 22% of them said they never actually sought that care. Eleven percent of ever-abused women reported having lost consciousness because of violence against them, indicating the severity of the violence.

Survivors of violence visit health services facilities frequently although not always for treatment of their directly related injuries. Health professionals are frontline service providers and they have the potential to make huge differences to women victims of violence and as advocates for ending violence against women. However, most health workers do not have sufficient training to identify the issue and respond adequately. Some may even harbor biased attitudes toward survivors.

## 3.4 Recommendations

**Gender analysis of health policy is a critical element of effective and efficient health systems and services.**

In addition, policy coordination with other ministries is needed to build evidence and implement health programs. Specific recommendations include the following:

- (i) Incorporate gender analysis and gender costing of health issues into Ministry of Health and Medical Services budgeting, strategic planning, and programming.
- (ii) Develop and strengthen coordination between education and health policies to improve maternal and children health outcomes, and to enhance education about sexual and reproductive health, especially for young people.
- (iii) Strengthen health sector data collection, monitoring, and evaluation at local levels to better assess improvements in health outcomes and identify specific constraints to health service delivery across different provinces.

- (iv) Analyze health data collected from referral networks serving victims of violence in order to better document health impacts of violence and to estimate the cost of violence to the national health care system.

**Improved health promotion and enhanced delivery of health services** are critical to ensure gender equity in health outcomes. Promoting women's and men's understanding of their sexual and reproductive health is a prerequisite for improving maternal and children's health outcomes and preventing HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancies. Specific recommendations include the following:

- (i) Promote awareness of the benefits of antenatal and postpartum care in rural areas, particularly those with high maternal and infant mortality.
- (ii) Enhance public health promotion campaigns on contraception and safe sex to reduce unintended pregnancies, decrease risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV, and improve confidentiality in testing.
- (iii) Improve the health sector's capacity to respond to violence against women by incorporating training requirements for health care staff in detecting and handling victims of violence, and by establishing clear response protocols for staff at different responsibility levels.

# 4

## Education

This chapter examines participation of girls and boys in all levels of education, along with disparities by province in school enrollments. It also explores the potential barriers to girls' school attendance and the extent of gender segregation in fields of study at tertiary institutions, which is likely to lead to gender differences in employment opportunities.

### Key Facts

- School enrollments have increased steadily, with primary net enrollments reaching nearly 90% for both girls and boys since 2009. While the gender gap has been narrowing, disparities remain at all levels of education as of 2013.
- Considerably fewer students attend secondary schools: net enrollment rates at junior secondary level are still below 40% and the rates at senior secondary level are below 30%. Girls have been catching up with boys in school attendance, but the gender gap still persists. The gap is particularly significant at senior secondary level, with gross enrollment rates of 28% for girls and 32% for boys.
- Available data on dropouts indicate an increasing dropout rate for higher levels of schooling. At primary and junior secondary levels, the dropout rate is slightly higher for girls than for boys. This pattern reverses at senior secondary level, with more boys dropping out than girls.
- For tertiary education, which includes degree and nondegree programs, women made up 38% of total estimated enrollment in 2012. Women are concentrated in traditional female subject areas such as education, tourism, and hospitality. Women are especially underserved by technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs, as most TVET programs are oriented toward young men with technical courses.
- Educational attainment of the adult population (aged 15 and above) is relatively low, with only 20% of women and 29% of men having at least some secondary schooling. Women are nearly twice as likely as men to have no schooling at all (21% versus 12%), whereas men are twice as likely as women to have tertiary education (6% versus 3%).
- The 2009 census shows reasonably high literacy rates, although women (79%) are less likely to be literate than men (89%). However, studies at the provincial level indicate very low levels of functional literacy, ranging from 7% to 28%. Functional literacy is also significantly lower for women (14%) than for men (21%). Functional literacy improves for those completing higher levels of schooling.

### 4.1 Education Policy Environment and Systems

Solomon Islands is committed to ensuring that all girls and boys are provided a full primary education, which is reflected in the Education Act (1978, 2015) and the Education Strategic Framework (2015). Education policies, action plans, and frameworks also contain policy commitments and international agreements related to gender equality (Table 4.1). The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) is developing a

policy that identifies strategic issues and priorities to promote gender equality in education. The gender equality in education policy will be informed by two recent studies showing that structural and systematic barriers in education contribute to gender gaps in educational attainment.<sup>59</sup>

**Table 4.1 Guiding Commitments for Gender Equality in Education**

| Guidance Document Title                                                              | Date                                                         | Type of Document and Focus on Gender Equality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)                                                  | 2000                                                         | Set of international goals for development. Gender equality and equity is measured in part by indicators for girls' participation in primary and secondary schools.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Education for All (EFA)                                                              | Solomon Islands incorporated EFA goals into planning in 2004 | Education for All is an international movement to improve basic education. It is led by UNESCO and aims to, inter alia, eliminate gender disparities in education.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Pacific Plan                                                                         | 2007                                                         | Sustainable development goals include objectives for improved education and training and improved gender equality.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Pacific Education Development Framework                                              | 2009–2015                                                    | Gender equality and equity is a cross-cutting thematic area in the plan and is also referenced in the HIV/AIDS and Youth thematic areas. It is referenced as an issue throughout the document.                                                                                                                                                  |
| Education Act                                                                        | Under revision in 2014                                       | The technical working group reviewing the act has an objective to ensure that the revised act is gender responsive.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Education Strategic Framework                                                        | 2007–2015                                                    | Overarching policy for the education system. Complementary to the National Education Action Plan.<br>Framework notes gender discrimination and identifies some infrastructure-oriented approaches to address disparities in enrollment.<br>Framework also identifies issues of disability—which may be exacerbated for girls with disabilities. |
| National Education Action Plan                                                       | 2010–2012                                                    | Plan is linked to the above framework. Strategic Goal 1 identifies the need to ensure equitable access to education “regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, location or disability.”                                                                                                                                                        |
| Performance Assessment Report (known as Performance Assessment Framework until 2012) | Ongoing management tool                                      | Information management and monitoring mechanism to track performance of the education system.<br>Includes some sex-disaggregated information on enrollment and other performance indicators that can show gender disparities.                                                                                                                   |
| Policy Statement and Guidelines for Tertiary Education in Solomon Islands            | 2010                                                         | Goal 1 identifies the need to “provide equitable access to high quality tertiary education... for marginalized groups.” However, no specific groups are identified.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Draft Gender Equality in Education Policy                                            | Drafting in 2014                                             | The final draft is for submission to the National Education Board in November 2015.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

The MEHRD has overall responsibility for education in Solomon Islands and manages that responsibility in conjunction with provincial education authorities and nongovernment education authorities that have government approval to run schools. Nongovernment authorities are primarily linked to religious groups.

<sup>59</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2011. *Barriers to Education*; and S. Akao and J. Strachan. 2012. *A Gender Analysis of the Education Sector in the Solomon Islands*. University of Waikato. Hamilton, New Zealand.



There are six levels in the Solomon Islands education system. Management of the system and related data are complicated by several factors: (i) there are three different, but overlapping, types of schools for the two levels of secondary education; (ii) different education authorities may have different approaches to monitoring, collecting, and reporting information; and (iii) different authorities have different levels of quality control when collecting sex-disaggregated data. The education system is also heavily reliant on community and mission schools.

**Table 4.2 Education Levels in Solomon Islands**

| Level of Education | Duration | Approximate Age Range  | Type of School                                      |
|--------------------|----------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Preschool          | Variable | Less than 3 years      | Nursery                                             |
| Early childhood    | 3 years  | 3–6 years              | Early childhood care and education center           |
| Primary            | 6 years  | 6–12 years             | Primary school                                      |
| Junior secondary   | 3 years  | 13–15 years            | Junior secondary/community high school <sup>a</sup> |
| Senior secondary   | 3 years  | 16–19 years            | Senior secondary/community high school <sup>a</sup> |
| Tertiary           | Variable | 18–25 years (variable) | Vocational, technical, college, university          |

<sup>a</sup> Note that community high schools vary in levels and age cohorts depending on which education authority they are managed by.

Source: S. Akao and J. Strachan. 2012. *A Gender Analysis of the Education Sector in the Solomon Islands*. University of Waikato. Hamilton, New Zealand.

## 4.2 Trends in Educational Attainment by Gender

The management of education statistics at MEHRD is still weak and sex-disaggregated statistics are not comprehensive across all data categories. Given variations in data quality, it is difficult to accurately assess trends in girls' and boys' enrollment and performance in schools.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, recent improvements in education data collection and management by MEHRD indicate steady progress in overall school enrollment and narrowing the gender gap.

The number of students enrolled in primary school increased by nearly 20%, from 104,062 in 2007 to 123,779 in 2013 (Table 4.3). The net enrollment ratio also reached 90% since 2009, for both girls and boys. The large difference between gross and net enrollment ratios indicates that there are still many over-age students attending primary schools, similarly for both genders but more so for boys. Despite improvement, girls' enrollment at primary level still lags behind boys'; girls made up 48% of the total enrollment in 2013 and the gender parity index is still under 1.

At the secondary level, considerably fewer students are in school: as of 2013, less than 40% of children in ages eligible for junior secondary school (ages 13–15) were enrolled, although this net enrollment ratio was a significant improvement from less than 30% in 2007. Gross enrollment ratios, on the other hand, were nearly 70% in 2013 (68% for girls and 69% for boys), again suggesting large numbers of over-age students at this level.

<sup>60</sup> Akao and Strachan. 2012. *A Gender Analysis of the Education Sector in the Solomon Islands*.

**Table 4.3 Trends in School Enrollment by Sex, 2007–2013**

|                             | 2007   |        | 2009   |        | 2011   |        | 2013   |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                             | Female | Male   | Female | Male   | Female | Male   | Female | Male   |
| <b>Primary</b>              |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| Number of students enrolled | 49,094 | 54,973 | 55,646 | 61,378 | 58,185 | 63,80  | 59,720 | 64,059 |
| Gross enrollment ratio (%)  | 107.7  | 113.7  | 115.2  | 120.1  | 114.6  | 119.3  | 111.6  | 113.9  |
| Net enrollment ratio (%)    | 84.5   | 88.5   | 90.5   | 93.4   | 90.2   | 93.0   | 88.5   | 89.2   |
| Gender parity index for GER | 0.95   |        | 0.96   |        | 0.96   |        | 0.98   |        |
| Transition rate (year 6–7)  | 79.2   | 83.8   | 93.9   | 92.7   | 86.3   | 85.5   | 88.8   | 88.8   |
| <b>Junior Secondary</b>     |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| Number enrolled             | 8,744  | 10,545 | 11,616 | 13,429 | 12,949 | 14,293 | 13,819 | 14,974 |
| Gross enrollment ratio (%)  | 53.4   | 60.8   | 66.2   | 72.2   | 68.3   | 71.1   | 67.7   | 69.0   |
| Net enrollment ratio (%)    | 29.4   | 26.6   | 37.6   | 37.1   | 37.6   | 35.8   | 39.1   | 37.1   |
| Gender parity index for GER | 0.88   |        | 0.92   |        | 0.96   |        | 0.98   |        |
| Transition rate (year 9–10) | 70.7   | 76.5   | 81.5   | 78.8   | 66.5   | 72.9   | 75.7   | 76.7   |
| <b>Senior Secondary</b>     |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| Number enrolled             | 3,426  | 5,305  | 4,774  | 6,123  | 5,455  | 7,427  | 6,687  | 8,124  |
| Gross enrollment ratio (%)  | 16.9   | 24.8   | 22.8   | 27.6   | 24.6   | 31.7   | 28.0   | 32.0   |
| Net enrollment ratio (%)    | 15.6   | 21.5   | 19.8   | 22.5   | 21.2   | 24.9   | 24.4   | 26.1   |
| Gender parity index for GER | 0.68   |        | 0.83   |        | 0.78   |        | 0.88   |        |

GER = gross enrollment ratio.

Note: Gender parity index (GPI) measures the relative education participation of females and males. GPI of 1 indicates equal enrollment of females and males; GPI of less than 1 reflects a disparity in favor of males.

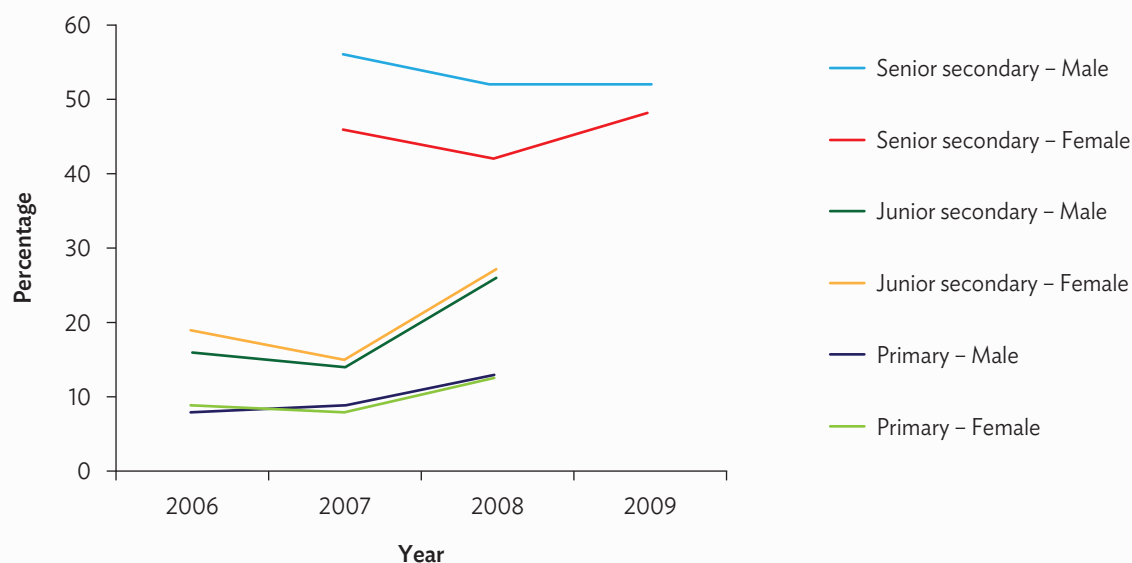
Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2013. *Performance Assessment Report 2006–2013*. Honiara.

For senior secondary schools, despite steady increases, net enrollment ratios continue to be low at below 30% in 2013 (24% for girls and 26% for boys).

Girls have been catching up with boys in secondary school attendance, as illustrated by continuous increases in enrollment and a narrowing gender gap. Transition rates—from primary to junior secondary, and from junior secondary to senior secondary levels—also indicate greater increases for girls than boys over time. Yet, the gender gap persists at all levels of schooling in both gross and net enrollment ratios. In particular, the gap is still significant at senior secondary level with a gender parity index of 0.88 in 2013, whereas the gender parity index has greatly improved for primary and junior secondary enrollments (0.98 as of 2013). One main reason for the gender gap at senior secondary level is that many of these schools are boarding schools and there is insufficient accommodation for girls.<sup>61</sup> The government is now working with development partners to increase dormitory spaces for both boys and girls.

<sup>61</sup> Footnote 60.

**Figure 4.1** Percentages of Males and Females Dropping Out by School Level



Source: S. Akao and J. Strachan. 2012. *A Gender Analysis of the Education Sector in the Solomon Islands*. University of Waikato. Hamilton, New Zealand.

Although recent data are not available, existing data on dropouts indicate increasing rates of dropouts for higher levels of schooling (Figure 4.1). At primary and junior secondary levels, the rate of dropout was slightly higher for girls than boys during 2006–2009. However, the dropout rate reverses at senior secondary level, with more boys dropping out than girls. While detailed information about the reasons for dropping out is not available, boys' engagement in informal or subsistence employment at that age may be a reason. For girls, pregnancy is likely to be one reason for leaving school early, given a relatively high rate of teen pregnancy. Girls are generally stigmatized if they become pregnant. The current school policy forces them to drop out with no eligibility to reenroll, suggesting that few of these young women would return to any form of education.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, a lower rate of girls' dropping out relative to boys at the secondary level indicates that girls who have succeeded in reaching secondary level are likely to be committed to education and have family support to stay in school.

**Provincial variations in school attendance.** Along with a gender gap, differences in school attendance are pronounced between urban and rural areas, and especially so by province. The 2009 census results show a higher school attendance rate in urban (87%) than rural areas (83%) among children aged 6–15; by province, Malaita shows the lowest enrollment rate.<sup>63</sup> The latest data on school enrollment by MEHRD show similar results.<sup>64</sup> Gross enrollment rates for junior secondary education range from 56% to 136%, with the lowest rates indicated for Malaita (56% for girls and 58% for boys), Central (56% for girls and 59% for boys), and

<sup>62</sup> WHO. 2012. *Asia-Pacific Leadership and Policy Dialogue for Women's and Children's Health: Solomon Islands Case Study*. [http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/press\\_materials/pr/2012/solomonIsland\\_casestudy.pdf](http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/press_materials/pr/2012/solomonIsland_casestudy.pdf)

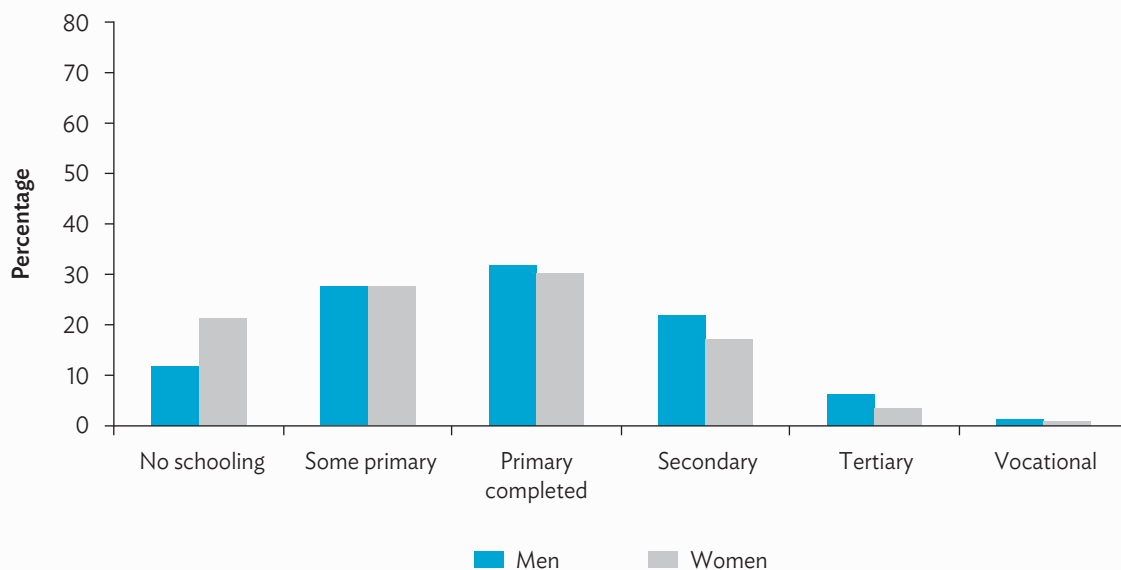
<sup>63</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. *2009 National Population and Housing Census Report*. Vol. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2015. *Draft Performance Assessment Report 2014*. Honiara.

