

# Solomon Islands

*'My vision for Pacific women in 10 years' time – I'd like to see women in the Pacific, including women with disabilities, live in a gender equitable society where they are free to exercise their rights, are living free from discrimination and are economically empowered.'*

**Ms Savina Nongebatu, Office Manager, previous President (2005-2011) of People with Disabilities in the Solomon Islands (PWDSI), and Pacific Women Advisory Board member.<sup>1</sup>**

Solomon Islands is the third largest country in the Pacific and ranks 156 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index.<sup>2</sup> Despite being resource rich, women and men have limited access to resources; there are poor health and education outcomes and financial hardship.<sup>3</sup> Progress has been made by the Solomon Islands Government, development partners, the private sector and non-government organisations (NGOs) to empower women and reduce inequality but there is still significant work to be done. The Solomon Islands Government has recently revised national policies on Gender Equality and Women's Development 2016-2020 and Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls 2016-2020.

## Leadership and Decision Making

Since Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978, only three women have been elected into the National Parliament,<sup>4</sup> with similarly poor representation at sub-national level, both in senior Government positions and across the private sector.<sup>5</sup> According to the last population census in 2009, women's participation in management roles is only 19 per cent. However, there are some avenues for women's leadership in the country. Churches are an integral part of Solomon Islands life and women are actively engaged in church activities. The United Church and Christian Fellowship Church have quotas for women to hold decision making positions in the church hierarchy (30 per cent and 50 per cent respectively).<sup>6</sup>

Solomon Islands is also the first country in the Pacific to launch a Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2017-2021. This Plan recognises the peacebuilding role women undertake during conflicts and the importance of women's representation in the decision making process.

## Economic Empowerment

There are significant inequalities between economic opportunities for men and women in Solomon Islands. Women make up over half (56 per cent) of all unpaid workers, and only one third (33 per cent) of paid workers. Further, men are more than twice as likely to hold a job in the formal sector (23 per cent men compared to 9 per cent women).<sup>7</sup> The majority of unpaid work is done by women, including women producing goods for sale. This unpaid work has no formal work arrangements or protections and these women are therefore more exposed to risks.<sup>8</sup> The Economic Intelligence Unit ranks Solomon Islands 124 out of 128 countries in terms of women's economic opportunity and sixth out of the seven Pacific Island countries assessed.<sup>9</sup> Like many women across the Pacific, women in Solomon Islands are largely confined to the informal sector. Women are constrained from increasing their participation in the formal and informal sectors by: domestic responsibilities; poor numeracy and

literacy skills; discrimination in the workplace; health; geographic isolation; lack of access to government business services and information; lack of decision making power; and limited access to financial services.<sup>10</sup> The legal environment also restricts women – until recently, women in Solomon Islands could not register a business without supplying the name of their husband.<sup>11</sup>

### Ending Violence Against Women

There are extremely high levels of family violence in Solomon Islands, with approximately two-thirds of women experiencing intimate partner violence and one-third of women sexually abused before the age of 15.<sup>12</sup> Fear of reprisals from perpetrators and their families, shame, trauma and cultural taboos all prevent women from discussing their experience of violence, particularly sexual assault.<sup>13</sup> The Solomon Islands Government has recognised the need to continue to respond to and reduce family violence through two revised policies, the National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2016-2020 and the National Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women and Girls 2016-2020. The Family Protection Act (FPA) is a landmark legislation that came into effect in April 2016. For the first time in Solomon Islands, this legislation explicitly criminalises domestic violence and helps to protect vulnerable people, including women and children.

### Enhancing Agency

The Solomon Islands Government has shown a commitment to promoting equality for women and men through legal frameworks and initiatives at national and international levels. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was ratified in 2002. Solomon Islands agreed to the Millennium Development Goals and in 2015 reiterated its commitment by endorsing the Sustainable Development Goals, which establish goals and indicators pertaining to gender equality. Solomon Islands has also endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action, the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2005–2015) and the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. While these latter agreements are not legally binding, they serve to formalise commitments and establish a contract between states and their citizens. Together these laws and policies have the potential to advance the status of women, however gaps in the legal frameworks and insufficient capacity to implement policies are slowing progress.

## Key Statistics

### Leadership and Decision Making

- **2 per cent** of Solomon Islands National Parliament is comprised of women (1 out of 50 members).
- **19 per cent** of management and decision making positions are held by women.<sup>14</sup>

### Economic Empowerment

- **67 per cent** of women participate in the labour force (includes formal and informal economy).
- **2 per cent** gender gap in the labour force participation rate (male to female).

### Ending Violence Against Women

- **64 per cent** of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner in their lifetime.

## Enhancing Agency

- Solomon Islands has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- **34.6 per cent** is the contraceptive prevalence rate of women aged between 15-49.
- **103** is the Gender Parity Index for secondary school enrolment (gross) in 2014 – for every 100 boys enrolled, there were 103 girls enrolled.

*Note: Statistics in this section are from the [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#) report unless otherwise stated.*

## Partnership with *Pacific Women*

Through *Pacific Women*, the Australian Government will spend approximately AU\$34.8 million over ten years (2012-2022) on initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in Solomon Islands. Approximately AU\$8.1 million has been spent delivering activities in-country (FY2012-2013 to FY2015-2016). More information on the partnership and nature of support is included in the [Pacific Women Solomon Islands Country Plan Summary 2013-2017](#) valued at AU\$8.5 million. Details on activities currently underway in-country with various partners is available via our [interactive map](#). The list of program partners can be found [here](#). Solomon Islands is also supported by *Pacific Women's* regional program, details of which can be viewed on the interactive map under regional activities.

## Stories of Change

1. [Investing in women is smart business](#)
2. [Ensuring that survivors' stories are documented sensitively](#)

## Further Information

- [SPC \(2016\) Gender equality: Where do we stand? Solomon Islands](#)
- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)
- [United Nations Statistics Division, Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development \(2015\) First Progress Report 2012-2015](#)

<sup>2</sup> [United Nations, Human Development Indicators 2015](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Solomon Islands Government, National Statistics Office, Solomon Islands Poverty Profile](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Pacific Women in Politics \(Solomon Islands\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Solomon Islands Government (2013) CEDAW Solomon Islands initial to third periodic report

<sup>6</sup> Tavola, H., Billy A., and Kama, J., (2016), Advancing Australia's Work on Leadership and Decision making "The Next Level" Scoping Study on Women in Leadership

<sup>7</sup> Solomon Islands Statistics Office (2009) Report on Economic Activity and Labour Force

<sup>8</sup> [SPC \(2016\) Gender equality: Where do we stand? Solomon Islands](#)

<sup>9</sup> Economic Intelligence Unit (2012) Women's Economic Opportunity 2012, The Economist

<sup>10</sup> [Asian Development Bank \(2015\) Solomon Islands Country Gender Assessment](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Asian Development Bank \(ADB, 2015\) Empowering the Other Half: Women and Private Sector Growth in the Pacific](#)

<sup>12</sup> [SPC \(2009\) Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study](#)

<sup>13</sup> [UNIFEM \(2010\) Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evidence, Data and Knowledge in the Pacific Islands Countries](#)

<sup>14</sup> Managerial positions include politicians, senior government officials, and corporate and general managers in the public and private sector.