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du Pacifique



# **COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT**

OF AGRICULTURE AND  
THE RURAL SECTOR IN  

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SOLOMON ISLANDS



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# Acronyms and abbreviations

ARD	agriculture and rural development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CGA-ARS	Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector
CSO	civil society organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	gross domestic product
HDI	Human Development Index
HIES	Household and Income Expenditure Survey
ILO	International Labour Organization
MAL	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
MECCDMM	Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology
MFMR	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
MMR	maternal mortality ratio
MPS	Ministry of Public Service
MRDL	Ministry of Rural Development and Livelihoods
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
NALP	National Agriculture and Livestock Policy
NGO	non-governmental organization
NTP	National Transport Plan
SBD	Solomon Islands dollar
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SINACC	Solomon Islands National Advisory Committee on CEDAW
SPBD	South Pacific Business Development
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TB	tuberculosis
TFR	total fertility rate
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States dollar
WARA	West Are'Are Rokotanikeni Association
WDD	Women's Development Division



# Executive summary

The purpose of the Solomon Islands Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector (CGA-ARS, or Assessment) is twofold. First, it provides a situational analysis of rural women's experiences and considers social norms, gender power dynamics and how rural women and men access, control and use natural resources for their livelihoods. Second, it provides an assessment of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming by government agencies by examining five key criteria impacting mainstreaming work. These are political will, organizational culture, accountability mechanisms, technical capacity and adequacy of financing.

The report is intended to inform the work of the United Nations (UN) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) as they develop country plans and provide input into larger review processes such as the regional United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The report will also inform the Government of Solomon Islands in the development and implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive policies, programmes, and services that benefit rural women and men.

Solomon Islands is the third largest country in the South Pacific sub-region of Melanesia. The country has a wealth of natural resources including native forests, fresh water, marine and fishery resources, minerals and agricultural land. These resources are distributed unevenly across the nine provinces. The Solomon Islands economy is heavily dependent upon the performance of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Together, these sectors account for about 40 percent of Solomon Islands' gross domestic product (GDP), with agriculture contributing approximately 29 percent. The 2009 Population and Housing Census reported that approximately 96 percent of rural households grew at least some of their own food and 69 percent of rural households caught fish for their own use.

Both women and men engage in subsistence agriculture and fisheries, although they may do different tasks and use different tools. Statistics show that rural livelihoods are heavily concentrated in the subsistence sector and that women play a prominent role in inshore fishing and gleaning, as well as selling agricultural produce and goods produced in the home in markets or alongside roads.

The Assessment further reveals that, in an effort to secure cash income, rural women are also turning to cash cropping since it is more lucrative. This poses a critical area of analysis for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, as women play a large role in subsistence agriculture and the growing of root crops, tubers and vegetables for both household consumption and sale in local markets. A substantial move by women and their families into cash cropping could impact the health of families as nutritious food is increasingly replaced imported foods that are less nutritious.

In general, men of the Solomon Islands control most of the productive resources and services, including land, tools and equipment, income and savings, raw material, transportation, livestock, training and extension, farming inputs and technical agricultural information. Anecdotal information indicates that it is common for husbands to consult with wives in making decisions on resources and benefits, but that men have the final say.

In relation to partnerships and stakeholder engagement, this Assessment points to the need for more collaboration among agencies. Given that their mandates for rural livelihoods are linked, they will only succeed in enhancing rural women's livelihoods if these agencies collaborate more effectively. The recommendations in the report – involving the need for capacity development, more gender-responsive organizational cultures and the generation of evidence to support gender mainstreaming in rural sectors – are specifically tailored for the Solomon Islands Government and for development partners such as FAO and SPC.

Key recommendations include:

- Creation of an operational and functioning intragovernmental mechanism for the advancement of gender equality and rural women's empowerment in agriculture and rural development (ARD), to be led and coordinated by the Women's Development Division (WDD) of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA).

- Fostering of collaboration and coordination among MWYCFA, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), the Ministry of Rural Development and Livelihoods (MRDL) and provincial government departments to increase WDD's technical knowledge on agriculture, including fisheries, while concurrently building gender awareness among extension staff and communities.
- Utilization of gender-related research and analysis in ARD to build institutional awareness and technical capacity on gender equality and rural women's empowerment within MWYCFA and agricultural line ministries.
- Promotion of policy research and analysis on gender equality and rural women's empowerment in the agricultural sector to inform policies and strategic planning, including systematic gender analysis of legislation and policies, such as macroeconomic policies, structural reforms, and aid and trade agreements.
- Gender sensitization of existing national and provincial data collection efforts by agricultural line ministries, including existing market surveys such as the Hapi Fis programme of MFMR.
- Fostering collaboration with development partners and civil society organizations (CSOs) to enhance income-generating activities for rural women, including through the development of value chains, decent work and productive employment, as well as diversification of livelihood opportunities for rural women, including for women with disabilities and young women.
- Increasing the gender sensitivity of the extension services provided by MAL and MFMR, including through the incorporation of measures to ensure that rural women and men benefit equitably from these services, the provision of gender sensitivity training for extension officials at all levels and increasing the number of women extension officers.
- Increasing the budget allocations in all agricultural line ministries as well as in MWYCFA for gender equality mainstreaming in their plans, programmes and projects to specifically assist women agricultural producers.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION



FAO recognizes that gender equality is both a human right and an absolute necessity for achieving the Organization's mandate to eradicate hunger and poverty worldwide. In 2013, FAO published its *FAO Policy on Gender Equality: Attaining Food Security Goals in Agriculture and Rural Development*.<sup>1</sup> In this policy document, gender mainstreaming and women-targeted actions are the components of a two-pronged strategy for promoting gender equality in agriculture and the rural sector. The set of minimum standards for gender mainstreaming laid out in the FAO policy document include a requirement to undertake a Country Gender Assessment (CGA). The CGA contributes to the formulation of the Country Programme that is established between FAO and a member country government and expressed in the Country Programming Framework. The CGA also supports gender analysis at the identification and formulation stages of technical assistance projects. The 2012 *FAO Guide to the Project Cycle* states that a gender analysis is essential for the preparation of concept notes for programmes and projects and it is recommended by FAO that a gender assessment be carried out prior to any project formulation.<sup>2</sup>

**"Gender Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."**

**United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1997**

## 1.1 Background and rationale

Solomon Islands is a Melanesian country with an ethnically diverse population. An estimated 70 indigenous languages are spoken in addition to English and the lingua franca, Pijin. The diverse indigenous languages spoken indicate a wide range of cultures and social norms that shape Solomon Islanders' worldviews and the construction of gender relations in society.

Eighty-one percent of the population lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture for their livelihoods. The country has high levels of marine and terrestrial biodiversity, and in most areas there are still rich fishing resources and soils suitable for agriculture. According to the Solomon Islands 2012/13 Household and Income Expenditure Survey (HIES), nationally, around 76 percent of households derive their cash incomes from active participation in the following four main subsistence-based activities: agriculture (including forestry), fisheries (including gathering/harvesting), livestock and handicrafts (including home processing of food). This share is even higher in rural areas, where 85 percent of households derive their cash incomes from the aforementioned subsistence-based activities, compared to less than a third (31 percent) of urban households (National Statistics Office, 2015).

Women and men are active in subsistence work in nearly equal numbers, yet a gendered division of tasks, responsibilities, equipment use and knowledge is prevalent. Men tend to undertake the more strenuous work of clearing gardens, heavy planting and harvesting tasks, and construction work, whereas women tend to do more ongoing and labour-intensive tasks such as maintenance of seedlings and gardens, and post-harvest processing.

In fisheries, men are predominantly engaged in offshore fishing and near-shore fin fishing from boats. Women spend more time reef gleaning for invertebrates, wading with hand lines and small cast nets, and fishing from small canoes in protected lagoons. Women are employed in large numbers in tuna canneries and are engaged in fishpond aquaculture and in harvest and post-harvest processing of species like *bêche-de-mer* and giant clams.

<sup>1</sup> *FAO Policy on Gender Equality: Attaining Food Security Goals in Agriculture and Rural Development* is available at: [www.fao.org/policy-support/resources/resources-details/en/c/427024](http://www.fao.org/policy-support/resources/resources-details/en/c/427024).

<sup>2</sup> *FAO's Guide to the Project Cycle* is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ap105e/ap105e.pdf>.

Both rural women and men are engaged in small-scale marketing in the Solomon Islands, selling fruit, vegetables, fish and handicrafts. However, there is currently little added value in the processing of agricultural products by rural women. Depending on the remoteness of their communities, rural women are less likely to travel to larger markets as often as men. Market infrastructure is poor, lacking proper sanitation, security and transparent governance systems.

At the national level, policy frameworks exist that support gender equality and gender mainstreaming across sectors. These policies are managed primarily through the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA).

The Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination and the Ministry of Public Service (MPS) actively support gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy (2016–2020).

The overall objective of the Assessment is to analyse agriculture<sup>3</sup> and the rural sector at the macro (policy), meso (institutional) and micro (community and household) levels from a gender perspective. The Assessment further aims to 1) provide information to the Government of Solomon Islands to inform the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programmes in ARD; 2) inform the development of the FAO country programming process by FAO and the Government of Solomon Islands and 3) contribute to SPC's programmes for strengthening the national enabling environment for gender mainstreaming.

## 1.2 Methodology

Information for the production of the CGA-ARS has been collected through a combination of review of literature, analysis of public policies and development programmes, interviews with stakeholders from the government and civil society, and focus group discussions with rural women and men.

The analysis framework used in this assessment has two components – a situational analysis and an enabling environment analysis. The situational analysis of gender issues in the rural sector is based on desk

research and supplemented by information from site visits and consultations with government ministries and CSOs. This analysis includes a qualitative examination of women's and men's access to and control over resources, including economic and political resources, time and knowledge. Family and community decision-making and leadership are considered components of political influence at the family and community levels. This qualitative information is supported with available quantitative data.

The analysis of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming replicates the methodology developed by SPC for taking stock of governments' capacities for mainstreaming gender across their policies and programmes and is consistent with the FAO approach outlined in its 2013 Policy on Gender Equality. This Assessment looks at the enabling environment for mainstreaming gender, including: 1) legal and policy frameworks that uphold and promote gender equality; 2) demonstrated government commitment; 3) clear accountability mechanisms; 4) strong technical capacity; and 5) adequate financial resources.

Four methods have been used to collect data and inform the analysis behind the Assessment.

- 1) A desk review of national, regional and global literature relevant to gender equality and the advancement of rural women across natural resource management sectors. The desk review included reports, policies, programme documents and other information from government agencies, development partners and CSOs.
- 2) In-depth interviews with government officials (see Annex 1).
- 3) Consultations with CSOs and development partners engaged in promoting sustainable resource management and gender equality (see Annex 2).
- 4) Site visits to communities on the islands of Guadalcanal and Malaita (see Annex 3). The site visits included interviews and one focus group discussion. It is recognized that limited site studies cannot provide representative information about a country as diverse as Solomon Islands. Rather, the information gathered from the site visits is used throughout the report to illustrate some aspects of gender perspectives in rural livelihoods.