Guadalcanal (69% for girls and 65% for boys) provinces; the highest rates are shown for Honiara (130% for girls and 136% for boys) and Makira (86% for girls and 82% for boys). As for gross enrollment rates for senior secondary schools, the lowest rates are for Choiseul (14% for girls and 13% for boys), Malaita (17% for girls and 21% for boys), and Central (20% for girls and 23% for boys) provinces, while the highest rate is for Honiara (100% for girls and 116% for boys).

**Educational attainment of the adult population.** The gender gap is also apparent in the educational attainment of the population aged 15 and above, given persisting gaps in school attendance between females and males. According to the 2009 census, the percentage of women who have no schooling (21%) is nearly twice as high as that of men (12%) (Figure 4.2). While the percentage of women and men with primary schooling is similar, men are more likely to have attended or completed secondary or tertiary education; men are twice as likely as women to have a tertiary education (6% versus 3%). Overall, more than three-quarters of women aged 15 and older (79%) and two-thirds of men (70%) have at most primary schooling, whereas only 20% of women and 29% of men have at least secondary schooling. This relatively low level of educational attainment among the adult population indicates various challenges in employment, such as inadequate literacy and numeracy and lack of job-related skills.

**Figure 4.2** Educational Attainment of Population Aged 15 and Above, 2009



Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2014. *2009 National Population and Housing Census Report on Gender*. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

The level of educational attainment is particularly low in rural areas, especially among women (Table 4.4). Almost one-quarter of rural women have no schooling compared with 10% of urban women. Women and men in urban areas are also twice as likely to have secondary schooling (31% of women and 36% of men) compared with their counterparts in rural areas. Women and men in urban areas are far more likely to have tertiary education as well, although urban women are significantly less likely than urban men (9% of women and 14%

**Table 4.4** Educational Attainment of Population Aged 15 and Above by Area, 2009

| Schooling Attended or Completed | Total (%) |       | Urban (%) |       | Rural (%) |       |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|
|                                 | Men       | Women | Men       | Women | Men       | Women |
| No schooling                    | 11.8      | 21.4  | 4.4       | 9.8   | 13.8      | 24.4  |
| Some primary                    | 27.4      | 27.8  | 16.9      | 19.7  | 30.4      | 29.9  |
| Primary completed               | 31.6      | 30.2  | 27.5      | 29.5  | 32.7      | 30.3  |
| Secondary attended/completed    | 22.0      | 16.8  | 36.2      | 31.4  | 18.0      | 13.1  |
| Tertiary attended/completed     | 6.0       | 3.1   | 13.5      | 8.9   | 3.8       | 1.6   |
| Vocational certificate          | 1.3       | 0.6   | 1.6       | 0.7   | 1.3       | 0.6   |
| Total                           | 100       | 100   | 100       | 100   | 100       | 100   |

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2014. *2009 National Population and Housing Census Report on Gender*. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

of men). Variations by province also exist: Honiara has the highest proportion of residents with secondary education (35%), followed by Isabel (25%). The proportion of the population with no education is particularly high in Malaita (27%), followed by Temotu (25%).<sup>65</sup>

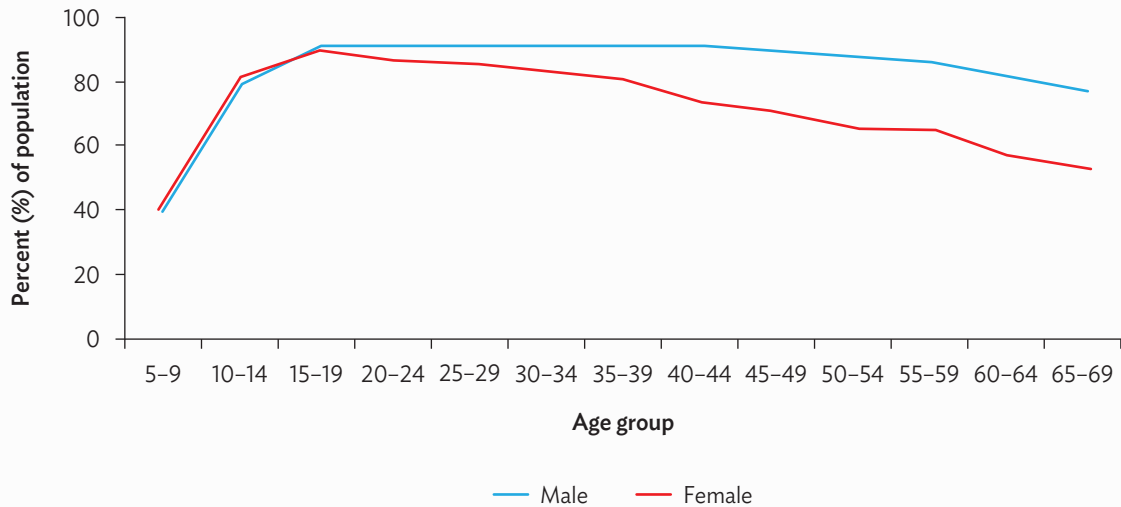
**Literacy.** According to the 2009 census, literacy rates in Solomon Islands are reasonably high: 89% of men and 79% of women aged 15 and older are literate, although women's literacy rate is lower than men's.<sup>66</sup> Literacy rates across age groups indicate a narrowing of the gender gap, as well as improvements for younger generations. Among youth, there is little gender gap in literacy rates (Figure 4.3).

Given the linguistic diversity in Solomon Islands, completion of primary schooling does not guarantee functional literacy (Box 4.1). Studies conducted at the provincial level on functional literacy and employment experience show quite different results from the census result, which was based on self-reported literacy.<sup>67</sup> These studies found that functional literacy rates range from 7% to 34%, and women are more likely than men to be illiterate or semi-illiterate. The 2007 survey showed only a 7% functional literacy rate in Malaita and 28% in Honiara among those aged 15–60. The overall rate for women was 14% compared with 21% for men. Furthermore, only 28% of those who completed primary school were found to be functionally literate.

<sup>65</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 National Population and Housing Census Report, Vol. 2.

<sup>66</sup> The 2009 census measured a general indication of literacy with the following question: "Can you read and write a simple sentence in one or more of the following languages—English, Pidgin, local language, or other language?" Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. *2009 National Population and Housing Census Report*. Vol. 2, p. 99.

<sup>67</sup> Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education. 2011. *Education Experience Assessment and Literacy Survey: Renbel and Isabel Provinces, Solomon Islands*. Canberra; and Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education. 2007. *Solomon Islands Summary Report: Education Experience Survey*. Canberra.

**Figure 4.3** Literacy Rates (in Any Language) by Age Group, 2009

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2014. *2009 National Population and Housing Census Report on Gender*. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

Low levels of functional literacy not only inhibit individuals from finding employment, but make it difficult for women and men to take advantage of written health and education promotion campaigns or support their children's studies. Lack of literacy can also isolate women, prevent them from seeking services in case of domestic violence, and restrict their participation in community decision making. Due to linguistic barriers, completion of primary schooling does not guarantee functional literacy. However, the higher the level of school completion, the greater the chance of girls and women achieving functional literacy.

#### Box 4.1 Linguistic Barriers to Literacy

Solomon Islands is ethnically and linguistically diverse. The country has 70 listed local languages with Pidgin serving as the lingua franca. The official language is English, but it is only spoken as the first language by 1%–2% of the population. The vast majority of children don't speak English as their first language. This often strains children's learning and motivation when starting primary school. This is in particular reflected by the high number of dropouts in the first two grades of primary school. The Solomon Islands Standardised Test of Achievement (SISTA) has shown very clearly that many children are struggling to read and write at the required level. The 2010 SISTA revealed that only one out of every two Standard 6 students meets the national literacy standards, which reveals issues surrounding the quality and efficiency of the education system. Therefore, even when children complete basic education, it is far from certain that they have gained the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in an increasingly challenging and changing society.

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2011. *Barriers to Education*. Honiara. pp. 12–13.

### 4.3 Gender Responsiveness of the Education System

Education is not compulsory in Solomon Islands, but primary enrollment has improved greatly with the introduction of the Fee-Free Education Policy in 2009. However, parents are still required to pay for some school-related costs, including the costs of uniforms, supplies, transport, and school events. For families with multiple children, these costs can create a great economic burden, which escalates further for secondary education. In many cases, this results in withdrawal of children from school, most often girls, since boys' education is perceived to be of higher priority. The lower enrollment and transition rates of girls at primary and junior secondary levels are likely to be linked to such gendered priorities among parents.<sup>68</sup>

There could be other reasons for boys and girls to drop out or be withdrawn from school, which vary by their age. For teenage girls, distance to day schools in rural areas and the lack of safe transport may influence parents' decision to keep them at home. This is to protect them against risks such as sexual assault. In addition, in provinces where schools do not have enough available spaces, parents often prefer to send their boys to school. Inadequate infrastructure at schools, such as lack of sanitation facilities and water supply, is also a barrier for teenage girls' school attendance. When schools do not have separate male and female toilets, menstruating girls stay home for several days each month, which directly impacts their ability to learn, successfully pass exams, and progress through the system. As noted, shortage and overcrowding of dormitory facilities limit the number of students for junior and senior secondary boarding schools, which tends to impact girls more than boys.

Although corporal punishment is not allowed in schools in Solomon Islands, it is still widely practiced. The use of ridicule and shaming by teachers also contributes to children's reluctance to attend school and their reduced ability to learn. When teacher intimidation methods and abuse of power extend to sexual innuendo or abuse, or when girls are conditioned to fear dominant behavior, girls are more likely to be absent from school or drop out.<sup>69</sup>

Teachers' behaviors and attitudes can influence gender differences in children's school attendance and performance, as can gender stereotypes in school curriculum. The education curriculum was revised in 2014 to ensure that teaching materials do not promote gender stereotypes.

The gender ratio among teaching staff can also influence girls' education, since female teachers or administrators can be role models for girls. As of 2013, 43% of teaching staff at primary and community high schools were women, while only about 30% of teaching staff at national or provincial secondary schools were women.<sup>70</sup> The proportion of women in leadership positions is even fewer and it drops further for higher levels of schooling: only around 15% of community or national secondary principals were women, compared with 23% of primary head teachers (Table 4.5).

<sup>68</sup> Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education. 2007. *Solomon Islands Summary Report: Education Experience Survey*; and Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2011. *Barriers to Education*.

<sup>69</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2011. *Barriers to Education*.

<sup>70</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2013. *Performance Assessment Report 2006–2013*. Honiara.

**Table 4.5** Number of Senior Staff Positions in Primary and Secondary Schools, 2013

| Position                         | Male | Female | % Female |
|----------------------------------|------|--------|----------|
| Primary head teachers            | 379  | 88     | 23       |
| Community high school principals | 140  | 21     | 15       |
| Provincial secondary principals  | 14   | 0      | 0        |
| National secondary principals    | 7    | 1      | 14       |

Source: Solomon Islands Education Management Information System. Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. Honiara.

#### Box 4.2 Education for Disabled Boys and Girls

The Solomon Islands National University introduced a compulsory course in “inclusive education” in 2009 as part of its teacher training program. Yet, those moving into the field have noted that this training is not enough to give them confidence to cope with children with disabilities in a classroom setting.<sup>a</sup> Rural schools are often not accessible to disabled children at all.

Children, especially girls with disability, are perceived as a burden to the family. They are at higher risk of neglect and violence.<sup>b</sup> Often, parents do not send them to school due to the perceived risks. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development’s *Barriers to Education* report highlights that children with physical and learning disabilities are often mocked, harassed, and abused by both students and teachers with the result that they no longer feel comfortable attending school.<sup>c</sup> This has implications for their ability to function as part of the community and to successfully exercise their rights.

<sup>a</sup> Government of Solomon Islands. 2013. *Review of the Solomon Islands National Disability Policy 2005–2010*. This document presents a review of the previous policy aimed at ensuring an informed and improved revision of that policy document. This document is supplemented by a revised policy action plan.

<sup>b</sup> *The Guardian*. 2011. The Challenges Faced by Disabled Girls in the Solomon Islands. 5 July. <http://www.theguardian.com/journalismcompetition/the-challenges-faced-by-disabled-girls-in-the-solomon-islands>

<sup>c</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2011. *Barriers to Education*. Honiara.

## 4.4 Gender and Postsecondary Education

Several recent studies illustrate that the education system in Solomon Islands is not providing the skills and knowledge that are needed in the labor market. There are large gaps between what is gained in formal education and what is required to participate in the economy, especially in terms of basic cognitive skills, technical skills, and work-related behaviors. Firms reported that they could create 50% more jobs if they could find employees with the right skills.<sup>71</sup> Only 20% of youth aged 15–24 were employed and 40% were economically inactive at the time. Basic functional literacy and cognitive skills—which are essential for boosting productivity—are lacking, and inadequate technical skills constrain many, especially women, from taking advantage of economic opportunities.

<sup>71</sup> The World Bank. 2013. *Skills for Solomon Islands: Opening New Opportunities*. Washington, DC.



Beyond secondary education, there are tertiary education or other training opportunities for women and men to gain further cognitive and technical skills for employment or own livelihood development. Yet more concerted efforts are needed to help women take advantage of available opportunities. Currently available training and higher education opportunities also need improvements to make their content more relevant to economic and labor market needs, while overcoming traditional gender norms to offer equal opportunities for women and men.

**Tertiary education** in Solomon Islands is provided by universities, technical colleges, and vocational training centers, which offer certificates, diplomas, bachelor's degrees, or advanced degrees. The major degree-conferring institutions are the Solomon Islands National University (formerly the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education) and the University of the South Pacific. Other accredited training providers include Australia Pacific Technical College, Don Bosco Technical Institute, and rural training centers that are operated by churches or provincial government agencies. As of 2012, an estimated 7,943 students were enrolled in these institutions, ranging from certificate to doctoral-level programs. Of the total number, 62% were men and 38% were women (Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6 Enrollment in Major Tertiary Institutions, 2012**

| Institution                         | Total        | Male         | Female       | % Female    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Solomon Islands National University | 2,228        | 1,257        | 971          | 43.6        |
| University of the South Pacific     | 3,347        | 2,094        | 1,253        | 37.4        |
| Australia Pacific Technical College | 176          | 81           | 95           | 54.0        |
| Don Bosco                           | 289          | 228          | 61           | 21.1        |
| Rural training centers              | 1,903        | 1,243        | 660          | 34.7        |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>7,943</b> | <b>4,903</b> | <b>3,040</b> | <b>38.3</b> |

Source: Asian Development Bank. 2015. Higher Education Assessment for Solomon Islands. Draft final report. Unpublished.

The University of the South Pacific alone accommodated more than 40% of Solomon Islanders seeking tertiary education opportunities in 2012, but only about 20% of its students were enrolled in degree programs; three-quarters were attending preliminary or foundation programs.<sup>72</sup> While there was no gender difference in degree programs, women were more likely to be enrolled in short-term continuing education programs, while men were more likely to attend foundation or preliminary programs that would prepare them for degree programs.

Available data on enrollment across programs reflect a considerable degree of gender segregation, which results in job segregation between women and men in the labor market. The majority of female students at the Solomon Islands National University are enrolled in the education program (Table 4.7). Women make up more than half of the students in education and in finance and administration. However, very few women are studying industrial development, a field that is in high demand in the economy.

<sup>72</sup> Asian Development Bank. 2015. Higher Education Assessment for Solomon Islands. Draft final report. Unpublished.

**Table 4.7 Enrollment by School Program and Gender, Solomon Islands National University, 2012**

| School                       | Total        | Male         | Female     | % Female    |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Education                    | 1,122        | 555          | 567        | 50.5        |
| Marine and Fisheries Studies | 126          | 122          | 4          | 3.2         |
| Natural Resources            | 197          | 102          | 95         | 48.2        |
| Industrial Development       | 258          | 251          | 7          | 2.7         |
| Humanities and Science       | 16           | 11           | 5          | 31.3        |
| Finance and Administration   | 442          | 180          | 262        | 59.3        |
| Nursing and Health Studies   | 67           | 36           | 31         | 46.3        |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>2,228</b> | <b>1,257</b> | <b>971</b> | <b>43.6</b> |

In addition to degree-conferring programs, various **technical and vocational education and training (TVET)** programs are provided through Australia Pacific Technical College, Don Bosco Institute, rural training centers, and community high schools. Of these, rural training centers have the widest reach, enrolling approximately 2,000 people per year in 44 centers around the country. Rural training centers offer training to young people for preemployment and vocational skills, mostly in traditional trade areas and life skills. In 2012, about 35% of enrollees were females, mainly in life skills programs (e.g., home economics). For Australia Pacific Community College, about half of the 197 students were women, most of them attending tourism, hospitality, and nursing programs.

Overall, women are underserved by TVET programs, as many programs offer technical courses oriented toward young men, such as construction, mechanical trades, or agriculture. For example, of 253 programs offered by rural training centers in 2012, 161 programs (64%) were focusing on these technical subjects. There is no proactive support for women to enter nontraditional programs. Few female teaching staff are available outside of home economics and tourism, and there are no clear protection mechanisms for female students, such as sexual harassment policies. The Skills for Solomon Islands report recommends that women should be encouraged to enter nontraditional technical and vocational areas to access employment opportunities.<sup>73</sup> It also stresses that such opportunities need to be delivered at the local level in modules or short courses so that women can both enroll and complete them.

