

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Country and Government Context

Solomon Islands is an archipelagic nation comprising close to 1,000 islands, approximately 350 of which are inhabited. Located in the Southwest Pacific Ocean, the largest island is Guadalcanal, which hosts the country's capital, Honiara. There are nine main island groups, nine provinces, and a capital territory. With a population of approximately 580,000,^a approximately 90% of Solomon Islanders are Melanesian, although other ethnic groups are also present, including Polynesians and Micronesians. The population is highly dispersed, with more than 85% living in small rural villages.

English is the official national language but it is only spoken by a small proportion of the population. The widely spoken language is Melanesian pidgin, although there are over 60 additional distinct languages in use.

The islands that now make up Solomon Islands were first settled at least by 2000 BC and first contact with Europeans was in 1568 with the Spanish Explorer Mendaña. The British declared most of the Eastern part of the Solomon Islands a protectorate in 1893, and by 1900 the entire Solomon Islands was under British administration. The Solomon Islands gained self-governance in 1976 and independence from the United Kingdom in 1978, although remains as part of the Commonwealth.

In 1998, conflict caused by ethnic tensions, interisland migration, plus economic and land disputes (largely between Isatabu Freedom Movement and Malaitan settlers) escalated into violence, which continued unresolved for several years. The conflict has caused the displacement of approximately 35,000 Solomon Islanders and the death of about 200 people.^b During this period of unrest, the country's economy contracted sharply, there was widespread corruption, and law and order was in disarray.

In 2003, Solomon Islands requested international assistance to address the problems of the country. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), or Operation Helpem Fren, commenced in July 2003 and was a coalition of soldiers, police, and civilians from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu. The RAMSI worked in partnership with the Government of Solomon Islands to restore law and

continued on next page

Civil Society: An Overview

History of Civil Society in Solomon Islands

Village and chiefly organizations preceded the churches as the early form of societal structures in Solomon Islands.¹ The chiefly system existed in Solomon Islands well before colonization, and continues to exist today.² Chiefly systems are informed by *kastom*, which is often understood as “tradition,” “custom,” or “customary law” and in some cases is often used as a metonym for the “chiefly system.”³ *Kastom* is a fluid concept that is specific to place, and embodies the distinctiveness of different groups.⁴ It defines the cultures and norms that regulate community life in Solomon Islands, although it is becoming increasingly fragile in many locations.⁵

After chiefly organizations, many of the earliest civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Pacific were established by missionaries, who, in addition to their religious roles, formed youth and women's groups.⁶ The first missionaries to arrive in the Solomon Islands included the Catholic Spanish explorer Mendaña in 1568. He was followed by Jean Baptiste-Epalle who founded a Catholic Mission in 1845, but the mission was short-lived and did not return until 1898. The Anglican Diocese of Melanesia began in 1861, although outreach from New Zealand began some years earlier.⁷ The Methodist Mission arrived in Solomon Islands in 1902, the Seventh-Day Adventists in 1914.⁸ An example of the women's groups set up by churches is the Anglican Church of Melanesia Mothers Union, which was established in Ysabel in 1919.⁹ After these early missionaries, church groups continued to establish themselves, including the Solomon Islands Christian Association, founded in 1967, the Community of the Sisters of the Solomon Islands which started in 1970, and the Young Women's Christian Association of the Solomon Islands, which was founded in 1975.

Some have described three “waves” of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) arriving in the Solomon Islands. The first wave, occurring after the arrival of early missionaries and church groups, were overseas NGOs arriving in the Solomon Islands prior to independence in 1978.¹⁰ The Boy Scouts established troops in Solomon Islands in 1951,¹¹ while the Girl Guides' Association of the Solomon Islands held their first meeting in Honiara in 1958.¹² Others to be established in this first wave of overseas NGOs were the Red Cross, the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific, and Catholic Relief Services.¹³ These “first wave” organizations provided much needed support to Solomon Islands, particularly disaster relief. The “second wave” of NGOs is characterized when these international NGOs stayed on and established development community projects.

order, rebuild national institutions, and stabilize the economy. In 2013, RAMSI transitioned to solely a policing mission, due to operate for a further 4 years.^a

Today Solomon Islands is a parliamentary democracy. The country has a unicameral 50-seat parliament, with a term of 4 years. The last parliamentary elections occurred in 2014, with the next due in 2018. The head of state is Queen Elizabeth II, represented in Solomon Islands by a Governor-General. The Head of the Government is the Prime Minister, the Hon. Manasseh Sogavare.