<sup>3</sup> In general, this report uses a broad definition of agriculture which comprises crop production, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and forestry.



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### Limitations of the analysis

The interviews undertaken for this assessment both at the community level and across the government provide a snapshot in time that is not representative of all the views across the government or of the realities of all rural Solomon Islanders.

### 1.3 FAO in Solomon Islands

Cooperation between Solomon Islands and FAO has been ongoing since the country joined the Organization in 1985 and was strengthened with the establishment of a country office in 2016. With the aim of sustainably increasing the production and marketing of domestic agricultural products and the healthy consumption of safe and nutritious food, FAO assistance in Solomon Islands focuses on:

- developing and promoting evidence-based recommendations to incentivize the production and consumption of safe and healthy food;
- promoting sustainable and climate-smart practices to help build resilient agriculture, fisheries and forestry production systems; and
- identifying and promoting food control and business practices to facilitate efficient agrifood value chains that provide safe, nutritious and affordable food.

### 1.4 Organization of the Assessment

This Assessment is divided into five chapters comprised of 1) this introduction; 2) an overview of the country context; 3) a gender analysis of the policy environment; 4) assessment of gender inequalities in agriculture and the rural sector and 5) the conclusion and recommendations.

This first chapter has laid out the purpose of the report, its objectives and the methodology used to undertake the Assessment. Chapter 2 provides information on the country context using data from national statistical surveys accompanied by gender analysis where data and information are available. Chapter 3 focuses on the stocktake of the capacity of the government to mainstream gender equality and rural women's empowerment in ARD and provides an analysis of the enabling environment. Chapter 4 provides a gender analysis of agriculture and the rural sector, which is designed to reflect the priority areas of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) along with other areas pertinent to the livelihoods of rural women. Chapter 5 highlights key findings and provides recommendations of possible actions that can be adopted by the Government of Solomon Islands and other key stakeholders, notably FAO and the Pacific Community.

# 2

## COUNTRY CONTEXT



This section presents information on the national social and economic context underlying the Assessment. It focuses on human development issues, looking in particular at demography, health, education, employment, infrastructure and gender inequality.

Solomon Islands, an archipelago of 997 islands with a total land area of 30 407 km<sup>2</sup>, is the third largest archipelago in the South Pacific. Its Main Group Archipelago stretches for approximately 1 700 km between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. The central archipelago is comprised of a double chain of six large islands (Guadalcanal, Choiseul, Santa Isabel, New Georgia, Malaita and Makira) (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).

There are two dominant climate systems: sunny and calm weather with south-easterly trade winds from May to October and the north-easterly trade monsoon winds from December to March. Weather temperatures do not vary much throughout the year given the country's close proximity to the equator, with mean daily temperatures ranging from about 23 to 30 degrees Celsius (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).

## 2.1 Demographics and population dynamics

In 2013, the estimated total population of Solomon Islands was 615 804 people, with 317 205 (51.5 percent) males and 298 598 (48.5 percent) females (Solomon Islands Government, 2015). Compared to the last national census carried out in 2009, the total population increased by 99 934, or by 52 750 males and 47 183 females (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

According to the 2012/13 HIES, 19 percent of the population resides in urban areas and 81 percent in rural areas (National Statistics Office, 2015).

The country has a young population, with 41 percent of Solomon Islanders being under 15 years of age. This results in a very high dependency ratio, which stood at 72 percent in 2018, meaning that for every 100 individuals between 15 and 65 years of age,

there are 72 young or elderly individuals (World Bank, 2019). This high dependency ratio can create hardship for income earners, especially those living in rural areas and depending on income from the agricultural sector.

Fertility levels of Solomon Islands women decreased from a total fertility rate (TFR) of 4.7 in 2009 to 4.4 in 2015 (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a). The TFR is higher in rural areas than in urban areas (4.7 and 4.4, respectively). The adolescent fertility rate is high, at 77 births per 1 000 women aged 15–19 years between 2011–2015. This rate is down from 88 births per 1 000 women during 1996–2000 but is significantly higher than the regional average of 22 births per 1 000 women aged 15–19 years in East Asia and the Pacific (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a).

The 2009 Census population projections foresee the population of the Solomon Islands increasing by about one-third every 20 years: to about 930 000 in 2030 and 1.3 million in 2050. The 2009 Census also forecasts that the population will age and that the working age population (aged 15–59) will drastically increase (rising by about 83 percent from 2009 to 2030) (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).

## 2.2 National social and economic situation

Solomon Islands has a wealth of natural resources, including native forests, fresh water, marine and fishery resources, minerals and agricultural land. These resources, however, are distributed unevenly across the country's nine provinces.

The Solomon Islands economy is heavily dependent on the performance of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Together, these sectors account for about 40 percent of Solomon Islands' gross domestic product (GDP) and agriculture alone accounts for about 29 percent (Solomon Islands Government, 2018). The 2009 Census reported that approximately 96 percent of rural households grow at least some of their own food and 69 percent of rural households catch fish for their own use (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> The last national Census of Population and Housing was conducted in 2009. In this Assessment, newer demographic data from the 2012/13 HIES is used to complement the 2009 Census data.

Solomon Islands is classified as a developing country; in 2017, at least 12.7 percent of its population was living below the national poverty line (ADB, 2018). Solomon Islands' GDP was USD 1 073 577 in 2016, with a 3.2 percent annual GDP growth rate (Pacific Community, 2018b).

Both matrilineal and patrilineal social systems are found in Solomon Islands. In matrilineal systems, inheritance rights are passed on through the female lines. However, even in matrilineal systems, including those of the Solomon Islands, men tend to dominate public decision-making and control economic and productive resources (ADB, 2015).

## 2.3 Demography and population dynamics

The Human Development Index (HDI) value for Solomon Islands was 0.546 in 2018. This positions the country within the low human development category, with a ranking of 152 out of 189 countries and territories recognized by the United Nations. Sex-disaggregated HDI is not available for the Solomon Islands, nor are Gender Development Index (GDI) or Gender Inequality Index (GII) values and rankings available.

This section examines trends in health, education, employment, services and the status of gender equality.

### 2.3.1 Health

Malaria and tuberculosis (TB) are major public health concerns in Solomon Islands. Malaria is of particular concern among pregnant women and children under five years of age and is the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in both inpatient admissions and outpatient attendance (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a). The 2015 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) highlights the social and economic implications of malaria in Solomon Islands, including absenteeism in work and school, and low productivity in the workplace. However, the survey does not provide any sex-disaggregated statistics on those who contract malaria.

TB incidence in children aged 0–14 years is about the same for girls and boys. Gender differences are evident in the adult population, with men more than twice as likely to have TB as women (World Health Organization, 2019). In an assessment of Solomon Islanders' knowledge and awareness of TB, the 2015 DHS reveals that knowledge of the disease is high both among women and men (92 percent for females and 97 percent for males), although adolescents aged 15–19 years were less likely to have heard of the disease. Additionally, more men and women in urban areas are aware that TB can be cured than men and women living in rural areas (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a). This could potentially be a barrier for rural men and women in seeking necessary treatment.

In its 'Millennium Development Goals plus' framework, the Government of Solomon Islands had set the priority of reducing the country's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) from 550 deaths per 100 000 live births in 1992 to fewer than 100 deaths per 100 000 live births by 2015. While this target was not met, a significant decrease was achieved, with an MMR of 124 by 2014 (Pacific Community, 2016).

While many indicators of women's reproductive health have improved, rural women still face difficulties in accessing health facilities where service providers and drugs are consistently available. Knowledge of reproductive health is limited among young people, and while rates of adolescent pregnancy have declined, they are still high. Thirteen percent of young rural women aged between 15 and 19 years have already begun childbearing in comparison to 10 percent of same aged urban women (Solomon Islands Government, 2015).

The infant mortality rate<sup>6</sup> decreased from 32 deaths below the age of one per 1 000 births in 1990 to 21.8 deaths below the age of one per 1 000 births in 2018.

<sup>5</sup> The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.

<sup>6</sup> The infant mortality rate indicates the probability that the child will not survive to their first birthday.

### 2.3.2 Education and literacy

Access to quality secondary education for all children and improved access to technical and vocational education and training and higher education by 2030 is an overarching strategic goal of the National Development Strategy 2016–2035 (Solomon Islands Government, 2016d). In 2014, there were almost 200 000 students enrolled in the national educational system. In the early childhood education category, 12 359 males were enrolled compared to 11 633 females. At the primary school level (preparatory year through year six), this difference was slightly higher, with 65 307 males and 59 991 females enrolled. At the secondary school level, the gap narrowed again, with 24 601 males and 22 449 females enrolled (Pacific Community, 2016).

Solomon Islands has a high literacy rate of 88 percent for females aged 15–24 and 91 percent for males aged 15–24. In 2009, fewer girls five years of age attended school compared to grade one, when enrolment rates increase. In 2009, the grade one enrolment rate for boys and girls was 86 percent. However, the education system faces the challenge of students leaving it early. In 2009, 7 percent of the population aged 6–15 years had already left school, and another 7 percent (aged 5–7 years) had never been to school. The capital Honiara, the country's urban centre, has a lower enrolment rate for primary education than other provinces. Equally notable, compared to other provinces, women from Malaita between 15–24 years of age have the lowest literacy rates nationwide at 78 percent (Pacific Community, 2016).

The 2009 Census showed that levels of girls' education are particularly low in rural areas, where 25 percent of females aged 15 years and above have had no schooling compared to 13 percent of males in the same age category. As a comparison, in Honiara 10 percent of females aged 15 years and above have had no schooling. Levels of secondary schooling are quite low in rural areas, with only 13 percent of females and 18 percent of males having completed secondary education (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).

### 2.3.3 Employment and income

According to the 2009 Census, nearly two-thirds (62.9 percent) of the population aged 12 years and older was economically active. A higher percentage of labour force was recorded in rural areas (65.5 percent) compared to urban areas (52.8 percent). In rural areas there were no significant gender differences in labour force participation (65.5 percent for males and 65.8 percent for females). A greater discrepancy by gender was noted in urban areas, with 56.6 percent of males and 48.5 percent of females economically active. Correlated to this, the unemployment rate was lower in rural areas (1.2 percent of males and 1.3 percent of females) as compared to urban areas (7.3 percent of males and 7.2 percent of females).

Of the total population aged 12 years and older that was economically active, only one-quarter (24 percent) received a regular paid income, 30 percent of males and 10 percent of females (Solomon Islands Government, 2009).

According to the 2012/13 HIES, the incomes received by rural households are on average about three times lower than the incomes received by urban households. Most urban households' incomes are cash-based (80 percent), while this was the case for only half (53 percent) of rural households' incomes. Income from subsistence agriculture, including fishing and food processing, and from other subsistence activities such as handicrafts accounts for 16 percent of total employment income at the national level (National Statistics Office, 2015).