TVET courses currently do not sufficiently meet labor market demands, target women, or diversify to incorporate new technologies. The introduction of financial inclusion programs to rural areas, use of mobile phones to access and understand markets, and social networking to foster rural enterprises and share experiences are areas that could be integrated into TVET curricula. Training more women to become TVET instructors, along with more programs and more subject diversification, would provide women with role models as well as training opportunities.

<sup>73</sup> The World Bank. 2013. *Skills for Solomon Islands Women: Opening New Opportunities*. Washington, DC.

**Second-chance education** provides an opportunity to complete secondary education for those who have left school early. Given the lower levels of educational attainment among women and also girls' higher likelihood of leaving school early, second-chance education can be valuable for women to gain functional literacy and work skills. It is currently available only in Honiara, delivered through two high schools. With limited places offering second-chance education, women are likely to have difficulty attending due to family responsibilities. More opportunities for second-chance education will certainly help women gain basic skills and improve opportunities to pursue further education.

The European Union (EU) has supported programs to integrate gender equality and disability into TVET training, including awareness and support for promotion of women in nontraditional sectors as role models. For instance, the EU's Skills Training Grant Scheme includes funding criteria for institutions to improve access to more diversified skills training for women.<sup>74</sup> Its forthcoming report should provide more details on the implementation of its gender responsiveness initiatives and what results have been achieved.

Preemployment skills training and short-term or internship employment managed by development partners serve as another opportunity for women to improve their skill set and access economic opportunities. For example, the Youth@Work program provides internship-based training to almost as many young women as young men (Box 4.3).

#### Box 4.3 Youth@Work

Youth@Work is a youth internship program supported by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Government of Solomon Islands. It is noted for a very positive impact on the lives of participants, with tracer studies showing that approximately 32% of young men and women retain full-time employment. The program started in July 2012 and runs in 6-month phases. Participants are required to do community service as a prerequisite to entering the program. They then receive preemployment training and support to find internships in government and the private sector.

In Phase 1, 98 young men and 85 young women finished their internships, and of those, 39 young men and 35 young women got permanent jobs. In each successive phase more young people have joined the program, including progressively higher percentages of young women. The program builds confidence, provides critical work experience, and exposes employers to the potential of young people.

## 4.5 Recommendations

**Strengthen education policy to eliminate discrimination based on sex and support gender equity, with the following recommendations:**

- (i) Endorse and implement the proposed gender in education policy.
- (ii) Ensure that materials for the newly revised education curriculum do not include gender stereotypes.
- (iii) Provide training and awareness to all stakeholders on eliminating gender stereotypes, occupational streaming, sexual harassment, and violence against women.

<sup>74</sup> European Union. 2012. *Mission Report: Integration of Technical, Vocational Education and Training into the Formal and Non-Formal Education System in Solomon Islands: Tourism and Hospitality Curriculum Development*. Annex II. p. 163. Honiara.

- (iv) Provide support for girls who are pregnant to remain in school during and after pregnancy.
- (v) Identify specific barriers to girls' attendance on a province-by-province basis, and implement actions to reduce barriers, which would include (a) improving water and sanitation facilities and (b) increasing the allocation of dormitory spaces for girls through quotas.
- (vi) Given that more women than men are functionally illiterate, promote vernacular education programs for early childhood education and the early primary grades to reduce linguistic barriers to literacy.
- (vii) Provide role models for female students by supporting women in education decision-making positions, integrating leadership and management skills into teacher training, and encouraging women to compete for head teacher and principal positions.

**Improve data collection and gender analysis in education for the following recommendations:**

- (i) To improve accuracy and sex-disaggregated reporting on enrollment, dropout, transition, and completion rates, enhance the data management and reporting systems used by schools, the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), and the Statistics Bureau.
- (ii) Monitor and evaluate financial barriers to girls' education and develop strategies to promote equal enrollment, transition, and retention of girls at all educational levels.

**Increase women's opportunities for postsecondary education and skills development to empower women and reduce poverty, including nontraditional areas, with the following recommendations:**

- (i) Expand and diversify TVET programs with strong labor market relevance so that more skills development options are available for women that are not gender segregated, and make these programs more flexible to accommodate young women with child-rearing, family, or other responsibilities.
- (ii) Promote skills development and second-chance education opportunities at the community level for greater awareness of available programs, especially those in disciplines that are not traditional for women, and use financial incentives to encourage training centers to adopt quotas for women in nontraditional areas.
- (iii) Require all tertiary institutions and training centers to undertake gender awareness training for teaching staff and students to reduce discrimination against and harassment of young women and men in nontraditional courses.
- (iv) The MEHRD and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs should work with employers to encourage women's recruitment into nontraditional occupations and also to reduce discrimination against women in male-dominated technical occupations.

# 5

## Economic Participation and Livelihoods: Improving the Economic Status of Women

This chapter examines gender issues in the economy, including the extent of women's and men's participation in the labor force, the nature and types of employment they are engaged in, opportunities and constraints for women's participation in the public and private sectors, and gender relations that influence access to and control of productive resources.

### Key Facts

- According to the 2009 census, 62% of women and 64% of men aged 12 and older were in the labor force, including those who produce goods for own consumption (subsistence work). Both labor force participation and employment rates are higher in rural than urban areas, given the largely agricultural and subsistence nature of the work. Gender differences are very small for overall labor force participation or employment rates.
- Of those employed, women were only half as likely as men to be in paid work (26% of women and 51% of men). Even in urban areas where paid work is much more common, women were significantly less likely than men to be in paid work (62% of women and 88% of men). In rural areas, only 19% of women and 42% of men were engaged in paid work.
- Within paid work, men are much more likely than women to hold a wage job, particularly in the private sector. Women hold only one-quarter of private sector wage jobs, while they account for a greater share of public sector wage jobs at 36%.
- When subsistence work, self-employment, and unpaid family work are categorized as vulnerable employment, 75% of women and 54% of men are in vulnerable employment. Vulnerable employment is significantly less in urban areas, but women are still more likely to be in vulnerable employment (41% of urban women versus 21% of urban men).
- Despite efforts to remove discriminatory barriers to starting a business through reforms of business legislation and regulations, women continue to face challenges in starting a business due to their lower levels of education, limited functional literacy, and/or distance from government offices.
- Women are highly active in small-scale income generation and agriculture but their economic participation and control of productive resources are constrained by lack of education, sociocultural discrimination, and lack of access to key resources such as transport and market infrastructure.

## 5.1 Gender and Labor Force Participation

In Solomon Islands, most people still engage in subsistence farming or informal-sector economic activities, such as small-scale farming, market gardening, fishing, handicrafts, and petty trading. A relatively smaller population work in the formal sector as wage employees or employers. The analysis presented here is largely based on the 2009 Population and Housing Census, which is the most recently available and comprehensive source of information.

According to the 2009 census, the labor force is defined as all those aged 12 and above who are either employed or looking for work (unemployed). The national definition of “employed” includes all those who produce goods for own consumption or for sale. By doing so, the census recognizes that in largely semi-subsistence economies, women and men make many in-kind but unpaid contributions to family and community welfare.

Table 5.1 shows labor force and employment status by sex and by area. Of the population aged 12 and over, similar percentages of men (64%) and women (62%) are in the labor force overall and employment rates are also similar between men (62%) and women (61%). However, both labor force participation and employment rates are higher in rural areas than urban areas, given the largely agricultural nature of the work, particularly unpaid subsistence work. While gender difference in rural areas is negligible for labor force participation or employment rates, in urban areas men are more likely than women to be economically active.

**Table 5.1 Economic Activity Status by Sex and Area**

| Categories of Work Activity                                  | All     |         | Urban  |        | Rural   |         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
|                                                              | Male    | Female  | Male   | Female | Male    | Female  |
| Total population aged 12+                                    | 174,031 | 168,393 | 38,927 | 34,960 | 135,104 | 133,433 |
| 1. In labor force                                            | 110,478 | 104,791 | 22,020 | 16,957 | 88,458  | 87,834  |
| a. Employed                                                  | 107,692 | 102,693 | 20,419 | 15,746 | 87,273  | 86,947  |
| Paid work <sup>a</sup>                                       | 54,571  | 26,669  | 17,916 | 9,759  | 36,655  | 16,910  |
| Unpaid work <sup>b</sup>                                     | 53,121  | 76,024  | 2,503  | 5,987  | 50,618  | 70,037  |
| b. Unemployed                                                | 2,786   | 2,098   | 1,601  | 1,211  | 1,185   | 887     |
| 2. Not in labor force<br>(retiree, student, homemaker, etc.) | 63,553  | 63,602  | 16,875 | 17,963 | 46,646  | 45,599  |
| Labor force participation rate (%)                           | 63.5    | 62.2    | 56.6   | 48.5   | 65.5    | 65.8    |
| Employment to population rate (%)                            | 61.9    | 61.0    | 52.5   | 45.0   | 64.6    | 65.2    |
| Unemployment rate (%)                                        | 2.5     | 2.0     | 7.3    | 7.1    | 1.3     | 1.0     |
| % paid work of the employed                                  | 50.7    | 26.0    | 87.7   | 62.0   | 42.0    | 19.4    |
| % unpaid work of the employed                                | 49.3    | 74.0    | 12.3   | 38.0   | 58.0    | 80.6    |

<sup>a</sup> Paid work includes employees, employers, self-employed, and those producing goods for sale.

<sup>b</sup> Unpaid work includes those producing goods for own consumption, unpaid family workers, and volunteers.

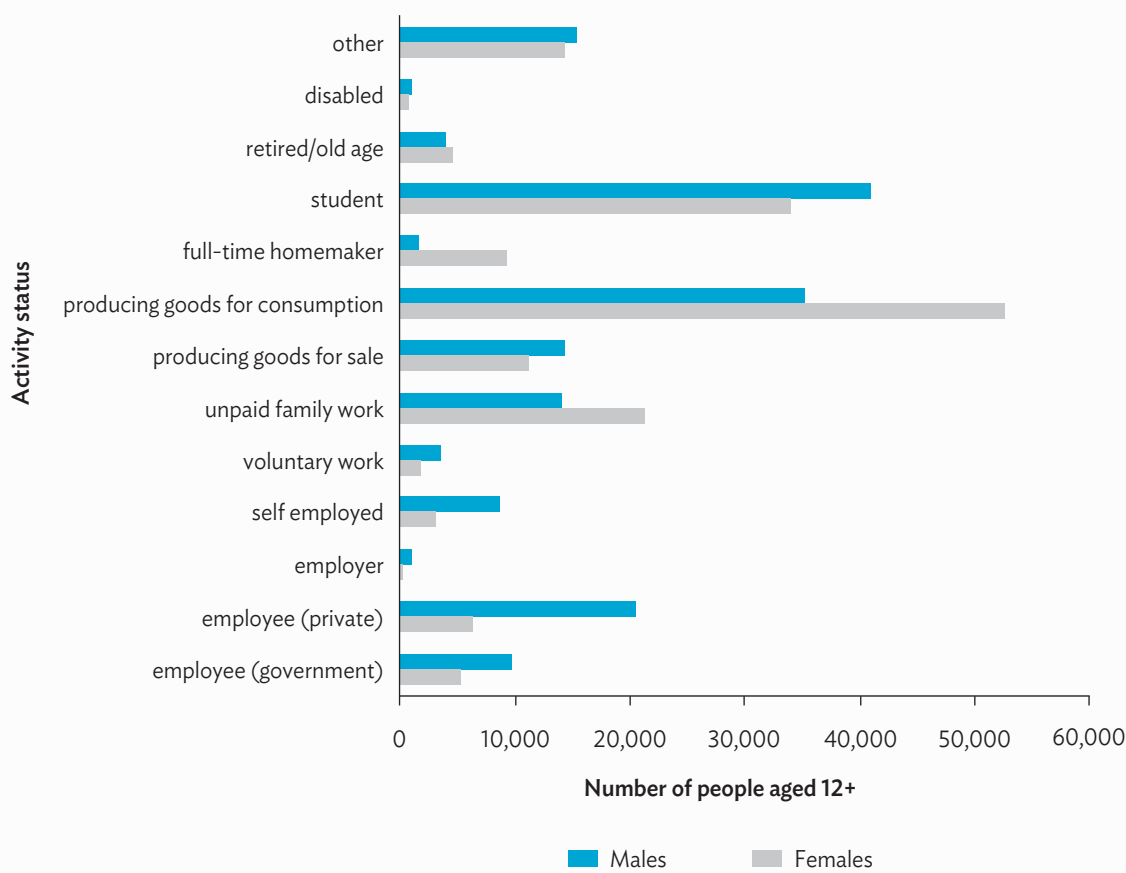
Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 Population and Housing Census Report on Economic Activity and Labor Force. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

Gender differences become more salient when we examine the paid versus unpaid status of employment. Of those employed overall, women were only half as likely as men to be in paid work (26% of women and 51% of men). The unpaid nature of women's work is especially striking in rural areas: 81% of women were engaged in unpaid subsistence work compared with 58% of men. In urban areas, the majority are engaged in paid work, yet women were less likely than men to be in paid work (62% of women and 88% of men).

Figure 5.1 shows more detailed categories of work status including those not in the labor force, as well as those in the labor force. Those not in the labor force include homemakers, students, retirees, those with a disability, and others not specified. The largest proportion of those not in the labor force aged 12 and older are students.

Of men and women in the labor force, the majority work to produce goods for household consumption (subsistence work) and the number is much higher for women than for men. For women, unpaid family work is the next most common activity. In Figure 5.1, paid work includes self-employed, employer, and employees. Of paid work, men are much more likely to hold a wage job than women, particularly private sector wage jobs.

**Figure 5.1** Activity Status of Men and Women Aged 12 and Older



Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 Population and Housing Census Report on Economic Activity and Labor Force. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

Of 27,000 private sector employees, women make up only about 24%. There are fewer public sector employees, but women make up a large proportion at 36% compared to their proportion in private sector wage employment.

Detailed occupational information further reveals significant gender differences (Table 5.2). Among the top 10 occupations held by women and men, subsistence crop farmers are the dominant category for both sexes.<sup>75</sup> Other than this category, women are much more likely to be in sales and handicraft-related occupations, whereas men are more likely to be in extraction and building trades, protective services, or drivers and mobile operators.

**Table 5.2 Top Occupations for Men and Women**

| Men                                                |               |                   | Women                                                        |                 |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Occupation                                         | Number of Men | % of Employed Men | Occupation                                                   | Number of Women | % of Employed Women |
| 1. Subsistence crop farmers                        | 46,768        | 43.4              | 1. Subsistence crop farmers                                  | 62,914          | 61.3                |
| 2. Market oriented skilled agriculture and fishery | 9,805         | 9.1               | 2. Sales and services elementary occupations                 | 9,576           | 9.3                 |
| 3. Extraction and building trade workers           | 8,705         | 8.1               | 3. Market oriented skilled agriculture and fishery           | 7,829           | 7.6                 |
| 4. Subsistence agricultural and fishery            | 7,961         | 7.4               | 4. Personal and protective services                          | 6,657           | 6.5                 |
| 5. Teaching professionals                          | 4,293         | 4.0               | 5. Teaching professionals                                    | 3,483           | 3.4                 |
| 6. Protective service workers                      | 3,500         | 3.3               | 6. Models, salespersons, and demonstrators                   | 2,772           | 2.7                 |
| 7. Drivers and mobile plant operators              | 3,269         | 3.0               | 7. Food processing, wood working, garments, and other crafts | 1,464           | 1.4                 |
| 8. Models, salespersons, and demonstrators         | 2,457         | 2.3               | 8. Precision, handicrafts, and printing                      | 1,336           | 1.3                 |
| 9. Metal machinery and related workers             | 1,842         | 1.7               | 9. Life science and health professionals                     | 824             | 0.2                 |
| 10. Stationery plant and related operators         | 1,783         | 1.7               | 10. Subsistence agricultural and fishery                     | 700             | 0.7                 |

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 Population and Housing Census Report on Gender. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

**Vulnerable employment and gender-based discrimination.** Along with a large proportion of women and men in subsistence work producing goods for own consumption, those who are self-employed or who are unpaid family workers are usually considered to be in vulnerable employment. These are the kinds of work that are unpaid or with an irregular income, and lack formal work arrangements with social protection benefits.

<sup>75</sup> Even in remote rural areas in Pacific islands countries, households often draw on a number of livelihood strategies and sources for income generation, as well as subsistence living. Hence, the term “subsistence” may not be accurate in capturing the kinds of economic activities. For instance, subsistence crops in Solomon Islands may contain tradable items such as betel nut, ngali nuts, tobacco, and others.



When we examine the overall proportion of those in vulnerable employment (Table 5.3), it is clear that the majority of women (75%) in Solomon Islands are engaged in vulnerable jobs, and at a much higher rate than men (54%). Although vulnerable employment is significantly less in urban than in rural areas, women in urban areas are still twice as likely as men to hold vulnerable jobs, even when we exclude those in subsistence work (41% of women versus 21% men).

**Table 5.3 Vulnerable Employment by Sex and Area**

|                                                             | Total |        | Urban |        | Rural |        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
|                                                             | Male  | Female | Male  | Female | Male  | Female |
| Vulnerable employment rate (%) <sup>a</sup>                 | 54.1  | 75.3   | 21.0  | 40.7   | 61.8  | 81.5   |
| Vulnerable employment rate (%) including own-use production | 67.4  | 86.3   | 24.8  | 50.9   | 77.4  | 92.7   |

<sup>a</sup> Following the international definition, vulnerable employment includes self-employment, producing goods for sale, and unpaid family workers (the rate is calculated out of total employed).

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 Population and Housing Census Report on Gender. National Statistics Office, Honiara.

Gender differences in the type of work, such as women's greater representation in unpaid work or vulnerable employment, compared with men's greater representation in wage employment, demonstrate that women mostly work in the informal economy. Such differences also suggest that women and men have differential access to and control over economic resources, decision making, and hours worked. Women's lower levels of educational attainment and social norms certainly play a role in producing gender disparities in employment patterns. In addition, gender-based discrimination, such as differential wages and limited access to credit and dispute resolution, reinforce gender differences and exacerbate women's vulnerability to poverty (Box 5.1).