The economy of Solomon Islands is based around agriculture, forestry, and fishing, with scarce availability of other income-generating opportunities. The three largest export commodities are rough wood (73% of exports in 2013), gold (9.7%), and fish (7.8% of exports, both processed and frozen fish).^d Logging dominates the country's exports and the rate of logging is unsustainable.^e The country is highly dependent on foreign aid: it jumped from being the 35th most aid dependent country in the world in 2000–2002 to being the second most aid dependent country in 2009–2011.^f In 2013, Solomon Islands had one of the highest ratios of overseas development assistance to gross national income of any country in the world, at 27.4%.^g

The country is vulnerable to adverse climate and weather events: floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Major recent climatic events have included a combined earthquake and tsunami in 2013 which displaced 2,500 people and caused 10 fatalities,^h and Tropical Cyclone Ita in April 2014 which caused 23 fatalities and displaced 10,000 people.ⁱ Sea level rise is an ongoing concern and may render low-lying coastal settlements unlivable.

Challenges facing the country include its narrow economic base, weak state structures, the unavailability of basic services (water, electricity, telecommunications) for the majority, and poor transport infrastructure. Gender inequality manifests in male-dominated social structures and high rates of domestic violence. The majority of the population in rural areas survives through subsistence agriculture, and the gap between the rural population and those that live in the capital is wide in terms of access to education and earning capacity. Solomon Islands' human development index was 0.506 in 2014, placing it in the low human development group and ranking it 156 out of 188 countries.^j

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been working with the Government of the Solomon Islands since 1973 and has cumulative disbursements worth \$126.1 million since that time.^k

^a ADB. 2015. *Basic Statistics 2015*. Manila.

^b S. Hameiri. 2007. The Trouble with RAMSI: Reexamining the Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands. *The Contemporary Pacific* 19(2), 409.

^c Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. About RAMSI. <http://www.ramsi.org/about-ramsi/>

^d OEC. Solomon Islands. <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/slb/>

^e ADB. 2012. *Country Partnership Strategy: Solomon Islands 2012–2016*. Manila.

^f J Hayward-Jones. 2014. Australia's Costly Investment in Solomon Islands: The Lessons of RAMSI. Lowy Institute. <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/>

^g The World Bank. Net ODA received (% of GNI). http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DY.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS?order=wbapi_data_value_2013+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=desc (Accessed 6 November 2015)

^h Reliefweb. Solomon Islands: Earthquake and Tsunami—Feb 2013. <http://reliefweb.int/disaster/ts-2013-000015-slb>

ⁱ ADB. 2014. *Transport Sector Flood Recovery Project*. Transport Sector Assessment Summary Report. Manila.

^j United Nations Development Programme. 2015. *Human Development Report 2015 – Work for Human Development*. New York.

^k ADB. 2016. *Solomon Islands Fact Sheet*. Manila.

The “third wave” of NGO presence developed in the early 1980s. These were local NGOs established after independence and, for the first time, some of these new NGOs began to get involved in advocacy and political engagement with the government. The most prominent of these was the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), established in 1982. The SIDT focuses on village empowerment and community development. Other local CSOs to be established since independence were the Solomon Islands Football Federation, formed in 1979; the Family Support Centre, a support for victims of domestic, sexual, and child abuse, established in 1995; and Vois Blong Mere Solomon Islands, a women's NGO that works to advance the status women through information dissemination, linking, and networking, established in 2002.

In addition, chapters of international organizations were also established in Solomon Islands around this time. The Red Cross Solomon Islands was established in 1983.¹⁴ World Vision Solomon Islands began work in 1981. Greenpeace started in the Solomon Islands in 1991 and the Nature Conservancy in 1992. Transparency Solomon Islands, a chapter of Transparency International, was formed in 2002.

In 1984, around the time of the third wave of NGOs in Solomon Islands, the umbrella group for NGOs was formed. Two NGOs, the SIDT and the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific, met in Honiara in response to government concerns that there were too many NGOs representing women's issues in the Solomon Islands. They agreed there was an urgent need to form an umbrella organization for NGOs in the Solomon Islands, so the idea of the Development Services Exchange (DSE) was devised. DSE was to be the focal point for NGOs in the Solomon Islands and a voice for civil society.¹⁵ However, throughout the 1990s it experienced a decline in membership and by 2003 it was in a dire financial situation as donors withdrew.¹⁶ Since 2010, it has regained ground and today represents over 75 local and international NGOs and community-based organizations.

Trade unions have been active in the Solomon Islands since colonial times, with early organizations including the British Solomon Islands General Workers' Union. The Media Association of the Solomon Islands was established in 1982. The Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions was established in 1986—today it represents 10 unions in the public sector, and 1 private sector union.

