



# SOLOMON ISLANDS YOUTH STATUS REPORT

2018



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*Front cover: Sunday school members of All Saints Parish during their sport day at the SMI in Town Ground. Photo: Daniel Kakadi*

## Contents

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Foreword                         | 5  |
| Executive summary                | 6  |
| Introduction                     | 9  |
| Economic participation           | 12 |
| Participation in decision-making | 20 |
| Recommendations                  | 30 |
| Appendices                       | 36 |

## Acronyms

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| HDI    | Human Development Index                               |
| MNURP  | Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace  |
| MWYCFA | Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs |
| RAMSI  | Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands        |
| REP    | Rapid Employment Project                              |
| TRC    | Truth and Reconciliation Commission                   |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme                  |
| YOPP   | Youth Outreach Partnership Project                    |



## FOREWORD

There are more young people between the ages of 10 and 24 today than at any other time in human history. Solomon Islands reflects that global trend.

Although youth make up a substantial part of the population, their involvement in Solomon Islands' society is limited. The Commonwealth's Youth Development Index ranks Solomon Islands 76th globally for youth political participation and 70th in terms of youth civic participation.

If the nation wants to boost its economy, foster positive change and meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are aimed at bringing prosperity to all people by 2030 and protecting the planet, we must engage this key demographic.

Youth in Solomon Islands face similar challenges to their counterparts across the region, such as lack of access to quality and affordable education and health services, unemployment and various types of discrimination.

Youth have identified problems that hinder progress in their own communities. But they have also come up with solutions to those problems using their experiences, knowledge and fresh ideas.

The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund project in Solomon Islands is working to provide platforms for dialogue and empowerment to help youth across the country act as agents of change.

When young people engage in activities that connect them with mentors, youth advocates and inspirational speakers, such as the 2017 Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum, they realize that they have the power to make a difference. Instead of waiting for others to assist youth or blaming them for their failure to act, youth themselves are able and willing to work towards an improved future.

But we must support our youth in their efforts.

This youth status report describes the challenges to youth participation in Solomon Islands and proposes means of inclusion from the community to the national level.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Anouk Ride for giving insights into the lives of youth in Solomon Islands today by compiling this report.

My colleagues at the Prime Minister's Office and the peacebuilding project's partner ministries – the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace – also deserve recognition for their continued collaboration and commitment to the project and Solomon Islands' youth at large.

Our shared objective is to empower young people and build partnerships to bring about the change they seek. It is only with youth that we will achieve our Sustainable Development Goals without leaving anyone behind. UNDP hopes this report will trigger debates and movements that have positive effects on the lives of youth and future generations in Solomon Islands.



Azusa Kubota  
UNDP Solomon Islands Country Manager

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Solomon Islands Youth Status Report is a national report on youth participation in development and political processes. While the youth are a significant cohort of the population – seven out of 10 Solomon Islanders are under 30 years old<sup>1</sup> – there are several obstacles to youth involvement in work and livelihoods, politics and decision-making.

This report details these challenges, provides examples of local ways of including the youth in decisions, and puts forward recommendations for government, development partners (including the UN agencies), community leaders and civil society organizations. It is the first such report to be developed in the past 20 years and comes at a critical time following the withdrawal of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in June 2017 and increased attention on progress in policing and peacebuilding. Its recommendations draw on the five pillars of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, which aims to encourage youth-inclusive development.

This report was developed from November 2016 to July 2017 through several rounds of consultations and a literature review of key research and policy documents. As the lead coordinating ministry on youth affairs, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) published this report in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which commissioned Dr Anouk Ride to draft it.

Prior to publication, the report was reviewed at a stakeholders' workshop involving Solomon Islands Government, bilateral partner governments, non-government agencies and youth representatives, at a session of the National Youth Forum,<sup>2</sup> and in

28 individual meetings with relevant government ministries and experts. Kind thanks are extended to all the agencies that provided information, including the MWYCFA, the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Guadalcanal and Malaita Provincial Governments, Honiara City Council, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, the National Youth Forum, the Solomon Islands Development Trust, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision, Youth at Work, consultant Jimmie Rogers, and various youth, women, church and traditional leaders.

The report is divided into two thematic areas: youth participation in education, employment and livelihoods; and youth participation in politics and governance, including elections, national government, provincial government and community-level decision-making. Ten broad recommendations are provided, each with sub-recommendations with more detailed approaches on pressing issues for young people.

The launch of this report occurs in the same period as the launch of the new National Youth Policy. While the Policy represents the voices and priorities of youth, this report provides background information, evidence and context for the issues youth have raised, and is designed to complement the Policy. Recommendations in this report provide a guide for international and national agencies in the design, conduct and review of youth-related projects and programmes.

Many recommendations in this report are already being implemented by the various agencies involved (see Appendix A and B for summaries). The need for a more strategic approach to education and employment and better interventions in these fields is increasingly

<sup>1</sup> National Statistics Office, *Report on 2009 Population and Housing Census Basic Tables and Census Description* (Volume 1) (Honiara, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> This forum was held 27 February to 1 March 2017 to input into the new

three-tier policy framework around youth. Coordinated by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, it was funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

recognized; however, few interventions have been made to increase youth participation in decision-making (other than local traditions of youth representatives in village committees and through the activities of the Youth Division of MWYCFA). In general, youth participation in politics and development remains piecemeal, under-resourced and in need of further attention.

Solomon Islands has the second youngest population in the Oceania region and its rapid population growth rate means this trend will continue. This presents challenges in terms of providing education and health services, risks in terms of large cohorts of young people being without income-generating activities, and also opportunities for business to supply expanding local markets and for young people to contribute to different sectors with their energy, skills and abilities.

While school attendance rates have been moving towards gender parity, there are significant disadvantages for young women in education – for example, in 2017 only 28 percent of government scholarships for school graduates were awarded to women (26 out of 91 pre-service scholarships). With not only those who have not finished school but also tertiary graduates struggling to find a source of income, many young people lack a sense of purpose and value in society. This is an underlying cause of other issues such as alcohol and substance abuse, anti-social behaviour, crime and conflict (including in the civil conflict of 1998-2003 and incidents of violence during elections since then).

Proposed recommendations in this report to address these issues include reform of employment and livelihood projects, mentorship and internship opportunities, and targeting assistance to disadvantaged groups (particularly young mothers and people with disabilities). Rural youth projects, training opportunities, and community-based education are emphasized in the recommendations, given that around 80 percent of the Solomon population live in rural

areas. It is recommended that scholarships and educational opportunities be better linked with industry needs to ensure educated youths can gain employment. The life skills young people are learning in schools need to be reviewed to assess whether the school system is providing financial literacy and other skills critical for self-employment and entrepreneurship, particularly for those who do not access secondary or tertiary education.

In relation to young people's political participation, the report offers recommendations around peace and reconciliation – particularly the need to encourage learning about local ways of resolving conflict and adapt materials so that young people can engage with the findings of the Final Report of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Certain youth vulnerabilities need to be addressed, such as better protection from sexual exploitation and gender-based violence – through proposed legal reform, further police action and targeting assistance on at-risk areas (especially around logging and mining camps). Preventative and support programmes for people at risk of substance/alcohol abuse and gender-based violence are encouraged in sub-recommendations under Recommendation 8, noting that police reports indicate most crimes involving youth also involve alcohol.

This report highlights that government spending on young people – and youth influence over spending – is relatively low. The entire national annual budget for youth development is only 35 percent of the discretionary funding allocated to just one Member of Parliament, and there is poor transparency around expenditure.

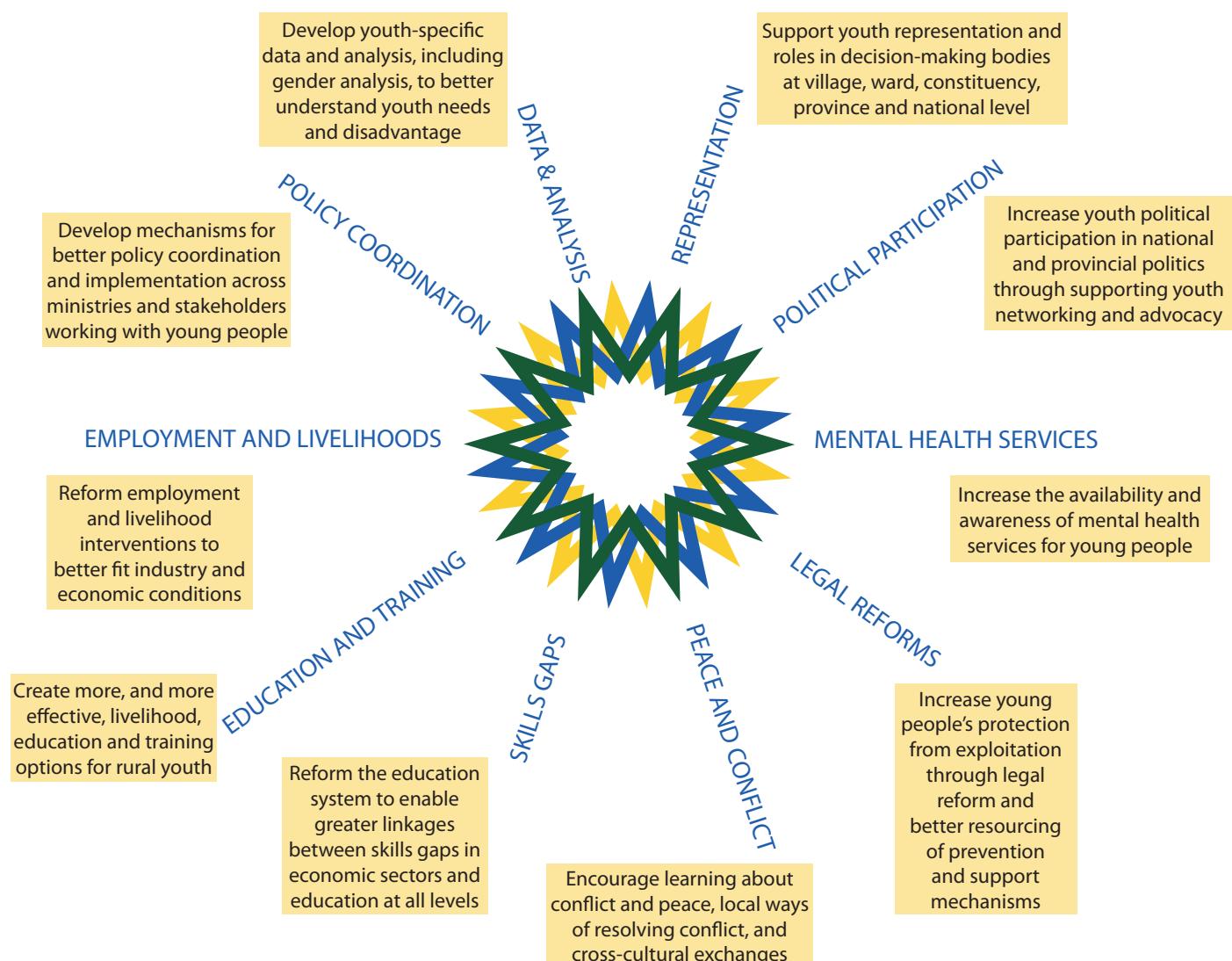
There are a range of grants at national, provincial, constituency, NGO and UN levels that could reward inclusivity in projects – the inclusion of youth and particularly young women and young mothers, people with disabilities, plus cross-cultural exchanges and other activities

that encourage peace and resilience in local communities. Some positive examples are provided from the NGO sector, such as Solomon Islands Development Trust's village committees, which bring young people into decision-making forums.