#### Box 5.1 Examples of Gender-Based Discrimination in the Workplace

- Lower salary grades for women than for men with the same qualifications
- Failure to pay salaries to women and physical or sexual intimidation to prevent filing of complaints
- Bank officials requesting husbands to give permission for women to access credit or joint accounts even though it is not a requirement in law or institutional policy
- Refusal to pay overtime or allow time off for family emergencies
- Requests for sexual favors linked to threats of loss of employment

Source: These issues were mentioned in focus group and individual discussions during the country gender assessment research.

## 5.2 Women in Business

**Formal and informal businesses.** Weaknesses in the way business registration procedures operate and are regulated make it difficult to count the number of men and women actually operating in the formal economy or private sector, as no one list is guaranteed to include all formal-sector businesses.

Much work has been done recently by development partners to ensure that neither business-related legislation nor the actual business start-up processes are discriminatory to any group, especially women. Business registration processes have been simplified with a similar purpose, with the new Companies Act passed in 2010 which established an online registration system, Company Haus.<sup>76</sup> The online system makes the business registration process cheaper, faster, and more accessible from the provinces. However, women are still more likely than men to experience challenges in starting a business, due to their lower levels of education, limited functional literacy, distance from government offices, and potential intimidation by government officials in positions of authority. For instance, women's limited knowledge on tax issues hinders many women in the informal sector to enter the formal sector.<sup>77</sup> In addition, while both women and men are subject to traditional obligations of the *wantok* system, women often have less power than men to refuse the requests of *wantoks* who ask for favors, free goods, and financial handouts.<sup>78</sup> Women are also more likely to be subjected to physical, sexual, or psychological intimidation by male relatives wanting goods or money. All these factors hinder women from making use of what are, for the most part, gender-neutral business start-up processes. Box 5.2 identifies a number of those constraints and the following sections look in more detail at current responses to these barriers.

### Box 5.2 Constraints to Women's Engagement in Informal and Formal Business

There are a number of ways in which gender inequality and discrimination intersect with and negatively impact women's economic participation and empowerment:

- Subsistence and reproductive activities are a major time constraint to women's ability to engage in employment or income generation.
- Women are less educated and have lower literacy and numeracy skills than men.
- Women are discriminated against in the workplace and by state institutions.
- Women's health status can limit their ability to be economically active.
- Geographic isolation and poor transport, market, water, and power infrastructure are persistent barriers to home production of goods.
- Lack of access to government business services and lack of information generally constitute more intimidating and challenging external barriers to women than to men.
- Lack of decision-making power and limited control of financial resources or collateral undermines women's ability to become economically active.
- Women, like men, have low access to banking facilities and savings mechanisms, but women are more constrained because of power differentials in households, transportation barriers, and lack of significant cash income.

Currently, it is estimated that the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association (SIWIBA)—representing salaried or self-employed women based in Honiara—has about 85 members listed on its website; a few additional women owners or managers are also listed in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry's general membership list. The total number of women listed as main business contacts for the chamber and SIWIBA combined does not exceed 100.

<sup>76</sup> The new Companies Act was part of efforts to modernize business laws in Solomon Islands, with support from the Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) by the Asian Development Bank and the Australian Government. Asian Development Bank. 2014. *Solomon Islands: PSDI Activity Update, May 2014*. Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. Sydney.

<sup>77</sup> Asian Development Bank. 2013. *Solomon Islands: Barriers to the Economic Empowerment of Women*. Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. Sydney. <http://www.adbpsdi.org/2013/12/solomon-islands-gender-assessment.html>

<sup>78</sup> *Wantoks* are people who speak a common language (in a country with a great diversity of languages) and therefore fall within a system of traditional recognition. The term literally means "one language" but obligations are generally limited to those who belong to one's extended family or who come from the same village.

SIWIBA facilitates women's participation in the private sector by representing salaried or business women and advocating with government on behalf of the private sector.<sup>79</sup> However, because SIWIBA is based in Honiara, it has less opportunity to assist small-scale agricultural producers and traders in rural areas. Increasing the number of women in decision-making positions in the private sector, on boards of state-owned enterprises, and in senior positions in government are strategies to foster gender-responsive business environments and practices. The Ministry of Finance and Treasury is working with SIWIBA to increase the pool of qualified candidates to serve on company boards and to increase transparency in the selection criteria.

As a result of growing number of initiatives, Solomon Islands' electronic registry of companies—Company Haus—has recorded an increase in both women shareholders of companies and female company directors.<sup>80</sup> Also, new initiatives to develop more robust and less expensive modes of payments and money transfers are under way to improve the ability of women entrepreneurs (in both formal and informal sectors) to save and invest.<sup>81</sup>

Many women sell fruit and vegetables, betel nut, tobacco, and fish at local markets or improvised stalls along roadsides or wharves. These activities enable women to learn business skills and lead to take on more entrepreneurial activities. The labor report for the 2009 census identifies some developing or recovering niche markets such as floriculture, vanilla, and coconut oil, which have the potential to expand business options for women.<sup>82</sup> For women operating small-scale informal activities, markets play a critical role. Making them safe is another important component of supporting women's entrepreneurial activities (Box 5.3).

### Box 5.3 Market Conditions Influence Women's Success as Entrepreneurs

Improving market conditions and increasing the number of markets has been identified as a critical step toward enhancing women's economic activity, as are safety and security measures. The extremely high rates of violence against women inhibit many women from being economically active and from controlling their own incomes. Women entrepreneurs also face harassment, theft, assault, and intimidation both in the market environment and in homes and communities.

A series of studies by UN Women found that there are consistent threats in market environments including discrimination and exploitation in market governance, entrenched male collusion and corruption in market operations, neglect of infrastructure systems, lack of accessible market-centered services, and gender-based violence and insecurity.

Initiatives to make markets safer and to provide women with viable savings opportunities will contribute to physical safety and help women protect their earnings and investments from theft. Savings clubs also help women avoid the erosion of their earnings by demands for support from relatives and *wantoks*.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> UN Women. 2013. *Markets for Change: Solomon Islands*. Honiara.

<sup>79</sup> Solomon Islands Women in Business within Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce website. <http://www.solomonchamber.com.sb/index.php/women-in-business.html>

<sup>80</sup> The new company laws—supported by PSDI of the Asian Development Bank and the Australian Government—also included innovative company structures, such as the single shareholder company which was designed to allow flexibility for entrepreneurs, particularly women, to set up and manage a business without external ownership influences. Asian Development Bank. 2014. *Solomon Islands: PSDI Activity Update, May 2014*. Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. Sydney.

<sup>81</sup> This initiative is undertaken by International Finance Corporation.

<sup>82</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2009 *Population and Housing Census Report on Economic Activity and Labour Force*.

**Financial inclusion.** Promoting financial inclusion is a key strategy for supporting women’s income and livelihood initiatives. A study by the Pacific Financial Inclusion Program shows that most rural people have low financial literacy and little knowledge about how banking works.<sup>83</sup> The Central Bank of Solomon Islands is working with the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development to include improved financial education in the school curriculum. The Central Bank of Solomon Islands also leads the Financial Inclusion Program for the country in partnership with a United Nations Development Programme regional program and several commercial banks. The savings clubs, rural communities, the urban poor, and others who can benefit from mobile banking processes are stakeholders in the initiative. The program started in 2010 and its success is being measured in terms of access, use, quality, and impact of services.

As of 2010, the government estimated that 80% of Solomon Islanders were unbanked. The program’s 2015 target is to have 70,000 new account holders, with 30,000 of those being women. By the end of 2013 the program was at 89% of its target, reducing the percentage of unbanked Solomon Islanders to 60%. The program’s revised target is to make a variety of affordable financial services available to an additional 160,000 Solomon Islanders by 2017, which would include at least 50% women and 50% account holders from rural areas. Eligibility to open a bank account depends on an individual’s occupation, income level, and geographic location. The smaller the income and the more rural and subsistence based a person is, the more straightforward the requirements are. For example, a rural woman producer with very small annual earnings will likely only need the signature of a community or church leader as a guarantor to facilitate mobile banking. The program is linked to training on how mobile banking works and how to manage risks related to sharing account information.

#### Box 5.4 Women’s Savings Clubs Provide Security and Empowerment

The savings clubs run by the West ‘Are ‘Are Rokotanikeni Association and supported by Live & Learn and the International Women’s Development Agency are small informal “home banks,” led and managed by women, for women in rural communities. Once a club is started, women meet regularly to deposit money and share expertise, support, and stories. Savings clubs give women a safe place to deposit income so that they can access it when it is needed most, often to pay school fees or meet family medical expenses.

Saving club members can also contribute to a pool of funds, which are then used to make small loans to group members to support income-generation activities, like starting small businesses. For example, the 40 women members of the Ghoveo Savings Club in Isabel Province recently decided to use their collective savings to build a fisheries hut. At their inaugural sale, the women worked together to purchase, scale, and resell fish at a profit. The funds they earned were reinvested into the savings club so that members could access loans to support income-generating activities.

Women usually manage the daily financial processes for their families. Evidence shows that when women are provided with access to financial services and financial literacy training, there is a positive impact on all household members.

Sources: J. Brislane and J. Crawford. 2014. Gender equality is smart economics—but it takes more than money and markets. *Gender Matters*. Issue 5, October. International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA). p. 7. <http://www.cid.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Gender-Matters-issue-5.pdf>; and IWDA. 2013. *Money Matters Brochure*. <http://www.fpmagazine.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/IWDA-brochure.pdf%20>

Live & Learn is a civil society organization that supports women’s saving clubs together with community development. They undertake awareness about women’s savings and how it contributes to the financial security of families (Box 5.4). This approach is intended to give men an appreciation of women’s capabilities and reduce

<sup>83</sup> Pacific Financial Inclusion Program. 2010. *In Search of Sustainability: The Provision of Rural Financial Services in Solomon Islands*. United Nations Development Programme Pacific Center. Suva.

threats and risk for women. The model has been used around the world with positive outcomes. A number of other savings clubs started out to provide small windows of financial opportunity for women, and have become key facilitators of women's economic empowerment by enhancing their financial literacy, self-esteem, and community status. A number of these clubs now work with the financial inclusion programs led by government in partnership with commercial banks.

### Box 5.5 Constraints to Women's Engagement in the Cash Economy

| Discriminatory Practices and Social Norms | Impact on Women's Economic Engagement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Access to markets                         | In many parts of the country that are far from provincial centers or the town of Honiara, there are no opportunities for women to earn money by selling produce, fish, or handicrafts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Access to and control of collateral       | Customary systems of traditional obligation and control of family assets make it difficult for women to independently access or control collateral. Customary land tenure systems and complexities of land lease rights generally exclude women from using land as a source of collateral or as a base for business enterprises.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Access to credit                          | There are no legislative barriers to women accessing bank loans, mortgages, and other forms of financial credit, but de facto discrimination is commonly reported. This, combined with the barriers to obtain collateral, constrain women's ability to raise funds to invest in business.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Access to financial services              | Limited financial services are available to the 80% of Solomon Islanders who live in rural areas. This makes it difficult for women to secure their finances, save, and borrow; it also means women cannot develop credit histories, which facilitate improving and growing businesses.<br><br>Women have difficulty accessing financial institution services without formal identification (such as birth certificate, driver's license, or the endorsement of a designated authority), which many people do not have. |
| Control of income or profit               | Systems of traditional obligations and women's often high-risk position in violent relationships make it very difficult for them to control any income or profit they may make.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Violence against women                    | Violence against women makes it more difficult for women to retain money they have earned; to receive a share of their spouse's money; or to assert their rights to travel, engage in their own work, and access education and training.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

**Provision of short-term employment and training** is another strategy being used in Solomon Islands to kick-start more business activity. For example, the World Bank Rapid Employment Project is linked to public works and infrastructure initiatives. Its main objective is to increase the incomes of the urban poor through short-term employment. The project provides women and men with preemployment and life skills training, as well as to gain work experience. The project also trains local contractors who hire female and male graduates from the training. Working with the Honiara City Council, participants do road repair and maintenance works.

Other transport and road infrastructure programs are developing gender-responsive action plans to ensure men and women can benefit equally from contracting and employment opportunities. Transport projects under the Ministry of Infrastructure Development, financed by the Asian Development Bank, support female contractors to bid for road maintenance contracts by providing various capacity building activities.<sup>84</sup> About 30%–40% of road maintenance contractors are women, although this female percentage varies by area. Lead contracting firms are also required to provide gender awareness training for their staff, while ensuring that the needs and interests of women and men in participating communities are addressed.

<sup>84</sup> Asian Development Bank. 2013. Transport Sector Development Project: Revised Gender Action Plan Implementation Strategy. Working document. Manila.

## 5.3 Women and Natural Resources

**Agriculture.** The 2009 census shows that more than 80% of Solomon Islanders live in rural areas and approximately 96% rely on agriculture and fisheries for livelihoods and income. As shown earlier in Table 5.1, rural women are much more likely to be in the labor force than urban women (66% of rural women and 49% of urban women). For the economically active population engaged in agriculture, women account for 46%.<sup>85</sup> Women are usually responsible for growing staple foods and raising livestock such as poultry or pigs, and also for preparing food for the household. Where women have access to marketplaces they predominate among those selling agricultural produce. Men are more likely to specialize in commercial crops for export such as coffee, coconuts, cocoa, and others, although women and children provide labor at harvesting times.

Women and men both face constraints to adopting modern agricultural practices, especially in remote areas where agricultural extension services are limited and tools, seeds, and fertilizers are relatively expensive. Women are more constrained than men when it comes to benefiting from extension services because they are less educated, have less time to attend community meetings or participate in extension workshops, and have more limited access to financial services and credit. In addition, because men and women tend to work in different aspects of agriculture, they have different needs in terms of extension services. Government agricultural services and projects delivered by civil society or development partners increasingly target women farmers but there is little collection of sex-disaggregated information to monitor outcomes.

The Ministry of Agriculture has 30 female extension officers out of a total of 144 (21%), who work across the country. Each province has at least one female extension staff person, but this is not adequate to meet the needs of women farmers. The Livelihoods Program (formerly Women in Agriculture Unit) of the ministry is funded from the government's recurrent budget and provides in-kind grants ranging from SI\$2,000 to SI\$20,000 to offset financial constraints faced by existing enterprises, such as family businesses, youth groups, and women's groups. The program funds such activities as fencing, seeds, and start-up money for poultry businesses, and also gives priority to female-headed households and single mothers. The program funded more than 100 projects in 2013 and they are now reviewing feedback from participants to improve the program. The Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association, also supports women in the Honiara area to start agriculture-related businesses such as market gardens, niche crops, floriculture, and poultry projects.

**Fisheries.** Women are engaged in both artisanal and industrial fisheries. Those living in coastal areas use fisheries and reef gleaning as a source of food for subsistence and sale, and they use shells and coral as materials for handicraft production. They also sell fresh and processed fish—mostly dried smoked fish—in markets or on roadsides. They are also employed in the Ministry of Fisheries at both junior and senior levels. In matrilineal areas where women may be officially recognized as resource owners, there are some examples where commercial fishing companies have compensated them with royalties.

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<sup>85</sup> Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research. 2012. *Transforming Aquatic Agricultural Systems Toward Gender Equality: A Five Country Review*. Penang.

As elsewhere in the Pacific, fish processing operations usually employ a significant female workforce, especially in canneries and loining operations. International Finance Corporation reported that in 2012 SolTuna employed approximately 1,500 staff, 65% of which were women.<sup>86</sup> A recent study of women's role in the tuna industry notes two impacts of gender inequality (i) high rates of turnover and absenteeism among women fish processing workers, which affect productivity and profitability; and (ii) sex segregation in work roles in the sector (i.e., the lack of women in supervisory and senior roles).<sup>87</sup> Absenteeism and turnover were related to lack of childcare, limited transportation to and from work, poor quality of housing, poor health, gender-based violence, insufficient wage income, and family and community responsibilities. Addressing these issues will be important to improve the wellbeing of women's families and communities, as well as the profitability of the industry. SolTuna, for example, has introduced an attendance bonus to address the issue of absenteeism and turnover, and provides paid maternity leave according to length of employment. Yet more incentives will be needed to overcome the issues of poor housing and childcare facilities and to improve health and safety provisions.

Social and gender impacts have been documented in relation to industrial fisheries in the Pacific. Negative impacts include prostitution, sexual exploitation of under-age girls and boys, increased sexually transmitted infections, and high risk of HIV transmission; these risks are particularly high in areas where there is transshipment and foreign fishing vessels anchoring or docking. Alcohol and drug use is frequent, as is violence against women.<sup>88</sup> Despite these risks, the fisheries sector can be one of Solomon Islands' greatest and most sustainable resources. Creating opportunities and reducing risks for women to be engaged in that industry is critical. There is scope for improved fisheries policy that will foster women's entrepreneurship and employment.

A gender strategy for fisheries has been developed and is linked to the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Corporate Plan 2011–2013. The ministry, in partnership with World Fish, established the Mekem Strong Solomon Islands Fisheries program. It focuses on integrating gender equality in fisheries management and governance, enhancing women's participation in decision making, and introducing a holistic gender-responsive approach in all aspects of fisheries management, development, and sustainable utilization.

## 5.4 Access to and Control of Productive Natural Resources

The people of Solomon Islands depend on the country's natural resources for their livelihoods and also for economic development. Table 5.4 shows the gross domestic product (GDP) contributions of different natural resource sectors, which can be a basis for further budget analysis in assessing how women and men benefit from large- and small-scale industrial development. Agriculture is the largest contributor to GDP, followed by forestry and logging. In some areas of the country, landowners depend on natural resources for cash incomes in the form of royalties or other payments for logging, fishing, and mining.

<sup>86</sup> International Finance Corporation. IFC and SolTuna Help Solomon Islands Retain More Tuna Revenues and Create Jobs. <http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/74525c004123710f899bb9df0d0e71af/IFC+and+SolTuna+Help+Solomon+Islands+Retain+More+Tuna+Revenues+and+Create+Jobs.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

<sup>87</sup> O. Krushelnyska. 2015. *Toward Gender-Equitable Fisheries Management in Solomon Islands*. World Bank. Washington, DC.

<sup>88</sup> Patricia Tuara Demmke. 2006. *Gender Issues in the Pacific Islands Tuna Industry*. Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Noumea. pp. 25–28.