Civil Society Under Recent Administrations

During the period of ethnic tension (1998–2003), civil society played a key role in attempts at peacemaking. The churches were particularly involved in mediation and limiting the violence. Seven Anglican Melanesian Brothers were martyred after being involved in conflict mediation in 2003.¹⁷ The Solomon Islands Christian Association was instrumental in forming

the Civil Society Network, which advocated for peace and responsible government throughout.¹⁸ Christian women's groups played an active role in promoting unity throughout this troubled time.¹⁹

The Civil Society Network, which emerged in 2001, was a formation of women's, church groups, trade unions, other NGOs, and the chamber of commerce. It campaigned on a number of issues, including disarmament and good governance. However, it faced division from within with the establishment of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), with some NGOs and civil society groups supporting the intervention while others did not.²⁰

The arrival of RAMSI also served to strengthen certain aspects of civil society, particularly through the Australian Government and nongovernment support to civil society strengthening. The support provided by international donors to the DSE was significant.²¹ However, there were also concerns expressed that RAMSI gave preference to the input and expertise of Australian expatriates²² at the expense of local support to community projects.²³ Local activists argued that local pastors, women's groups, village elders, and youth representatives should have been consulted to direct RAMSI's efforts.²⁴

Civil Society Today

Today, civil society in the Solomon Islands encompasses church groups, customary landowning groups, civic groups, women's organizations, disability groups, agricultural or farmers associations, environmental groups, community and youth organizations, sports clubs, trade unions, and advocacy and governance groups. There is a range of both membership and nonmembership organizations, including those that are established for public benefit, and those that are established to support their members.²⁵ Some are registered as NGOs but many, especially community based organizations, are not.

The church is a large and important component of civil society in Solomon Islands. With 98% of the population identifying as Christian, there is a wide variety of denominations and faiths, although 90% of Christians belong to one of five main churches: the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the Catholic Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the United Church.²⁶ The services offered by the national government do not reach far outside of Honiara and the churches play an important role in providing services to the rural populous. The churches are particularly active in providing services in education and training, health, and youth issues.²⁷

Women's organizations proliferate in Solomon Islands, both at the national and village level. It has been estimated that there are 3,000 provincial and community women's organizations, many of these

church-based (known as church women's groups). These women's groups play a role in delivering essential health and education services to women, particularly to the dispersed rural population.²⁸

The majority of land in Solomon Islands is under customary ownership, with up to 87% of the land areas under the customary system.²⁹ There are specific community-based landowning groups in Solomon Islands, although identifying who landowners are and who is representative of landowners is highly contentious and the cause of much disputation. This is heightened in light of benefits due from development, such as logging, particularly in rural areas (as there is little customary land in urban areas).

Village communities are also increasingly being organized into formalized community-based organizations, called variously village councils, village committees, or village and community associations. These organizations are often formally constituted with the aim of attracting development and local resources to address high priority needs, and providing a unified voice for their communities. Often they register as charitable trusts.³⁰

A number of CSOs produce regular media content in Solomon Islands. For example, Vois Blong Mere Solomon Islands produces a 15-minute radio show that is aired on Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation and Catholic Communications produces radio content and newsletters.³¹ Radio is the medium with the greatest penetration in Solomon Islands, with over 90% of the population having access to radio. One radio station, Gud Nuis FM, is church-owned.³²

A new forum for civil society engagement in Solomon Islands is social media. Forum Solomon Islands International is a Facebook page for expatriate Solomon Islanders. It is highly active and robust in its criticism of government. It has been registered as a CSO in Solomon Islands. However, while mobile phone penetration is relatively high (around 50 subscriptions per 100 people), internet penetration is low (at 6 users per 100 people).³³

There is one local Solomon Islands university in Solomon Islands: the Solomon Islands National University was established in 2012, being formed out of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. In addition, there is a Solomon Islands campus of the University of the South Pacific.

NGOs in Solomon Islands are seen by the public as being relatively free of corruption, with only 11% of those surveyed by Transparency Solomon Islands believing that NGOs were engaged in corruption. This is in the context of the majority surveyed believing that corruption was on the rise in Solomon Islands and 85% believing that police were corrupt.³⁴ The issue

of corruption has been taken up by some in the civil society sector, with one civil society coalition calling for a freeze on all donor funds to the Government of Solomon Islands until corruption issues have been addressed.³⁵

There are several important and intersecting concepts for understanding the perception of the work of civil society today in Solomon Islands. *Wantok*, or “one talk,” describes the ties that bind communities and the expectation of reciprocity and mutual obligation of relations bound by social or geographical associations.³⁶ *Wantokism*, in addition to serving as an informal form of social welfare and support, also has been argued to have the potential to be a check against corrupt behavior.³⁷ Another important concept is the focus on the local over national, translating to a lack of “sense of nation” and a lack of broad community understanding on the role that a national government should play, partly in response to the fact that the state reach does not extend far outside Honiara.³⁸ Some have characterized Solomon Islands as less of a nation, and more a country of villages.³⁹ These cultural concepts have implications for the work of civil society: much of the focus of CSOs is at the local or community level, rather than at the national level.