The nature of politics in Solomon Islands means that young people face significant disadvantages when it comes to being elected into provincial or national leadership positions, and young females face a double disadvantage of gender and youth. Profiling and rewarding cooperation between young people and leaders – such as where chiefs, church leaders or MPs support youth networks, forums, debates and political party participation – is one way of moving towards greater youth

knowledge and participation in politics. It is often said that the youth are the future, but they are in fact the present in Solomon Islands – most islanders are young and development in all sectors cannot proceed fully without their involvement. The report calls for recognition of the potential of young people, which entails their greater involvement in research, stakeholder coordination to meet policy goals, interventions that fit broader macroeconomic and political conditions, and youth involvement at all levels of decision-making. Through these actions, Solomon Islands can provide young people with the future they want and become not only one of the youngest countries in the world, but also one of the most inclusive.

## Recommendations



## INTRODUCTION

Solomon Islands' diverse and growing population is one of the youngest in the world. In 2009, the median age was just 19.7 years.<sup>1</sup> The rapid rate of population growth means that by 2050, the population will exceed Fiji's and reach 1.3 million.<sup>2</sup>

While the youth make up a significant and growing part of the population of Solomon Islands – seven out of 10 Solomon Islanders are under 30 years old<sup>3</sup> – there are several obstacles to youth participation in the economy, politics and decision-making. This has critical impacts on peacebuilding, economic development, government policy and implementation, and community life at the village and town level.

Global-level analyses of younger populations have pointed to certain risks and opportunities in these phenomena. On the one hand, a "youth bulge" in a population can be associated with an increased likelihood of violent conflict and unrest.<sup>4</sup> The growing population puts strain on services, particularly education and health. On the other hand, younger people are also more likely to be receptive to new ideas and learning, and growing populations present significant economic opportunities for production for the local market and ample labour for industry and trade.

The status of Solomon Islands youth is complex and varied across the nine provinces, reflecting the cultural diversity and situational differences in the nation itself. There are around 70 languages spoken in the islands,<sup>5</sup> with different tribal groups

### Youngest in the region?

Solomon Islands has the second youngest population in the region (35 percent of the population is aged 1-14, compared to Vanuatu's 36 percent).

The youth population is likely to continue to be significant and continue rapid growth until at least 2050. The number of people aged 0-24 in Solomon Islands is projected to increase by 19 percent by 2030 (over 120,000 people, equivalent to the whole population of Honiara and outer areas) and 47 percent by 2050 (300,000 people, or three times Honiara City's current population).

This young and growing population presents just one of many significant challenges for the government to provide services to children, youth and parents today and tomorrow.

*Sources: Unicef, Pacific Community, MWYCF*

also having different cultural traditions and norms and levels of interaction and contact with people from other islands or countries. Different locations also have vastly different levels of access to government services and education, economic activity and types of violence and conflict. The civil conflict of 1998-2003, colloquially known as "the tensions", adversely affected Malaita, Guadalcanal and Western Province in particular, with insecurity, armed conflict, crime, sexual violence and violent disputes between and among local armed groups. Youths living in areas affected by conflict face additional challenges to their participation in economic, political and social life (see Box above).

The status of the youth is reflective of the status of economic and social development more broadly, with Solomon Islands being classified as a Least Developed Country. On the Human Development Index 2016 (HDI), Solomon Islands is ranked 156th out of 188 countries and territories. Its HDI of

1 Solomon Islands Government, *Statistical Bulletin 06/2011* (Honiara, 2011), p. 1.

2 The population in 2009 was 636,750. See Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *Revised Pacific population projections* (Noumea, 2016).

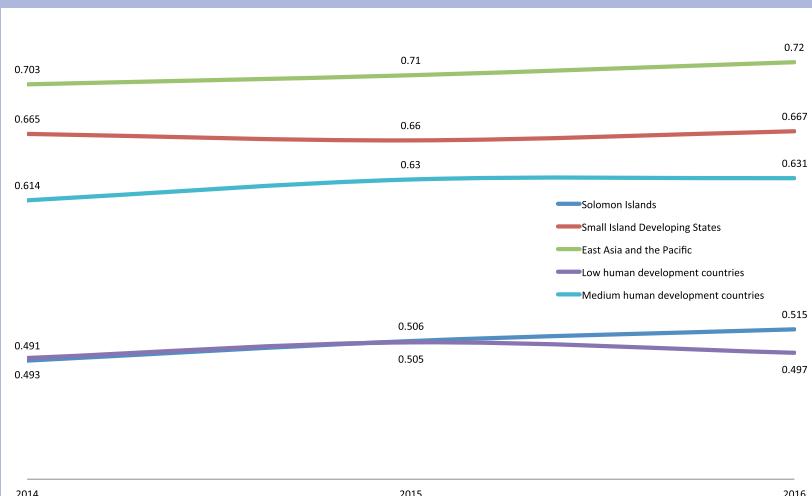
3 National Statistics Office, *Report on 2009 Population and Housing Census*.

4 Henrik Urdal, "A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 50, No. 3 (September 2006), pp. 607-629.

5 Ann Lindvall Arika, "Glimpses of the linguistic situation in Solomon

Islands". International Conference on Languages, Romania, 2012.

# Human Development Index 2014-16



0.515 is slightly above the average of 0.497 for “low human development” countries but well below the average of 0.720 for East Asia and Pacific countries and 0.667 for Small Island Developing States.<sup>6</sup> In 2016, the Global Youth Development Index ranked Solomon Islands 109 out of 183 countries. This index is formed using 18 indicators for education, health and well-being, employment and opportunity, political participation and civic participation. The country ranked only 150 on youth education and 125 on youth health.<sup>7</sup>

This report details the status of youth in Solomon Islands by synthesizing literature, interviews with key informants working on youth policy and projects, and the editor’s own experience and research with young people in Solomon Islands over the past decade. It had substantive input from the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA), the key coordinating agency on youth affairs, and was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the Supporting Peaceful and Inclusive Transition in Solomon Islands Project.

The report is divided into two thematic areas: youth participation in education, employment and livelihoods; and youth participation in decision-making, including elections, national government, provincial government and community-level decision-making. Each thematic subsection identifies what is known and where the knowledge gaps are, as well as suggesting approaches and recommendations. Recommendations are categorized into those relevant for government, development sector and UN agencies.

In formulating recommendations, the emphasis was on those policies and projects in which young people have been involved in participatory and consultative processes to identify their own needs. Recommendations relate to issues raised by the various stakeholders consulted as part of the research for this report. Kind thanks go to all the agencies which provided information to the researcher, including the MWYCFA, the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Guadalcanal and Malaita Provincial Governments, Honiara City Council, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, the National Youth Forum, the Solomon Islands Development Trust, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision, Youth at Work,

<sup>6</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone* (New York, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, *Global Youth Development Index & Report* (London, 2016), pp.124-125.

## **Violent conflict and its effects on youth**

While the “tensions” from 1998-2003 are often referred to as an “ethnic conflict” involving militants from Guadalcanal and Malaita, the causes and types of violence that occurred were far more complex than this suggests. An in-depth conflict analysis conducted by the government in collaboration with UNDP in 2004 found that contributing factors included land, traditional versus non-traditional authority structures, unequal access to government services, unequal development and economic opportunity, inadequate law and justice institutions, youth unemployment and lack of participation, plus a lack of educational opportunity. The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) found that what started as ethnic tensions (with Guadalcanal militants threatening Malaitans and evicting them, with a Malaitan militia in Honiara arising as a response) soon developed into a conflict where most violence was directed by the militants against their own people. Out of the approximately 200 deaths that occurred due to violence, only 20 were caused by militants from the different ethnic groups killing each other. Young people were both victims and combatants, and were engaged by militant groups to serve as cooks, to spy, or to steal property. Young women were particularly vulnerable to intimidation and sexual violence.

On both sides of the conflict, many youths joined the militants because they supported the political causes that militants espoused. There is a sense of relative deprivation on the Weathercoast, which is located on the same island as Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, but is a world away in terms of economic and political opportunities. The militants built support for their cause by building on resentment over the lack of government services and support, political and economic exclusion, and exploitation by outsiders (such as loggers). However, most Weathercoast people giving testimony to the TRC said that while communities supported the militants at first, they soon came to fear and loathe their violent and intimidating behavior.

Similarly, after murders, beatings and the threat of tens of thousands Malaitans being forced out by Guale militants, Malaitans felt a sense of threat and organized militias to “protect” Honiara. However, this protection provided by the Malaitan militants soon deviated into exploitation, with militants ransacking government funds and intimidating families to get access to cars, money and other goods in Honiara, Auki and North Malaita. The line between Malaita militant groups and youth gangs became blurred, with many Malaitan youths reporting enjoying the feeling of power they had wearing army-style clothing and carrying weapons. Marujuana and *kwaso* (homemade alcohol) also became cheaper and more widely available, fuelling anti-social behavior and violence. Chiefs and women leaders around Auki, the provincial capital, and in the region of North Malaita (areas most affected by violence) consistently told the TRC that they were unhappy with militants usurping traditional authority, taking charge of goods and people by threatening them with guns and encouraging violent behaviour by men and male youths.

Structural drivers of the tensions remain largely unchanged today – poverty and relative deprivation, ethnic stereotypes and divisions, high numbers of disaffected youths, elite capture of state resources, low levels of rural development and access to services, and the marginalization of women from politics and decision-making. There is also the lingering aftermath of internal conflicts inside communities because of what happened during the conflict, and unresolved grievances with government. The Solomon Islands TRC has pointed to the critical need to increase youth participation in decision-making at local and national levels, provide youths with employment and encourage learning from the tensions so such conflict is not repeated.

Sources: Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission; UNDP

consultant Jimmie Rodgers and various youth, women, church and traditional leaders.

Across all sectors, youth projects and policies tend to be under-resourced, relying on the

dedication and resourcefulness of staff to continue. This report is indebted to these Solomon Islanders who work with young people to advance their participation in the economy, politics and society.

## Defining youth and the youth population

This report uses the definition of youth stipulated by the previous Solomon Islands National Youth Policy as young people aged 14-29, a definition also shared by the Commonwealth Youth Programme. Data collection by international and national organizations has not always used this definition, however, with the Solomon Islands Census collecting data for youth defined as 15-24 years old, leading to inconsistencies in data sets. However, the term "youth" is a social and functional construct that may not be definitively about age.<sup>8</sup>

In the last nationwide participatory situation analysis involving youths, consultations revealed "youth" was commonly perceived by communities as a category somewhere between student and adult – that is, young people not in tertiary education or employment.<sup>9</sup> This can also be seen today in the discussions in media or other public spaces about the "problem of youth" being largely about youths not working or studying and prone to anti-social behaviours such as dangerous drinking and petty crime. In this discourse, the youths in question are usually young men. It is young men who often move away from their families: in the past, many went to work on plantations or in other labour as a rite of passage; nowadays, they might migrate from villages to urban areas.<sup>10</sup>

Young women do not usually have the same level of freedom of movement owing to fears about their sexuality or vulnerability to exploitation and the perceived need to guard them until marriage. They are also more likely to be tied to domestic work around the house and under care of older

relatives. The idea of youth being relatively free of responsibilities and physical constraints reflects a degree of gender blindness. Research and programmes focused on youth need to pay special attention to the situation of women to explore the differences between young men and women in terms of social status, freedoms and opportunities.

Younger youths, such as teenagers and those in their early 20s, are more vulnerable than older ones who may be transitioning into full adulthood, by virtue of age, getting married or taking on an important role in the community. But older youths who do not make this transition may also have diminished influence or status.<sup>11</sup>

Households in urban areas tend to have higher numbers of younger youths. In Honiara, 56 percent of the population is aged 24 or under,<sup>12</sup> with many younger people coming from other provinces to access schooling or find employment. Households in Honiara usually encompass extended families, including large cohorts of youths. While the average household contains 6.9 people, in Honiara households may include 20 or more, putting significant strain on financial resources.<sup>13</sup>

## ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

### Education

Solomon Islands has made significant strides in the provision of primary school education, but many young people are still not going to secondary school or getting vocational education. This contributes to low levels of human development and to poverty.