**Table 5.4** Gross Domestic Product Contributions of Natural Resource Sectors

| National System of Accounts Categories  | GDP in Constant 2004 Prices (SI\$ millions) |            |              |            |              |            |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
|                                         | 2008                                        |            | 2010         |            | 2012         |            |
|                                         | Contribution                                | % of Total | Contribution | % of Total | Contribution | % of Total |
| Total GDP (excludes development budget) | 3,698.9                                     |            | 4,120.8      |            | 4,549.0      |            |
| Agriculture/Hunting                     | 624.9                                       | 16.9       | 675.4        | 16.4       | 700.0        | 15.4       |
| Forestry/Logging                        | 282.1                                       | 7.6        | 451.7        | 11.0       | 407.3        | 9.0        |
| Fishing                                 | 208.2                                       | 5.6        | 188.9        | 4.6        | 235.4        | 5.2        |
| Mining /Quarrying                       | 9.1                                         | 0.2        | 27.4         | 0.7        | 221.5        | 4.9        |

GDP = gross domestic product, SI\$ = Solomon Islands dollars.

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. *Statistical Bulletin 13/2013: Gross Domestic Product 2007–2012*. National Statistics Office. Honiara.

**Land tenure.** Over 80% of land in the country—and almost all land in rural areas—is under customary ownership recognized in Solomon Islands law. Land is owned in common by clans but is used by individuals or families. The leaders of clans make decisions about access and use.<sup>89</sup> Solomon Islands has both matrilineal and patrilineal descent and inheritance systems. In matrilineal clans, membership of the clan and rights to its land are inherited through the mother rather than through the father (as it is in a patrilineal system), but matrilineal clans are headed by men and men make decisions about the use of clan land, including negotiations with investors.

In general, individuals and their immediate families share rights to use portions of their clan’s land holdings. The right to use a particular area of land for agriculture does not confer or imply ownership; traditional principles of land tenure accommodated a system of cultivation of annual crops in which land was fallowed and rotated to maintain soil fertility. Therefore no single area was considered to permanently belong to an individual or family. However, nowadays plantations of perennial crops such as coconuts, coffee, or cocoa can confer long-term use rights over the land where the trees are planted, even though ownership continues to rest with the clan group.

Because men are almost always the heads of both matrilineal and patrilineal clans, they are usually the signatories to land agreements and beneficiaries of royalty payments (Box 5.6). They may not choose to share money received with women or younger men within their families and communities. This has created conflict in communities and among families over land rights and ownership.<sup>90</sup> Land-related disputes are dealt with at the local level. Only cases where resolution is not possible are moved to the court system. Women are disadvantaged in these systems as local-level adjudicators are male chiefs or elders, and in the court system women magistrates and judges are almost unheard of.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> R. Monson. 2011. *Women, Men and the Transformation of Land Tenure in the Solomon Islands*. International Development Law Organization. Rome. <http://www.idlo.org/Publications/WP2Monson.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> K. Stege, R. Maetala, A. Naupa, and J. Simo. 2008. *Land and Women: The Matrilineal Factor. The cases of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu*. Pacific Islands Secretariat. Suva.

<sup>91</sup> Monson. 2011. *Women, Men and the Transformation of Land Tenure in Solomon Islands*.



### Box 5.6 Changes in Women's Influence and Decision Making in Matrilineal Areas

“In many parts of Solomon Islands there is pressure on land for development, housing, relocation of villages, and the raising cash for the livelihoods of families. Competition for space to accommodate the needs of a rapidly growing population in semi-urban areas like Honiara results in constant difficulties placed on the department of Lands and Housing to address land issues. Major provincial centres and areas such as Buala, Kia and KiraKira are affected by large scale developments such as plantations, extensive and extractive exploitation of natural resources through mining and logging operations, and developing tourism. Many of these activities lead to men disregarding matrilineal protocols in Guadalcanal, Isabel, and Makira. When there is a project that will result in monetary spin-offs, men always want to head the negotiations. A woman respondent from the Weather Coast, Guadalcanal, said, ‘Even if I am a landowner, I am seen as a nobody, only good for home making and baby rearing.’”

Source: K. Stege, R. Maetala, A. Naupa, and J. Simo. 2008. *Land and Women: The Matrilineal Factor. The cases of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu*. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Suva.

Research on women's land rights in Solomon Islands is limited.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, those who have studied modern manifestations of customary land tenure in the Pacific point out that because of social and economic change, practices may no longer conform to old customary principals or to modern legal principles of tenure, but they usually favor men.<sup>93</sup> Women's rights to a share of the proceeds of land leased for development, or from marine resource agreements, are not currently safeguarded in government policy or in law. The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy identifies land rights as an area for review and advocates development of policy and legislation on women's property ownership rights and access to land and property.

**Water rights.** According to custom, water rights are associated with land ownership but when water is affected by nontraditional economic activities, there are no clear means of seeking redress. Plantations, logging, or mining operations may contaminate or change water sources or flows. When this occurs, it has a disproportionate impact on women as they are the majority of those who use water for agricultural purposes, household water supplies, bathing, and laundry. Water rights may be specifically negotiated with developers but there are few documented cases where women are engaged in this process.<sup>94</sup>

**Climate change** is affecting the natural resource base of Solomon Islands, which provides subsistence and economic livelihoods to the population. To date a number of agencies, including the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and World Fish, are working with the government to address issues related to climate change. Gender analysis of climate change and mitigation measures is identified as an action area in the government's 2012–2017 National Climate Change Policy.<sup>95</sup> Lack of sex-disaggregated data to demonstrate women's and men's distinct roles in resource management and mitigation of climate change prevents greater engagement in this area.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Monson. 2011. *Women, Men and the Transformation of Land Tenure in the Solomon Islands*; and R. Monson. 2010. *Justice for the Poor Briefing Note: Women, State Law and Land in Peri-Urban Settlements on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands*. World Bank. Washington, DC.

<sup>93</sup> R. Gerard Ward and Elizabeth Kingdon, eds. 1995. *Land, Custom and Practice in the South Pacific*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>94</sup> Monson. 2011. *Women, Men and the Transformation of Land Tenure in Solomon Islands*.

<sup>95</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology. 2012. *National Climate Change Policy*. Honiara.

<sup>96</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2013. *Pacific Gender and Climate Change Toolkit*. Suva.

**Forest resources.** Like agriculture, fishery, and mining, forestry is a significant source of government revenue and provides royalty payments to landowners in many parts of the country. However, forests are currently overexploited and stocks and yields are declining due to unsustainable levels of harvests.<sup>97</sup> In rural villages both men and women depend on forest resources, men for hunting and for building materials, and women for collecting foods, medicinal plants, and firewood.

Logging is an important industry in Solomon Islands and employs mainly men in logging operations, including foreign workers brought into the country by international logging companies. There have been some attempts to engage women as forestry extension workers, but women's wage employment in this area is limited to public service jobs in the Ministry of Forests, provision of services for camp workers, and administrative roles within forest companies.

While the industry provides men with short-term opportunities to earn money, women are more affected by the negative consequences; logging operations can result in soil erosion, contamination of water sources, and silting of streams and reefs. Soil compaction from heavy equipment can render land unsuitable for agriculture. Where these impacts have occurred, women may have to travel further away to look for water sources or to find areas for planting crops. Anecdotal reports also indicate negative social impacts of logging camps on women. Some families sell girls to work as domestic servants for men, or some parents sell girls to foreign workers who "marry" them in informal ceremonies but leave them behind when they return to their home countries.<sup>98</sup>

**Minerals and energy** are relatively less exploited in Solomon Islands, although there are significant copper, gold, nickel, and geothermal resources in several provinces. Early colonial administrators were aware of mineral resources in the country, and serious exploration has been ongoing by a number of foreign-owned companies since the 1960s. Land tenure difficulties, disagreements between companies, and the political tensions in the late 1990's have, however, limited development of the industry.

Mining developments may provide positive opportunities for Solomon Islanders in terms of jobs for women in administration, cleaning, and food services, as well as spin-off opportunities for local businesses and services. However, similar negative social and gender impacts exist as in logging camps and fishing ports. In addition, without proper regulation on the environmental contamination of mining, consequences can be worse than in other resource extraction industries.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. 2011. *Medium Term Fiscal Framework 2011–2016*. Honiara.

<sup>98</sup> United States Department of State. 2015. *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Washington, DC; The Protection Project. 2010. *A Human Rights Report on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children: Solomon Islands*. Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC. <http://www.protectionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Solomon-Islands.pdf>

<sup>99</sup> Oxfam Australia. 2010. *Women, communities and mining: The gender impacts of mining and the role of gender impact assessment*. Carlton, Australia. <http://commdev.org/women-communities-and-mining-gender-impacts-mining-and-role-gender-impact-assessment>

## 5.5 Policy Framework for Gender Equitable Economic Empowerment

The women's economic opportunity index of the Economist Intelligence Unit ranks Solomon Islands 124th of 128 countries based on categories that include labor policy and practice; access to finance, education, and training; women's legal and social status; and the general business environment.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, the current policy environment is favorable for women: it is party to international and regional agreements that support gender equality and women's economic empowerment (Table 5.5). These include the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the eight fundamental International Labor Organization conventions, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Pacific Plan. In 2012 the Prime Minister signed the Forum Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the subsequent Forum Economic Ministers Action Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment.<sup>101</sup>

**Table 5.5** Regional and National Priorities for Women's Economic Empowerment

| Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting Action Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment <sup>a</sup> | Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy Action Areas for Improved Economic Status of Women <sup>b</sup>                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (i) Improve women's employment and participation in the formal and informal sectors.        | (i) Develop policies and programs to involve women and men in natural resource management and development.                                                                              |
| (ii) Increase women's access to finance, business ownership, and markets.                   | (ii) Improve women's access to development opportunities in the productive sectors of fisheries, agriculture, forestry, and minerals; increase women's ownership of resources and land. |
| (iii) Increase women's right to safe, fair, and equal participation in local economies.     | (iii) Improve women's ability to access and benefit from financial resources and enterprise development opportunities.                                                                  |
| (iv) Improve access to and use of sex-disaggregated data.                                   | (iv) Improve employment and business opportunities for women in public, private, and community sectors.                                                                                 |

<sup>a</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2013. Updates on Measures to Improve Economic Empowerment of Women. Paper presented at Forum Economics Ministers Meeting and Forum Economic Officials Meeting, 3–5 July 2013, Nuku'alofa, Tonga. [http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2013FEMM\\_FEMT.10.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2013FEMM_FEMT.10.pdf)

<sup>b</sup> Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. 2010. *Solomon Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Development*. Honiara.

The National Development Strategy and the Medium Term Development Plan clearly state the need for equitable economic growth, sustainable livelihoods, and income generation to improve the lives of people living in rural areas. In turn, the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy prioritizes women's economic development at all levels, pinpointing areas where there is inherent discrimination, and indicating where detailed equity and equality strategies are required. To support positive change, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs has developed a detailed draft strategy for women's economic development. After approval it will be implemented concurrent with advocacy for improved legislation and more transparency in private sector development processes.

<sup>100</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit. 2012. Women's Economic Opportunity. *The Economist*. [http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=WEO\\_full\\_report\\_final.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=weoindex2012](http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=WEO_full_report_final.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=weoindex2012)

<sup>101</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2013. Updates on Measures to Improve Economic Empowerment of Women.

**Table 5.6 Draft National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls**

| Strategy                                                                                                      | Key Action Areas and Activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Implement gender mainstreaming: making gender equality and women's development a whole of government approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate gender equality into Medium Term Development Plan.</li> <li>Develop system of gender focal points in government.</li> <li>Create gender-related performance indicators for permanent secretaries.</li> <li>Eliminate violence against women as a strategy to promote gender equality and women's development.</li> <li>Introduce gender-based budgeting.</li> </ul> |
| Increase women and youth participation in financial literacy and access to affordable financial services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote savings clubs by partnering with nongovernment organizations, communities, banks, and churches.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Support for agricultural and fisheries products and marketing for rural women                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower women farmers with financial literacy and access to savings and credit.</li> <li>Improve market conditions and introduce savings clubs with market vendors.</li> <li>Make Constituency Development Funds available to support women's projects.<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>                                                                                                  |
| Provide Enterprise and business development skills training for the informal sector                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support institutional strengthening of the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association</li> <li>Assist the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association with establishment of handicraft center in Honiara.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                       |
| Increase access to and participation in formal labor market                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on increased representation of women on boards, tribunals, and in the public sector to facilitate legislation and policy supporting affirmative action and equal employment policy.</li> <li>Increase scholarships for women to undertake tertiary and postgraduate studies.</li> </ul>                                                                                   |
| Increase access to land and secure rights for property ownership                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with Ministry of Lands to develop related policy and legislation.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

<sup>a</sup> Constituency Development Funds (CDF) are a pool of discretionary funds allocated to members of Parliament for use in their constituencies.

The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy's second major outcome area is improved economic status of women. The subsidiary draft National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls identifies seven strategies and multiple action areas (Table 5.6). The first of the seven strategies is to make permanent secretaries more aware, responsible, and accountable for gender outcomes in their ministries and to create a network of gender focal points who can advocate for gender-responsive actions and monitor progress. The Public Service Commission initiated a program to facilitate this in 2013, which includes work to more clearly articulate gender issues in relation to high-level plans such as the Medium Term Development Plan.

In addition, the draft National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and girls identifies five action areas to improve income generation, employment, and business opportunities for women across formal and informal sectors. It also recognizes the need to increase women's decision-making power and influence as a means to ensure women's gains are sustainable.

The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs has identified a need for gender-responsive budgeting and to mainstream gender considerations into economic policy. Gender budgeting is a challenging undertaking in developing countries. The scope has to be clearly defined to ensure feasibility and there is a need for data, evidence, and models to reflect women's economic contributions—in both the productive and

reproductive sectors—as well as information on potential social costs and negative impacts across different industrial sectors. Such data facilitate integration of gender considerations into economic decision making and into budget processes at different administrative, sector, or geographic scales. While the limited availability of data is still a major constraint, there is potential to introduce gender-responsive budgeting. Solomon Islands has benefited from extensive external technical assistance for economic reform, and can draw on lessons learned from other countries to integrate gender into sector or national budgets.

More **data and analysis** on women’s economic empowerment and labor patterns in Solomon Islands will strengthen the recognition of women’s roles and economic contributions, while identifying the areas of persisting gender disparities. This has been clearly recognized by the government and by development partners, and many efforts are under way to improve the capacity of data collection and analysis on gender issues.

## 5.6 Recommendations

**To remove gender-based discrimination and promote gender and geographic equity in the labor force, the following policy-related actions are recommended:**

- (i) Initiate gender analysis of government’s development policies to increase employment opportunities for women across different industry sectors, to reduce constraints to women’s business activities in urban and rural areas, and to enhance government support services to unpaid home and on-farm workers.
- (ii) To support women’s employment in the public and private sectors, introduce special measures such as quotas for women to be hired, incentive schemes for employers to take on female apprentices, and targeted training support for women in business.
- (iii) Develop initiatives in the private and public sectors to raise awareness about the need to eliminate gender-based discrimination in training, hiring, and promotions.
- (iv) Given women’s major role in the agriculture sector, develop specific mechanisms to increase female agriculture and fisheries extension workers, such as quotas for women in agricultural and fisheries training institutions and in government.
- (v) Support implementation of gender strategies within the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure gender equity in extension, training, and support services offered to rural women and men.
- (vi) Support cross-sector collaboration (health, education, agriculture, fisheries, commerce, finance) to develop and promote domestic value chains for local crops.

**To redress historical discrimination, optimize women’s potential contribution to the economy, and fulfill women’s economic rights, the following targeted empowerment measures can be implemented:**

- (i) Carry out education and advocacy campaigns to reduce social and attitudinal barriers, which will facilitate women’s engagement in formal sector businesses in both rural and urban areas and increase the number of women role models in private and public sector enterprises.
- (ii) Support implementation of the government’s Micro, Small and Medium-Sized (SME) Enterprises Policy and Strategy to ensure women’s increased access to finance and marketing opportunities in urban and rural areas.

- (iii) Enhance and support existing financial inclusion programs and savings clubs to increase women's participation in the cash economy.
- (iv) Strengthen women's visibility and voice in social dialogue mechanisms at all levels, including women's representation in trade unions, public service unions, and other similar organizations.
- (v) Increase outreach of niche agricultural production, such as vanilla, spices, and floriculture, to rural women and encourage them to transition from solely subsistence production to a combination of subsistence and niche cash crop production.
- (vi) Improve market infrastructure, operating conditions, and governance to support women's engagement in selling agricultural products and handicrafts at local urban markets.

**Build additional evidence to improve gender equity in Solomon Islands and strengthen the economy through the following:**

- (i) Conduct research to identify factors that influence women's and men's economic participation, such as levels of educational attainment, specific job-related skills, health status, family size, and violence against women, along with specific policy implications. Ensure such research is done separately for urban and rural areas, highlighting potential differences across subgroups of women.
- (ii) To reduce women's greater vulnerability to climate change and related economic disadvantages, examine interrelationships among gendered power dynamics; access to government services; and climate change resilience, adaptation, and mitigation.

# 6

## Gender Equality in Decision Making and Leadership

### Key Facts

- Women are underrepresented in all levels of decision making in Solomon Islands. While women make up 40% of public service employees, women fill mostly junior or mid-level positions. Only 5% of women in the public service are in senior positions. In 2014, there was only one female member of Parliament and there were three women in provincial legislatures.
- Women are constrained from taking leadership roles by sociocultural barriers, stereotypes, high levels of violence against women, and lack of institutional support such as maternity leave provisions and sexual harassment legislation. These factors undermine women's self-confidence and can create a climate of intimidation for those who attempt to break new ground in leadership.
- The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy creates a framework to promote women's greater participation in decision-making roles, yet the government lacks technical capacity, skilled staff, and adequate resources to implement major policy changes.
- While a temporary special measure task force was established, the actual proposal on temporary special measures was not included in the 2014 Political Parties Integrity Act. The revised Public Service Act prohibits sexual harassment through general orders but there is no sexual harassment legislation to protect women in the formal or informal private sector.

### 6.1 Status of Women's Participation in Decision Making and Leadership

Gender equality in decision making is one of Solomon Islands' most challenging development issues. From the family and community level through to the highest levels of government, women remain largely excluded from leadership. This creates a major challenge to both sustainable development and the achievement of human rights.