Honiara has the highest share of employment income, valued at SBD 1.3 billion (24 percent), followed by Guadalcanal Province (20 percent).<sup>7</sup> Statistics also show that while Honiara households earn on average three to six times the average cash income of all households across provinces, and two to four times the average employment income, it has the lowest average income from home production, which is an activity most associated with rural areas (National Statistics Office, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> One Solomon Islands dollar (SBD) is equivalent to 0.12 United States dollars (USD) as of September 2019.

Fifty-eight percent of rural women, compared to 25 percent of urban women, are in vulnerable employment.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, 63 percent of rural women compared to 48 percent of rural men are subsistence workers.<sup>9</sup> Rural women have limited participation in both informal and formal businesses despite the fact that they are actively engaged in the economy through subsistence production and in-kind and on-farm work (National Statistics Office, 2015).

Barriers to women's participation in small businesses include time constraints due to reproductive and caregiving responsibilities, subsistence food production and community expectations that women will provide free labour to prepare and serve food at community and church events.

Additionally, women's lower levels of education and lack of literacy make it more difficult for them to identify and respond to opportunities and understand requirements of formalized business development. Geographic isolation, poor financial services, weak transportation and telecommunication networks and lack of knowledge on quality assurance and marketing are all barriers to women's engagement in employment. Financial inclusion programmes and savings clubs are working to increase women's financial literacy and opportunities to save and learn basic business skills. However, power differentials within households and systems of traditional obligation often make it difficult for women to control cash incomes.

### 2.3.4 Services and basic infrastructure

Infrastructure and services are frequently poor in rural areas. Solomon Islanders use ferries, small private boats, a nationally-owned airline and roads to travel around the country. Transportation costs are generally high relative to incomes. This limits mobility, especially for rural women who have few income generation opportunities.

Service delivery and the quality and safety of services are negatively impacted by isolation of rural communities and lack of infrastructure. Schools

and health centres in rural areas may be in poor condition or unable to retain trained staff. Repairs and maintenance to buildings and delivery of health and education supplies are constrained by transport and shipping costs. Crowded truck and mini-bus transport create personal safety risks for women. Women in the Honiara Central Market report that they have faced theft, threats of assault and physical groping when traveling to markets or health centres.

The 2015 DHS found that for 58 percent of rural women, distance and lack of transport accessibility pose significant barriers to accessing a health care facility. Other barriers include not wanting to travel alone (44 percent), limited access to money to pay for services or transport (53 percent), no drugs at health centres (83 percent) and no service providers present at the facility (75 percent) (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a).

Women's marital and employment status (especially their cash-earning potential) also determine women's access to health care services. Women who are not married and/or do not have a cash-earning job tend to face more constraints in accessing health care when they are sick (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a).

Market facilities often lack adequate sanitation or security, which can negatively impact rural women who need to travel and stay overnight to sell produce in local markets (ADB, 2015). UN Women has been working with municipal councils in the Solomon Islands to improve market infrastructure and support the income generation potential of rural women.

In 2016, only 47.6 percent of the Solomon Islands population had access to electricity (ADB, 2018). Access to safe drinking water and sanitation also continues to be a major issue for the country, with at least 30 percent of its rural population in dire need of access to safe drinking water (World Bank, 2015). In 2015, the second phase of the Solomon Islands Rural Development Programme, the only nation-wide community-level government programme reaching all 172 rural wards in the country, was implemented.

<sup>8</sup> Vulnerable employment comprises own-account workers and contributing family workers. Those engaged in these activities have a lower likelihood of having formal work arrangements and are more likely to lack elements associated with decent employment, such as adequate social security and a voice at work (ILO, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> ILO (ICSE-93) defines subsistence workers as self-employed workers who produce goods or services that are predominantly consumed by their own household and constitute an important basis for its livelihood (ILO, 1993).

The programme's primary purpose was to improve basic infrastructure and services in rural areas, as well as to better connect smallholder farming households to markets. A large component of this programme was to set up new rainwater catchment and storage systems in the most underserved communities and to address people's needs for clean drinking water.

### 2.3.5 Gender equality and women's empowerment

A range of variables shape gender relations in Solomon Islands and influence rural women's experiences of life. Traditional male-dominated systems of governance combined with patriarchal colonial assumptions about women's roles in the family and in development have historically disadvantaged women.

In general, statistics show that women and girls have less access to opportunities and services, and less control over resources, than men and boys. Heavy workloads and high rates of violence against women and girls significantly constrain both rural and urban women from exercising their rights to participate equally in the social, economic and political spheres.

As mentioned above, while many indicators of women's reproductive health have showed improvement, rural women still have difficulty accessing health facilities where service providers and drugs are consistently available. Knowledge about reproductive health is limited among young people, and while rates of adolescent pregnancy have declined, they are still high.

As also mentioned above, rural women have limited participation in informal and formal businesses despite being actively engaged in the economy through subsistence production and in-kind and on-farm work. Barriers include time constraints due to reproductive and caregiving responsibilities, subsistence food production and community expectations combined with women's lower levels of education, geographic isolation, poor financial services, weak transportation and telecommunication networks, and lack of knowledge on quality assurance and marketing.

The 2015 DHS found that women's participation in decision making does not vary greatly by residence, although women's age and employment status play a role. Women aged 15–19 years and those who are unemployed have the least decision-making power in relation to their health care, major household purchases and visits to their family and relatives (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a).

The Government has made legislative and policy commitments to promote gender equality. A number of local and international civil society and faith-based organizations also support this work through programmes aimed at equitable engagement of women and men in natural resource management, economic development and social change (Solomon Islands Government, 2015)

The National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls (2016–2020) is a critical policy instrument intended to protect the rights of all women and girls against widespread physical and sexual violence in the country. According to the 2009 Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study (Pacific Community, 2009), 64 percent of women aged 15–49 who have ever been in a relationship report having experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, and more than 37 percent report being sexually abused before the age of 15 years. Support services including trained front-line service providers to attend to such cases are lacking. Furthermore, there are higher levels of social acceptance of violence against women and more social stigma around seeking support in rural areas than in urban areas (Pacific Community, 2009).

Women's political participation in Solomon Islands is very low. The general elections held in April 2019 resulted in the election of two women to the National Parliament of Solomon Islands – out of a total of 50 members of parliament. This is the highest women's representation in the Parliament since country's independence in the late 1970s.

# 3

## POLICY, LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT



This section provides an analysis of 1) international commitments concerning the promotion of gender equality to which Solomon Islands is a signatory; 2) relevant national policies, strategies and plans; and 3) institutional capacities in mainstreaming gender.

### 3.1 International commitments and legal provisions on gender equality

Solomon Islands has made commitments to advance gender equality through endorsement of international and regional agreements that include:

- Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (1994, 2004, and 2018–2030)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1995)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (2002)
- Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2005)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (signed in 2008 but not ratified)
- Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (2012)
- ILO Equal Remuneration Convention (2012)
- Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A.) Pathway (2014)
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out a global agenda to inform national and sectorial development plans. While the SDGs are not mandatory in terms of reporting, the Solomon Islands Government has highlighted a number of SDG-related indicators in its National Development Strategy (2016–2035), which aims to facilitate better integration and policy coherence across sectors and sector policies. The Strategy makes the link that achievement of some goals is critical to the achievement of others, such as education being essential for capacity building and integral to achieving goals around health, gender equality and climate change adaptation, all of which require awareness raising.

Agreed to in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and brought into force in 1981, CEDAW is the first international treaty to address fundamental rights for women in politics, health care, education, economics,

employment, law, property, marriage and family. After ratifying CEDAW in 2002, Solomon Islands met its first reporting obligation in 2013 through the submission of its combined initial, second and third periodic reports to the UN CEDAW Committee.

A significant effort by the Government of Solomon Islands in meeting its CEDAW obligations was the establishment of a high-level advisory and consultation group called the Solomon Islands National Advisory Committee on CEDAW (SINACC) in 2006. Over the years the terms of reference and composition of SINACC have been revised to keep pace with Solomon Islands' obligations to CEDAW, including addressing the concluding observations by the UN CEDAW Committee. As of 2016, there were a number of key ministries responsible for rural development involved in SINACC, such as the MRDL and the Ministry of Lands Housing and Survey, along with CSO member groups. However, missing from this list were the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) and the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECCDMM). The involvement of these ministries in discussions on women and gender related to CEDAW could be a critical entry point to addressing the needs of women in agriculture and rural development.

Solomon Islands has also signed onto to the Convention on Biodiversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol. The governing bodies of each of these conventions have identified that gender-responsive approaches will increase the effectiveness of action to manage and conserve biodiversity and adapt to climate change. Solomon Islands also benefits from funding by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which is the financing mechanism for the UNFCCC made available through implementing agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), FAO and the World Bank. According to interviews for this Assessment, such financing mechanisms and programmes rolled out through development partners to support the gender mainstreaming agenda within the government require the government agencies involved to address and report on gender perspectives in their programmes. The Permanent Secretary of MECCDMM stated during an interview for this Assessment that until recently, MECCDMM hasn't had the technical means to implement gender mainstreaming and has typically

### Policy outcome areas of the Solomon Islands National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2016–2020

1. Gender-responsive government programmes and services
2. Improved economic status of women
3. Equal participation of women and men at all levels of decision making, governance and leadership
4. Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls
5. Increased awareness and recognition of the role of women in peace
6. Increased access to education and a supportive school environment
7. Improved access to services supporting women's sexual and reproductive health

depended on the MWYCFA for support in such work. But MECCDMM is increasingly being called upon to do this work itself and has been receiving technical know-how through donor-funded projects and programmes. He added that, "We are grateful for such support."

The above statement highlights a common concern within agricultural line ministries that while gender mainstreaming efforts might be undertaken well in donor-funded projects and programmes, government-funded projects might present a different story. Additionally, interviews with technical government officials from MAL and MFMR revealed that within the technical ministries there are often donor-funded posts to ensure coordination and smooth running of specific donor-funded projects. Those recruited to these posts are more likely to be exposed to training and capacity building opportunities such as gender analysis training. However, since these individuals are not core ministry staff, they tend to leave for other jobs when their particular projects are over, resulting in the loss of institutional expertise.

## 3.2 National gender equality frameworks in the Solomon Islands

### Constitution of Solomon Islands (1978)

The Constitution of Solomon Islands, passed in 1978 and amended in 2009, provides for the protection of individual rights and freedoms and protection against discrimination based on race colour, sex, creed, place of origin or political views. However, whilst there is protection from discrimination based on sex, there is no comprehensive definition of gender-based discrimination.

### National Development Strategy (2015–2035)

The Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2015–2035 highlights aspirations for a modern, united Solomon Islands built on trust and mutual respect and further highlights gender equality priorities espoused in the National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy (see below). In particular, the National Development Strategy highlights improving gender equality as a medium-term strategy.