Primary school enrolment has increased remarkably since the tensions: in 1999, 28 percent of young people had little or no

8 For a discussion of the concept of youth and implications for youth policy, see: UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, *Youth and violent conflict: Society and development in crisis* (New York, 2006).

9 Hassall & Associates and AusAID, *Youth in Solomon Islands: A participatory study of issues, needs and priorities* (2003), pp. 9-10.

10 Christine Jourdan, *Youth and mental health in Solomon Islands: A situation analysis: tingting helti, tingting siki!* (Suva, Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International, 2008), p.14.

11 Hassall & Associates and AusAID, *Youth in Solomon Islands*.

12 National Statistics Office, *Report on 2009 Population and Housing Census*.

13 Christine Jourdan, *Youth and mental health in Solomon Islands*.

primary education, whereas 94 percent of children in Solomon Islands attended primary school in 2010.<sup>14</sup> In 2009 the government adopted a fee-free policy for primary school – though, in reality, officials at all schools ask for various contributions, meaning cost remains a barrier for some.

The main financial barrier is in secondary schools, where fees steadily rise each year. Annual fees can range from a few hundred Solomon dollars in rural areas to several thousand in Honiara. Other issues leading to children leaving school include teacher absenteeism and poor standards at schools.<sup>15</sup> For example, it is not uncommon to have class sizes of 50 students in Honiara primary schools and to have days and weeks where teachers are absent. Poor teaching also impacts on students' motivation and ability to pass the standard examinations, resulting in many having to leave school. For students with special needs there is inadequate support, and there is little data on disadvantage and education – for example, enrolment rates for people with disabilities.

Irregular individual participation in education can mean discrepancies in age and educational level. In 2009, less than one percent of secondary school students were younger than official age levels and 25 percent of students were 19 or older.<sup>16</sup>

Many students leave the education system altogether in secondary school. The rate of school leaving, 40 percent of all students, has profound effects, with young girls in urban areas leaving school at a faster rate than boys.<sup>17</sup>

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14 UNICEF Pacific and Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *The state of Pacific youth: Opportunities and obstacles* (Noumea, 2011), p. 6.

15 The need to adapt curriculum materials to local contexts, life-skill and labour market needs and the inconsistent supply of textbooks have also been identified as issues, see Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, *Education Strategic Framework 2016-2030* (Honiara, 2016), pp. 17-18.

16 National Statistics Office, *Population and Housing Census Gender Report* (Honiara, 2009), p. 54.

17 Ibid., p. 49.

The previous youth policy referred to people who leave school as "push outs", suggesting social and economic factors, as well as individual performance, are to blame for the phenomenon of high numbers of young people not completing secondary school. Reasons for these rates may differ between young men and young women. In 2009, around 8 percent (almost 2,000) of teenage women had given birth and 85 percent of those were out of school or never went. Around 13 percent of young mothers completed Form 3 as opposed to 25 percent of other women. Most unmarried teenage mothers (72 percent) live with their parents, do not work and rely on others for support.<sup>18</sup>

Young women are more likely to be stigmatized for teenage pregnancy and most who do get pregnant are suspended from school, while the boy-fathers will typically continue schooling. On the other hand, boys are more likely to use *kwasso* (homemade alcohol) or marijuana, which may lead to dropping out of school. In certain areas, young women report having less control or influence over family finances than the young men, which may impact on family choices about whose school fees are paid. However, rising education levels across society are changing these dynamics and leading to the prioritization of education of both sexes.

While school enrolment rates show increasing gender parity, completion of secondary school and further education remains skewed in favour of male students: 47 percent of 18-year-old males are enrolled in education compared to only 37 percent of 18-year-old females. Literacy rates for boys aged 15-24 are 91 percent compared to 88 percent for girls of the same age – a gap narrower than found among older generations, although there may be a discrepancy between these rates and functional literacy.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Ibid., p. 37.

19 The 2009 census included a question to capture the literacy rate by asking the question to all persons 5 years and older: "Can you read and write a simple sentence in one or more of the following languages: English, Pidgin, Local language, or Other language?". The way the question was phrased



*Graduating Form 5 students from Vura Community High School. Photo: Daniel Kakadi*

Access to education is relatively low in rural areas: while 55 percent of children and youth aged 10-19 in Honiara attend secondary school, only 36 percent of the same age group across the whole of Guadalcanal are in school, and only 25 percent in Malaita. These disparities are also reflected in literacy rates – 56 percent in Malaita and 66 percent in Guadalcanal (although testing by the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education found only 7 percent of people in Malaita and 28 percent in Honiara were judged literate).<sup>20</sup>

The concentration of the National Secondary Schools in Honiara has had several effects. First, it means that the chances of rural people accessing education is lower, due to increased costs and travel needed to go to school. It also

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captures a basic skill of reading and writing, and not a more fluent literacy.

<sup>20</sup> David Oakeshott and Matthew Allen, "Schooling as a 'stepping-stone to national consciousness' in Solomon Islands: The last twenty years", Australian National University SSGM Discussion Paper 8: (Canberra, 2015), p. 9.

drives migration to Honiara, with education seen as the way to transition from rural to "modern" life. In areas such as Temotu and Savo, young people have to walk long distances each day (2-4 hours) in order to go to secondary school. Other students may leave their provinces to go to Honiara and stay with extended family, which puts financial pressure on households and can lead to disillusionment if education is not completed or does not lead to work.

In some areas, such as mountainous parts of Malaita and Weathercoast of Guadalcanal, rather than formal schooling, education is traditionally provided in a village setting to teach children about culture and subsistence agriculture. In other areas, for example those reliant on illicit trade such as *kwaso* sales, household poverty and financial pressures may mean education is less of a priority than making a livelihood and earning money.

The lack of resources at Provincial Secondary Schools also puts rural students at a disadvantage in terms of applying for tertiary education, scholarships and other opportunities.<sup>21</sup> The Guadalcanal Provincial Youth Policy (2010), for example, identified many pressing needs for provincial schools, including more qualified teachers and better school facilities and access to the internet – with a recommendation for internet stations in each ward. The lack of internet access in rural areas remains a problem several years later.

Boarding schools in the provinces can provide another option between staying in the village without secondary schools and having to travel all the way to Honiara to access education. However, there has been relatively little consideration of boarding schools and their various impacts. On the one hand, boarding schools offer cross-cultural experiences and friendships through shared experience. On the other, these students can be vulnerable. A 2013 study of natural disasters, for example, found that when disasters occurred, they were effectively left to “fend for themselves”, and in the case of Temotu’s tsunami, the students were unable to contact their families.<sup>22</sup>

Tertiary education tends to entrench elite privilege and gender and other disadvantages. Every year, students complain about scholarships being allocated not according to educational performance but to elite and kin-based privileges. The system tends to disadvantage women: in 2017, only 28 percent of government scholarships for school graduates (26 out of 91 pre-service scholarships) were awarded to women.

There is a need to reform the scholarship system to ensure access according to merit, match scholarships with government and industry needs, and foster effective spending of this large financial allocation. The Education Strategic Framework

responds to this by establishing a Solomon Islands Tertiary Education and Skills Authority to oversee the system, but this is currently in its early stages.<sup>23</sup>

At the postgraduate level, few men or women have the opportunity to study. Only 25 Solomon Islanders currently possess a PhD, which is very low compared with neighbouring countries such as Fiji, and the government stated in 2016 that it wants to support high-achieving tertiary students into post-graduate degrees.

Access to education is only part of the story, however, with many tertiary-educated people unable to find work in their field after their studies. Scholarships have tended to focus on the civil service while neglecting industry needs, resulting in a shortage of finance and managerial staff in most sectors. The tourism and cultural industries, for example, suffer from a lack of managerial, promotional and marketing expertise – skills needed to professionalize services and export cultural products.

At the other end of the spectrum, only one in six school leavers finds paid employment. There is an acute lack of vocational and life-skills training. Rural Training Centres report high demand for the less than 3,000 places offered each year. As stated in a recent report on urban youth:

*...the education system continues to orient young people towards a formal economy and insufficiently prepares them for alternative options, including informal livelihood options. Increasing population numbers have resulted in the current situation where the numbers of vacancies in this sector are few and cannot meet the demand for employment of school leavers.<sup>24</sup>*

<sup>21</sup> Guadalcanal Provincial Government, *Guadalcanal Provincial Youth Policy* (Honiara, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Anouk Ride, Melinda Kii, George West and Dallas Hila, *Information in Natural Disasters – Solomon Islands* (Canberra, AUSAID/SOLMAS, 2013), pp. 25 & 27.

<sup>23</sup> The Authority will also regulate quality and standards for tertiary institutions.

<sup>24</sup> Cameron Noble, Nanise Saune and Natalia Pereira, *Urban youth in the Pacific: Increasing resilience and reducing risk for involvement in crime and violence* (Suva, UNDP, 2011) p. 110.

This was recognized by stakeholders in the National Youth Policy 2017-2030 and in several national policy documents (see Appendix A). School leavers are even more marginalized from the economy than those with some education, although sometimes the obstacles they face regarding participation remain similar. It is not uncommon for educated and uneducated youths to be doing the same activities – such as selling betel nut or running errands for family businesses – in order to eke out a living.

There are broad links between education and conflict drivers – with the current system fuelling population pressure on Guadalcanal and contributing to disparities. But education also has a role to play in peacebuilding. Several authors, notably Christine Jourdan and Jack Maebuta, have argued that the experience of being at school with people from various backgrounds contributes to cross-cultural social linkages and a greater national consciousness. Friendships and connections made in the formative school years are similar to kin bonds in Solomon culture and highly salient to individual decision-making in times of conflict.<sup>25</sup>

The curriculum also matters. The old curriculum used before the tensions contributed to ethnic stereotypes (particularly of Malaitans) through the uncritical use of colonial texts.<sup>26</sup> A recent paper finds that the new materials bring ideas of unity and diversity into the classroom, complemented by religious studies content on conflict resolution and reconciliation. However, it warns that this effect may be constrained by gaps in access to education and the reluctance of teachers to talk about “sensitive” issues such as the tensions.<sup>27</sup> Peace topics have been included in the curriculum.

25 Anouk Ride, *Creativity, testimony and politics – Interpretations of politics in Solomon Islands*, PhD Manuscript, University of Queensland, 2014.

26 Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, “Beyond Ethnicity: the Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands”, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Working Paper 1/1 (Canberra, ANU, 2001).

27 David Oakeshott and Matthew Allen, “Schooling as a ‘stepping-stone to national consciousness’ in Solomon Islands: The last twenty years”.

Social studies in Grades 7-9 (junior secondary level) address causes and solutions to conflict, using examples from Solomon Islands and overseas to get students to think critically about conflict prevention. The Grade 8 curriculum addresses the tensions, peace agreements, reconciliation, local peace work and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).<sup>28</sup> In practice, however, teachers are often wary of tackling these topics. Maebuta has pointed to the need for further teacher training and capacity to provide these courses.<sup>29</sup>

The Malaita and Guadalcanal provincial governments are also developing a peace curriculum to address some of these issues, promote further cultural exchange and break down stereotypes. There is significant local expertise but a lack of resources to undertake curriculum testing, review and teacher training. The youth recommendations from the TRC also pointed to the desirability of young people being encouraged to read, discuss and understand the TRC Final Report.<sup>30</sup>

## Work and livelihoods

Solomon Islands has high youth unemployment. The International Labour Organization puts the youth unemployment rate at over 35 percent, although this is difficult to measure precisely because of informal work, patterns of shifting between agriculture and informal business, variable incomes and lack of data on livelihood incomes. Among young people who do get

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28 Ibid.