Within the public service, the last decade or so has seen some encouraging changes, including a sharp increase in the number of women in senior and mid-level public service positions. Roughly 40% of public service employees are female, and 60% of those are in junior positions. Women fill about 22% of mid-level positions, but only 5% of senior public service positions. There are 24 permanent secretary positions in government, but women occupy only 2 of those posts, and only 3 of 20 undersecretaries are female. Within the justice system, there are no female High Court judges and none of the justice agencies have female leaders.

There are technically three levels of elected government in Solomon Islands: national, provincial, and local. At the time of writing there was one woman in Parliament.<sup>102</sup> Women held 3 of the 38 seats in provincial legislatures. The Local Government Act allows ministerial establishment of local councils, but currently the Honiara City Council is the only local government entity and has no women representatives.

Solomon Islands ratified the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) but has not acted on its commitment to take all appropriate measures for the full advancement of women, including the introduction of temporary special measures (Articles 3 and 4). In 2008, the government mandated the Constituency Boundaries Commission to review the number of elected members of Parliament. Women's groups used this as an entry point to propose the introduction of 10 reserved seats for women: 1 seat for each province and 1 seat for Honiara. A temporary special measures task force was established by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and supported by the Government of Australia and UN Women. It recommended enactment of the political parties integrity legislation as a means to improve women's representation and to make the political party system more transparent and conducive to women's participation. These proposals, however, were subsequently omitted from the 2014 Political Parties Integrity Act after cabinet review and parliamentary debate.

## 6.2 Barriers to Women's Increased Participation in Decision Making

**Patterns of respect** between men and women tend to be developed and ingrained through tradition and example. If respect is not practiced at home, within clan groups, and in the education system, it will not be reflected in community norms or systems of governance.

Bias against women in both matrilineal and patrilineal culture has been exacerbated by the influence of colonial administrators, some churches, and early models of development. This has normalized gender relationships where men are decision makers and women are subordinate citizens. These norms are entrenched from the household to the political level. And, despite the fact that women are very visible in public life, they control few decisions and have little influence on the development process and the use of economic resources.

**High levels of physical violence lead to unequal power between men and women.** This has been clearly shown through the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study, which demonstrates that women and children are frequently "punished" with violence if they challenge men's power or don't meet men's expectations about how they should behave. Civil society advocates for gender equality have identified that violence and fear of violence undermine women's confidence to challenge power relationships and prevent them from participating in decision making—from the household level to party politics.

<sup>102</sup> In addition to the current female member of Parliament, who was chosen in a by-election to take over her deceased husband's seat, there has only been one woman ever elected to Parliament during a full electoral competition. Hilda Kari served as a member of Parliament from 1989 to 1997 and was an active advocate for the advancement of women.



**Women’s participation in public and private sector leadership is constrained** by gaps in regulations and legislation. These include weak maternity leave provisions, lack of sexual harassment legislation, and lack of protections for women in the private sector where employers may demand longer hours but often with lower pay in exchange for promises of job security. Hiring processes for women also tend to include questions about intent to have children. There is significant discrimination against women who are likely to become pregnant and need time off work.<sup>103</sup> Public servants are not eligible for maternity benefits during their 1–2 year probationary period, giving female public servants much lower job security than their male counterparts.

**Potential support for women in leadership is not being tapped.** In contradiction to the lack of women currently active and visible in decision-making roles, the 2013 People’s Survey illustrated strong public support for women as decision makers: about 91% of respondents indicated that women make good leaders, 89% thought there should be female members of Parliament, and 80% reported there should be reserved seats.<sup>104</sup>

There are many possible reasons for the disconnect between this 2013 survey finding and the data on women’s well-being and control of decision making at home, in the workplace, and in politics. Public stigma, peer pressure within the traditional “big man” system, and fear of change may constrain people from pursuing public action or positions.<sup>105</sup> Breaking this cycle requires both male and female role models willing to advocate for balanced participation at all levels of decision making, as well as improved capacity within both the public service and civil society to facilitate reform of legislation, policies, and practices.

### 6.3 Policy Approaches and Current Initiatives

The Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy recognizes the need to address the issue of women’s low participation in decision making. It has identified specific actions and objectives including increased participation of women in families, communities, the workplace, and politics. Policy priorities include the following:

- Increase women’s participation at all levels of decision making.
- Strengthen and coordinate donor support for the Women in Shared Decision Making (WISDM) Program managed by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and the National Council of Women.
- Improve management in the public sector to reduce gender disparities and bad governance.
- Increase leadership development training opportunities for women at all levels.

The policy’s strategic approach to women in decision making creates a framework that will promote gender-equitable decision making in the community, public service, the private sector, and politics. It is designed to build a critical mass of women in political and public service leadership and to diversify ideas, experiences, and values within decision-making structures. The policy also recognizes the need to improve men’s understanding about benefits of gender equality vis-à-vis development success in order to reduce resistance to women’s advancement.

<sup>103</sup> This point was raised in country gender assessment reference group consultations that took place from September 2013 to June 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. 2013. *People’s Survey*. The 2013 People’s Survey interviewed 3,400 people in four geographic areas (three provinces covered by the survey were Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Western—it was also done in Honiara and Honiara settlements). Respondents comprised equal numbers of men and women, and equal numbers of individuals over and under age 30.

<sup>105</sup> The concept and terminology of “big men” relates to traditional male-dominated power structures operating on models of distribution of goods and favors with traditional obligations for reciprocity. The person who gives away the most ends up being owed the most and is therefore most powerful.

To date, while the policy framework is relatively robust, the government lacks technical capacity, staff numbers, and adequate resources to implement major policy changes. This is further constrained by a weak enabling environment, lack of awareness, and cultural biases within the political leadership and political parties.

**Special measures for women in Parliament.** To increase women’s representation in Parliament, the government may consider special equity measures in relation to its CEDAW and MDG commitments. Potential models are the “parity” system of France (and French Pacific territories), models provided by Timor-Leste and Rwanda, or a more modest initiative recently taken by the government of Samoa to guarantee that at least 10% of the members of Parliament are women.<sup>106</sup> Further research is needed at the local government level in Solomon Islands to identify obstacles to women’s equal participation and representation in politics. Such research can facilitate a review of local government legislation to ensure that it conforms to the government’s commitments and policies for gender equity.

The **Women in Shared Decision Making (WISDM)** program is an ongoing initiative managed by the Solomon Islands National Council of Women. It is a strategic component of the Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy. WISDM aims to improve the quality of national governance by supporting women’s participation in elections and by raising awareness about the electoral process and civic responsibility. In addition, the program works with parliamentarians to raise their understanding about the value of diversity in governance. The WISDM program becomes increasingly active during election periods and was revitalized in July 2014 with specific emphasis on supporting women candidates in the election for later in 2014. The program has identified three key barriers facing women candidates for election:

- lack of support from political parties;
- difficulty creating constituencies of male and female supporters; and
- harassment, threatening behavior, and actual violence from male candidates and their supporters.

Prior to the 2010 elections, WISDM provided training to potential candidates in all aspects of developing a campaign and standing for election, including researching and analyzing issues relevant to constituents. The candidates found that despite positive feedback from women in response to their campaign messages on gender-specific issues, women voters often followed the instruction of male relatives on voting day and cast their ballots for male candidates. The extent to which such influence is coercion, or linked to women’s insecurity and lack of knowledge about politics and civic rights, is not completely clear, but it identifies an area where more work needs to be done. Non-incumbent women candidates also face an immediate financial disadvantage relative to the incumbents, who have discretionary funds that can be used to influence constituents for votes. Serving members of Parliament are provided with constituency development funds by government to be used in their communities that may also be used for election campaigns.

<sup>106</sup> J. Fraenkel. 2014. *The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’s Representation in Pacific Parliaments*. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance. Suva; E. Huffer. 2006. *A Woman’s Place is in the House—the House of Parliament, Research to advance women’s political representation in Forum Island Countries: a regional study presented in five reports*. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Suva; and M. Meleisea et al. 2015. *Political Representation and Women’s Empowerment in Samoa. Volume 1: Findings and Recommendations*. Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa.

**Requiring women’s participation as decision makers in development initiatives is critical to equitable results.** A stocktake by Australia, looking at gender issues in its global portfolio of rural development initiatives, highlights some good practice from the Solomon Islands Rural Development Program. The program was a collaboration among the government, Australia, the European Union, the World Bank, and other partners from 2007 to 2012. The stocktake notes that project components supporting delivery of local infrastructure promoted women’s leadership because they mandated that women make up at least 30% of the ward committees charged with allocating funds for local village infrastructure development. The flow-on effect of this was that issues important to women were addressed.<sup>107</sup> The 2013 evaluation of the program highlights that it gave women more influence over decision making than other community projects and that women who participated in subproject committees increased their status in the communities.<sup>108</sup>

**Young educated women are also mobilizing for political action and advocacy,** liaising with development partners and working in collaboration with government and civil society to support implementation of the Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy. In mid-2013, the government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) held a national mock parliamentary debate for youth, and Solomon Islands hosted a full mock youth parliament for Pacific Islands Forum countries. Both events helped to build awareness of civic issues and national decision-making processes, while creating an opportunity for young women and men to envision themselves in leadership positions and to be valued for their opinions. Experiences from mock parliaments in other countries also suggest that these events are particularly useful in raising awareness among men about women’s capacity to engage in substantive debates and bring important perspectives based on women’s life experiences.

## 6.4 Impacts of Gender Imbalances in Decision-Making Power

**Inhibitions that prevent women from speaking out** in public, or engaging in what is deemed as acceptable behavior, are often rooted in gendered power dynamics. While women are, to varying extents, decision makers at home and leaders in their communities, men control the limits of that power. Women are responsible for decisions about raising children, providing food, and running the household, but men have the power to beat them if they get it wrong. Power imbalances have an inherent element of fear for the less powerful, especially when physical violence is involved.<sup>109</sup>

The 2007 Demographic and Health Survey shows that over 90% of women participate in some independent or shared decision making in the household. More than half said they participated in all four categories that were asked about: major household purchases, daily needs, their own health care, and visits to their family. However, major reasons for domestic violence reported in the Family Health and Safety Study were also related

<sup>107</sup> S. Ferguson and B. Wiseman. 2012. *Gender Equality and Rural Development—A Stocktake of AusAID’s Approach and Progress*. Australian Agency for International Development, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Canberra.

<sup>108</sup> A. Neelim and J. Vecci. 2013. *Evaluation of the Solomon Islands Rural Development Program*. Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination. Honiara.

<sup>109</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*. Noumea.

to decision making in their assigned responsibilities; for instance, burning food, not having it prepared on time, or spending money in an unacceptable way.

**Dependence on male support for success** of women-led initiatives is another impact of gender inequality. Women in community and church groups provide leadership on an ongoing basis and comprise effective networks for communication of issues. Rural women's organizations are often identified by development organizations to promote awareness and implement projects because they have systems for influencing change. However, these groups are also dependent—to varying extents—on the support and approval of men if their initiatives are to become sustainable, internalized practice.

**Poor governance and inequitable distribution of benefits** at all levels result when there is underrepresentation of women in decision making. Poor governance makes it difficult to target plans and policies appropriately. In turn, policy implementation is less successful because the interests of women and girls are not accurately represented or addressed. The cycle of inequality is reproduced when men model dominant behavior to their children, and when women are inhibited from asserting their views and exercising their rights by social stigma and the threat of physical violence. Consequently, addressing gender equality in access to, and control of, knowledge and decision making at the legislative, policy, and program level is critical.

## 6.5 Recommendations

**Policy improvement and targeted empowerment measures are needed to support gender equality in leadership and decision making.** There is also a need to build strong evidence about the positive benefits of more women in leadership, which will help alter discriminatory social attitudes and support more effective decision making at all levels. Specific recommendations include the following:

- (i) Promote introduction of appropriate temporary special measures in Parliament, political parties, and the public service to support more women in senior decision-making positions, and review electoral laws to enable the introduction of special measures.
- (ii) Continue to conduct mock parliament sessions for women and youth to maintain awareness of opportunities and to profile their ability and potential to be influential decision makers.
- (iii) Support civil society organizations and government ministries to provide education and mentorships to young women in senior secondary and tertiary institutions and clarify the range of leadership opportunities available to them in their communities, government, the private sector, and politics.
- (iv) Conduct gender awareness campaigns by engaging men and women, as well as by partnering with media and civil society. Challenge stereotypes of women and men, using profiles of successful women leaders at different levels of society.
- (v) Undertake research on social determinants and pathways that impact women's desire and ability to become leaders. Use findings to support positive determinants and reduce constraints for women to participate in leadership positions.
- (vi) Undertake research on local governments to identify specific barriers to women's participation and representation in local politics, and develop measures to reduce barriers identified.

# 7 Violence against Women and Girls

## Key Facts

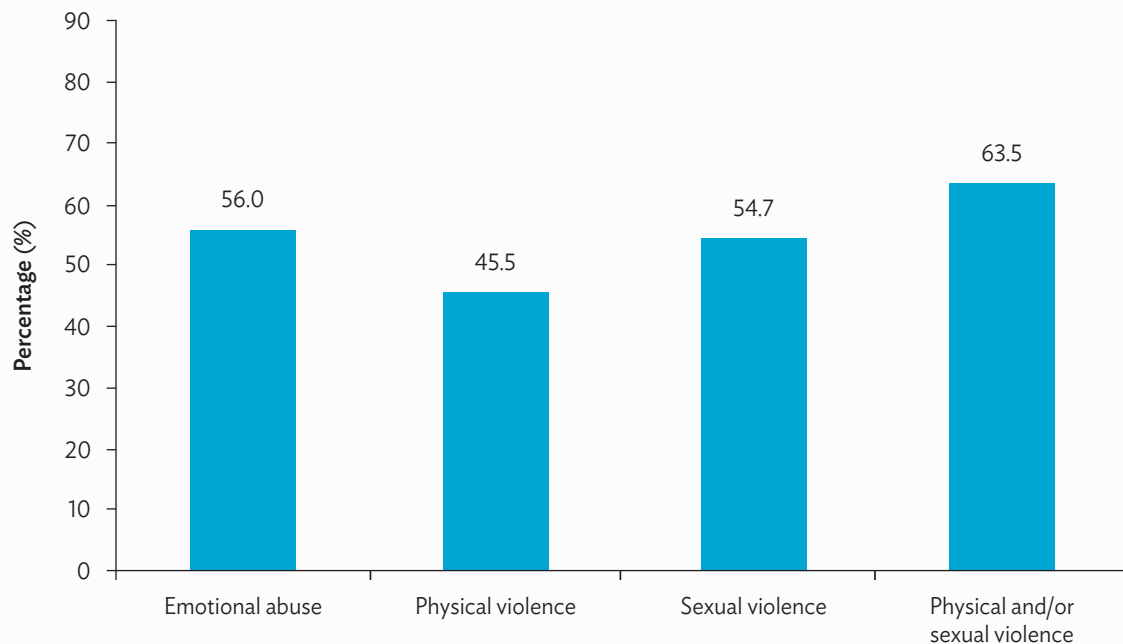
- The 2009 Family Health and Safety Study shows epidemic levels of violence against women in Solomon Islands: 64% of women who had ever been in an intimate relationship reported having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by an intimate partner, and 42% of the women reported experiencing such violence in the previous 12 months.
- Sexual violence and emotional abuse by intimate partners were common, with more than 50% of women experiencing such violence or abuse. For women reporting physical violence, the majority (75%) were likely to experience several forms of violence such as kicking or having a weapon used against them rather than moderate or mild violence.
- About 29% of women aged 15–49 reported either physical or sexual violence, or both, by people other than intimate partners since age 15. More than one-third (37%) of women reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age 15, most often by male acquaintances or male family members.
- Women who experienced intimate violence or other forms of violence were more likely to report poorer health outcomes than those who did not.
- There are a number of integrated government-led programs, and SafeNet is the largest program being coordinated among different government agencies and development partners. However, weaknesses in legal, judicial, and protection mechanisms undermine efforts by government and civil society, and the government's weak capacity to build coordinated responses continues to be a challenge.
- The complexity and entrenched nature of violence against women makes ending it one of Solomon Islands' biggest development challenges. It will require strong leadership from both men and women, particularly in the justice and policing sectors but also by churches and community leaders.

## 7.1 Building the Evidence Base on Violence against Women

Violence against women and girls is shown to be at epidemic levels in Solomon Islands, and is a symptom of gender inequality. It also perpetuates inequality by entrenching unequal and discriminatory power dynamics, and creates psychological and intergenerational cycles of violence that are very difficult to break. This chapter reviews existing data and studies to assess the prevalence level. It also discusses ongoing efforts and initiatives on eliminating violence against women at the legislative, policy, and program levels.

The **Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS)**, carried out in 2008 and 2009, examined the prevalence and dynamics of violence against women in Solomon Islands, using the World Health Organization (WHO) methodology.<sup>110</sup> Key findings from the study point out a complex web of issues linked to violence against women, including its close links to child abuse and other health issues, male and female justifications for such violence, risks and protecting factors, and potential coping strategies. The findings also illustrate how violence is linked in multiple ways to entrenched social norms, systematic discrimination in health and education, economic inequality and women's limited access to resources, women's lack of knowledge about rights and the law, and women's lack of access to justice systems.

**Figure 7.1** Percentage of Women Aged 15–49 Reporting Experience of Types of Intimate Partner Violence



Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*. Noumea.

The FHSS demonstrates a high prevalence of violence against women: nearly 2 out of 3 women (64%) aged 15–49 who had been in a relationship reported experiencing physical or/and sexual violence by an intimate partner. And 42% of women reported such experience in the past 12 months. As shown in Figure 7.1, sexual violence and emotional abuse by intimate partners were common, with more than half of the women reporting

<sup>110</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2009. *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study*. It was conducted as a collaborative effort by the Solomon Islands government, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the United Nations Population Fund, and the Government of Australia. Using the WHO methodology, the survey replicated associated questionnaires and interview training materials to ensure statistical rigor and comparability with other WHO multicountry studies. Pacific island countries that have done studies using versions of the WHO methodology include Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu; similar studies are under way in the Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, and Palau, with support from various donors.

experience of such violence or abuse. For physical violence, 75% of women with such experience reported severe forms of intimate violence, while 25% reported just moderate violence. A regional difference was also noted, with Honiara showing a higher rate of violence by an intimate partner compared to other provinces. Wider availability of alcohol and social problems such as unemployment, overcrowding, and high costs of living were likely to contribute to higher levels of prevalence in Honiara.