These concepts combine with two other issues: a perception of an expectation of direct personal benefit from community development projects by citizens or clients; and NGO perceptions of a perceived passivism, dependency, or lack of community ownership of NGO projects.⁴⁰ It has been argued that the concept of “development” can sometimes be understood in Solomon Islands as merely the disbursement of petty funds. This understanding of development may be due to the name of the “Rural Constituency Development Fund,” which is a discretionary fund given to each Solomon Islands sitting member of parliament (MP) for distribution in their local communities. The practical outcome of this is that national politicians disburse funds, goods, and services to their local communities, with the argument that some local communities expect the same from civil society. Some NGO workers in Solomon Islands have expressed a concern about the perceived passivity of the recipients of development assistance—expecting similar benefits of money and goods as provided by politicians.⁴¹ Further concerns are raised about a lack of community ownership of projects unless payments are involved. These concepts have implications for civil society operating in Solomon Islands today, including how civil society and government projects are perceived and engaged with by local communities.

Some local NGOs have argued that pursuit of donor funding has resulted in indigenous NGOs adopting donor-driven agendas at the expense of indigenous consent and knowledge. There is a concern that community knowledge and values are not adequately being incorporated into foreign civil society

interventions, as local NGOs seek funding from international donors to survive. There are also concerns about the sustainability of these interventions without clear exit strategies.

Key Civil Society Organizations in Solomon Islands

Church-based Organizations

Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA)

ankou-deemi@adra.org.sb

+677 38656/30438

Catholic Communications Solomon Islands

<http://www.catholicchurchsolomonislands.com>

srssala@gmail.com

+677 22125

Christian Care Centre (CCC)

<http://sistersofthechurch.org/our-houses/solomon-islands/christian-care-centre>

+677 22801

Mothers Union (Church of Melanesia)

mumelanesia@solomon.com.sb

+677 20572

Solomon Islands Christian Association

+677 23350

Local Nongovernment Organizations

Environmental Concerns Action Network of Solomon Islands (ECANSI)

ecansi@solomon.com.sb

+677 28642

Family Support Centre

fsc@solomon.com.sb or nyreefsc@gmail.com

+677 26999

Live and Learn Environmental Education

<http://www.livelearn.org/locations/solomon-islands>

solomons@livelearn.org

+677 23697

Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT)

<http://www.sidt.org.sb>

admin@sidt.org.sb, longden.m@sidt.org.sb

+677 23409

Solomon Islands Football Federation (SIFF)

<http://www.siff.com.sb>

administration@siff.com.sb

+677 26 496

Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association (SIPPA)

mike.salini@gmail.com, msalini@fpsi.com.sb
+677 22991 / 27554

Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI)

<http://transparencysi.org>
eo@transparencysi.org
+677 28319

The Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI)

Leni Dalavera
+677 7508764

Vois Blo Mere (VBMSI)

<https://www.facebook.com/Vois-Blong-Mere-Solomon-750776398289020/timeline/>
l vbms@solomon.com.sb
+677 28738

International Nongovernment Organizations

Caritas Australia

<http://www.caritas.org.au/learn/countries/solomon-islands>
questions@caritas.org.au

Oxfam International

<https://www.oxfam.org.au/country/solomon-islands/>
katieg@oxfam.org.au
+677 22004

Save The Children

<https://www.savethechildren.org.au/our-work/where-we-work/pacific-islands/solomon-islands>
info@savethechildren.org.au, peter.sykes@savethechildren.org
+677 22400

The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/asiaandthepacific/solomonislands/index.htm>
asiapacific@tnc.org or watu@TNC.ORG
+677 20940

Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA)

<http://www.apheda.org>
apheda@solomon.com.sb
+677 24453

World Vision International Solomon Islands

Phone: <http://www.worldvision.com.au/>
andrew_catford@wvi.org
+677 23092

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

http://www.wwfpacific.org/about/solomon_islands_/
sseeto@wwfpacific.org
+677 28023

Government–Civil Society Relations

The Government of Solomon Islands has had an uneven response to the civil society sector since independence, at times engaging civil society in its programs and development agenda and occasionally criticizing elements of civil society for its methods and approaches. Some have argued that NGO and government relations in Solomon Islands have been “beset with friction, misunderstanding, and potential difficulty,” although there are suggestions this is improving.⁴² In 2003, the government characterized the relationship between civil society and the government as not very healthy and suspicious.⁴³ The government at that time expressed concerns that civil society has been overly critical of its work and that some NGOs were unduly influenced by foreign agendas.⁴⁴ The SIDT in particular has had a rocky relationship with the government, with reports that members of the government were seeking ways to dismantle SIDT early after it was established.⁴⁵

In 2003, the Ministry of Home Affairs commissioned the *Services Taskforce of Solomon Islands Report* with the aim of formulating a community development strategy between the government and NGOs in implementing national programs. This taskforce encouraged an improvement in the relationship between civil society and the government to one based on mutual respect. To achieve this, the taskforce recommended the establishment of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the government and civil society.⁴⁶ A framework MOU was developed between the two and presented to Cabinet in 2010. However, this MOU was never executed. Instead, the government has indicated that it will introduce an NGO bill, but this is yet to be released. Civil society has expressed frustration about the lack of formal mechanisms for engaging with various levels of government.⁴⁷

Environmental and logging issues have been an arena of discord between the government and civil society groups. The government and civil society clashed over logging on Pavuvu Island in 1995, when sections of civil society raised concerns over the license issued to a logging company. The Prime Minister at the time urged civil society not to interfere with government matters, leading to an NGO petition and peaceful demonstration at Parliament House.⁴⁸ Logging and environmental issues have continued to be a point of dispute in Solomon Islands.

