



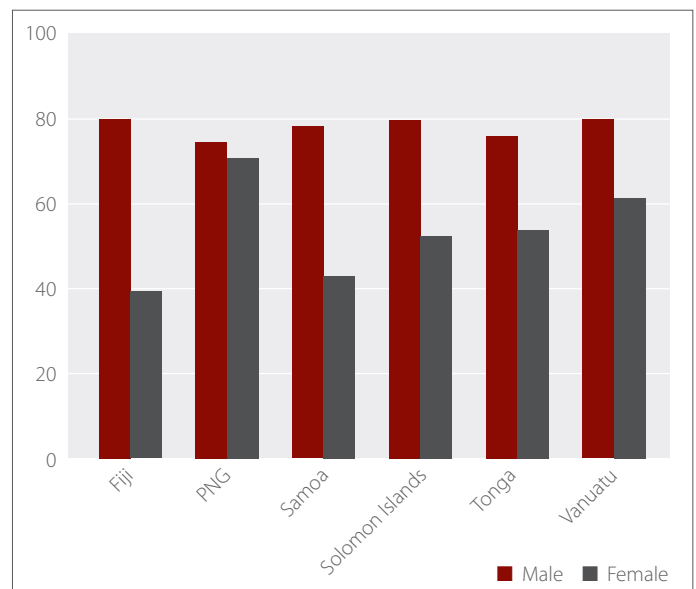
Skills for Solomon Islands women

Opening new opportunities

New economic opportunities are available to Solomon Islands, at home and overseas; but a serious skills deficit constrains Solomon Islanders from accessing them. Women, youth, and rural Solomon Islanders are disproportionately affected.

Action on the mismatch between skills supplied and skills in demand from employers, enterprise and economic opportunities, can be highly beneficial to Solomon Islands women. Solomon Islands has a shortage of the skills needed for economic growth opportunities. Imported labour fills skills shortages, even while up to 80 percent of youth are unemployed. Employers report a lack of key behavioural as well as technical skills, contributing to staff shortages which constrain enterprise growth. Formal job opportunities are limited. While informal and self-employment and enterprise are important income sources for most Solomon Islanders, these are also constrained by a lack of entrepreneurial, financial management and livelihood skills. There is a widespread lack of basic skills needed to boost productivity in both formal and informal employment – such as literacy and numeracy. Capturing realities in the field, a significant literacy and educational experience survey in Honiara, Malaita, Renbel and Isabel in 2007 and 2010¹ found rates of assessed functional literacy far lower than census-based self-reported rates. The findings indicate a strong perceived value of literacy and numeracy for livelihoods and employment: yet that too few Solomon Islanders gain these skills from basic or even secondary education, or retain these skills after school. Functional literacy, not educational attainment alone, is important for employment options for Solomon Islanders beyond subsistence activities.

Labour force participation in Pacific Island countries



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2010.

This Informal Briefing Note is extracted from the World Bank report, *Skills for Solomon Islands: Opening New Opportunities*, Stephen Close, World Bank Sydney, October 2012. Please see the full report for full references and copyright information.

¹ Asia Pacific Basic Education Association and Coalition for Education Solomon Islands, Literacy and Educational Experience Survey, 2007 and 2010.

Employment and labour market participation is difficult to measure in the Pacific context, where people move between subsistence, formal and informal employment.

Available statistics highlight particular disadvantages for women in skills supply and in the labour market. The mostly positive gender balance in basic education is not maintained at higher levels. Disparities begin at primary school completion and in junior secondary, where limited dormitory facilities for girls present a barrier to access.² At tertiary level, gender biases are more evident in access, award of scholarships and fields of study. Solomon Islands' Rural Training Centres (RTCs) are of particular relevance to employment and rural livelihoods, but opportunities for women in RTCs are more limited to agriculture, home economics and typing subjects. These subjects are noted by graduates as less job-relevant. Women often attend RTCs closer to home and are recalled for family obligations.³ Across all ages, girls' and women's participation in education, training and employment opportunities in Solomon Islands is likely limited by high levels of violence against women in girls. In a World Health Organization study, 64 percent of ever-partnered women had been subject to physical abuse, and 37 percent of women and girls had been sexually abused before age 15.⁴