The FHSS further shows that 29% of women aged 15–49 had experienced physical and/or sexual violence since age 15 by people other than intimate partners, who were often male family members. In addition, more than one-third (37%) of women reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 15, illustrating a high prevalence of child abuse. Women who experienced intimate violence or other forms of violence were more likely to report poorer health outcomes than those who did not experience violence, indicating that lifetime experience of violence has long-lasting impacts on women's physical and mental health.

As for risk factors associated with the occurrence of violence by intimate partners, the FHSS study identified that customary practices such as bride price can be harmful by perpetuating beliefs that a man owns a woman once he has paid bride price for her. Women whose marriage involved bride price were two and a half times more likely to experience violence by their partners than women whose marriage did not involve bride price. The characteristics of partners, rather than those of women respondents, were closely associated with experience of intimate partner violence. Along with alcohol use, intergenerational patterns of violence were contributing factors to violence (Table 7.1). Men who experienced violence or abuse during childhood were more likely to become violent to their partners. Men who used violence to solve conflicts with other men, men who had affairs, and men who exhibited dominating and controlling behavior were also more likely to be violent to their partners. Intergenerational cycles of violence are perpetuated by the use of corporal punishment in schools and in homes. This practice normalizes violence as a dispute resolution mechanism.

**Male perspectives on violence against women.** Qualitative research conducted as part of the FHSS study with men through focus group discussions and interviews showed that men also consider violence against women by intimate partners is a serious issue in their communities. They also acknowledged that such violence could have serious effects on women's health, mental well-being, and their ability to work or care for the family. However, male perpetrators justify their violence against women as a form of discipline especially when women are viewed not living up to their gender roles: common reasons for their violence included not preparing food on time, going out without permission, not completing housework, not looking after children, refusing sex, and so on. The 2007 Demographic and Health Survey also found that 69% of women and 65% of men justified violence against women for similar reasons. The extent to which women help perpetuate violence by men should not be seen as a rationale to ignore it as a policy issue. Rather, it reflects the need for a systematic approach to addressing negative stereotypes of women and impunity for men.

**Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence.** A 2005 United Nations Population Fund study highlighted that disability increases women's vulnerability to violence, sexual abuse, and rape in Solomon Islands. Women and girls with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than those with no disabilities. In particular, women with mental disabilities were more vulnerable. Families of mentally disabled women reported difficulty in protecting their relative from sexual assault and other abuse.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>111</sup> United Nations Population Fund. 2013. *A Deeper Silence: The Unheard Experiences of Women with Disabilities—Sexual and Reproductive Health and Violence against Women in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tonga*. Suva.

**Table 7.1 Women’s Experience of Violence According to Male Partner’s Characteristics**

| Characteristics of Male Partners     | % Women Experiencing Violence from Current/Most Recent Partner | Total Number of Women in Each Category |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>Father beat mother</b>            |                                                                |                                        |
| Yes                                  | 82.1                                                           | 330                                    |
| No                                   | 57.6                                                           | 1,062                                  |
| <b>Frequently beaten as a child</b>  |                                                                |                                        |
| Yes                                  | 85.0                                                           | 356                                    |
| No                                   | 56.7                                                           | 1,036                                  |
| <b>Violent with other men</b>        |                                                                |                                        |
| Yes                                  | 81.7                                                           | 366                                    |
| No                                   | 57.1                                                           | 1,026                                  |
| <b>Had a concurrent relationship</b> |                                                                |                                        |
| Yes                                  | 83.0                                                           | 376                                    |
| No                                   | 56.7                                                           | 1,016                                  |
| <b>Exhibits controlling behavior</b> |                                                                |                                        |
| Yes                                  | 76.5                                                           | 1,004                                  |
| No                                   | 41.5                                                           | 383                                    |
| <b>Alcohol use</b>                   |                                                                |                                        |
| Never drinks                         | 52.2                                                           | 480                                    |
| Drinks but not drunk often           | 64.2                                                           | 648                                    |
| Drinks at least once a week          | 83.5                                                           | 264                                    |

**The implicit acceptance of violence disempowers women** and reduces their ability to access “safe spaces.” Violence against women and girls also takes place in public institutions such as schools and marketplaces; sexual harassment occurs in the workplace and in public spaces such as on buses, on sidewalks, and in shops. The stigma against women seeking to leave abusive relationships is often evident within the health system and in some churches. These institutional biases are perpetuated and exacerbated by weaknesses in legal, judicial, and protection mechanisms.

**Weaknesses in legal, judicial, and protection mechanisms** undermine efforts by government and civil society to end violence against women. As discussed in Chapter 2, examination of access to justice and the use of legal systems to promote women’s human rights in Solomon Islands has been identified as an area for further research and investment by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs; the World Bank; the Australian government; and civil society. Main weaknesses in legal, judicial, and protection mechanisms can be summarized as follows:<sup>112</sup>

- lack of legislation to criminalize domestic violence;

<sup>112</sup> Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2012. *Delivery Strategy: Solomon Islands Justice Program 2012–2014*. Canberra.



- absence of trained leaders in the police and justice systems to hear and adjudicate cases of violence against women;
- overall weakness of the judicial system such as lack of court facilities, inadequate numbers of judges and magistrates, lack of publicized legal precedents in favor of women, wait times for cases to be heard, lack of legal advice for women, and lack of awareness about gender equality and women's human rights among magistrates and judges;
- absence of networks and referral processes between local and higher-level courts using a common approach to eliminate violence against women;
- women's lack of awareness about their rights; and
- barriers that prevent women's access to the justice system including lack of operational local courts.

## 7.2 Policy Framework for Ending Violence against Women

The Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) Policy establishes the elimination of violence against women as one of its priority outcome areas. It highlights the need for more detailed attention to harmonizing existing programs with international human rights commitments; improving multisector government collaboration; and ensuring effective, high-quality responses to victims' needs. The GEWD Policy also identifies the need to develop specific legislation criminalizing violence against women as an offense separate from common assault. Finally, it specifies the need to address the elimination of violence against women as a core development issue, and notes that success in ending violence against women is dependent on the commitment and engagement of both men and women.

The Solomon Islands National Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women (EVAW) is subsidiary to the GEWD Policy. It is designed to support effective collaboration between stakeholders and to facilitate coordination of initiatives taking place by civil society and government agencies (Box 7.1).

### Box 7.1 Policy Statement for the Elimination of Violence against Women

The Solomon Islands government will exercise leadership to end all forms of violence against women and support advocacy in this regard at the local, provincial, national, regional, and international levels, by all sectors and all political and community leaders, as well as the media and civil society.

The Solomon Islands government will take positive measures to

- (i) address the social, political, legal, and economic inequalities that cause and perpetuate violence against women;
- (ii) address the situations and risk factors that can trigger violence against women;
- (iii) strengthen prevention efforts that address discriminatory practices and social and cultural norms; and
- (iv) uphold and raise awareness of women's rights and the responsibility of Solomon Islands' citizens to respect the rights of others.

*Source:* Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. 2012. *The National Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women*. Honiara.

The Family Health and Safety Study makes 21 policy-related recommendations, which have been incorporated into the EVAW Policy. These are related broadly to weaknesses in legal, judicial, and protection mechanisms identified above. They also cover seven strategic areas to be operationalized through a national action plan managed by government with support from civil society and development partners. The seven strategic action areas include the following:

- (i) development of specific mechanisms to implement national commitments to end violence against women;
- (ii) strengthening legal frameworks, law enforcement, and the justice system;
- (iii) undertaking extensive public awareness and advocacy to eliminate and prevent violence;
- (iv) improvement of protective social and support services in all areas of the country;
- (v) working with men to end violence;
- (vi) rehabilitation of perpetrators; and
- (vii) coordination of policies and services.

The EVAW Policy stipulates that the government will provide sufficient budgetary and human resources to implement the policy and to ensure effective, complementary coordination among government agencies. All government agencies are expected to implement the policy as a part of their corporate plan, with the national task force for the elimination of violence against women providing oversight. During the first policy period, however, the task force discontinued its meetings due to lack of staff time and capacity at the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs.

### 7.3 Ongoing Initiatives to End Violence against Women

**There are a number of integrated, as well as targeted, government-led programs** for women who experience violence. In some cases civil society organizations are key implementing partners. Box 7.2 summarizes integrated programs led by government. The SafeNet initiative is the largest of these and involves the most partners. All other government-led programs are linked to and share information through the SafeNet program meetings. Additional initiatives and services provided by civil society groups are shown in Box 7.2.

**SafeNet, the largest government-led program to end violence against women**, was formally initiated in early 2013. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services coordinates all government agencies involved in the SafeNet project. The partner agencies have different responsibilities, and coordination to date has been managed by a multi-agency task force that includes government and civil society. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services—including health facilities and the integrated mental health services—aims to provide crucial timely clinical care for survivors, which includes preventing transmission of sexually transmitted infections, preventing unwanted pregnancies, treating wounds, and collecting forensic evidence. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force supports protection and investigation, and the Public Solicitor’s Office is responsible for legal assistance. The SafeNet civil society agencies—the Christian Care Center and the Family Support Center—provide counseling, shelter, and community support. The Seif Ples gender-based violence crisis and referral center functions as a coordination hub and medical clinic supported by the Ministry of Police and National Security, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.

### Box 7.2 Government-Led Initiatives to End Violence against Women

- The Ministry of Health coordinates the multi-ministry SafeNet initiative and referral system along with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), Social Welfare Division, and the Public Solicitors Office of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs as well as two nongovernment groups: the Christian Care Center and the Family Support Center.
- The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWCFA) and the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs lead legal research (Law Reform Commission) and legislative reform on domestic violence and family safety including a review of the penal code related to sexual offenses and research on sentencing for sexual offenses (ongoing).
- The MWCFA leads policy coordination across ministries and with civil society groups and provides oversight of policy implementation for the Gender Equality Policy and the Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women (ongoing).
- The Seif Ples (Safe Place) is the gender-based violence crisis and referral center supported by the Ministry of Police and National Security, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, and the RSIPF. It provides a clinic with first aid and facilities for forensic examinations, and houses the SafeNet referral initiative.
- In 2013 and 2014, the RSIPF, supported by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands' Participating Police Force, undertook missions to all provinces to raise community awareness about ending violence against women and sexual abuse, and the role of community policing in promoting social stability.
- A new regional project known as Cyber Safety Pasifika will aim to conduct community education with Honiara youth groups to protect children, youth, and vulnerable people from pornography and computer crimes such as child abuse and fraud.
- Correctional Services of Solomon Islands has developed behavior change programs on anger management for inmates and prison staff targeted at reducing violence against women and reoffending.

*Note:* Many of these initiatives also involve partnerships with civil society groups and communities to ensure services are effectively delivered and to monitor use.

Table 7.2 provides a summary of additional work being done by civil society organizations to end violence against women. This includes initiatives that support ending violence against women through legislative reform, empowerment of women, and enhanced social stability.

**Engaging men to end violence against women** is a common strategy being used by both government and civil society in Solomon Islands. The model of masculine behavior in the Solomon Islands is relatively rigid and it will take courage for men not only to speak on the subject but also to speak out against men who perpetrate and condone violence. The SafeNet initiative, along with engagement of the police and justice systems, provides an opportunity to have male advocates in positions of authority speaking out against violence. Of the 16 civil society organizations actively engaged in ending violence against women, one-third focus on engaging men and boys (Table 7.2). The work of Live & Learn provides an example of promising practice in this area. Through facilitated community consultations, they explore the concept of masculinities and what it means to be a man in Solomon Islands: the guide *Naf Nao! Lumi man save stopem vaelens* (Enough Now! We men can stop violence) supports discussions of how power and violence are related to customary traditions and religion. Live & Learn also promotes men's involvement in building safer communities and changing their own behavior.<sup>113</sup>

**Development partners are highly supportive** of the government's commitment to eliminate violence against women through funding, technical assistance, and targeted capacity development to government and civil society organizations. Development agencies are also adapting their planning and programming frameworks to

<sup>113</sup> Live & Learn. *Enough Now! We men can stop violence. A male advocate's guide to stopping violence against women in the Solomon Islands.* <http://www.livelearn.org/resources/naf-nao-iumi-man-save-stopem-vaelens-enough-now-we-men-can-stop-violence>

**Table 7.2 Civil Society Organizations Working to End Violence against Women**

| Name                                                      | Coverage                                                                 | Thematic Focus                            | Programs                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Solomon Islands Development Trust                         | Villages                                                                 | EVAW, male advocacy                       | Theater awareness on violence against women                                                                                                                                       |
| Family Support Centre                                     | Honiara city                                                             | EVAW, male advocacy                       | Counseling; referral; legal aid to victims of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault; community awareness; advocacy                                                   |
| Christian Care Centre                                     | Honiara                                                                  | EVAW, male advocacy                       | Safe home for women and children victims of domestic violence, incest, rape, and sexual abuse; community awareness                                                                |
| Young Women's Christian Association                       | Honiara and Munda                                                        | WIL, EEW                                  | <b>Rise Up</b> —young women's empowerment; <b>Sista Savve</b> —improve social and economic life of young women in Honiara                                                         |
| Vois Blo Mere                                             | Honiara and outreach to provinces                                        | Gender as crosscutting issue              | Information dissemination on women's rights; <b>Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE)</b>                                                            |
| Live & Learn Environmental Education                      | 5 provinces + 50 communities                                             | Male advocacy, EEW, WIL                   | Microfinance; inclusive natural resource management; and men against violence against women (20 settlements in Honiara)                                                           |
| People with Disabilities Solomon Islands                  | 6 provinces, self-help groups—3 led by women with disability             | EVAW, EEW                                 | Advocacy on rights of people with disabilities and the rights of women with disabilities                                                                                          |
| Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association            | Honiara city + all provinces                                             | Sexual and reproductive health and rights | Referral for victims of domestic violence that come to their clinic                                                                                                               |
| Ilukim Sustainable Solomon Islands                        | 2 provinces, East 'Are 'Are ward, 5 villages                             | EEW, male advocacy                        | Research and human rights advocacy                                                                                                                                                |
| West 'Are 'Are Rokotaniken Association                    | West 'Are 'Are (50 villages) plus wards #24 and #25 (located in Honiara) | EEW, WIL, EVAW                            | Economic empowerment and market security; leadership and political awareness; violence against women; and HIV/AIDS                                                                |
| Young Women Parliamentary Group                           | Honiara                                                                  | WIL, EVAW, male advocacy                  | Advocacy on family protection bill; support to Christian Care Centre                                                                                                              |
| Women's Rights Action Movement                            | Honiara                                                                  | WIL, EVAW                                 | CEDAW shadow report; women in politics                                                                                                                                            |
| World Vision                                              | 5 communities in Honiara, 6 provinces and 50 communities                 | GBV, EEW                                  | <b>Community Channels of Hope</b> —only in Honiara Gender mainstreaming in community and provincial programs includes messaging on GBV and EEW initiatives                        |
| Solomon Islands Christian Association Federation of Women | All provinces                                                            | EVAW                                      | Training and awareness on gender equality issues and ending violence against women; establishing referral networks ( <b>RefNet</b> ) in provinces; awareness on human trafficking |
| Save the Children Australia                               | Guadalcanal, Malaita, Isabel, Choiseul, Western, Makira provinces        | EVAW                                      | <b>Youth Outreach Partnership Project</b><br>Programs for children and youth in conflict with the law                                                                             |
| Oxfam                                                     | Guadalcanal—3 villages                                                   | EVAW                                      | Women and youth EVAW programs; general population (HIV)                                                                                                                           |

CEDAW = Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, EEW = economic empowerment of women, EVAW = ending violence against women, GBV = gender-based violence, WIL = women in leadership.

Source: Government of Solomon Islands, Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. 2012. Unpublished civil society organization mapping. Note that since this mapping was done some of these projects may have closed and others opened. The table is intended to provide a demonstration of the scope of engagement by civil society organizations on the issue of ending violence against women.

incorporate measures to respond to prevalent violence against women. The Solomon Islands Justice Program, supported by Australia, recognizes that gender-based violence and child abuse represent the largest caseloads for the justice system, while tackling these issues are beyond the capacity and mandate of law and justice agencies. Therefore, those cases require both government and civil society involvement across sectors. Within the law and justice sector, all development partners, including civil society organizations, accept the need for passing of the family protection bill into law, together with updates in the criminal procedural code and the penal code.<sup>114</sup> In addition, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, with support from Australia, is working with the National Statistics Office to improve data collection, gender analysis of data, and research on the social and economic implications of violence against women.

Other donors are supporting various initiatives across different sectors, which can reduce risk factors for women and empower them. The British High Commission and the World Bank support the government's SafeNet initiative by identifying that women's limited access to justice in rural areas, as well as educational constraints, also make it challenging for women to exercise their rights to employment and economic independence. New Zealand is supporting the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development to develop the gender equality in education policy, which will promote girls' rights to education and recommend the elimination of corporal punishment, violence, and sexual harassment in school. The Asian Development Bank works with the Ministry of Infrastructure Development to incorporate a gender action plan into its transport development activities to protect women and girls from sexual harassment and personal safety risks in the transport sector, which includes awareness and capacity building training to transport operators and the police.

The combination of stated commitments and current efforts by government, civil society, and development partners illustrates that violence against women is increasingly recognized as a serious cross-cutting and development issue. However, the lack of understanding gender relations based on power and traditional and religious beliefs, and the lack of government capacity to build comprehensive and coordinated responses continue to be significant barriers in the ongoing efforts. The geographic remoteness of provinces and communities, combined with lack of capacity to deliver essential services in rural areas, also remains a serious constraint.

**Lessons learned** from other countries demonstrate that monitoring, evaluation, and analysis of results from programs and projects are critical to enhance protection and response mechanisms and reduce violence against women; improved data collection and long-term funding commitments are essential as well. It is also important to note that women are not a homogenous group and some women—women with disabilities and women whose marriages involve bride price—are more vulnerable to violence than others. Fine-tuning policy approaches to address specific circumstances of women will contribute to ensuring the rights of all women without exception.