In more recent times, the government has more actively cultivated the views and participation of civil society. The government involved civil society in its consultations and planning for the National Development Strategy 2011–2020, with consultations taking place across all provinces for the first time; and again with the more recent revision of the National Development Strategy covering 2016–2035. The National Development Strategy recognizes the role of civil society and NGOs in national development in

- (i) improvement of service delivery by providing an enabling environment for provincial administrations to deliver goods and services and infrastructure development; strengthening their management capacity including in partnership with NGOs able to cost effectively provide services on behalf of government within a transparent legal and regulatory framework;
- (ii) preparation of a medium term National Poverty Alleviation Plan through stakeholder consultations in partnership with national and provincial authorities, civil society, NGOs, and the donor community;
- (iii) implementation of current laws and regulations in coordination with relevant public and private sector organizations, international bodies including family support, service providers, NGOs, and survivors to address gender-based violence;
- (iv) implementation of the Family Protection Act in coordination with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, family support and service providers, NGOs, survivors, and development partners; and
- (v) conducting readiness activities for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation and related conservation and sustainability measures (REDD+) and informing line ministries about the program and carbon financing alternatives to logging, and working with NGOs and CSOs on REDD+ compatible projects.

At times, civil society unifies to hold government accountable, although its capacity to do this is thought to need strengthening. Examples where civil society has criticized the government include the diversion of landowner royalty funds, concerns over the use of Constituency Development Funds, the costs associated with a Prime Ministerial trip to Indonesia, and the decision in 2015 by the government to grant MPs tax-free salaries.^{49, 50} This issue has generated a large push-back on the policy from the public and civil society alike.⁵¹ In addition, in 2013, the government was engaged in a protracted wage dispute with the teachers union.⁵²

The government currently partners with civil society on a range of initiatives, including: the Coral Triangle Initiative, involving various ministries plus NGOs such as The Nature Conservancy, World Wide Fund for Nature, the World Fish Center, and the Foundation for Peoples in the South Pacific; SafeNet, a network to provide services to victims of domestic violence and abuse, for which the government has signed an MOU with civil society; and DSE and Transparency Solomon Islands, who were part of an MOU signed with the government and the extractive industry to promote transparency in extractives in 2012.^{53, 54, 55} The government has also established a partnership with the Kastom Garden Association while the Solomon Islands Development Trust works in partnership with

the Ministry of Rural Development and Planning to facilitate trainings for rural community helpers to improve the implementation of the Rural Constituency Development Fund. In addition, the Ministry for Home Affairs, as the focal ministry for NGOs, is represented on the DSE Board as an ex-officio member.

The Legal Framework for Civil Society⁵⁶

Civil Society Organization Registration

There is no government central registry of CSOs in Solomon Islands. Civil society organizations are generally registered either under the Cooperative Societies Act (1953) or the Charitable Trusts Act (1964) in Solomon Islands. For those organizations that do register, most register under the Charitable Trusts Act. Organizations eligible to register under this act include those established for religious, educational, literary, scientific, social, or charitable purposes. They must register with the Registrar of Companies. Those organizations eligible to register under the Cooperative Societies Act are those cooperatives whose objectives are to promote the economic interests of their members. These organizations must register with the Registrar of Cooperative Societies.

In addition, there is specific legislation that regulates the activities of some religious groups (such as Church of Melanesia Trust Board [Incorporated] Act and the Church of the Province of Melanesia [Solomon Islands] Property Act) along with specific legislation pertaining to the Solomon Islands Red Cross Society.

Organizations registered under the Cooperative Societies Act are required to submit their financial statements annually to the Registrar of Societies, but there is no such provision in the Charitable Trusts Act.

Tax Treatment of Civil Society Organizations

CSOs in Solomon Islands are generally exempt from a range of taxes, although the exemption differs for each tax. Organizations which are exempt from goods tax include not-for-profit institutes of learning; organizations promoting the interests of a university or school; sport promotion bodies; and any religious, charitable, or benevolent institution. CSOs are generally exempt from paying income tax and stamp duties on property.

There are also general provisions for the relevant minister to waive or reduce sales tax and customs and excise duties.

Umbrella and Coordinating Bodies

Development Services Exchange

The DSE was formed in 1984 and is the umbrella coordinating body for civil society in Solomon Islands. The DSE's mission is to strengthen effective NGO coordination in Solomon Islands. The DSE plays an important coordination, facilitation, and networking role, building collaborations and cooperation between NGOs, the government, and donors in Solomon Islands. DSE has 75 actively registered members throughout Solomon Islands. DSE provides various services for its members including advocacy, capacity building, collecting, and sharing information. It produces a salary survey and a directory of members. It is also the National Liaison Unit for Solomon Islands with the Pacific Islands Association of Nongovernment Organizations.