Skills supply imbalances are reflected in the workforce. As in other Pacific Island Countries, labour force participation by Solomon Islands women is consistently around 10–20 percent lower than men across age groups according to HIES data. Although 2009 Census figures show labour force participation close to equal at 63.3 percent for men and 62.1 percent for women, census figures indicated that 67.2 percent of those in employment were men and only 32.8 percent were women. The same literacy and education experience survey of Isabel and Renbel in 2010 found a notable gender gap in rates for primary school intake, transition, completion, literacy, and employment, with 20–30 percent more men reported having

held a paid job than women, and higher rates of participation in subsistence agriculture livelihoods among women. The survey indicates wide provincial variations. Meanwhile, rural Solomon Islands women moving to urban squatter settlements in Honiara face particular challenges. Perhaps due to social and economic pressures, already-high levels of intimate partner violence against women are higher again in Honiara. Of household members in urban squatter settlements in full time employment, only 18.2 percent were women. Many reported harsh working conditions with long hours, driving them to informal income-generating activities like selling betel-nuts and cigarettes, vegetables and root crops, and handicrafts.⁵

Key statistics

Average annual population growth	2.3%
Employed population (Census 2009):	81,194
– males	54,536 (67.2%)
– females	26,658 (32.8%)
Employment to population, 15+ (Census 2009)	64.4%
Employment to population ratio (Census 2009):	23.7%
– males	31.4%
– females	15.8%
Subsistence workers (Census 2009):	87,913
– males	35,248
– females	52,665
Unpaid workers (Census 2009):	41,191
– males	17,861
– females	23,330

Six recommendations for skills and economic opportunities for Solomon Islands women

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

² Solomon Islands Government and UNICEF, Barriers to Education Study, 2011.

³ Labour Market Study, European Union, 2012.

⁴ Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study, Report prepared by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community for the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, 2009.

⁵ Maebuta, H.E., and Maebuta, J. 'Generating Livelihoods: A Study of Urban Squatter Settlements in Solomon Islands', in Pacific Economic Bulletin, Australian National University, Volume 24, Number 3, 2009.

New growth opportunities will be accessible for more Solomon Islanders if the skills needed to explore them are built in the growing and youthful population. Actions across the life transitions from early childhood to labour force matching are needed. Solomon Islands can build on current initiatives, turn concepts into action, and make new partnerships across sectors, employers and provinces, to expand opportunities for Solomon Islands women. Six practical and achievable recommendations include:

- 1) **Actions to reduce push out of girls at secondary level.** Water and sanitation facilities ensuring schools cater for girls, assurance of continued access to education for pregnant young women, safe accommodation for boarding students, and access to adolescent sexual and reproductive health services, and safety from violence and sexual abuse, all contribute to girls proceeding to higher levels of education beyond primary.
- 2) **Implementing Solomon Islands' demand-oriented skills plan will increase women's participation in education, training and employment.** The Cabinet-approved National Human Resources Development & Training Plan (NHRDTP) prioritises actions to increase women's education, training, and employment participation. The plan prioritises women's participation in skills training to increase productivity and rural, subsistence and non-formal livelihoods, in which they are active. The plan proposes incentives for women to participate in higher levels of formal education and training, including pathways and competency recognition for non-traditional occupations in which more Solomon Islanders may be active as they diversify income sources from subsistence agriculture and fishing. A training system oriented to demand would include funding formula incentivising learning options, to increase the numbers of women participating in literacy courses, TVET courses, and enterprise-related courses, and motivating providers to increase women's enrolment of women.⁶
- 3) **More second chances and non-formal learning opportunities are needed to expand learning for all; benefiting women's life outcomes.** An effective second chances system can give people hope and incentive to catch up from bad luck or bad choices.⁷ Solomon Islanders face challenges accessing quality education relevant to the economic and employment opportunities available, including in gaining functional literacy and numeracy from basic education. The ASPBAE/COESI survey results highlight the need for SIG and its development partners to provide second-chance learning opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults. The ASPBAE/COESI results suggest a second-



Photo: Alison Ofolatau, World Bank.