29 See, for example, Jack Maebuta, “Understanding the indigenous context for peace education in Temotu, Nendo, Solomon Islands”, *Educate*, vol. 10, No. 1 (2010), pp. 2-5.

30 Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Confronting the truth for a better Solomon Islands, the Final Report of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Honiara, 2013), p. 769. (At the time of preparation of this report, the final report had not yet been endorsed by Parliament as a step preceding its release.)

## Working or just keeping busy? Employment and livelihood programs

Solomon Islands has a range of projects designed to address youth employment and livelihoods. The World Bank-funded Rapid Employment Project (REP) aims to provide skills to participants, pay wages and build small-scale infrastructure (e.g. pedestrian steps or "Jacobs ladders") to communities such as those in the frontier areas of Honiara, commonly home to many squatters. REP has reached many people (around 12,000 in urban works and services) and in 2015 53 percent of participants were youths. It is expected to continue until 2018.

Youth at Work (Y@W) is an initiative of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community that is currently funded by a range of donors and focuses on skills training, unpaid internships and getting participants "ready for work". Over 2,000 youths have participated in the scheme, mostly in Honiara, but there are also local offices in Gizo, Western Province and Auki, Malaita. Provincial offices have more focus on entrepreneurial support as the organization also has a small amount of funding (2,000 Solomon Islands dollars, or US\$260) for non-cash support for young people starting businesses under the Youth Entrepreneur Program (which uses curriculum materials developed by the International Labour Organization). People with disabilities and former prison inmates are actively recruited to participate. Y@W has funding in place until 2020.

A recent analysis by Daniel Evans\* found that while these programmes had positive impacts in terms of soft skills transfer, they had a limited impact on the likelihood participants would find employment or more stable incomes. In surveys of participants, around 85 percent had not found employment following participation in REP and only 16-22 percent had saved any wages they earned. Survey data from Y@W indicated one in three participants had full- or part-time work, which is lower than the national employment rate for 15-24 year olds of 43 percent.

Changes are now being made to Y@W recruitment to match youths with assistance (with more focus on entrepreneur vs formal employment), support for youth entrepreneurs to obtain proper licensing and other documents needed (e.g. for food preparation), making the community service component more relevant to intended livelihoods, adaptation of training materials for low literacy, and ongoing mentoring and refresher sessions after the programme has finished. The challenges that more disadvantaged groups face – particularly those who cannot read and write, people with disabilities and people with a criminal record – plus the saturation of the formal employment market, persist.

World Vision was also engaged in youth employment through its Honiara Youth Development, Employment and Small Enterprise Project, which provides skills training, partnerships to increase youth employment opportunities, and small business support. World Vision formed partnerships directly with companies to encourage them to take on short-term young employees. Out of approximately 50 placements, eight found ongoing work with these companies. It had high rates of success for the livelihood part of the project which gave youth skills to conduct one-page market surveys, develop a plan for small business activities (e.g. selling phone credit, market stalls and livestock) and present their proposals, with the successful presenters receiving start-up support equivalent to US\$350 per person. Out of 16 businesses, 11 continued and many of these have expanded. Lessons learnt included the importance of mentorship for business and young employee alike: a buddy system has been set up to try and provide ongoing support to young people. The project began in 2014 and ended in 2017.

Save the Children has been recently engaged in two projects relevant to livelihoods. The Youth Outreach Partnership Project (YOPP), which ended in 2015, was focused on youth-led livelihood projects and increasing youth participation and decision-making in community leadership. Over 2,000 young people in 29 sites across Malaita, Guadalcanal, Western Province and Choiseul participated. In Choiseul Province, three savings clubs were established with approximately 20 members each and in Malaita, YOPP led to a successful chicken farm selling chickens to hotels in Auki. Reviews of the projects found the project was implemented on the same model for rural and urban communities, despite different strengths and needs. It was found the Strengths Based Approach was more difficult in urban areas where community members do not necessarily own the natural resources and material assets around them.

Save the Children's previous project – Supporting Youth in Dealing with Alcohol Use to Reduce Violence against Women and Children in Solomon Islands – worked with the youth in communities around Honiara and Auki. The project included support for youth involvement in development and monitoring of community by-laws, awareness and capacity building and diversionary activities (such as sports and music). However, young people involved in the project expressed a need for diversionary activities to include education and livelihoods. The need for livelihood activities has an added significance for the communities in which Save the Children works, where many families are dependent on sales of illicit substances and leaders want to offer alternative livelihoods.

Lessons learnt from each of these projects illustrate the importance of targeting assistance to local employment markets and local market needs, planning for literacy and other capacity barriers, and providing ongoing support such as mentoring rather than "one-off" interventions.

\* Daniel Evans. "Hard work: Youth employment programming in Honiara, Solomon Islands" Australian National University SSGM Discussion Paper 7 (Canberra, ANU, 2016)

formal employment, turnover can be high.<sup>31</sup> Certain sectors such as retail and journalism have generally young workforces but they also tend to be low-paid.

Lower education levels and the fact that most women get married in their early or mid-twenties impacts on women's employment. The average age at first marriage is 23.3 for women and 27.1 for men.

Young mothers in particular are less likely to be able to participate in work and the economy. In the 2009 census, young mothers in rural areas produced goods for their own consumption (56 percent), but most urban teenage mothers were doing unpaid domestic work (60 percent). Only 17 percent of young mothers were in paid employment (28 percent of those in urban areas and 16 percent of those in rural areas).

Their options are limited due to childcare responsibilities and lower levels of education.<sup>32</sup>

An area which has been identified as a priority for youth in successive consultations is support for livelihood projects. Youth livelihood programmes have been predominantly focused on urban areas, despite the fact most youth live in rural areas (see box on page 17). Access to credit and start-up funds remains a key challenge for young people. Another issue is the lack of business strategy and planning – for example spaces such as youth markets may have several stalls selling the same product, rather than developing youth finance and business skills to identify market needs and plan their production and sales. Financial literacy and management skills have been identified as a need in many areas, with women's microfinance programmes having some success in Western Province and Malaita in increasing incomes and savings, but targeted approaches to help

disadvantaged young women such as single mothers are absent.

Projects to address youth employment and livelihoods are mostly short in duration, leading the Solomon Islands TRC to recommend more "strategic long-term" interventions.<sup>33</sup> Programmes devised to help young people into work have strengthened their "soft skills" such as communication, applying for jobs or anger management, but have not in the main led to employment (see Box 3).<sup>34</sup> This is partly to do with the limited job market in the country, with Honiara estimated to have only around 10,000 full-time positions available, but partly it is a failure in the design of education and work projects to tailor their interventions to industry needs and skills gaps. Skills gaps include technical and professional roles in life sciences, health, natural resource extraction, building and trades, education, retail and tourism, science and engineering, arts and culture and agricultural trade. As a result of the lack of foresight in education and employment policy and projects on the part of government, donors and partners,<sup>35</sup> many skilled positions in these fields are routinely filled by expatriates rather than Solomon Islanders.

The lack of analysis of markets – whether local markets or trade between Melanesian Spearhead Group countries – means youth employment programmes are trying to get young people into sectors that are already crowded. Much project planning around employment and livelihoods is also blind to the needs of the rural youth. Most poor people (87 percent) live in rural areas and even more of the extremely poor do so, according to the 2012/2013 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. The writers comment:

33 Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, p. 768.

34 Daniel Evans, "Hard Work", pp. 15-17.

35 RAMSI, for example, was criticized for not engaging with the private sector, see Humanitarian Futures Programme, "The Private Sector, the Solomon Islands and the Peace-Economic Dividend: Learning from the RAMSI Experience" (London, Kings College, 2013).

31 Daniel Evans, "Hard work: Youth employment programming in Honiara, Solomon Islands" Australian National University SSGM Discussion Paper 7 (Canberra, ANU, 2016), p. 4.

32 National Statistics Office, *Population and Housing Census Gender Report*. p. 39.

*Overall, between 87-99 percent of the poor are found in rural areas, with the higher percentage obtained when using more austere poverty lines and the poverty severity index. In other words, more of the total poverty is found in rural areas if the attention is focused on the poorest.<sup>36</sup>*

Yet, livelihood projects are primarily targeted at the urban youth (see box on page 17) and do not link young people with emerging new export sectors and commodity production – such as cocoa and other agricultural goods – or opportunities to produce niche products or commodities currently exported from overseas. Exploring such avenues could potentially provide employment and livelihood opportunities for urban and rural youths alike.

Youth employment and livelihood opportunities are dependent on broader economic policy and planning. This

can include national development strategies and plans and emerging bilateral and regional issues such as labour mobility of Pacific workers to fill skills and staffing shortages in other countries. As a 2006 UNDP report argued about youth unemployment internationally:

*The youth employment challenge is larger than just creating jobs; it concerns the fundamental and challenging problem of how to establish functioning economies, to promote and redistribute growth and to generate government revenue. If youth employment is to be seriously addressed, training must be accompanied by governmental regulations and incentives favourable to the employment of young people, an increase in international investment and an improved macroeconomic environment.<sup>37</sup>*

In Solomon Islands, the participation of youth in the economy is tied to these elements as well. For instance, the Guadalcanal Youth Policy states:

*Each year more than 1,500 youths waits to enter into the labour market, but the provincial economy is unable to create jobs for this numbers...*

*rehabilitation of the provincial economy and implementation of a comprehensive program of the rural development would keep the youths busy in productive employment.<sup>38</sup>*

Youth unemployment is associated with the risk of exploitation – particularly sexual exploitation of young girls around logging and mining camps and foreign fishing vessels. Street prostitution in Honiara often involves young women who have experienced abuse at home, while prostitution at hotels and bars involves both local and Asian migrant women. It is unclear if these trades also

include young boys. Investigation and prosecution of the sex trade is rare. In September 2017, the first case of human

trafficking, involving a young girl married to a foreign logger, was before the courts.

**“Livelihood projects are primarily targeted at the urban youth and do not link young people with emerging new export sectors”**

Only Save the Children and UNICEF are actively working on prevention through awareness and child protection programmes locally, while the ILO builds capacity through its Pacific Sub-Regional Child Labor and Trafficking Program. At the government level, the Advisory Committee on Children informs Cabinet and coordinates the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>39</sup> The Committee on the Rights of the Child has pointed to several inconsistencies on minimum ages that could be changed to reflect international standards: the minimum

36 Solomon Islands National Statistics Office and World Bank Group, *Solomon Islands poverty profile based on the 2012/13 household income and expenditure survey* (Honiara, 2015), p. 14.

37 UNDP, “Youth and violent conflict: Society and development in crisis” (New York, UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, 2006) p. 74.