The DSE has a civil society directory that is available by contacting DSE directly.

Contact details:

General Secretary: Nancy Jolo

P.O. Box 556

Lombi Crescent Street

New China* Town

Honiara

Solomon Islands

Tel: +677 23760

E-mail: generalsecretary@dse.org.sb

People with Disability Solomon Islands

People with Disability Solomon Islands (PWDSI) is the umbrella organization for disability groups in Solomon Islands. It was formed in 2003.

Contact details:

Office Manager: Savina Nongebatu

E-mail: savinafnongebatu@gmail.com

Tel: +677 25608

Solomon Islands National Council of Women

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women was founded in 1983. It is the umbrella organization for women's groups in Solomon Islands.

Contact details:

General Secretary: Lorio Sisiolo

Tel: +677 27529

E-mail: sincw@solomon.com.sb

Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions

The Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions is the national umbrella body for trade unions in the Solomon

Islands. It represents 10 unions in the public sector, and 1 private sector union.

Contact details:

Tel: sictu.sinuw@solomon.com.sb

E-mail: +677 27640

Civil Society Capacity

Civil society has been described as having relatively weak capacity in Solomon Islands, but with the potential to play a vital role in improving governance in Solomon Islands.⁵⁷ CSOs are able to access funds from a range of donors from different countries, with many funded projects having a particular focus on strengthening civil society capacity.

CSOs source funds from a range of international donors including overseas government, particularly the governments of Australia and New Zealand. They have also accessed funds from the European Union, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Development Programme, and international NGOs such as CIVICUS. Several of these funders have a priority focus area to strengthen civil society in Solomon Islands, including the European Union through the Non-State Actors in Development Program and the Australian Government's Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement, valued at A\$20 million from 2009 to 2014. Some local organizations also receive funding from the Solomon Islands government and through membership fees.

A significant majority of NGOs are dependent on external funding. As donors also set priorities about the nature and size of the activities funded, some NGOs are caught in a cycle of short-term funding and unable to engage in long-term planning.

The capacity challenges facing CSOs in Solomon Islands are numerous, including staff shortages, maintaining links and networks outside of Honiara, obtaining equipment and supplies, communications and transportation costs, and lack of basic infrastructure.

It is difficult for civil society to recruit and maintain qualified personnel. This is especially so for local CSOs who may not be able to match the pay and conditions of their international counterparts. There is also high labor force mobility, in part due to the higher salaries offered by other sectors.⁵⁸ For example, the national umbrella body for trade unions is entirely voluntary, which is a decline in capacity from 1999 when it had two paid staff. Of its affiliate unions, only four have paid staff. Overall, trade unions in Solomon Islands have weak infrastructure and human resource capacity.⁵⁹

In addition, there is a wage disparity between women and men in Solomon Islands for those working in the civil society sector.⁶⁰

Capacity gaps for civil society staff are in organizational leadership, project design, proposal writing, management of the project cycle, and financial management.⁶¹ In addition, there are significant capacity differentials between CSOs based in the capital Honiara and the rural areas. Most NGOs and CSOs are based in Honiara, and there is a stark difference between the development assistance that reaches Honiara compared to rural areas.⁶²

Power outages and slow internet connections are further challenges for those working in Honiara, let alone the regions (many of which are not connected to the grid). Another challenge, especially for rural CSOs, is securing adequate equipment and supplies, considering transport difficulties between islands. Specific civil society sectors also face specific challenges: for example, those working in domestic violence prevention find it very hard to rent or purchase land for safehouses or crisis centers, especially in rural areas.⁶³

A capacity concern for civil society is the issue of engaging with local communities and the expectations for distribution of immediate material benefit, along with the NGO workers or church leaders being seen by some in local communities as “middle people.” Some local NGOs find it difficult to match the fees paid and services paid by international organizations and local Solomon Islands MPs.⁶⁴ There also is a perception in some communities that funding for communities is spent on these middle people, not spent directly on the target communities.⁶⁵

However, despite these capacity constraints, CSOs in Solomon Islands regularly come together to work on issues of joint concern. For example, a group of 11 NGOs came together to prepare an *NGO Shadow Report on the Status of Women in the Solomon Islands*. Civil society has also collaborated on the NGO response to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review.

DSE, as the umbrella group for civil society, works to address the capacity constraints of its members and help civil society better respond to community priorities. It offers its members training in a number of areas, including financial management literacy, governance and leadership development, human resources development, media literacy, and project management. A particular focus of capacity development in Solomon Islands has been to increase skills and systems related to financial management. The strengths of civil society vary significantly across the sector: some civil society groups have well-developed planning and implementation strengths but others lack capacity in these areas.