### National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy (2016–2020)

The Solomon Islands National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2016–2020 links national, regional and international gender commitments, providing policy direction, identifying strategic areas for action and calling for a collaborative approach among government agencies and NGOs to advance gender equality. There are seven policy outcome areas, all of which have critical bearing on the lives of rural women and girls. In particular, the Policy emphasizes the need for access to quality healthcare for rural women and girls and improvement of services for women in rural areas to support their economic empowerment.

### National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls (2016–2020)

The National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls (2016–2020) includes the following priority outcome areas: 1) violence against women and girls is reduced as a result of holistic prevention strategies; 2) legal frameworks, law enforcement and the justice system are strengthened; 3) victims and survivors have better access to medical, legal and protective services; 4) perpetrators are held accountable and rehabilitated; and 5) national

commitments are developed and coordination is improved. The Policy also acknowledges that rural women lack basic awareness of the government's commitments on the issue of violence against women. It also highlights some success in the establishment of coordination mechanisms for survivors of violence in the provinces of Isabel and Choiseul, which the Policy hopes to build upon.

### 3.3 Mapping and assessment of relevant ARD policies, strategies and plans<sup>10</sup>

#### National Agriculture and Livestock Policy (2015–2019)

The National Agriculture and Livestock Policy (NALP) (2015–2019) is the principal policy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock with the goals of: 1) achieving food sovereignty; 2) improving rural livelihoods; 3) promoting agriculture for import substitution; and 4) increasing trade. It is noteworthy that despite the critical role of women in the agriculture sector, the NALP does not include gender analysis or strategies to incorporate gendered perspectives in its implementation. It does, however, include women, together with youth, in the category of vulnerable groups and highlights the need to include women in agricultural extension support.

#### Solomon Islands Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy (2007)

Country-wide consultations were convened to develop the national ARD strategy in 2007, which was led by the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination, in cooperation with the World Bank. Unlike the NALP, the Strategy includes gender perspectives, taking into account the role of women in ARD, their lack of involvement and limited opportunities to attend agriculture training and consultations, and how customary land ownership disputes often marginalize them. It is unclear how the Strategy has informed the NALP, but the findings of the Strategy are still relevant over a decade later and could inform the work programme of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock today.

#### National Climate Change Policy (2012–2017)

The National Climate Change Policy (2012–2017) is a cross-cutting policy recognized by the government to have the potential to significantly enhance sustainable development and support economic growth, in line with the National Development Strategy. The Policy aims to respond to climate change, manage environmental issues and improve governance at the national, provincial and community levels.

#### National Water and Sanitation Sector Plan (2013)

Apart from recognition of gender in the preamble of the Plan, there is no gender analysis nor integration of gender perspectives in the Plan, including in the key policy issues addressed and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes reflected in the Plan.

#### Corporate Plan of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (2015–2018)

Unlike other governmental ministries, the MFMR does not have policies in place for the various mandates of the Ministry. This Corporate Plan makes clear linkages to the government's strategic objectives, including the improvement and strengthening of small-scale fisheries, establishment of market-led sustainable aquaculture, improvement of commercial-scale tuna distribution, and contribution to and the review of the National Fisheries Act. However, there are no gender indicators nor gender-related activities explicitly highlighted in it.<sup>11</sup>

#### National Education Action Plan (2016–2020)

The National Education Action Plan (NEAP) (2016–2020), implemented by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, focuses on three strategic areas for the improvement of access, quality and management of education services. The Plan highlights that rural children face an inordinate amount of challenges, such as lack of basic school infrastructure, lack of toilets for girls, lack of junior secondary schools and presence of untrained teachers.

<sup>10</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of policies, plans and strategies but a selection of key documents available to the researchers at the time of researching and writing this Assessment.

<sup>11</sup> Concrete activities could have been included in the Plan based on a comprehensive gender analysis of the fisheries sector in Solomon Islands conducted in 2017 by the SPC, the WorldFish and the MFMR and an extensive review of fisheries management in the Solomon Islands undertaken by the World Bank in 2015.



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**Table 1: Assessment of gender equality and rural women's empowerment in agriculture and rural development related policies, strategies and legislation**

Policies, legislation and strategies	Highlights for rural women's empowerment and gender equality	Recommendations
National Agriculture and Livestock Sector Policy (2015–2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes statements on gender and women in its values and highlights the need to promote and empower women in all agricultural development activities as one of several strategies.</li> <li>• Promotes the development of extension service programmes to enhance women and youth involvement in agricultural production.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the next review of the Policy, gender analysis should be undertaken under each policy area and not just at the extension services level.</li> <li>• Gender outputs and indicators could also be included in the monitoring and evaluation framework of the Policy to ensure that the MAL and stakeholders are held accountable to these policy directives.</li> </ul>
National Water and Sanitation Sector Plan (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes that women play a central role in providing, managing and safeguarding water.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should the government conduct further reviewing before finalizing this draft Sector Plan, it is recommended that gendered perspectives are integrated through gender-sensitive consultations held with stakeholders.</li> </ul>
National Climate Change Policy (2012–2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not include any gender analysis or implications for rural women, although all policy outcome areas could include gender perspectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender perspectives should be included in the enabling environment and institutional arrangements of the Policy.</li> <li>• The MWYCFA could be included in the National Climate Change Council and various other working groups under this Policy to address national climate change and disaster issues from a gender perspective.</li> <li>• Gender expertise could also be sought from development partners, including FAO, SPC and UNDP.</li> </ul>
Corporate Plan of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (2015–2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not include any gender analysis or implications for rural women.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate the recommendations highlighted in the report <i>Gender Analysis of the Fisheries Sector – Solomon Islands</i> (Pacific Community, 2018a) when the Corporate Plan is reviewed or should any other MFMR policy be developed.</li> </ul>

**National Health Strategic Plan (2016–2020)**

The National Health Strategic Plan (2016–2020) lists the key health priority areas for the government within a five-year time frame. Key policy areas for action include improved maternal health and improved health sector responsiveness to gender-based violence. The Plan makes linkages to the Family Protection Act (2014) and to the Seif Ples (Safe Place) programme for survivors of violence. The Plan also highlights the appointment of a gender focal point within the Ministry of Health to support the gendered activities

of the ministry and of health services more broadly. The Plan also makes strong links to the rural sector, addressing the need for more training of rural nurses and putting a strong focus on partnerships for better rural infrastructure, including water and sanitation, to support rural populations in the provinces.

**The Solomon Islands Safeguards Procedures Manual to Implement the National Transport Plan (2011–2030)**

This procedures manual was prepared by the Ministry of Infrastructure to support the implementation of

the National Transport Plan (NTP) (2011–2030) and to manage the environmental and social impacts and risks that could arise in the course of implementing the NTP. It highlights gender-sensitive and gender-responsive procedures in its grievance redress mechanism, including the need for a female focal point in the Grievance Redress Mechanism Committee. The manual also highlights the need for gender analysis to be conducted in all approved provinces where infrastructure work will take place under the NTP.

#### **Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (2017–2021)**

The Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (2017–2021) is coordinated by the MWYCFA. It addresses a number of relevant issues pertaining to rural women, including rural women’s displacement and loss of economic livelihoods, not only due to ethnic tensions but also due to natural disasters. The Plan highlights priority concerns such as the inclusion of rural women in decision-making processes at all levels, especially at the provincial and community levels.

#### **National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls (2015)**

The National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls (2015) was developed by the MWYCFA through extensive consultations across the country. Among other strategic areas of focus, the Strategy highlights first and foremost *“the gender mainstreaming in the resources sector with particular focus on agriculture and fisheries activities especially targeting rural women”* and calls for a whole of government approach to addressing key economic development issues.

### **3.4 Capacity to mainstream gender across agriculture and rural development sectors**

During the CGA-ARS process, a stocktake of the gender mainstreaming capacities of key ministries involved in agriculture, fisheries and rural livelihoods was conducted. Such a stocktake helped to assess the gender awareness levels of key governmental institutions and the extent to which they are able to efficiently address gender inequality at the policy, institutional and local levels and to provide overall support towards the empowerment of rural women. The key ministries that were included in the gender

stocktake are: the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), the Ministry of Rural Development and Livelihoods (MRDL), MECCDMM, and the MWYCFA.

The Assessment has found that while MAL, MFMR, MECCDMM and MWYCFA recognize women’s roles in the rural economy, agriculture, food security and nutrition, as well as in maintaining livelihoods and managing households, this recognition is not translated into concrete actions to support rural women’s needs and advance their empowerment.

The work of the agricultural line ministries and MWYCFA is influenced by the provincial government system, which has a shared jurisdiction for agriculture, fisheries, forestry, infrastructure, health and social welfare (Commonwealth of Local Government Forum, 2017). Additionally, MRDL operates with a large budget and has access to the Constituency Development Fund, which facilitates the distribution of in-kind and financial support to agricultural producers at the discretion of the Members of the Parliament. Consultations held for this Assessment indicate that current capacity for gender mainstreaming in provincial governments is low, and that concerted effort is required to build technical capacity and change organizational culture throughout the governmental system.

#### **Policy frameworks and enabling environments**

An initial stocktake of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming in Solomon Islands was carried out by SPC in 2009 (Pacific Community, 2012), and it is noticeable that there has been significant progress within governmental policy frameworks in the decade since. The CGA-ARS shows, however, that there are still significant gaps linked to investment in mainstreaming of gender equality and rural women’s empowerment, use of accountability mechanisms, technical capacity and financing.

As part of the CGA-ARS, the following five interrelated criteria were applied to key governmental institutions responsible for agriculture, fisheries, rural development and women’s issues:

- i. Demonstrated political will, including policy frameworks, stated commitments, investment and leadership
- ii. Organizational cultures supportive of gender mainstreaming approaches

- iii. Accountability mechanisms that facilitate collection of data, enforcement of commitments and measurement of progress.
- iv. Technical capacity for gender analysis, collection and analysis of evidence, gender-responsive planning and programme design, and monitoring and evaluation of change
- v. Adequate financing to implement gender mainstreaming requirements

Of the five ministries assessed, only the MWYCFA has a specific gender policy, the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy (2016–2020). However as noted earlier, the aim of the MWYCFA's gender policy and associated National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls (Solomon Islands Government, 2015b) is to guide gender mainstreaming government-wide, including in agriculture, fisheries and delivery of rural sector services. Implementation of the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy and the National Strategy is also a responsibility of the permanent secretaries of each of the five assessed ministries, although performance monitoring remains weak. Improving capacity development and accountability mechanisms is key to improving policy implementation.

### 3.4.1 Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs

MWYCFA acts as a catalyst for the implementation of policies related to gender equality and gender mainstreaming within the governmental system. The Ministry's Women's Development Division (WDD) has multiple and layered responsibilities related to provincial, national, regional and international commitments.

The mandate of WDD has changed since it was established in the 1960s. Initially focused on supporting women in their reproductive roles, over time its mandate has become more oriented towards the strategic interests and rights of women.