38 Guadalcanal Provincial Government, *Guadalcanal Provincial Youth Policy*, p. 3.

39 United States Department of Labor, *Child Labor and Forced Labor Report: Solomon Islands* (Washington, DC, 2015).

age of criminal responsibility is just 8 years old, employment 12 and marriage 15.<sup>40</sup>

The lack of adequate opportunities for young people to participate in the informal and formal economy makes lasting peace harder to sustain, with young men who lack direction more prone to recruitment by militant or criminal groups – as happened during the tensions. The Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study also found a correlation between male unemployment and violence against women. Focus groups pointed to the financial stressors on Honiara households combining with changing gender norms to create arguments between couples.<sup>41</sup>

In Honiara, while there are regulations that set aside certain sectors such as transport for indigenous small businesses, the entry of Asian migrants and their subsequent scapegoating for broader governance failures is also creating a potential security risk. One report argues that the resentment faced by Chinese businesses has led them to rely on private security companies, which in turn recruit many young men. Different businesses use security staff from different *wantok* (tribal/language groups) groups, which has in the past led to outbreaks of fighting.<sup>42</sup>

Lack of employment and livelihood opportunities affects many young people's sense of self-worth and their ability to participate in social, community and political life. Many scrape by on a subsistence level in rural areas or through odd jobs or support from others in urban areas, and this reduces their sense of agency. A 2005 UNICEF report pointed to the fact that the wide range of barriers to youth participation in the economy meant youths lacked a sense of control regarding work and livelihoods:

*It is interesting that most of the young people interviewed for this report said they had not given much thought to their future career and possible sources of employment. It seemed that since they did not expect to have the opportunity to choose they had decided that there was little point in making any plans. They just seemed to assume that they would have to do whatever work they could find.<sup>43</sup>*

A study of mental health found that school leavers or those who had received little schooling were at risk of social and psychological difficulties such as isolation and depression. They felt a need, linked to their self-esteem, to place themselves in their communities through taking on productive roles.<sup>44</sup>

## PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Youth participation in decision-making, politics and governance in Solomon Islands reflects a complex mix of cultural, political, historical and circumstantial factors. The Commonwealth's Youth Development Index ranks Solomon Islands in the medium grouping for "political participation" at 76th globally. The nation also ranked medium (70th in the world) in terms of "civic participation" (a rating calculated on factors such as volunteering time and willingness to help strangers).<sup>45</sup> However, the positive attributes that lead to these middle rankings do not generally translate into young people having an influence in political decision-making, as explored below.

Young people can generally vote without hindrance and participate politically in other ways, such as taking part in rallies and engaging in advocacy. In some areas, however, MPs will secure the support of male youths, generally through cash payouts, to attend rallies or parade through towns and villages in trucks. They will also provide

40 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Solomon Islands: Child Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review, 11th Session – 2011*, 4th May.

41 Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: a study on violence against women and children* (Noumea, 2009).

42 Humanitarian Futures Programme, "The private sector, the Solomon Islands and the peace-economic dividend", pp. 8-10.

43 UNICEF, *Solomon Islands: A situation analysis of children, women and youth* (Honiara, 2005), p. 36.

44 Christine Jourdan, *Youth and mental health in Solomon Islands*, p. 9.

45 Commonwealth Secretariat, *Global Youth Development Index & Report*. Noumea: UNICEF/Secretariat of Pacific Community.



*Form 5 graduation at Mbokona Community High School. Photo: Daniel Kakadi*

transport to make sure their supporters vote. There were allegations in the 2014 election that MPs had sought to manipulate the vote by paying people to register to vote in constituencies other than the ones they lived in.

Wherever there is unrest during election campaigns, male youths are prominent. However, to blame “wayward youth” for fostering violence in election times is to turn a blind eye to the role of many different parts of society and wider governance problems.

After the 2006 election, looting in Honiara targeted Chinese businesses (although longstanding family-run businesses with good local security networks were generally spared). Young men were seen breaking into the stores, but women waited outside to carry the looted goods home. Many people who lamented these events had also expressed their own resentment of corrupt MPs and their perceived Asian backers. While the riots were often blamed on young men, a wide array

of factors contributed to the incidents – including resentment of foreign control of economic sectors and influence over politics, and dissatisfaction with corruption and poor governance.<sup>46</sup>

A Commission of Inquiry into the matter found that what appeared to be “spontaneous riots” in fact showed signs of having been planned, although it was difficult to identify which political and business leaders were involved, while the lines of responsibility between looters and leaders were blurred. The Commission tried to explain the violent action, noting that planning may be the wrong thing to look for:

*Evidence points to a far more organic process in which commonalities are understood, and do not have to be articulated, or discussions on ways and means are kept to a minimum so that the action is in the hands of individuals, their ability to work as a team, and group cohesion.<sup>47</sup>*

<sup>46</sup> Anouk Ride, *Creativity, testimony and politics*.

<sup>47</sup> Solomon Islands Government, *Second Interim Report, Commission of*

## **From troublemakers to decision-makers – local initiatives to increase rural youth participation**

Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) has a focus on rural development and works in the nine provinces of the country. Administration Officer Kathrine Sanga said there are challenges that the rural youths face, commenting: "Some communities see youths as demeaning and troublemakers thus are not fit to make decisions on a community level."

SIDT counters this with youth participation and representation in all their committees and projects. Sanga cites their advocacy and awareness group as an example where the characteristics of youth made young people more effective in social change. The young people in the groups were willing to travel and their high energy levels made them engaging performers, said Sanga, with communities reporting their visits were memorable.

SIDT uses Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to discuss issues affecting the village community. Youth involvement in the PRA is substantial and continues to grow as more youths and women become aware of their right to voice their concerns and make significant decisions in the community.

Project Coordinator Augustine Todonga emphasized that in the PRA process young people have the space to contribute on issues that affect them in their community: "Over the past PRA meetings, some active youth representatives raised issues like education and sanitation as the main issues affecting their livelihood in their villages." After the issues are listed, they are prioritised and SIDT assistance is offered to see if they need outside support or look at ways to advocate on the issues listed. The PRA also helps village plans to design small community projects.

Speaking highly of the SIDT's programmes and approaches, Todonga said he knows how well these programmes have helped shape young lives. In his early 20s, he was a participant in SIDT's Youth Mental Health Program, which spurred his interest in advocacy. Now in his late 20s, he is responsible for coordinating all the trainings and PRA.

"It is understood that some young people limit their participation due to their education level. They have low self-esteem, while in some communities women and youths are not encouraged to take part," Todonga said. However, he says these challenges can be overcome if programmes like PRA continue to build cooperation in the villages, supplemented with community-organizing skills and advocacy about the rights of women and youths in the community.

*Box by Georgianna Lepping (youth and reporter/fiction writer)*

The looters were taking a particular role in a broader political drama of what was happening in Parliament, and one they felt would be socially supported.

The phenomenon of youth violence masking broader social and political problems was also seen in the lead-up to the tensions. The then Police Commissioner remarked that the nascent militant group were "young people who want a bit of fun and adventure".<sup>48</sup>

*Inquiry into the April 2006 Civil Unrest in Honiara*, 7 September 2007, pp. 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, "Beyond ethnicity the political economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands". Australian National University

This complex mix of participation and exclusion of youth in political dynamics is compounded by the fact that in most households, the question of who to vote for is a communal rather than individual decision, generally based on pragmatic considerations of which candidate is most likely to offer assistance, as well as kin and other loyalties (including relationships of employment). In Solomon culture, a person who gives a gift or favour is generally owed something in return, and so funds or material assistance may be considered "gifts" that establish loyalty to MPs. These loyalties may be weighted more heavily than policy or other matters in voting decisions. In the lead-

SSGM Working Paper 1/1 (Canberra, 2001).

up to elections, MPs use this to their advantage, giving out many small grants, supplies, or cash to individuals or households on “devils night”, the night before the election, to shore up support.

MPs are usually well-resourced and become more so through the holding of office. With state support, they often act as “landlords” for local land and resources, meaning, as Foukana and Timmer argue, that “wealth in Solomon Islands is highly politicized and dependent on the bargaining position of the state and foreign investors.”<sup>49</sup>

These electoral and political dynamics work against young people being elected to provincial or national parliaments as they do not have the resources to demonstrate their value as leaders and participate in gift-giving.<sup>50</sup> However, they can and do play important roles in influencing voting, organizing for the candidates, and advocating on youth and other causes.

Publicly challenging MPs and influential electoral candidates on youth concerns can be risky and difficult on several levels. First, cultural norms mean young people rarely speak when an elder is speaking or present in meetings and events, meaning appropriate spaces must be given for them to develop their ideas and the confidence to express them. Second, many MPs claim to have seen lists of voter preferences and use them to determine who gets constituency-based assistance (favouring those who voted for them). In rural electorates this may be particularly conducive for silencing dissent as constituency funds are the largest and most visible source of funds in communities that lack other national, provincial or NGO services and support.

Finally, the large groups of supporters for certain MPs, who are generally male, can be intimidating for people who wish to speak in public forums. Females and marginalized groups may feel particularly open to ridicule or threats to their personal security. Elections can be tense, marked by fear of rival groups engaging in intimidation or violence.

Young women in particular are likely to face a “double marginalization” from politics –because of their youth and because politics tends to be seen as business for men. There is currently just one female MP, who is also the Minister for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. In 2017, there were just five provincial female members: two from Isabel, (which has matrilineal land traditions and female chiefs), and three female members from other provinces (one each from Malaita, Western Province and Temotu). However, women and young women are active as organizers in civil society groups – leadership that is often not recognized and given the same status as male political leadership.<sup>51</sup> In 2017, the Solomon Islands Women Peace and Security National Action Plan (2017-2020) was launched, and this includes the aim of a biennial parliamentary forum on women and girls’ security as a mechanism to elevate young women’s concerns on politics and security.

Given young people’s lack of voice in elections and the high proportion of the population that is young, it is important that the government provides opportunities for youth participation in policy-making. The snapshot of major economic and development policies in Appendix A shows that there are provisions related to youth in all of them. All recognize the critical need to formulate assistance targeted to youth, with those in the MWYCFA and Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation (MNURP) having a particular focus on youth participation in policy formation and governance.

49 Joseph Foukona and Jaap Timmer, “The culture of agreement making in Solomon Islands”, *Oceania* vol. 86, No. 2 (July 2016), pp. 116-131.

50 For a valuable report on how these dynamics reduce the likelihood and opportunities for women to get elected see: Kirir Dicker, Afu Billy and Alison Barclay, *The influence of gender norms and attitudes on voter preferences in Solomon Islands* (Suva: UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office, 2016).

51 Alice Aruhe'eta Pollard, “Women’s organizations, voluntarism, and self-financing in Solomon Islands”, *Oceania*, vol. 74, Nos. 1-2 (Sep-Dec 2003), pp. 44-58.

The National Youth Policy 2017-2030 is complemented by a new Strategic Framework for Youth Development in Solomon Islands and a new national Youth Employment Strategy that sits beneath it. A recent rapid assessment of the 2010-2015 policy by the MWYCFA found that while there had been successes – namely a number of skills-training and capacity-building activities, community policing awareness, and youth leadership in church activities – there were also several shortfalls. The main issue was the fact that the previous policy was only partially implemented due to capacity and finance constraints. More resources went to priority areas of “youth and career paths” and “youth and governance” while other priority areas (health, peacebuilding, sustainable development and youth mainstreaming) were relatively neglected. The majority of activities were implemented in Honiara, with provinces and rural areas mostly running their own activities through local youth groups and church groups, sometimes supplemented with small grants from provincial governments.<sup>52</sup> This was compounded by a lack of information, insufficient clarity on avenues for supporting local activities, poor collaboration between stakeholders (NGOs and others) and inadequate networking and coordination among government ministries. Resourcing for better planning and coordination of implementation of the Policy, bringing stakeholders into governance frameworks and the need for implementation in all provinces, will be vital to the success of the National Youth Policy.

A lack of coherence negatively impacts the policies' overall effectiveness. For instance, the National Children's Policy also includes 15-18 year olds, and national agencies such as the National Statistics Office do not use the MWYCFA definition of youth in their reports.

Several policy documents offer different strategies to deal with youth unemployment,

livelihoods and education. This means that several ministries are doing similar activities in an uncoordinated fashion. It is also very difficult to gather data on what is being done by the whole of government to assist young people. While the Youth Division of the MWYCFA is responsible for policy coordination and does this through the formation of the National Youth Policy and its frameworks, it remains too under-staffed and under-resourced to accurately monitor and report on implementation across the various ministries and partner organizations.