Asian Development Bank–Civil Society Cooperation in Solomon Islands

ADB has been working with the Government of Solomon Islands since 1973 and has cumulative disbursements worth \$126.1 million since that time.⁶⁶ ADB has approved 18 loan projects valued at \$102.42 million, 13 grant projects totaling \$147.08 million, and 73 technical assistance projects totaling \$25.90 million. ADB recognizes Solomon Islands as operating in a fragile and conflict-affected situation, which means that ADB adopts particular approaches that are fragile and conflict-affected situation sensitive in its work in the country. The Pacific Department of ADB covers operations in 14 countries, including Solomon Islands. Within the department, the Pacific Liaison and Coordination Office, based in Sydney, Australia, is the ADB’s focal point for the programming, preparation, and implementation of assistance to Nauru, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. In 2008, the World Bank and ADB established a joint presence in Honiara to provide better aid coordination.⁶⁷ In 2016, ADB opened an Extended Mission in Solomon Islands, further strengthening ADB’s in-country presence.

The ADB engagement with civil society in Solomon Islands has primarily focused on consultation and implementation of grants and projects, but in recent times, engagement outside this process has increased. In August 2015, ADB held a 3-day training workshop with civil society in Honiara titled “Civil Society Protection for Development Effectiveness. Engaging with ADB: the How and the Why for Civil Society Organizations.” The workshop engaged with about 20 people including representatives from civil society (local and international NGOs, and community-based organizations) in Solomon Islands. DSE and Live and Learn gave presentations at the workshop. The workshop covered how civil society is able to engage with ADB on projects, particularly around social safeguards, including land acquisition and resettlement safeguards.

ADB in Solomon Islands has been actively engaged with the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security, which was launched in 2007. It is as a multilateral partnership among six Pacific island countries, including Solomon Islands. The Coral Triangle Initiative is being implemented in cooperation with the civil society group WWF, and ADB has an MOU in place with WWF to govern these partnership arrangements around natural resource management.

The Private Sector Development Initiative—a regional technical assistance administered by the Pacific Liaison and Coordination Office—has been working with NGOs and civil society in the Solomon Islands to economically empower women.⁶⁸

West 'Are 'Are Rokotanikeni Association. The Private Sector Development Initiative has worked with the West 'Are 'Are Rokotanikeni Association, an established NGO in southwest Malaita, to identify women who are well placed to engage in a business maintaining and repairing solar panels. A total of 18 entrepreneurs attended the first training session where they received hands-on solar maintenance training as well as advice on registering their business and opening bank accounts.

Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industries. The Private Sector Development Initiative is also working with the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industries to develop a governance program directed at persons seeking to become directors and those who are already in such positions. It includes the creation of materials and case studies on corporate governance, governance by large non-corporate institutions including associations, and specifically governance of state-owned enterprises.

Asian Development Bank Country Operations Business Plan, 2017–2019

The Solomon Islands country operations business plan is aligned with the strategic priorities of the Pacific Approach, 2016–2020; the Midterm Review of Strategy 2020; and the government's National Development Strategy, 2016–2035, along with the policy statement and policy strategy.^{69, 70, 71} The Pacific Approach will assist the 11 smaller Pacific island countries (including Solomon Islands) pursue opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and human development by reducing costs, managing risks, and enabling value creation.

The country operations business plan continues the ADB's support to three sectors: energy, public sector management, and transport. The country operations business plan includes water and other urban infrastructure and services as a new sector for ADB involvement. In terms of regional projects, private sector and financial sector development is supported through the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, the Pacific Business Investment Facility, and the inclusion of Solomon Islands in a proposed new subregional project supporting agribusiness financing and sustainable tourism development.⁷²

Asian Development Bank Supported Activities Involving Civil Society

The Solomon Islands: Strengthening Financial Inclusion project was approved in September 2014 and aims to

improve access to and use of financial services in rural areas to promote economic opportunity. The project is focusing on smallholder farmers in two provinces by improving financial literacy and increasing access to financial services (including branchless banking models) in order to improve livelihoods through increased participation in the cash economy. Under this \$600,000 technical assistance, the first phase of the project is carrying out field surveys on financial capability in the two provinces. This first phase is being undertaken in a cost partnership with World Education Australia, a not-for-profit organization specializing in financial literacy, livelihood development, and microfinance.

A \$6.61-million grant plus a \$6.61-million loan was approved in August 2014 to address the damage to infrastructure from the April 2014 flash floods arising from Tropical Cyclone Ita in Solomon Islands. The damage was estimated to be equivalent to 9.2% of the gross domestic product of Solomon Islands, with 23 people killed, 10,000 displaced, and over 50,000 people affected by the flooding.⁷³ The reconstruction work involves public consultation.