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<sup>114</sup> Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2012. *Delivery Strategy: Solomon Islands Justice Program 2012–2014*. Canberra.

## 7.4 Recommendations

**Supporting coordinated effective policy implementation** to end violence against women needs to be a priority in Solomon Islands. Specific recommendations include the following:

- (i) Assess financial and human resource requirements for sustained implementation of the National Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women, and develop coordinated funding and capacity building plans for effective implementation of the policy.
- (ii) Improve coordination among service providers to ensure survivors of violence have safe and confidential access to response services (medical, psychosocial, safe space, and legal support).
- (iii) Strengthen the SafeNet referral system's data collection to monitor access, usage, quality, and impact of its services.
- (iv) Implement priority recommendations from the Family Health and Safety Study as identified in the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy and the Eliminating Violence against Women Policy.
- (v) Provide training to judges, magistrates, and communities on ending violence against women.
- (vi) Undertake strategic campaigns to engage men at all levels, from rural communities to Parliament, in ending violence against women.

# 8

## Integrating Gender Equality as a Mainstream Governance Issue

### Key Facts

- There are increasing indications of positive political will to support gender mainstreaming in government. Accountability mechanisms include gender mainstreaming performance indicators in contracts of permanent secretaries across government ministries. Gender focal points are also being established across all ministries with clear terms of reference.
- The organizational culture of government displays mixed signals for gender equality. While there are some improvements in policies supporting equality and some expressions of staff interest in learning about gender equality, there are concurrent and continuing examples of de facto discrimination in hiring and employment practices.
- There is inconsistency in availability of sex-disaggregated data across government and a lack of technical capacity to undertake gender analysis of existing data; this impedes monitoring and evaluation of mainstreaming efforts and results.
- Technical capacity to integrate gender analysis into planning, programming, monitoring, and evaluation is low across government, including in the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs.
- No systems are in place within government to track allocation or expenditures of financial resources associated with gender mainstreaming in government.

### 8.1 Integrating Gender Equality in Sector Development Policies and Planning

The government has made a number of international commitments to gender equality and, by extension, gender mainstreaming, including ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Solomon Islands also actively participates in regional commitments to gender equality, such as the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders communiques on gender equality.

The need to mainstream gender issues into the work of government has been recognized since the 1990s; however, there was no systematic analysis of government's capacity for mainstreaming until 2009. In 2009, along with the development of the Gender Equality and Women's Development (GEWD) Policy, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community conducted a stocktaking exercise of the government's gender mainstreaming capacity.<sup>115</sup> The stocktake examined the structure and functions of the Women's Development Division in the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and conducted interviews with senior officials across

<sup>115</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012. *Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Islands Governments: Solomon Islands*. Noumea.

government ministries. The exercise resulted in a number of practical and strategic recommendations that were then integrated into the GEWD Policy and the work of key ministries. In 2010, following completion of the stocktake and government endorsement, the Government of Solomon Islands and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community signed a memorandum of understanding to implement priority gender mainstreaming actions.

There are five key prerequisites for mainstreaming gender equality issues in government. These include (i) clear and demonstrated political will, (ii) a supportive organizational culture, (iii) technical capacity to analyze gender issues and incorporate them into planning systems, (iv) accountability mechanisms to ensure commitments and plans promoting gender equality are implemented, and (v) allocation of adequate resources to develop the enabling environment for gender equality in all government agencies.<sup>116</sup>

The government's first reports to the CEDAW Committee demonstrate that there is a large gap between stated national commitments and demonstrated action by government ministries, which is a key constraint to gender mainstreaming. The GEWD Policy identifies government's stated priorities and provides monitoring processes to track action, investment, or changes in commitments. As the key coordinating body for the GEWD Policy, the Women's Development Division staff in the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs are assigned responsibility for priority areas of the policy. The staffing, however, is limited, with only one staff person to coordinate across government to support gender mainstreaming.

**Implementing gender mainstreaming initiatives.** Building on recommendations of the stocktake, implementation of the gender mainstreaming process started through two major initiatives. The first is the SafeNet program discussed in the previous chapter. This multisector initiative is coordinated through the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and linked to the GEWD and the Eliminating Violence against Women policies. The second initiative focuses on technical capacity and accountability for gender mainstreaming in government. This is led by the Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, which involved revising the contracts of all permanent secretaries to include specific deliverables related to gender equality in their respective ministries (Box 8.1). In addition, a network of gender focal points has been developed to support capacity development and monitoring of gender mainstreaming in each ministry. Gender focal points are mainly senior staff members who have the authority to influence decision making, facilitate

#### Box 8.1 Gender-Related Performance Indicators for Permanent Secretaries

Under performance agreements, all the permanent secretaries are expected to have gender mainstreaming as a key result area. The following indicators are also included to measure progress on a ministry-by-ministry basis:

- ministry's corporate plan includes a gender implementation strategy,
- appointment of gender focal point or gender desk,
- evidence of gender sensitivity within the recruitment and selection process in the ministry,
- collection and dissemination of gender profiles and statistics,
- zero tolerance on workplace harassment including sexual harassment, and
- gender report as a part of the monthly and annual reporting processes.

<sup>116</sup> C. Grown, G. Gupta, and A. Kes. 2005. *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. UN Millennium Project. New York. <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/Gender-frontmatter.pdf>



changed practice, and exercise supervision of organizational attitudes about gender issues. It should be noted that the focal points are not gender specialists, but they are responsible for learning about gender equality in the context of their own ministry's mandate to support the work of the permanent secretaries in meeting their key performance indicators for gender mainstreaming.

A third gender mainstreaming initiative is under way to improve sector statistics and enable monitoring of progress and results of mainstreaming. The National Statistics Office is coordinating this in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community, with support from Australia, will provide technical assistance and work in selected sector ministries and the National Statistics Office to build staff capacity to collect and analyze data related to gender equality.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development is developing its own gender policy to deliver more gender-responsive programs. (The policy was still in development at the time of writing.) The Corrections Services within the Ministry of Police and National Security has conducted a gender audit of its work and working environment. It also has its own sexual harassment policy and has produced an audit report that can be considered as preliminary policy direction. Other ministries also have policies, such as the Financial Inclusion Policy of the Central Bank, and the Small and Medium-Size Business Policy from the Ministry of Commerce, that incorporate gender issues and some reporting mechanisms. These hold promise for making gender issues more visible across sectors; however, coordination of information, monitoring, and reporting on progress requires further improvements.

**Additional support to facilitate success of gender mainstreaming policies** is still needed. Engaging permanent secretaries as leaders of gender mainstreaming is a very positive development. However, there are still areas for improvement and these are intertwined with more systemic and structural constraints. Limited capacity makes it difficult for government to absorb available assistance and effectively integrate gender into initiatives in sector ministries. This also has negative implications for the coordination function that government ministries are expected to perform. Lack of women in senior positions in public service poses another limitation for gender mainstreaming. Increasing the number of women in government and ensuring a safe and equitable workplace for them is critical to effective gender mainstreaming. Lack of sex-disaggregated data, combined with an absence of staff who understand gender equality issues and are able to analyze data-based evidence, are a significant challenge. Without the data and analysis it is very difficult to build an evidence-based case for making policy and practice within government more gender responsive.

## 8.2 Accountability Mechanisms for Gender Mainstreaming

Solomon Islands has made significant progress in establishing accountability mechanisms at the level of permanent secretaries and in establishing chains of responsibility through appointing senior staff as gender focal points. Standards and monitoring mechanisms have also been established and incorporated through the Public Service Commission. However, given recent development of such initiatives, more time is needed to monitor the effectiveness of these mechanisms, including whether the Public Services Commission can sanction or reward permanent secretaries in relation to meeting gender-related performance indicators. Close monitoring by external partners, including civil society, the media, and development partners, can significantly influence the extent to which government maintains its momentum and attention to gender mainstreaming.

Promotion of gender mainstreaming is largely supported through funding from development partners and is implemented through government. This creates a dynamic of mutual responsibility and there is a need for funders, technical assistance providers, and government to maintain a common level of accountability for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of gender-related outcomes. Lessons learned in the Pacific illustrate that political will and dynamics around gender programs within development agencies are closely linked to success of program implementation by government.

Development agencies have gender policies of their own that dictate that gender issues are transparent at each stage of development projects. However, in practice gender as a development priority is not integrated at all levels of programs, and there is often lack of coordination between sector programming and gender equality initiatives. And gender responsive indicators are neither always available nor integrated into monitoring frameworks in sector programs. As a result, the visibility of gender issues tends to disappear during implementation and monitoring, particularly when awareness and capacity of the implementing agencies are weak. While development partners working in Solomon Islands have shown a strong commitment to gender issues as mentioned frequently in their program documents, there is a need for continued diligence, particularly in sectors such as macroeconomics, infrastructure, and natural resource management where feasible gender indicators need to be developed through detailed gender analysis.<sup>117</sup>

### 8.3 Resource Allocations for Gender Mainstreaming in Government

The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy advocates for gender-responsive budgeting of all government budgets and expenditures. Currently, however, gender equality is not an analysis factor in the government's budget processes. It is also not a consideration in technical capacity development within the public service. Even though gender-responsive planning has been identified as a priority, government spending on gender is very limited. Where there is spending related to gender—for example, in health or education—expenditure is not monitored in a transparent manner to demonstrate what returns are coming from specific investments. It will be important to track government allocations and expenditures and analyze those patterns for improved gender-responsive planning.

To overcome the impacts of severe gender inequality and improve development results, the government must enhance the diversity and capacity of its human resources. Capable women need to be proactively recruited, trained, mentored, and supported to become leaders in the public and the private sectors. At the same time, awareness activities on gender equality issues need to be expanded by engaging men into the work of eliminating inequality and violence against women. Development partners can also contribute by supporting a cadre of skilled men and women who can analyze government obligations and services from the perspective of gender equality, and integrate such analysis into policy designs, budget planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the government's work.

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<sup>117</sup> In the infrastructure sector, for instance, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) encourages all projects to integrate gender-responsive designs and gender-related performance indicators into project documents, which are specified in each project's gender action plan (GAP). The success of GAP implementation depends on awareness of such action plans and strong leadership by the implementing agencies, such as the Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MID). Recognizing weak capacity of MID on gender issues, ADB provides capacity development support to the ministry for GAP implementation and monitoring, as well as gender issues in the sector. The projects under MID are producing some promising gender equality outcomes, which include a growing number of female road maintenance contractors who are benefiting from infrastructure development projects.

## 8.4 Recommendations

**Government and development partners need to invest in gender mainstreaming** as a strategy to achieve national commitments to gender equality. Specific suggestions include the following:

- (i) Streamline existing oversight mechanisms for gender mainstreaming to improve efficiency and effectiveness of initiatives.
- (ii) The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, together with the Ministry of Finance and Treasury and the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination, establishes and tracks key indicators for budget allocations and expenditures on gender mainstreaming.
- (iii) Improve and increase sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis in sector ministries to facilitate monitoring of gender mainstreaming strategies.
- (iv) Continue to build technical capacity of male and female staff in all ministries to do gender analysis, planning, and monitoring for implementation of gender-responsive programs.
- (v) Engage government's senior political and public service leadership to regularly monitor and report on the progress of all ministries' mainstreaming initiatives, including the involvement of men as well as women in these initiatives.

# 9

## Areas for Further Research

There are many potential areas for further research on gender equality in Solomon Islands. The following have been identified by stakeholders during country gender assessment consultations and represent the interests of government, civil society, and development partners:

- (i) Explore tensions between cultural, political, and family decision-making systems and their influence on gender equality at local and national levels.
- (ii) Identify good practice strategies to support local justice systems to promote gender equality.
- (iii) Clarify supports and barriers to gender equality in natural resource management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster preparedness.
- (iv) Explore social, economic, and cultural determinants of women's leadership and identify pathways to women's leadership.
- (v) Analyze the intersection and impacts of women's decision-making roles, education levels, degree of economic empowerment, and levels of violence against women.
- (vi) Examine human rights violations—especially prostitution, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking—in relation to resource-based industries.
- (vii) Develop suitable good practice models for addressing gender equality and health issues in the education system, including reduction of physical and sexual violence, use of contraception, and prevention and reduction of sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

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# Constitution of Solomon Islands (1978) Chapter II, Section 15

## Section 15. Protection from discrimination

1. Subject to the provisions of subsections (5), (6), and (9) of this section, no law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect.
2. Subject to the provisions of subsections (7), (8), and (9) of this section, no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any written law or performance of the function of any public office or any public authority.
3. Subject to the provision of subsection (9) of this section, no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner in respect of access to shops, hotels, lodging-houses, public restaurants, eating-houses or places of public entertainment or in respect of access to places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of public funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.
4. In this section, the expression “discriminatory” means affording different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another such description are not made subject or are accorded privileges or advantages which are not accorded to persons of another such description.
5. Subsection (1) of this section shall not apply to any law so far as that law makes provision—
  - (a) for the imposition of taxation or the appropriation of revenue by the Government or the government of Honiara city, or any provincial government, or the Honiara city council or any provincial or any provincial assembly for local purposes;
  - (b) with respect to persons who are not citizens of Solomon Islands;
  - (c) for the application, in the case of persons of any such description as is mentioned in the preceding subsection (or of persons connected with such persons), of the law with respect to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other like matters that is the personal law applicable to persons of that description;
  - (d) for the application of customary law;
  - (e) with respect to land, the tenure of land, the resumption and acquisition of land and other like purposes;
  - (f) for the advancement of the more disadvantaged members of the community; or
  - (g) where persons of any such description as is mentioned in the preceding subsection may be subjected to any disability or restriction or may be accorded any privilege or advantage which, having regard to its nature and to special circumstances pertaining to those persons or to persons of any other such description, is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.
6. Nothing contained in any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of subsection (1) of this section to the extent that it makes provision with respect to standards or qualifications (not being standards or qualification specifically relating to race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex) to be required of any person who is appointed to any office in the public service, any office in a disciplined

force, any office in the service of the government of Honiara city or any provincial government or any office in a body corporate established directly by any law for public purposes, or who wishes to engage in any trade or business.

7. Subsection (2) of this section shall not apply to anything which is expressly or by necessary implication authorised to be done by any such provision of law as is referred to in subsection (5) or (6) of this section.
8. Subsection (2) of this section shall not affect any discretion relating to the institution, conduct or discontinuance of civil or criminal proceedings in any court that is vested in any person by or under this Constitution or any other law.
9. Nothing contained in or done under the authority of any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section to the extent that the law in question makes provision whereby persons of any such description as is mentioned in subsection (4) of this section may be subjected to any restriction on the rights and freedoms guaranteed by section 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14 of this Constitution, being such a restriction as is authorised by section 9(2), 11(6), 12(2), 13(2) or 14(3), as the case may be.

# News Release—Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration 2012

The Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum met from 27–30 August 2012 in Rarotonga and brought new determination and invigorated commitment to efforts to lift the status of women in the Pacific and empower them to be active participants in economic, political and social life.

Leaders expressed their deep concern that despite gains in girls' education and some positive initiatives to address violence against women, overall progress in the region towards gender equality is slow. In particular Leaders are concerned that women's representation in Pacific legislature remains the lowest in the world; violence against women is unacceptably high; and that women's economic opportunities remain limited.

Leaders understand that gender inequality is imposing a high personal, social and economic cost on Pacific people and nations, and that improved gender equality will make a significant contribution to creating a prosperous, stable and secure Pacific for all current and future generations.

To realize this goal, Leaders commit with renewed energy to implement the gender equality actions of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2005 to 2015); the Pacific Plan; the 42nd Pacific Islands Forum commitment to increase the representation of women in legislatures and decision making; and the 40th Pacific Islands Forum commitment to eradicate sexual and gender based violence.

To progress these commitments, Leaders commit to implement specific national policy actions to progress gender equality in the areas of gender responsive government programs and policies, decision making, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, and health and education.

## Gender Responsive Government Programs and Policies

- Incorporate articles from the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into legislative and statutory reforms and policy initiatives across government;
- Support the production and use of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis to inform government policies and programs;
- Strengthen consultative mechanisms with civil society groups, including women's advocacy groups, on key budget and policy issues of national and sub-national governments.

## Decision Making

- Adopt measures, including temporary special measures (such as legislation to establish reserved seats for women and political party reforms), to accelerate women's full and equal participation in governance reform at all levels and women's leadership in all decision making.

- Advocate for increased representation of women in private sector and local level governance boards and committees (e.g., school boards and produce market committees).

## Economic Empowerment

- Remove barriers to women's employment and participation in the formal and informal sectors, including in relation to legislation that directly or indirectly limits women's access to employment opportunities or contributes to discriminatory pay and conditions for women.
- Implement equal employment opportunity and gender equality measures in public sector employment, including State Owned Enterprises and statutory boards, to increase the proportion of women employed, including in senior positions, and advocate for a similar approach in private sector agencies;
- Improve the facilities and governance of local produce markets, including fair and transparent local regulation and taxation policies, so that market operations increase profitability and efficiency and encourage women's safe, fair and equal participation in local economies.
- Target support to women entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors, for example financial services, information and training, and review legislation that limits women's access to finance, assets, land and productive resources.

## Ending Violence against Women

- Implement progressively a package of essential services (protection, health, counselling, legal) for women and girls who are survivors of violence.
- Enact and implement legislation regarding sexual and gender based violence to protect women from violence and impose appropriate penalties for perpetrators of violence.

## Health and Education

- Ensure reproductive health (including family planning) education, awareness and service programs receive adequate funding support;
- Encourage gender parity in informal, primary, secondary and tertiary education and training opportunities.

Leaders called on Development Partners to work in a coordinated, consultative and harmonized way to support national led efforts to address gender inequality across the region in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific. Leaders also requested Development Partners to increase financial and technical support to gender equality and women's empowerment programs, and to adopt strategies within their programs to provide employment and consultation opportunities for women in the planning and delivery of development assistance to the region.

Leaders agreed that progress on the economic, political and social positions of women should be reported on at each Forum Leaders meeting. They directed the Forum Secretariat, with the support of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and Development Partners, to develop, as part of the Pacific Plan performance monitoring framework and annual report to Leaders on country progress in implementing the above commitments and moving towards achieving greater gender equality.