- chance focus on literacy, life and work skills, targeting those excluded from formal schooling, especially girls and youth in remote areas.⁸ Many literacy classes are attended (and taught on a volunteer basis) by women, often by community faith groups (see back page). Women could benefit greatly from expanded literacy classes through the proposed 'National Literacy Project'. Combining second-chance education with sexual and reproductive health services would improve life outcomes for women, given linked teenage pregnancy and school dropout.
- 4) **Expand access to short-courses, non-formal training, and mobile village skills training, to expand opportunities for girls and women, and for those needing second chances and who cannot access formal vocational training.** Allocating RTC courses by gender with a focus on domestic skills prevents women developing skills to participate in labour market and informal economic activity. Rural parents are also reluctant to send girls to board at RTCs⁹ for safety reasons. Informal sector training can link better to workplaces, as it works best when based on existing economic and employment activities, thus increasing motivation and productivity.¹⁰ Unemployed and lower-skilled workers, and those who have dropped out of education, need second chances and non-formal training. Internationally, 'Active Labour Market Programmes' (ALMPs) provide a further channel beyond formal TVET or on-the-job-training.¹¹

⁶ SIG, National Human Resource Development and Training Plan, 2011.

⁷ World Bank, World Development Report, 2007.

⁸ ASPBAE/COESI, 2010.

⁹ Asian Development Bank, Skilling the Pacific, 2008.

¹⁰ ADB, Skilling the Pacific, 2008.

¹¹ World Bank, The Right, Skills for the Job, 2012.

- 5) **Reducing barriers to entrepreneurship, including skills barriers, will benefit individuals, the economy; and women entrepreneurs in particular.** High-impact and immediately-implementable actions for SIG and donors are available. Updated websites and communication materials could improve access to accurate information on donor and government procurement practices, and training for suppliers. Funding for expanded business mentoring services through training institutions or business associations. Business associations could establish an online publicly accessible database for accessing procurement information and contacts of available suppliers. Addressing skills gaps, gender-review of scholarships and business mentoring could be undertaken. For the medium-term skills training could be expanded relevant to women entrepreneurs, including

in technical and vocational training, apprenticeships and scholarships to similar contexts, business training, entrepreneurial skills, market analysis, and research and development. Further actions to support expansion of business by women entrepreneurs include increasing access to finance, reducing processes for land registration and other obstacles to using customary land as collateral for accessing finance, and reducing immigration barriers to expatriate contributions to business growth (including filling immediate skills gaps).¹²

- 6) **Integration of gender equality, women's and children's rights and violence prevention into the school curriculum** to create the societal conditions for girls and women to equitably and safely access education, training and employment opportunities without fear of violence.

'Hem No Leit Tumas'

Second chances for women to read

Solomon Islands women often want to learn to read and write so that they can lead bible-reading, feel part of the community, or know what is going on around them. Without basic literacy and numeracy, women feel they are less able to stand up for themselves, stand up to their husbands, take a leading role in meeting community needs such as improved hygiene and water access, or fulfill their traditional role as community peacemakers. In a country with a fertility rate of 4.6, they are unable to read family planning materials or count a contraceptive pill cycle. Perpetuating the problem, illiterate women are not able to actively support their children's education. While recognised as important to livelihoods, rates of functional literacy in major provinces are as low as seven percent. Most commonly it is women, of all ages, who seek a second chance at reading and writing. This may be because of the historic impact of gender imbalances in basic education – imbalances persisting in some provinces and at higher levels of education. Finding ways to retain children in better quality education is better – and more cost-effective – than trying to catch them later. **But Solomon Islanders – women especially – need Second Chances.**

NGOs such as ADRA, World Vision and Church of Melanesia run literacy schools across the country to give those who have missed out a second chance. The schools are mostly run by unpaid volunteers trained in workshops by the Literacy Association of Solomon Islands (LASI). LASI provides learning materials in English, Pijin, and ten local languages. With no



Holy Cross literacy school in Honiara: a volunteer teacher with an intermediate level English class. Photo: Stephen Close, World Bank.

set entry or exit points, it takes about 6–12 months to learn basic literacy and numeracy, but many drop out early. Unpaid volunteer teachers stop and start classes, and students lack learning materials or stationery. When Government budget is available, it has been around SBD70,000 a year (around USD10,000); quickly spent printing learning materials. Selina Berah of LASI said that women's strong demand for literacy is sometimes countered by neighbours who say there's no point. Women say, 'Mifela leit pinis na' – ('it's too late for me'). But we say 'Hem no leit tumas' ('it's not too late').

Sources: UNDP, ASPBAE/COESI 2007 and 2010; World Bank discussion with Reuben Molli and visit to Fiu RTC, February 2009.

¹² World Bank, Increasing the Participation of Women Entrepreneurs in the Solomon Islands Aid Economy, 2011.