The regional technical assistance for Strengthening Coastal and Marine Resources Management in the Coral Triangle of the Pacific (Phase 2) is a \$1.95-million project approved in 2010 which aims to increase food security through improving coastal and marine management and resilience. In Solomon Islands, the project will work with The Nature Conservancy and WorldFish Solomon Islands. WorldFish conducted participatory stakeholder workshops in Malaita province in 2013 as a part of this project.

The Domestic Maritime Support (Sector) Project is a major infrastructure project that was approved by ADB in 2008 aimed at rehabilitating 12 wharves or jetties, and it is expected to conclude in 2019. CSOs in Solomon Islands are playing a key role in gender awareness training, engaging women in construction activities, and training on HIV/AIDS awareness and occupational health and safety.⁷⁴

The Economic Recovery Support Program—Subprograms 1 and 2 were two grants approved in 2010 and 2011, each valued at \$5 million. The grants were designed to improve fiscal management in the wake of the 2009 financial crisis and increase private sector development, to reduce reliance on foreign aid and unsustainable logging. Civil society was involved in design and implementation of these grants. In the design phase, consultations were held with CSOs including Solomon Women in Business, Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce, and Transparency Solomon Islands.⁷⁵ As part of the implementation of the grants, the Solomon Islands Extractive Industries National Stakeholder Group was formed in 2012 which included landowner groups, other civil society groups, extractive companies and government, and its mandate

was to oversee and coordinate the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in Solomon Islands, to promote transparency and accountability in the extractive sector. CSO representatives included the DSE and Transparency Solomon Islands.

The Economic and Financial Reform Program, approved in 2013, was a \$5-million grant aimed at continuing reform of public sector management, specifically by delivering better finance management, greater economic efficiency for a business enabling environment, and broader access to social services. The program involved civil society in the design phase, including the DSE, the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce, and the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association. In addition, 41 civil society organizations, including 7 women's groups, were consulted during the preparation of the 2014 budget.⁷⁶

The technical assistance project Support for the Formulation of a National Strategic Plan was approved in 2010 and provided assistance to the Government of the Solomon Islands in developing the draft of the National Development Strategy, 2011–2020. Civil society was involved in the consultation process under the project with consultations held across all administrative areas in the country. Over 30 workshops were held in 2011 with over 500 people attending in total, including representatives from churches, civil society, and NGOs. ADB subsequently provided technical assistance to support a revision of the existing National Development Strategy to cover the 2016–2035 period under a \$600,000 technical assistance project approved in 2014.

Under the regional technical assistance project Mainstreaming Environment for Poverty Reduction, the NGO Live & Learn developed demonstration activities and implemented the concept of REDD+. The pilot communities were in the central south area of Choiseul. The pilot project aimed to produce tools for education and capacity building for forest-dependent indigenous groups and local people in the Solomon Islands around governance and the implementation of REDD+.⁷⁷

Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction

The Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction was established in 2000. It provides direct assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable groups in developing member countries, while fostering long-term social and economic development.⁷⁸ It provides both project grants and technical assistance to developing member countries. Since its establishment in 2000, it has approved nine grants for the Pacific. Two technical

assistance projects have been approved for Solomon Islands. The first is Supporting Transport Sector Development, valued at \$800,000 and approved in 2010. The second project was Strengthening Country Safeguard Systems in the Transport Sector, valued at \$600,000 and approved in 2012. This project involved engaging with a range of government and nongovernment stakeholders including civil society in developing the institutional framework for safeguards assessment and protections in the transport sector in Solomon Islands. The project worked with the parastatal body, Landowners' Advocacy, and the Legal Support Office to deliver seven awareness-raising workshops in 2014, including engaging with representatives of civil society.

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For more information about ADB's work in Solomon Islands, visit www.adb.org/countries/solomon-islands/main; www.adb.org/publications/solomon-islands-fact-sheet

Definition and Objectives of Civil Society Collaboration

Civil society is an important stakeholder in the operations of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and its borrowers and clients. It is distinct from the government and the private sector and consists of a diverse range of individuals, groups, and nonprofit organizations. They operate around shared interests, purposes, and values with a varying degree of formality and encompass a diverse range—from informal unorganized community groups to large international labor union organizations. Of particular relevance to ADB are nongovernment organizations, community-based organizations and people's organizations, foundations, professional associations, research institutes and universities, labor unions, mass organizations, social movements, and coalitions and networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) and umbrella organizations.^a

ADB recognizes CSOs as development actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector, and who play a significant role in development in Asia and the Pacific. ADB has a long tradition of interacting with CSOs in different contexts, through policy- and country strategy-level consultation, and in designing, implementing, and monitoring projects.

In 2008, ADB launched Strategy 2020, which articulates the organization's future direction and vision until 2020.^b Above all, Strategy 2020 presents three complementary strategic agendas to guide ADB operations: inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. These agendas reflect the recognition that it is not only the pace of growth but also the pattern of growth matters in reducing poverty in the region. In this new strategic context, partnerships with a range of organizations, including CSOs, will become central to planning, financing, implementing, and evaluating ADB projects.

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