This broad mandate of WDD represents an extremely heavy workload for the four Provincial Women's Development Officers based in the MWYCFA. Given its diverse and multiple demands, the WDD relies heavily on support from development partners to implement its mandate. A main focus is on women's economic empowerment activities, such as coordination of savings clubs, awareness

raising on the policies of MWYCFA and awareness raising on the Family Protection Act (2014). Such efforts are done in collaboration with CSOs and other governmental stakeholders.

The WDD of MWYCFA is mandated to:

- collaborate with a range of stakeholders to implement and monitor national policies and commitments, including the implementation of CEDAW
- coordinate national-level planning and collaborate with other governmental agencies and civil society organizations to implement women's development priorities in the provinces
- work with development partners to ensure continuous learning, monitoring and evaluation of gender-equality efforts
- provide assistance, skills and training at the national, provincial and community levels, including financial and technical assistance to women and women's groups when possible
- identify needs and support specific initiatives for women where existing institutions and agencies are unable to meet those needs
- Work closely with and support the National Council of Women to provide a voice for women in Solomon Islands

Source: <http://www.mwycfa.gov.sb/about-us/women-s-development.html>

### Policy implications and enabling environment for gender mainstreaming

WDD's coordination with other governmental institutions creates a strategic framework for gender mainstreaming across the Government. The endorsement of the National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2016–2020 is seen as an indication of the Government's commitment and political will to act on its gender mainstreaming commitments. Furthermore, the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy also highlights priority actions to be taken in support of rural women, with a particular emphasis on rural women's economic empowerment, women's access to credit and training opportunities, and access to services for victims of domestic violence.

There are, however, some structural barriers to the successful mainstreaming of gender equality and rural women's empowerment in Solomon Islands.

Table 2: Summary of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (including the Women's Development Division)

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraints
Commitment at leadership level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political will for gender mainstreaming is strong within WDD, with a focus on implementation of the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy at various levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Despite relatively high levels of political will, apart from within WDD, gender analysis is not comprehensively articulated at the policy level within other divisions of MWYCFA.</li> </ul>
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational culture conducive to gender mainstreaming is relatively strong in WDD.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competing interests within MWYCFA in terms of financial and human resources obstruct the work of WDD.</li> <li>Time and effort spent on intra-ministerial negotiations can weaken and divert attention from gender mainstreaming.</li> <li>Organizational culture can also be fractured in terms of priority setting and use of staff time to implement different aspects of WDD's mandate.</li> </ul>
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WDD has sound technical capacity to undertake gender mainstreaming.</li> <li>WDD staff has skills in gender analysis and gender training and specialized knowledge in subject areas such as ending violence against women and girls and economic empowerment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WDD staff has limited skills and mandate to analyse gender-related data, assess needs and invest in mainstreaming efforts of other ministries.</li> <li>Monitoring, evaluation and documentation skills are limited in WDD.</li> <li>Other MWYCFA divisions have varying capacities to conduct gender analysis and gender-responsive programming, including in the youth, children and family affairs technical areas.</li> </ul>
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WDD accountability mechanisms to track implementation are linked to externally funded programmes or projects.</li> <li>WDD reports against its annual planning priorities based on the achievement of programme outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WDD accountability mechanisms related to gender mainstreaming are weak since WDD lacks authority over the implementation of gender mainstreaming across the 'whole of government.'</li> <li>Coordination of accountability across WDD's mandate is challenging.</li> </ul>
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Donor funding for gender mainstreaming has been available for several years and has supported progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MWYCFA as a whole and WDD specifically have limited budget and staffing from the recurrent budget.</li> </ul>

While MWYCFA, primarily through WDD, is the governmental entity expected to catalyse gender mainstreaming throughout the governmental system, their line ministry status does not provide them with authority over the decisions, priority setting and financing of their mandated work in other ministries. Partially in response to this constraint, the Ministry of Public Service (MPS) is integrating gender into its technical capacity building of governmental officials across all ministries.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.4.2 Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) recognizes the role women play in subsistence and commercial agriculture and has integrated this recognition into some of its high-level policy and planning work over the past 15 years. However, MAL has no gender policy or strategy, nor does it implement programmes with an integrated gender perspective. MAL's Women's Agricultural Extension Services officers work with women at the provincial level, but there are not enough women officers to provide comprehensive coverage to all MAL work areas. Neither male nor female extension officers receive any training on gender, nor do most consider gender mainstreaming to be a responsibility of agricultural extension services (Pacific Community, 2018a). During the CGA-ARS process, MAL staff, as with officials in a number of other ministries, expressed their perception that gender mainstreaming is solely the responsibility of WDD and MWYCFA. This is a common misconception when it comes to gender mainstreaming across governmental institutions.

#### Policy implications and enabling environment for gender mainstreaming

The current Agriculture and Livestock Sector Policy (2015–2019) mentions the importance of including women both in its values statement and in relation to extension services for women. A strategy to develop services delivered by women for women has been in existence for some years. It primarily aims to address the gendered divisions of labour and gendered differences in work specializations of women and men agricultural producers. The Women's Agricultural Extension Services programme is under-resourced, however, and there are inadequate numbers of female extension officers to carry out the measures stipulated by the Policy.

MAL policies and plans make little explicit or practical mention of gender issues aside from work related to its extension services. The consultations with MAL officials during the CGA-ARS did not yield precise information on the existence, roles and responsibilities of gender focal points in MAL or in agriculture departments at the provincial level. The fact alone that this information is not clear is an indicator of lack of prioritization of gender-specific aspects and empowerment of women in agriculture. This is also mirrored in a lack of effort by MAL to strengthen the engagement of women in decision making related to agricultural issues at the community level, to provide direction on collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data and to design and implement gender-responsive agricultural programmes. Additionally, there are no budgets available for gender mainstreaming within MAL.

### 3.4.3 Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources

Women of Solomon Islands are active in fisheries, carrying out diverse activities, ranging from reef gleaning, fin-fishing and community marine resource conservation, to engaging in commercial post-harvest processing and informal marketing. MFMR's core policies, plans and strategies do not specifically identify gender issues or respond to women's roles in the sector. At the programmatic level, it is noted that the Community-Based Resource Management and Aquaculture programmes identify inclusion of women and men as an operational approach to effective implementation.

#### Policy implications and enabling environment for gender mainstreaming

MFMR is aware of national direction and priorities for gender equality, but there is limited institutional understanding of gender concepts, gender analysis or what is involved in gender-responsive programming. Furthermore, there are no national or provincial-level policies for fisheries management that address gender. A gender mainstreaming strategy was developed for MFMR in 2011, applicable from 2011–2013. However, the policy was never implemented and few staff members have knowledge of the policy's content.

It was identified through this Assessment that MFMR has a gender focal point. However, the role does not include specific terms of reference or responsibilities.

<sup>12</sup> While the training institute of the MPS is integrating gender into all of its civil service training programme, it is still up to individual ministries to assess needs, analyse data and invest in mainstreaming efforts.

Table 3: Summary of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraints
Commitment at leadership level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher-level policy commitments at the national planning level and in the MWYCFA are intended to advance and direct the gender-related work of line ministries like MAL.</li> <li>MAL's Permanent Secretary has contractual responsibilities to mainstream gender into MAL's mandate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender mainstreaming is not a priority policy issue at the national or provincial levels.</li> </ul>
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women's roles and the value of their subsistence agricultural contributions are recognized.</li> <li>MAL staff are engaged in externally implemented gender-responsive development programmes on agriculture and economic empowerment of women, which results in awareness raising of staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of awareness of rationale for gender mainstreaming undermines attitudes and motivation to address issues.</li> <li>Many staff members state the assumption that WDD of MWYCFA is responsible for gender mainstreaming across the government.</li> </ul>
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension staff understand principles of inclusive participation processes and importance of consistent engagement of women in training programmes.</li> <li>Women's extension officers have the capacity to address women's technical agricultural issues and support women to improve their livelihoods.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MAL staff in the national headquarters and in provincial agriculture departments have little to no technical capacity to undertake gender analysis and design gender-responsive programmes.</li> <li>MAL does not provide gender training.</li> <li>MAL does not have a gender focal point or other dedicated staff for gender mainstreaming.</li> </ul>
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MAL's Permanent Secretary is expected to report on progress on gender mainstreaming.</li> <li>The Women's Agricultural Extension Services Programme provides one avenue for tracking specific gender and agriculture needs and issues.</li> <li>Programmes in integrated rural development and agricultural value chains are establishing processes for sex-disaggregated data collection that can potentially inform MAL's gender awareness and decision making.<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is inconsistent collection of sex-disaggregated data and little analysis of information applied to decision-making and project cycles within MAL.</li> </ul>
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financing is available for the Women's Agricultural Extension Programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is budget allocated to mainstreaming gender or assisting women agricultural producers specifically.</li> </ul>

<sup>13</sup> Development partners funding these initiatives include the World Bank and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Australia (DFAT) to assess needs, analyse data and invest in mainstreaming efforts.

Table 4: Summary of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming for the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraints
Commitment at leadership level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MFMR's Permanent Secretary has contractual responsibilities to mainstream gender into the MFMR's mandate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The MFMR does not currently have a gender policy, plan or strategy.</li> </ul>
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some staff are identified by others as gender champions within MFMR.</li> <li>A gender focal point position exists and is staffed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender balance in staffing is (falsely) perceived as equating progress in gender mainstreaming.</li> <li>Many staff members hold the view that gender mainstreaming is not their responsibility.</li> <li>Cultural bias maintains discriminatory gender norms in extension work at the provincial level.</li> </ul>
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff engage women in community aquaculture programmes and understand some gender issues even if they are not articulated in the context of strategic mainstreaming.</li> <li>MFMR has conducted some gender-focused studies and analyses, in partnership with other stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is limited awareness of gender concepts and technical aspects of gender analysis within MFMR.</li> <li>No gender training is provided by MFMR at either the national or provincial level.</li> <li>There is no clear evidence of how the gender-focused studies and analyses conducted by MFMR and partners guide and influence the MFMR's work.</li> </ul>
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is some collection of sex-disaggregated data in the Community-Based Resource Management and Aquaculture programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is unclear how the Permanent Secretary's responsibility of gender mainstreaming is reviewed and evaluated.</li> <li>MFMR conducts no analysis of sex-disaggregated data to inform programme implementation or improvement.</li> <li>The gender focal point within MFMR does not have any specific terms of reference.</li> </ul>
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited donor funds support gender mainstreaming in fisheries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No funding is allocated to gender mainstreaming within MFMR.</li> <li>MFMR has no women-specific programmes.</li> </ul>

The main responsibility of the gender focal point appears to be representing the MFMR at governmental meetings related to gender equality.

In 2018, SPC published an in-depth gender analysis and stocktake of the fisheries sector in Solomon Islands, which highlighted a number of constraints

to gender mainstreaming in the sector (Pacific Community, 2018a). The report identifies lack of priority setting for gender mainstreaming as a major constraint. The absence of gender analysis of fisheries issues and the absence of clear policy direction at the ministerial and provincial levels have further undermined interest and commitment (Pacific

Community, 2018a). While MFMR has increased the number of senior female staff over the years, there has been no corresponding change in attention to addressing gender issues within MFRM's frame of work. This indicates that gender balance of staff cannot be a proxy indicator for efficient gender mainstreaming and that further staff training is needed (Pacific Community, 2018a).