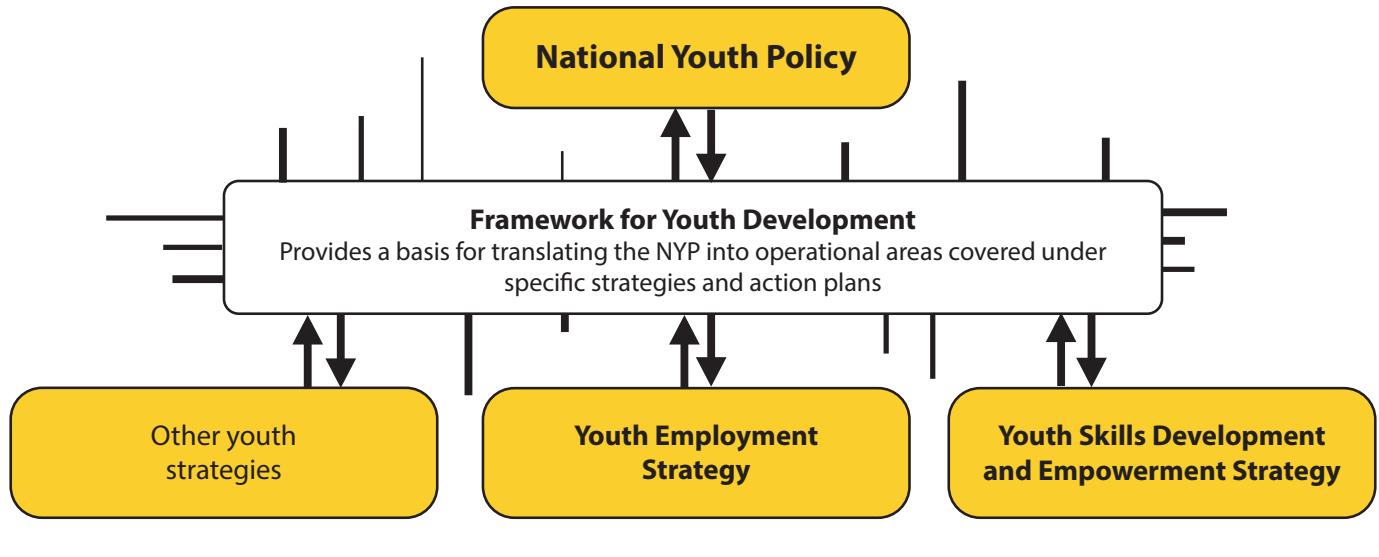
Particularly at provincial government level, stakeholders reported various international NGOs failing to seek advice or support before starting projects, and there were difficulties tracking NGO activities and directing them in a strategic and coordinated manner. This may be having adverse impacts – for example, as seen from the box on page 17, most NGO employment and livelihood projects are being directed to Honiara and other towns, which may promote rural-urban shifts. Similarly, projects to increase youth political participation and decision-making are predominantly urban, as illustrated in Appendix B. Livelihood projects that are relevant to young people in rural Malaita and rural Guadalcanal are still a major gap in assistance to alleviate rural-urban drift, rural poverty and migration, and pressures on land and services in urban areas.

National and provincial governments have created structures for youths to be represented in decision-making. The government supported the creation of a National Youth Congress, Provincial Youth Councils and Youth Stakeholders Coordination and Monitoring Committee. At the village level, associations often have youth representatives on committees (such as church, NGO project committees, village development committees) and these feed into Ward Youth Committees. The figure opposite illustrates the structure of the National Youth Policy 2017-2030.

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52 Interviews with MWYCFA staff and consultant Jimmie Rogers.

## National Youth Policy three-tier framework



Source: MWYCFA

However, most of these structural mechanisms for youth representation survive through the goodwill of volunteers. There have been problems retaining participants for the National Youth Congress, Provincial Youth Councils and Ward Youth Committees, with the result that, in Guadalcanal for instance, some of these levels are bypassed in favour of direct contact between local youth groups to the provincial government.

There needs to be better resourcing, connection, transparency and accountability with respect to these bodies. The young people they represent may feel left out of these initiatives. In this regard, it may be useful to analyse aspects of power in youth representation. For instance, if all "youth representatives" are actually sons of chiefs, then other youths are likely to feel excluded from decision-making. Building on local youth groups which demonstrate engagement through broad membership and activities could serve to increase accountability.

The institutions which have the best connections with these local grassroots youth groups are provincial governments. The local knowledge

and commitment of provincial government staff essentially provides the main avenue of government support for youth participation in political and social life in rural areas.

However, provincial government activities are critically under-resourced, with generally one staff member per province and annual budgets as low as 3,000-5,000 Solomon Islands dollars (US\$430-720) to fund youth forums and activities in the province. This is a particular challenge for provinces with larger populations, such as Guadalcanal, Makira and Malaita and areas where travel between islands is costly, such as Shortlands, Temotu and Western Province. In the case of Honiara City Council, only 80,000 Solomon Islands dollars (USD \$11,400) was given to the Youth Division in 2016. Despite the importance of youth in policy documents, young people's worth is not reflected in government funding for activities to foster their participation in politics and governance.

Several key informants commented on the phenomenon of politicians and governmental leaders relegating "youth" to a concern for

sports and church sectors, rather seeing them as critical to national issues such as democracy and economic growth. Youth can be included in national dialogue and discussion and recently had the opportunity to participate in the National Peace Dialogue in 2017. The NGO sector has been successful in promoting youth participation in village or suburb-level decision-making by requiring youth representation on committees as a condition for assistance (see box on page 22, which describes the approach of Solomon Islands' oldest NGO, the Solomon Islands Development Trust). Similarly, the churches have a tradition of youth activities and reaching out to the youth to engage with the church. Local groups, such as Red Cross volunteers, Girl Guides, Scouts, Pathfinders and others, build youth networks and skills which may be of critical importance during disasters and crisis.

Encouraging youth-inclusive structures at village level is critical, as young people are marginalized from key decisions, such as decisions about land. In Solomon Islands, membership of a tribe is intimately linked to land, but layers of colonial decisions, migration, displacement through tribal conflicts and the tensions, plus logging and mining developments have strained traditional land systems and created many disputes around land. Younger generations have disagreed with older generations giving land rights to outsiders. Temporary land rights split communities between those who gained from the initial deal and those who inherited the decisions of their elders, further fuelling land insecurity and conflict.<sup>53</sup> Brokers will typically offer traditional leaders cash in exchange for access to land, with young people left out of such deals.<sup>54</sup>

At the national and constituency level, the gap between funds available for youth and those

for other political priorities is most dramatically illustrated by the size and use of resources allocated to MPs. According to the 2016 budget, Constituency Development Funds nationally amount to US\$50 million.

Information about how these funds are spent and who their beneficiaries are is scarce. A World Bank review said funds were distributed and spent rapidly, but their efficiency and effectiveness, accountability, transparency, dispute management and sustainability were rated as poor.<sup>55</sup> NGOs attempt to highlight information about how funds are spent and their consequences for local development. These include the Solomon Islands Development Trust, which uses information from villages to report on the state of rural development in constituencies and conducts voter education and awareness (funded by the European Union). In 2017, Transparency Solomon Islands conducted, with the support of the UN Democracy Fund, a community audit of constituency funds which found public awareness of these funds was extremely low (only 14 of 1,000 people were aware and had basic knowledge of the fund).<sup>56</sup>

Provincial governments, the primary agent for youth policy implementation, are allocated just US\$430-720 a year for youth activities; the Honiara City Council was allocated US\$11,400 in 2016; while the Youth Development Division of MWYCFA budget is around US\$430,000 a year. In contrast, each MP was allocated just under US\$1 million in various constituency funds in 2016, which means the entire national annual budget for youth development was less than half of the discretionary funding allocated to just one MP.<sup>57</sup> A recent MNURP consultative process identified

55 World Bank, *Solomon Islands: Towards better investment in rural communities* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2014).

56 Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, "Mi no save: Solomon Islanders confused on CDF fund" July 24, 2017 as accessed online 24 September 2017: [www.sibconline.com.sb/mi-no-save-solomon-islanders-confused-on-cdf-fund](http://www.sibconline.com.sb/mi-no-save-solomon-islanders-confused-on-cdf-fund)

57 Figures for 2016 are that constituency funds amounted to a rounded figure of \$350 million SBD with each MP receiving almost \$7 million SBD in funds. Exchange rate used for this conversion is 7 Solomon to 1 US dollar.

53 Jon Fraenkel, *The manipulation of custom: From uprising to intervention in the Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Pandanus Books/Australian National University, 2004), p. 58.

54 Joseph Foukona and Jaap Timmer, "The culture of agreement making in Solomon Islands". Noumea: UNICEF/Secretariat of Pacific Community.

constituency funds as a critical issue. Young people recommended that a portion of constituency funds be allocated to youth issues, and that provincial governments be better resourced to implement youth policies.<sup>58</sup>

How young people can better access information about constituency funds

and influence MP decision-making is a critical issue for the future of Solomon Islands. Constituency funds are growing in size and are allocated with the aim of reaching out to all areas of the country, including remote and disadvantaged communities. In a few electorates, MPs have engaged with young people and identified needs for support and followed through with new projects, but in the vast majority of constituencies information about constituency funds and youth is not easily available.

Building the confidence of youth groups to better engage in policy making and development processes takes time and requires different ways of working than those used with other groups in society. Successful initiatives have tended to employ a participatory methodology rather than formal lecture- or classroom-style activities. Many stakeholders consulted for this report emphasized the value of youth-to-youth communication and youth forums but also the need to not conduct youth projects in isolation from the rest of the community but instead seek support and advice from traditional and church leaders and keep them informed on progress.

Youth empowerment is only accomplished by young people's active participation throughout the process of policy development and project implementation. Young people should be

allocated an active role in research and project design, and they have demonstrated their abilities in this area. For instance, young people delivered many of the key testimonies to the TRC on

human rights violations affecting their parents and other family members.

Young people

were also involved in the process of collecting and analysing statements. A recent FotoVois (PhotoVoice) exhibit organized by Youth at Work was designed for youths to discuss and share problems and issues relating to unemployment, with stories emerging about engaging in unlawful activities, family distress, drug and alcohol abuse, and political instability. FotoVois has also been used as a participatory analysis tool by youth leaders in Malaita as part of the youth development work of regional organisation Olofou. A participatory data analysis workshop using stories found young people in Honiara were particularly keen to use indirect ways to express their views and discuss sensitive issues such as discrimination, alcohol abuse, mental health and gender-based discrimination – such as through film, music and fiction.<sup>59</sup> These examples indicate that, provided inclusive and safe spaces are provided to hear their views, young people can play a positive role in identifying causes and solutions to violence and social problems in the community.

Gender-based violence and alcohol/substance abuse are cross-cutting issues that contribute to poor health and lower youth participation in community and national life and which create violent dynamics in communities. Rising levels of alcohol and substance abuse are often associated with crime and violence.<sup>60</sup>

58 These involved youth forums in: Taro, Choiseul Province; Gizo, Noro, and Seghe in the Western Province; Buma, Malaita Province; and Tabalia and Kuma in Guadalcanal Province. See Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, "Review of Youth Peacebuilding Forums" (Honiara: MNURP/MWYCPA, 2012).

59 Anouk Ride, *Creativity, testimony and politics*.

60 From 2005- 2010, RSIPF's Crime Statistics recorded a total of 3057 alcohol related offenses for the 12-45 age group. These alcohol offenses included disorderly behavior, drunk and disorderly conduct, consuming



Youths participating in a dialogue hosted by the Prime Minister and supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

Photo: Karl Bouro

In a household survey conducted in Temotu and the Weathercoast, when asked, "What do you think are the main causes of violence in families in your community?", 91 percent of respondents in Temotu and 70 percent of respondents in the Weathercoast area nominated alcohol.<sup>61</sup> In the last People's Survey in 2013 commissioned by RAMSI, 91 percent said the main cause of conflict and problems in their community was alcohol, drugs and/or *kwaso*.<sup>62</sup> Alcohol and substance abuse is also perceived by young people as a major cause of conflict in communities – although few

participatory studies have been conducted, one found "alcohol, marijuana and teenage pregnancy were almost ubiquitous issues for young women" and alcohol was in the top three issues of concern to young men.<sup>63</sup>

Young people are often involved in the family production and sale of illicit substances, with communities around Honiara such as Fishing Village, White River and Burns Creek known for this trade. In village settings, *kwaso* producers will often be on the margins of community development. There is a need for alternative livelihoods, crime prevention and awareness, and developing police and community support for prosecutions, particularly in areas where by-laws do not yet exist or are not implemented. Community by-laws involving chiefs and traditional leaders have led to some progress

liquor in public places and selling liquor without a license. Relating to substance use, for the 2006-2010 period, a total of 327 marijuana related offences were recorded by the RSIPF for the same age category.

61 Jodie Curth-Bibb, K. Higgins, D. Buataigha and G. West (2015) *Evaluation Report Channels of Hope Gender: Weathercoast and Temotu* (Australia: University of Queensland).

62 ANU Edge/University of South Pacific, 2013 *SIG RAMSI People's Survey* (Canberra: ANU Enterprise, 2013), p. 13.

63 Hassall & Associates and AusAID, *Youth in Solomon Islands*, p. 25.

in addressing alcohol and substance abuse and gender-based violence with support from the police, Save the Children's youth projects and Oxfam's and World Vision's projects on gender-based violence. NCD Warriors, a Youth at Work initiative (which works closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services for information), supports youth-to-youth awareness about Non-Communicable Diseases and personal health.

Nationally, there is a striking absence of mental health, counselling and alcohol and substance abuse treatment services. Even former combatants, usually targeted for social support and behaviour change programmes, have rarely accessed these services in the post-conflict period. Counselling services that do exist are run by churches and women's refuges (limiting their use to certain groups). The Catholic Church in Honiara (Holy Cross) runs an ongoing Alcoholics Anonymous group and Honiara City Council established a volunteer-staffed counselling service in 2017.

Existing national mental health services include outpatient services at the National Referral Hospital (Honiara), which currently has no accommodation or rehabilitation facilities so patients are seen daily but live at home. The acute care ward was closed in 2012. At Kilu'ufi Hospital (Auki) there are inpatient services but only 20 beds for the whole country. One mental health nurse/ coordinator exists in each provincial government with wide-ranging duties including counselling, education, dispensing medication (advised by staff in Honiara/Auki), awareness and follow-up of patients returning to their villages. This lack of mental health awareness, staff and facilities means it is extremely difficult to access mental health services in the provinces.

Parents also need interventions around positive parenting, violence and alcohol/substance abuse, as it is recognized that many children grow up with parents and other relatives who are themselves abusers, or who otherwise neglect to give appropriate parental guidance and supervision.

A study of mental health, particularly in and around Honiara, pointed to social change and family breakdown as major factors influencing poor mental health among young people, including arguments in families, depression and suicide.<sup>64</sup> Communities are generally unaware of community mental health services and severe mental illness are, in most cases, untreated.<sup>65</sup>

Individuals abusing alcohol/substances or perpetrating violence are most likely to encounter government services when the problems have become extreme – at the point of criminal prosecution or admittance to the hospital or psychiatric ward. The lack of government services puts the burden of dealing with issues of violence and alcohol or substance abuse on communities.

Some young people turn these stresses in on themselves and commit suicide. This is an issue of concern, particularly in certain locations. Data and qualitative studies are difficult to find, but anecdotal reports suggest most of those committing suicide are young. Hospital statistics indicate suicide among women spiked during the tensions, with one in 20 maternal deaths attributed to suicide.<sup>66</sup> Further research on suicide to gather information on the scale and nature of the problem in different localities, plus community-based provincial and national points of intervention and prevention, would be useful to understand this emerging issue.

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<sup>64</sup> For a summary of impacts of family breakdown, urban drift and other factors see Christine Jourdan, *Youth and mental health in Solomon Islands*.

<sup>65</sup> For a case study from Guadalcanal see: Ilse Blignault, Anne Bunde-Birouste, Jan Ritchie, Derrick Silove and Anthony Zwi (2009) "Community perceptions of mental health needs: A qualitative study in the Solomon Islands", *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, vol. 3, No. 6 (2009).

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Health and Medical Services, *Health status of women and children in Solomon Islands*. (Honiara, 2001).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Policy coordination

The Solomon Islands Government needs to coordinate youth policies and projects better to ensure complementarity and to use available resources more effectively. Development sector and UN agencies need to develop their projects in collaboration with national and provincial governments to support policy implementation rather than subvert it or divert resources in other directions.

#### **Recommendation 1. Develop mechanisms for better policy coordination and implementation across ministries and stakeholders working with youth.**

**1.1** Youth Development Division to have at least one additional staff member to monitor and coordinate youth inclusion in policy-making across the whole of government.

**1.2** Require ministries and stakeholders to share monitoring and evaluation and other reports on project performance to encourage learning across relevant agencies about best-fit approaches to youth projects and programming.

**1.3** Other agencies with a mandate and projects to work on youth to target their assistance on needs identified under the National Youth Policy, following approval from provincial and national governments.

**1.4** Trial coordinated approaches among government, development sector and UN agencies to address youth disadvantage in selected areas that will model better policy and implementation coordination and learn from results.

### Research

The marginalization of youth in policy and decision-making is reflected in the lack of data, academic research, participatory research

on needs and solutions and inconsistencies in government data collection. Better understanding of youth disadvantage enables better responses to it.

#### **Recommendation 2. Develop youth-specific data and analysis, including gender analysis, to better understand youth needs and youth disadvantage to inform youth development work.**

**2.1** Adopt a standardized definition of youth for policy and data collection that is used across all ministries to ensure consistent and comparable data on youth is provided by whole of government.

**2.2** Collect age data for youth (as per standard definition in recommendation 2.1) in collection of crime statistics to inform practice and policy regarding crime prevention, conflict and gender-based violence.

**2.3** Conduct research on youth involvement in development, monitoring and enforcement of community by-laws with a view to learning lessons to inform the Community Policing Program and its stakeholders.

**2.4** Conduct further research on youths who leave school, their needs, and the barriers to employment and education.

**2.5** Conduct further research on the situation of young mothers, their needs and the barriers to employment and education.

**2.6** Conduct further research on the situation of young people with disabilities, their needs, and barriers to employment and education.

**2.7** Conduct further research on youth participation in the sex trade and forced marriages to examine causes, needs and options for greater protection from sexual exploitation.

**2.8** Use participatory research elements in project and policy design to enable youths to better

contribute to project and policy design.

**2.9** Analyse power in youth representation structures with the view to developing recommendations for more inclusive youth representation.

## Youth economic participation

The main weaknesses in current efforts to alleviate unemployment and bolster youth incomes and livelihoods are a lack of coordination, sharing economic with development expertise in project planning, an overly urban focus, shortfalls in the education system, and the need to incorporate youth-specific interventions with broader macroeconomic strategy and planning.

### **Recommendation 3: Reform current interventions to address employment and livelihoods to better fit industry and economic conditions.**

**3.1** Reform existing employment projects to better target training and support at skill shortages and industry needs.

**3.2** Reform existing livelihood projects to better target assistance through market analysis, identification of market gaps and needs, and tailoring of livelihood activities to local conditions.

**3.3** Encourage businesses and government agencies at the local and national level to provide mentors to participants in employment and livelihood projects (and others as appropriate), and also to provide ongoing support.

**3.4** Target livelihood and microfinance funding to projects that include disadvantaged youths – particularly people with disabilities and young mothers (who are commonly confined to the domestic sphere and unable to earn an income).

**3.5** Facilitate internship programmes between and among government and non-government agencies to give young people further options for work experience to increase their chances of

### **Youth-inclusive peace and development programming**

The recommendations draw on UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security, adopted in 2015. The resolution sets out five pillars necessary for youth to be part of peacebuilding:

- 1) Participation – in decision-making at all levels of government, indigenous processes for conflict resolution, youth-specific fora and UN Security Council missions.
- 2) Protection – from human rights abuses, and to ensure respect for the rights of women, people with disabilities and youth.
- 3) Prevention – support for youth to conduct social inclusion and violence prevention activities, youth employment and education and activities to promote cultures of peace.
- 4) Partnerships – between UN, international, regional and local agencies, the role of the Peacebuilding Commission, and collective efforts on strategies to counter terrorism and extremism.
- 5) Youth-inclusive development ideally both identifies the risks facing youth and strengthens protection and prevention, while empowering youth through their full participation in local, national and international politics as well as policy and project design, implementation, monitoring and review.

*Sources: UNSC Resolution 2250, UNDP*

eligibility for government employment.

### **Recommendation 4: Create more, and more effective, livelihood, education and training options for rural youths.**

**4.1** Create rural livelihood projects for rural youths that would provide market analysis, skills training and options for start-up finance and materials.

**4.2** Reward youth-inclusive communal agricultural

enterprises through financial incentives (such as tax) awards, media, marketing support for their agricultural products and other means.

**4.3** Examine options to increase the quality of and youth access to vocational training, such as through Rural Training Centres.

**4.4** Link vocational training with market needs and start-up finance options to increase the chance that training will lead to better livelihoods.

**4.5** Provide support for inter-province, national and international marketing of cultural performances and projects including developing youth and women as professional managers, promoters and exporters.

**4.6** Facilitate research and policy forums to plan youth-inclusive development programmes for the provinces focusing on income generation.

**Recommendation 5: Introduce reforms to the education system to enable greater linkages between skills gaps in economic sectors and education at all levels.**

**5.1** Link scholarships and educational opportunities with skills gaps, particularly for current industries and emerging industries.

**5.2** Measure and review the effectiveness of primary school and secondary school life-skills education (including basic financial literacy).

**5.3** Support initiatives for community-based education, particularly around literacy, numeracy and financial literacy, to provide opportunities for school leavers to obtain basic skills.

## Youth participation in decision-making

Although the MNURP and provincial governments are already engaged in promoting peace in schools, this work is inadequately resourced. The *Final Report of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission* offers a potentially useful resource for young people to learn about

experiences of conflict from different points of view (including concerns of women and children), but additional materials need to be developed to tap this potential.

**Recommendation 6: Encourage learning about conflict and peace, local ways of conflict resolution and cross-cultural exchanges.**

**6.1** Support peace education, including professional teacher training and review of teaching outcomes, to expand peace education across the provinces.

**6.2** Adapt materials from the *Final Report of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission* for young people, with participatory and engaging use of its content to provide opportunities for them to analyse conflict and conflict resolution strategies based on the report analysis and findings.

**Recommendation 7: Increase protection of youth from exploitation through legal reform and better resourcing of prevention and support for youth.**

Exploitation of youth is possible because of a breakdown in family and community support, lack of information, reporting and law enforcement regarding sexual offences, and poor targeting and availability of services (such as on gender-based violence), to youths vulnerable to exploitation (e.g. those around logging and mining camps).

**7.1** Develop and support initiatives to foster more prevention from sexual exploitation, including greater awareness of rights, how to report crimes and where to go for individual support services.

**7.2** Target prevention initiatives to specific communities with logging, mining, fishing and tourism where exploitative activities are likely to be taking place, with a particular focus on creating youth support networks involving chiefs and local leaders, women's groups and young women.

**7.3** Establish an emergency fund for victims of

sexual violence and forced marriage to travel to Honiara to access services rapidly and provide information for prosecutions.

**7.4** Collect data on police reports and prosecutions to identify trends and hot spots for sexual exploitation of youth.

**7.5** Reform the legal system to raise the age of criminal responsibility and minimum age for employment to make it consistent with international legal norms.

**Recommendation 8: Increase the availability and awareness of mental health services for youths, particularly preventative programmes and support for those involved in alcohol/substance abuse and victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence.**

**8.1** Support drug and alcohol prevention awareness activities targeted at youths and provided at key youth hubs (such as at youth centres, church youth rallies and sporting festivals).