The findings of this Assessment reflect the earlier findings that MFRM does not invest in gender mainstreaming. In relation to gender statistics, it appears that MFMR neither collects nor analyses sex-disaggregated data apart from attendance at training courses and community meetings. While there is evidence that MFMR has undertaken studies involving gendered analysis of the fisheries sector in partnership with stakeholders such as WorldFish and SPC, it is not evident how these studies have impacted and guided the day-to-day work and mandate of MFMR.

#### **3.4.4 Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology**

MECCDMM does not have a specific policy on gender mainstreaming, nor does it have one on food security. However, collaborates with MAL and UNDP on a number of joint programmes related to agriculture and food security that include a dimension on disaster preparedness. In collaboration with MAL, MECCDMM has undertaken significant awareness raising and training in villages on operating and reading installed weather devices in their areas and testing and determining suitable types of crops that can withstand climate impacts. MECCDMM also has provided seeds and planting materials to villagers in response to natural disasters including flash flooding.

#### **Policy implications and enabling environment for gender mainstreaming**

In all of its work, MECCDMM actively promotes the inclusion of rural women in its programmes, as there is awareness amongst staff of the role of women in the agriculture sector. Political will, to ensure gendered approaches to the work, starts from the top. MECCDMM's Permanent Secretary availed himself during this Assessment to speak about the gender-sensitive approaches within MECCDMM. He said that:

*We need to remember that in Solomon Islands both men and women are farmers. In fact, women do more gardening for household consumption than men. I am always pleased when donor-driven projects already have gender activities that require us to include women and report on this work, but not all of them do. So that means we have to ensure that we include women in consultations, in training – in all our outreach work. Noncommunicable diseases are a big problem in Solomon Islands. For this we have to target women because they are the main players in growing food for the families. Men are mostly involved in cash cropping.<sup>14</sup>*

Although MECCDMM does not have a gender mainstreaming action plan within its key ministerial strategies and policies, the CGA-ARS identified that MECCDMM does have an active gender focal point committee consisting of three technical staff members from various divisions in the MECCDMM. At least one gender focal point committee member has undergone a number of gender trainings within the Government. The MECCDMM gender focal point committee members expressed willingness to incorporate gender perspectives into their work programmes and have emphasized on a number of occasions the need for support to undertake gender training and awareness raising across all of MECCDMM and the need to develop of a succinct, doable gender action plan to which MECCDMM can hold itself accountable. However, such support and actions have not happened to date.

#### **3.4.5 Ministry of Rural Development and Livelihoods**

While MRDL does not have a specific policy on gender, agriculture or food security, it collaborates with other ministries to implement livelihood projects, such as pig and poultry farming, in rural areas. According to the Rural Development Division Director interviewed for the Assessment, MRDL supplies tools, seeds and planting materials to farmers upon request through the Constituency Development Funds.

One of MRDL's primary objectives is to set up economic centres in all provinces. Such centres would include a wharf and other infrastructure to support the fisheries sector, including proper storage places

<sup>14</sup> Statement given by MECCDMM Permanent Secretary Melchior Mataki during the CGA-ARS in-depth consultation.

Table 5: Summary of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming for the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraints
Commitment at leadership level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The MECCDMM's Permanent Secretary has contractual responsibilities to mainstream gender into the MECCDMM's mandate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MECCDMM does not have a gender policy, plan or strategy</li> </ul>
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MECCDMM has a gender focal point committee composed of three committee members, reflecting the size and very different technical mandates of the divisions within the MECCDM.</li> <li>One gender focal point committee member attends the government-wide gender focal point network meetings convened by MWYCFA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are many women in senior positions as well as technical positions in MECCDMM, but a breakdown of actual numbers was not attained.</li> <li>According to one gender focal point, there is willingness to undertake gender mainstreaming in MECCDMM and the Permanent Secretary is always encouraging this work, but staff lack the necessary technical expertise and support. Such support has been sought from development partners on numerous occasions.</li> <li>While MECCDMM staff actively work to ensure women are engaged in all community outreach programmes, this is not documented properly in reports.</li> </ul>
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least one gender focal point has had access to gender training, but the ability to undertake gender analysis has been reported as a major gap across MECCDMM.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is limited awareness of gender concepts and technical aspects of gender analysis within MECCDMM.</li> <li>No gender training is provided by the MECCDMM or its provincial departments.</li> </ul>
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is some collection of sex-disaggregated data in community programmes, especially ones that are donor funded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is unclear how the Permanent Secretary's responsibility to mainstream gender is reviewed and evaluated.</li> <li>There is no analysis of sex-disaggregated data to inform programme implementation or improvement.</li> <li>Gender focal point does not have any specific terms of reference within MECCDMM.</li> </ul>
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While no financial or human resources are allocated to support gender mainstreaming, gender focal points are actively encouraged to attend any gender analysis trainings convened by MWYCFA or other development partners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No funding is allocated to gender mainstreaming within MECCDMM.</li> <li>MECCDMM has no women-specific programmes.</li> </ul>

Table 6: Summary of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming for the Ministry of Rural Development and Livelihoods

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraints
Commitment at leadership level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Permanent Secretary has contractual responsibilities to mainstream gender into the MRDL's mandate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The MRDL does not have a gender policy, plan or strategy.</li> </ul>
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no gender focal points and no plans to identify a gender focal point in the future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Despite recognition of weak numbers of constituency development officers, MRDL plans to increase women's representation in constituency working committees rather than recruit more women.</li> <li>Cultural bias maintains discriminatory gender norms, especially at the provincial level, and this is recognized by MRDL.</li> </ul>
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is very little gender awareness in MRDL and no technical capacity to undertake gender-related activities.</li> <li>MRDL has plans to organize a ministry-wide gender training for staff at all levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is limited awareness of gender concepts and technical aspects of gender analysis within MRDL.</li> <li>No gender training has been provided to date by MRDL at national or provincial level.</li> </ul>
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a lack of sex-disaggregated data and, in many instances, only verbal reports over the phone from constituency development officers with no proper records.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is unclear how the Permanent Secretary's responsibility for gender mainstreaming is reviewed and evaluated.<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No financial or human resources to implement gender mainstreaming have been identified.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While financing of agricultural and food security projects is in place, poor record keeping mean that it is not possible to determine whether rural women access these funds.</li> </ul>

to keep fish fresh and a safe space for women to sell their produce. It is unclear how and if MRDL is working with other ministries, local governments and other partners who are already involved in the development and renovation of existing market places in Solomon Islands.

#### Policy implications and enabling environment for gender mainstreaming

Feedback received during the Assessment process, including from the Rural Development Division

Director, suggests that there is political will in MRDL to support gender mainstreaming. However, to date, a gender focal point position has not been filled due to changes in ministerial management. Gender-related activities are not prioritized, but according to the Director of the Rural Development Division, there are plans to provide gender training for staff:

*We don't have a gender policy or action plan but we are planning to provide gender training for our staff, especially our constituency*

<sup>15</sup> No interview was conducted with the Permanent Secretary of the MRLD during the Assessment process.



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*development officers, project officers and financial officers in the provinces, as they are the ones who deal with whatever assistance goes to communities in all our constituencies.<sup>16</sup>*

While the Assessment findings suggest a balanced recruitment of men and women at the managerial level of MRDL, gender-balanced recruitment is still a significant challenge at the constituency level. For example, out of the fifty constituency development positions, only two are occupied by women.

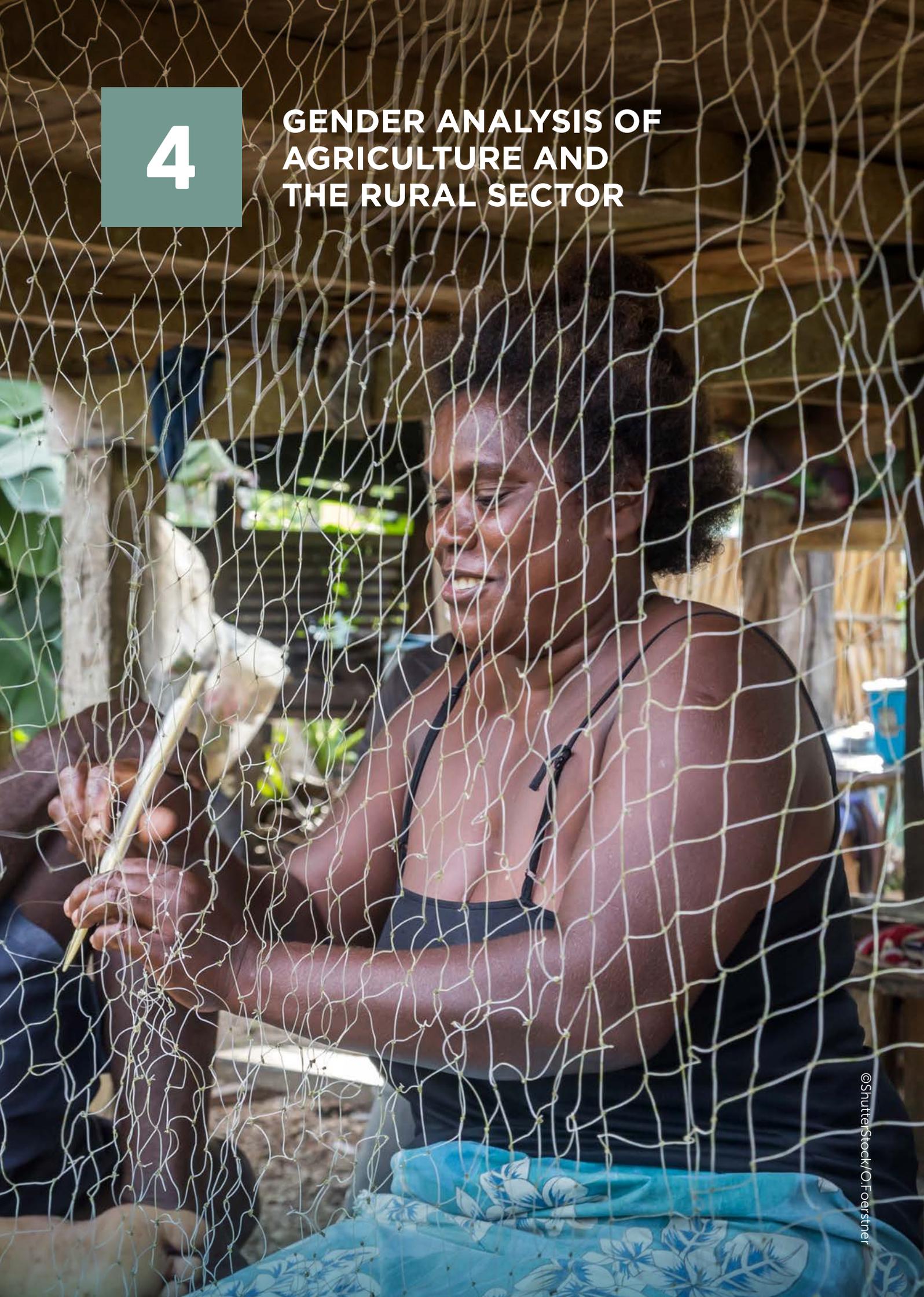
According to the Director of the Rural Development Division, the MRDL is aware of this and is working to put measures in place to ensure greater inclusion of women's representatives in all constituency working committees.

It was difficult to ascertain in this Assessment how and to what extent MRDL collaborates with MFMR and MAL. However, it is clear that MRDL has funds to potentially complement MAL's and MFMR's activities implemented on the ground.

<sup>16</sup> Statement given by MRDL Rural Development Division Director, Melinia Sese during the CGA-ARS in-depth consultation.

# 4

## GENDER ANALYSIS OF AGRICULTURE AND THE RURAL SECTOR



“Kaim kini i fanoa ki, mauiri lamil na’a ninia.”

“For us women of the land, this is our life!”

*Mercy Ago, farmer, 12 February 2018*

The livelihoods of the rural population of Solomon Islands depend on the country’s natural resources and agriculture. Table 7 shows the contributions of agriculture and selected extractive industries in rural areas to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Solomon Islands. These sectors are interdependent. For example, agriculture-based livelihoods will be affected by unsustainable levels of logging and the environmental impacts of mining and quarrying. This report does not assess the impacts of logging and mining on the agriculture sector, however, focusing instead on the gendered issues that emerge in those sectors. This chapter examines gender roles and gender issues in relation to agriculture and rural livelihoods, although the issues addressed herein are not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues.

The most common subsistence food crops in the Solomon Islands are sweet potato, cassava and banana, followed by taro and yams, as well as edible leaves such as slippery cabbage. In the smaller outer islands of Solomon Islands, subsistence food crops include breadfruit, nuts (ngali nut) and edible leaves. Agricultural livestock rearing consists mostly of pigs,

poultry, cattle and honey bees, although cattle and pigs are on the decline due to depletion of existing stocks, lack of new breeding stock and subsequent inbreeding (Evans, 2006). Fishing activities are also a key component of rural livelihoods and range from reef and off-shore fishing conducted by men to inshore fishing, including in lagoons and mangrove areas, done mostly by women.

Both rural women and men engage in subsistence agriculture and fisheries, although they may undertake different tasks, use different agricultural tools and have different levels of access and control over their resources. For example, in Niu village in Marau, Guadalcanal, respondents in a study highlighted that while men and women share fishing grounds around marine protected areas, they also have their own particular fishing areas; men work in the deep sea or nearer to reefs while women fish mainly in shallow waters. The study also found that men in Niu village would normally collect clams from marine protected areas (*paipai*) when they were open for the community to use but women were the ones diving for clams and trochus in the wild (Pacific Community, 2018a).

The distinct roles, status and entitlements of women and men, and their different levels of participation in decision making, are determined by social norms. Furthermore, both customary and constitutional laws are recognized in Solomon Islands. This can serve as a barrier for rural women to access local courts, given

Table 7: Contribution of agriculture and selected extractive industries to the GDP, 2013–2015

National System of Accounts categories	2013		2014		2015	
	Contribution (SBD million)	% of total	Contribution (SBD million)	% of total	Contribution (SBD million)	% of total
Total GDP (excluding development budget)	4 263.2		4 339.7		4 450.7	
Agriculture and hunting	1 365.3	16.1	1 444.6	15.8	1 480.0	14.5
Forestry/logging	386.8	9.1	435.2	9.7	468.7	9.6
Fishing	238.0	2.9	258.0	2.5	250.0	2.8
Mining/quarrying	192.8	2.6	79.1	0.8	25.7	0.2

Source: Solomon Islands Government, 2018

the general conservatism of customary law and potential to discriminate against women (ADB, 2015). While this Assessment did not include specific questions about discrimination faced by rural women in local courts, it bears noting that informal village courts and customary laws form the primary justice systems for rural populations. Many rural women in particular do not have adequate understanding of or access to formal justice services due to lack of information, finance and transport, together with restrictive social norms (ADB, 2015). Such constraints hinder the ability of women to seek legal redress in disputes over land and other natural resources and in cases of gender-based violence.

In Solomon Islands, women typically play a greater role in domestic work than men. Domestic activities performed by women and girls include fetching water and fuel, doing laundry, shopping, preparing food, cleaning the home and taking care of children and the elderly, including extended family members. Domestic activities of men are mostly centred around building and repairing the home, cutting trees for fuel wood as needed and maintenance of local water systems where they exist (ADB, 2015). Women and men are often both involved in food production, but with different roles, as mentioned above.

In general, men control most of the productive resources, including land, most tools and equipment, income and savings, raw materials, transportation and livestock. Men also largely control training and extension services, farm input programmes and technical agricultural information. Anecdotal information indicates that it is common for husbands in Solomon Islands to consult with wives in making decisions on agricultural resources and benefits, but that men have the final decision-making power (ADB, 2015).

Across all provinces, income from subsistence agricultural activities is the highest in Guadalcanal, making up 51 percent of annual income, or SBD 232.3 million a year.<sup>17</sup> Guadalcanal is followed by Malaita province, where income from subsistence agricultural activities accounts for 15 percent of annual income, or SBD 67 million a year. Across all provinces, Temotu receives the highest annual income from fishing activities (25 percent of annual income, or

SBD 34.5 million a year), followed by Western Province (17.5 percent of annual income, or SBD 24.1 million a year). Additionally, a significant majority of households across all provinces except Honiara spend a large portion of their time producing goods for their own consumption through subsistence-based activities in agriculture, fishing, livestock and handicrafts, including value-added activities (Solomon Islands Government, 2017a).

#### 4.1 Food and nutrition security

Food security is a critical issue for rural communities of Solomon Islands. Over the years, there have been a number of food security projects implemented by the Solomon Islands Government and other technical and donor agencies. These projects include, but are not limited to, bolstering food production through natural resource management, improving crop varieties and developing agriculture sector climate change adaptation response strategies at the national and local levels. Women and girls in most rural areas of Solomon Islands grow food for home consumption in traditional gardens known as *kastom* gardens, often with livestock (chickens and pigs) reared nearby. Men focus primarily on clearing land for bush gardens and cash cropping. As many agricultural development projects aim to improve food security and nutrition in rural communities, gender analysis at the start of projects would help to prevent unintended impacts, such as placing extra work burdens on women, as well as addressing considerations such as women's participation in decision-making processes.

While the traditional *wantok*<sup>18</sup> system that integrates belonging, reciprocity and caring for one's relatives provides a safety net, it can also add to food security pressures as the reciprocal nature of a *wantok* system can mean more mouths to feed. As the main subsistence producers, this ultimately puts additional pressure on women to spend more time in gardens to ensure that there is enough food for both the immediate household and extended family members (Anderson *et al.*, 2013).

Finally, the increased accessibility and widespread consumption of less nutritional imported foods in rural areas has negative impacts on women and children.

<sup>16</sup> USD 20 596 290 as of October 2019.

<sup>18</sup> The *wantok* system, or wantokism, is derived from the Pijin term for "one talk," meaning from the same language, and implies giving preference to kin in the expectation of a series of reciprocal obligations. (See <http://www.solomonencyclopaedia.net/biogs/E000336b.htm>).

According to the 2015 DHS, the highest percentage of underweight and stunted children aged 5 years and under lives in rural areas. Child malnutrition, which weakens the immune system, is linked to a number of diseases. Among the gendered implications of malnutrition is the extra burden of placed upon women of caring for the sick (Solomon Islands Government, 2015).

## 4.2 Land

The majority (85 percent) of land in Solomon Islands is under customary ownership. There is no freehold land in the country; customary and non-customary land owned by the Government can only be leased under certain types of agreements. The Solomon Islands Constitution recognizes the primacy of customary law in relation to the use and management of customary land. While customary laws vary from place to place, decision-making bodies are heavily male dominated. This can result in acceptance of discrimination against women clan members of land-owning groups, as norms favour men over women in decision making.

Both patrilineal and matrilineal inheritance systems exist in different areas of the country. These systems can influence where couples settle after marriage, responsibilities related to children's custody and guardianship, and land-use rights. In matrilineal systems, women's decision-making power within the home and extended family may be higher, but in general, decision making made in the public sphere is men's domain, and men are signatories to agreements linked to cash cropping, forestry, mining and infrastructure development. Women's legal rights to clan proceeds from land or foreshore leased for agricultural or fisheries development are unclear (ADB, 2015).

Land held by clans is generally divided up for use among individuals and families. As women are key agricultural producers, they have users' rights for farming and gathering. Given that agricultural land is rotated and fallowed, individuals or families do not have permanent rights to a given piece of land. However, semi-permanent uses of land for cash crops such as coffee, cocoa or coconut plantations are common, and both men and women contribute labour to farming, harvesting and processing in family businesses.

Incomes are generated in various ways, including small-scale marketing of vegetables and fish, market gardening for sale in larger centres, commercial harvesting of fish and invertebrates, cash cropping and leasing land for forestry and mining rights. In heavily populated areas, there may be strong competition among clans and extended families, and/or between women and men, for use rights to particularly fertile or resource-rich land.

The National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls includes actions for 1) ending discriminatory decision making on land and resource issues and 2) providing "equitable access, legal protection and ownership by women and men of land, property rights and royalty shares in the productive sectors" (Solomon Islands Government, 2015b).

The Strategy is new and a review of the government's implementation of it has not yet been undertaken. However, the Solomon Islands Government, through the MWYFA and the Ministry of Justice, and partners such as SPC and the Australian Government have invested in "access to justice" programming, which raises awareness of legal avenues available in rural areas, including the court system and gender-sensitive legislation such as the Family Protection Act of 2009. Furthermore, interviews with stakeholders for this Assessment revealed little awareness of the Strategy among staff in agricultural line ministries, including MAL and MECCDMM. This highlights a need for greater coordination of overlapping areas of work within the Government.

Disputes over land are common. The first level of resolution is the village court system, and if no solution is reached, disputes are moved to the land court system. Women are often disadvantaged in both constitutional and customary court settings due to social norms and traditional gender roles as well as lack of literacy, lack of financial means for travel to courts or seeking legal advice, and lack of confidence to represent themselves or present arguments in a male-dominated environment.

### 4.3 Cash cropping and subsistence farming

“The MAL has few activities aimed at supporting subsistence food production. In part it is a result of a chronic lack of capacity. Also traditionally, the focus was mainly on cash crops, which has resulted in comparatively little resources being directed towards subsistence production given its size and critical importance to the vast majority of the population.”