**8.2** Support community-based and church-based programmes for support and diversionary activities for youths known to be involved in drug and alcohol abuse and violence.

**8.3** Support training of youths in counselling, dealing with trauma, suicide prevention, awareness and peer-to-peer support for health and well-being.

**Recommendation 9: Increase youth political participation in national and provincial politics through supporting youth networking and advocacy.**

The greatest pool of funding available that could advance youth participation in economic and political life is the constituency funds. Ironically, these funds are also those that youths have the least knowledge of and influence over. There is a need to support networking of youth groups to build trust and confidence so youth can articulate their concerns and try to influence decisions at

different levels of decision-making, from local to national.

**9.1** Pool resources from Solomon Islands Government, NGOs, UN agencies and MP Constituency Development Funds to resource provincial youth centres to enable young people to organize more easily, receive and disseminate information, and access the internet and other tools for better youth advocacy.

**9.2** Encourage development of constituency-wide youth group networks.

**9.3** Encourage greater transparency regarding spending of funds and use the media and other means to recognize successful youth-elected representatives, dialogues and projects.

**9.4** Profile youth leaders from various communities around Solomon Islands in popular media (such as radio) to promote role models for youth in leadership.

**9.5** Support campaigns for mandatory youth participation in political parties and in Parliament through regulatory and legislative change.

**Recommendation 10: Support youth representation and roles in decision-making bodies at village, ward, constituency, provincial and national level.**

**10.1** In small grant funding, reward inclusivity in youth projects and activities – such as inclusion of people with disabilities, young women and young mothers – as well as cross-cultural exchanges and youth-led initiatives.

**10.2** Use the media, public talks and awards to profile successful cooperation between chiefs/local leaders and young people to combat crime and violence in order to encourage further cooperation.

**10.3** Support civic education to increase youth understanding of institutions and accountability mechanisms for Parliament and government.

## Appendix A: Snapshot of major national policy documents regarding youth

| <b>Policy</b>                                 | <b>Summary</b>  | <b>Timeframe</b> |
|---|---|------------------|
| National Youth Policy                         | <p>Ten priority policy outcomes and thematic areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employment and entrepreneurship</li> <li>2. Education and training</li> <li>3. Health and wellbeing</li> <li>4. Youths living with disabilities</li> <li>5. Sports and recreation</li> <li>6. Rural-urban drift</li> <li>7. Population growth</li> <li>8. Cultural and spiritual values and virtues</li> <li>9. Gender equality</li> <li>10. Technology and its role in youth development</li> </ol> <p>The National Youth Policy sets out the overarching long-term vision and mission for youth development and empowerment.</p>  | 2017-2030        |
| National Children's Policy                    | <p>Includes youth as children defined as anyone below age of 18. Includes thematic goals of protection, development, survival (health and poverty), participation (MWYCFA annual consultation, child clubs, arts, sports and culture to promote "toleration") and planning. Priority groups abused children, those out of school, children with disabilities or homeless, those in conflict with law.</p>   |                  |
| Solomon Islands National Peacebuilding Policy | <p>Key elements include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partnership and peace by developing capacity of youth, women and community leaders. The policy seeks to enhance youth and women's involvement in peacebuilding by encouraging the development of peace, non-violence, social cohesion and tolerance campaigns design by citizen groups using media, social networks and other forms of community outreach.</li> <li>2. Promotion of inclusive and participatory decision-making through increased participation of CSOs, women and youth in decision-making structures. The policy recognizes that this will need to be done in ways that ensure youths and women do not suffer any repercussions of hostile reaction(s) from members of the community.</li> <li>3. Goal to strengthen civil society, women, youth and traditional leaders' capacities to engage in decision-making and non-violent strategies and conflict resolution.</li> </ol> | 2014-2016        |
| National Development Strategy                 | <p>Aims of the strategy include: investment for young entrepreneurs to venture into potential identified industries, increase employment and labour mobility opportunities in rural areas; programmes targeting young people, including young newly married couples, with formal employment and non-formal employment opportunities; community engagement programmes that address the needs of women, youth and children; secondary education that delivers both work-related skills and transferable skills; changes in education to address the situation of excluded children, youth and adults including girls, children with disability and language minorities.</p>   | 2016-2035        |
| National Population Policy                    | <p>Policy includes provisions on improved access to reproductive health services for youth and improved employment opportunities for youth.</p>   | 2017-2026        |

| <b>Policy</b>   | <b>Summary</b>   | <b>Timeframe</b> |
|---|--|------------------|
| Solomon Islands National Policy Framework for Culture             | Outcome and goals regarding teaching of culture, arts and traditional knowledge to younger people, including cultural schools.   | Ongoing          |
| Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Policy                      | Includes goals to assist women's and youth participation in agriculture, for food security and livelihood development and develop gender and youth-related programmes.   | 2015-2019        |
| Small and Medium Enterprises Policy & Strategy                    | Aims to promote entrepreneurship with a focus on women and youth. Activities include: conducting a performance review of TVET policy; identifying successful entrepreneurs who would act as ambassadors to young people; introducing a component of entrepreneurship training into school and TVET curriculums; introducing a component of entrepreneurship training in school.  | 2016-2020        |
| Education Strategic Framework & National Education Action Plan    | This policy framework has a focus on achieving full completion of primary and basic secondary education by 2030. It includes strategies to address exclusion (particularly through cost barriers, and second chance/re-entry programmes), lifelong learning opportunities geared at youths and others who are illiterate and more responsiveness to the needs of labour market and society.<br><br>With these objectives, the National Education Action Plan also establishes what will be done between 2016-2020 around these key issues. | 2016-2030        |
| Community Engagement Strategic and Implementation Plan            | Ministry of Research, Policy and Planning document on development and execution of a community engagement strategic and implementation plan that builds on ongoing commitments for community development and addresses the specific needs of women, youth and children at the community level and in the most disadvantaged and vulnerable areas in Solomon Islands.   | In development   |
| Crime Prevention Strategy   | This Royal Solomon Islands Police Force strategy includes engagement with youth, youth representation on local crime prevention committees and identification of issues relevant to youth that also act as "drivers of crime": young women being vulnerable to family violence, high birth rates, low investment in youth and high youth unemployment, limited education opportunities, idleness and boredom, low self-esteem, alcohol, kwaso and marijuana use lead to risk taking.   | 2016-2018        |
| Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Act & Management Plans | Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, in partnership with others, notably WorldFIsh (Malaita) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF in Western Province), are supporting community-based fisheries management inclusive of youth and women. Community-based fisheries management involves youth in management, monitoring and sustainable livelihoods.   | Ongoing          |

## Appendix B: Youth projects around political and decision-making activities

### Governmental

| Organisation  | Thematic area  | Activity  | Location   | Timeframe |
|---|--|---|--|-----------|
| Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs | Youth empowerment<br>Policy development  | Formulation of National Youth Policy & Framework<br><br>Youth mainstreaming<br><br>Coordination of support to local youth organizations & provincial governments  | Nationwide, with implementation primarily through provincial government  | Ongoing   |
| Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace  | Inclusive participation in peacebuilding<br>Strengthening traditional leadership and conflict resolution | Peacebuilder capacity building and engagement with youth<br><br>Promotion of participation of CSOs in decision-making<br><br>Representation of youth and women in governance and security<br><br>Peace education  | Nationwide, has some provincial offices (e.g. Auki)  | Ongoing   |
| Honiara City Council                                  | Youth empowerment  | Youth mainstreaming and interdivisional coordination<br><br>Youth activities<br><br>Support for youth groups & Duke of Edinburgh awards<br><br>Youth volunteer scheme<br><br>Training (with partner organizations)<br><br>Youth events<br><br>Youth spaces (new project for free counselling) | Honiara  | Ongoing   |
| Provincial governments                                | Youth empowerment and participation  | Activities vary but generally include policy development, events, support for local youth groups and forums   | All provinces  | Ongoing   |
| Police  | Youth participation and crime<br>Youth cooperation with police<br>Prevention of crime                    | Youth representatives on crime prevention committees<br><br>Youth engagement including sports and awareness to increase confidence of youth in police<br><br>Plan for youth-to-youth education<br><br>Blue Light – youth education to understand law and order processes                      | Currently limited to around urban areas but planned roll out nationally (approx. 30 committees currently)<br><br>Currently limited to around urban areas | Ongoing   |

## Non-governmental

| <b>Organisation</b>      | <b>Thematic area</b>  | <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Location</b>   | <b>Timeframe</b> |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|------------------|
| Churches                 | Spiritual and social development<br>Fundraising for community events<br>Peacebuilding<br>Family counselling | Churches run youth activities and groups and also offer youth significant leadership positions in communities   | National  | Ongoing          |
| Duke of Edinburgh Awards | Community service<br>Youth leadership<br>Mentorship   | Previously provided financial and business skills for youth in conjunction with other life skills (Y-FIN)<br><br>Award programme focuses on community service and provides recognised achievement   | National, although dependent on volunteers for roll out<br><br>Malaita and Guadalcanal been most involved | Ongoing          |
| Olafou Youth Programme   | Youth participation in community organization and development   | Youth determine community priorities through participatory techniques and conduct small-scale projects<br><br>Training and support is provided by programme (funded by New Zealand Government)  | Various locations around Solomon Islands  | Ongoing          |
| Oxfam                    | Hearing Many Voices project   | Capacity building of community sector organizations<br><br>Coordination of CSOs<br><br>Advocacy skills<br><br>Solomon participation in regional and international forums  | Various   | 2016-2019        |
| Oxfam                    | Starting Fires  | Strengthening Youth Councils & groups<br><br>Advocacy for youth inclusion   | Honiara and select communities where Oxfam already works on Guadalcanal                                   |                  |
| Save the Children        | Youth and alcohol project   | Creation of community bylaws and youth-led project committees<br><br>Sports and cultural activities for youth<br><br>Data collection about alcohol and violence<br><br>Awareness and encouraging role models and behaviour change<br><br>Diversionary activities (from alcohol and substance abuse) | Communities around Auki and Honiara identified as at risk for crime and alcohol/substance abuse           | Completed        |

| <b>Organisation</b>  | <b>Thematic area</b>  | <b>Activity</b>  | <b>Location</b>  | <b>Timeframe</b> |
|--|---|--|--|------------------|
| Save the Children  | Children and Youth in Conflict with the Law                                       | Prevention and support for youth released from prison<br>Activities to build youth confidence in police<br>Support for ex criminals released from prison | Honiara and Auki   | Completed        |
| Solomon Islands Development Trust                                      | Youth involvement in Village Development Committees                               | Youth representatives on committees for decision-making, awareness and reporting to provincial and national governments youth concerns                   | National   | Ongoing          |
| United Nations Development Programme (funded by UN Peacebuilding Fund) | Youth involvement in livelihoods, peacebuilding and key decision-making forums    | Youth trained by Coconut Technology Centre in youth economic empowerment and to be peace advocates   | North Malaita and South Guadalcanal  | 2017             |
|  | Supports expansion of Youth at Work for marginalized youth                        | Training and support for livelihood activities and skills training in conflict resolution and peace  |  |                  |
|  | Innovative livelihood programs  | Youth Innovation Summit pre-accelerator support workshops, national summit on innovation   | Honiara  |                  |
| World Vision   | Youth involvement in WASH and Gender-based violence projects                      | Youth representatives are on community committees for projects   | Honiara and Weathercoast Auki  | Ongoing          |
| Young Women's Parliamentary Group                                      | Education about politics<br>Leadership training and opportunities for young women | Awareness about political system<br>Research<br>Training<br>Advocacy   | Honiara primarily with some youth from provinces benefitting from tours/visits to Parliament | Ongoing          |