*Solomon Islands Agriculture and Livestock Policy, 2015–2019*

Cash cropping is an important feature of the Solomon Islands Agriculture and Livestock Policy 2015–2019. Copra is the most widely spread cash crop with the potential to increase cash incomes of more rural people than any other single agricultural activity. Other prominent cash crops include cocoa and spices such as vanilla, cardamoms, ginger and turmeric, which, while relatively minor, have generated interest over the years given overseas market demands. Although the monetary benefits of cash cropping are enticing, it represents risks in terms of resilience and sustainability for rural families, as highlighted in Box 1.

Cash cropping typically utilizes large amounts of fertile land to plant a single crop that families cannot eat. Demands upon women to help out with cash cropping in addition to attending to their subsistence gardens

affect women’s ability to maintain sustainable sources of food for their families and to sell to local markets. The spread of cash cropping can also result in women needing to walk further to access their *kastom* gardens as subsistence farming is relegated to land further away from rural dwellings.

The government’s investment policies and land-use management practices that give preference to cash cropping have a direct impact on rural women’s activities in agriculture because women are directly involved in subsistence production at the same time that they are expected by their families to contribute to cash crop production, even though they may not necessarily have control over the generated income (see Box 1).

#### Box 1: Snapshot of rural livelihoods: Watermelon farming in Kakara Village, North Malaita

Kakara Village is a coastal community on the north of the island of Malaita where three main cash crops are grown – watermelons, cocoa and coconuts. A number of families also raise pigs, which are a source of food and income in the village, and provide fertilizer for the watermelon crops.

Women are primary food providers for their families, growing root crops and vegetables. They report that the emphasis on traditional food gardens has diminished as watermelon farming has become more lucrative. Men report that they have reduced the time they spend on subsistence fishing to farm the melons.

Watermelon farming is labour-intensive, as gardens are outside the village in an area with no water supply. Both men and women farmers carry water a considerable distance to their plots. Men build nursery boxes for seedlings, compost and haul manure from piggeries, maintain tools and manage transportation and shipping of the crops. Women tend to do the day-to-day maintenance of seedling nurseries and gardens and help with harvesting and packing. Women also manage and maintain food gardens in other areas and sell excess produce locally, as well as carrying large reproductive and caregiving workloads.

Watermelon farming is a lucrative seasonal venture for Kakara, where there are few employment options. Women and men both contribute to family businesses, but men control more of the resulting incomes. The labour-intensive nature of the crop has led to a reduction in subsistence food production and heavier reliance on purchased food of lower quality. This has implications for food security, nutrition and the incidence of noncommunicable diseases.

Source: CGA-ARS consultations held in February 2018

#### 4.4 Livestock production and management

According to the 2012/13 HIES, the total gross income of livestock (pigs and chicken) from subsistence activity in Solomon Islands was SBD 181 110 (approximately USD 21 407) during the survey years, with the highest income in this sector made in Malaita (SBD 67 070, approximately USD 7 928) (National Statistics Office, 2015). The livestock sector had the third highest gross household income in subsistence activity behind cash crops and root crops (cocoa, copra, kumara and cassava) (at SBD 254 700, approximately USD 30 106) and the fish and seafood industry (at SBD 218 120, approximately USD 25 782) (National Statistics Office, 2015).

Pigs and chickens are an important part of traditional agriculture. Pigs are often used for ceremonies and wild chickens are abundant in villages, providing an important source of protein for families. Cattle breeding has been implemented over the years by MAL, but this has been constrained by depletion of existing stocks, lack of new breeding stock and inbreeding. Despite these challenges, MAL continues to work towards the improvement of production and sustainability of small livestock projects and the revival of the cattle industry as national development

objectives for the agriculture sector (Solomon Islands Government, 2015a).

Lack of access to and control over land can hinder women from pursuing livestock farming, as this affects their not only their ability to manage livestock, but also their ability to apply for loans to assist in setting up their farms.

#### 4.5 Fisheries and aquaculture

Women are heavily involved in both subsistence and commercial fisheries, which are important sources of income and food security for Solomon Islanders. Fisheries are the third highest GDP contributor in the natural resource sector (see Table 7) and the second highest gross income earner in subsistence activity (when fish and other seafood are combined), with a combined income of SBD 254 700 (approximately USD 30 106) (National Statistics Office, 2015).

As Table 8 indicates, fisheries activities play a major role in rural livelihoods, with the provinces of Malaita and Western Province relying particularly heavily on subsistence fishing. Additionally, further analysis of Temotu figures show high levels of fishery activities

**Table 8: Total gross income from subsistence fishery activities nationally and in five provinces, according to the 2012/13 HIES (thousand SBD)**

Subsistence activity	Solomon Islands	Western Province	Central	Guadalcanal	Malaita	Temotu
All type of fish	158 860	27 170	25 200	19 040	31 140	21 680
Deep sea fish	60 080	8 630	14 340	10 300	6 500	8 850
Reef fish	54 500	13 800	7 400	4 150	11 780	2 510
Tuna	41 380	4 480	1 990	4 550	12 750	9 730
Other seafood.	59 260	9 630	4 320	230	10 250	20 150
Includes: other shellfish/seafood	26 440	6 100	20	0	1 310	17 190
Trochus	9 400	850	1 930	0	250	370
Seaweed	5 200	1 160	0	0	0	0

Source: National Statistics Office, 2015

Table 9: Gendered roles in the fisheries sector

Activity	Mainly men's role	Mainly women's role	Both men and women
Fishing from vessels outside the reef	●		
Fishing from canoes with lines or nets	●		
Fishing from bridges and promontories with lines			●
Diving with spears	●		
Wading with nets	●		
Diving for crabs, clams, trochus			●
Wading with handlines		●	
Reef gleaning for shellfish and invertebrates		●	
Tilapia farming – digging ponds, piping water, heavy maintenance	●		
Tilapia farming – pond cleaning and maintenance			●
Collection of speciality products such as bêche-de-mer		●	
Post-harvest processing of fisheries products		●	

Source: ADB, 2015 and Pacific Community, 2018a<sup>19</sup>

in shellfish and other seafood collection. According to the recent gender analysis of the fishery sector in Solomon Islands (Pacific Community, 2018a), these activities are mostly conducted by women, as this section further highlights.

Fisheries management and control of fisheries tenure at the rural level is male-dominated (Pacific Community, 2018a). According to in-depth analysis of gender and fisheries in Solomon Islands, rural women's and men's respective fishing activities are linked to gender roles and perceptions about what is socially acceptable for women or men to do. Table 9 shows that men tend to do more reef and offshore fishing and use larger boats and more complex and expensive gear. They are also more likely to use nets, spears and diving equipment (see Table 9). Women fish with hand lines, dive with little equipment or glean marine products by hand in shallow areas of lagoons,

mangroves, etc. (Pacific Community, 2018a). However, the 2018 analysis notes that roles are becoming more flexible, with more instances of women doing varied types of fishing and men participating in some post-harvest processing.

In in-shore commercial fisheries, rural women are most active in bêche-de-mer management, and harvesting and collection of giant clams, octopus and lobster. In the tuna industry, women are heavily involved in processing, working in canneries and administration. Women also do small-scale value-added work in fisheries, including salting, drying and cooking fish for sale in local markets. There is some collection of corals, shells and fish for the aquarium trade, but it is not clear how regular this is or if there are distinct gender roles around this apparently intermittent activity (Pacific Community, 2018a).

<sup>19</sup> Note that these delineations are generalized for all of Solomon Islands and thus do not reflect the variations that exist by province/district.

The fisheries sector has in the past had more men than women holding senior positions, but there is an increasing number of women working in fisheries science and management. As more women move into these roles, there may be increased political will to support gender analysis training among fisheries staff. This could in turn drive development of gender-responsive plans and programmes, and increased engagement of women in fisheries-related training at the community level (Pacific Community, 2018a).

#### 4.6 Access to and control over resources

Discussions with participants at the Assessment validation workshop (see Annex 4) revealed that rural women play an important role in agricultural products value addition, some obtaining the greatest portions of their incomes from this activity. According to the 2012/13 HIES, foods processed at home for sale contributed SBD 135 600 (approximately USD 16 028) a year to gross household income from subsistence activities (National Statistics Office, 2015). This income was higher than incomes from sales of both betel nut and handicrafts. Sale of food in rural markets and roadsides is common, with ready made meals of fried reef fish with cooked yams or bananas. Validation workshop participants added that rural women often sell their crops to intermediaries in Honiara, who in turn add value to the agricultural produce to sell in roadside markets.



Roadside food stalls in Honiara.

©FAO/J.L.Kunatuba

Women play a major role in food preparation for household consumption. Research reveals that in some parts of Solomon Islands, knowledge of preparation of traditional food is eroding. For example, in Morovo, women do not prepare sprouting mangrove pods (*petu*) because they no longer know how to process the pods, indicating loss of traditional knowledge of food preparation (Pitman, 2016).

Cooking food wrapped in leaves in a hot stone oven, or *motu*, is common, especially in rural areas in the absence of gas stoves and even kerosene burners, as these are expensive to purchase in the outer islands. However, geographic isolation and poor transport, market, water and power infrastructure are persistent barriers to home production of goods, negatively impacting income generation (International Finance Corporation, 2010).

#### 4.7 Agriculture extension services

The extension services of MAL have been significantly impacted by low budgetary allocations and general economic hardship. The Solomon Islands Agriculture and Livestock Sector Policy 2015–2019 highlights agricultural extension services as a key policy implementation tool for the sector and foresees the development of programmes to enhance the involvement of women and youth in agricultural production (Solomon Islands Government, 2015a).

As of 2018, MAL had 140 extension officers spread throughout each of the provinces, under the MAL's Department of Agriculture Extension. Out of the 140 extension officers, only 38 were women.<sup>20</sup> According to the Director of Agriculture Extension, the low number of women extension officers is just one of the many challenges MAL faces.

Both men and women of Solomon Islands, particularly those residing in remote areas, are adversely impacted when it comes to accessing extension services. The staff-to-farmer ratio is 1:3 000, and as such, regular on-site visits are nearly impossible. When extension services are available, rural women face additional constraints as compared to men because they are less educated and have less time to attend community meetings or participate in extension workshops (ADB, 2015). Additionally, because rural men

<sup>20</sup>Information obtained during an in-depth consultation with the Director of Agriculture Extension, MAL.

“Our biggest challenge is the vast geographical landscape of Solomon Islands, the high population and the fact I only have 140 extension officers to do extension work. The staff-to-farmer ratio is 1:3 000. It is a big challenge for the Ministry.”

*Director Agriculture Extension, Department of Agriculture Extension, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, 2018*

and women tend to engage in different types of agricultural work and employment and take on different responsibilities, they also have unique needs and requirements that need to be met by extension services. However, despite efforts by the government, civil society and development partners to increasingly target women farmers, these gender-based needs and requirements are not met.

#### 4.8 Rural finance

MAL recognizes that the agricultural sector is inextricably linked to the rest of the economy. This is why rural finance and credit facilities are among the cross-sectorial policy services of MAL. At the macro level, the South Pacific Business Development (SPBD) is the only micro-finance institution in Solomon Islands with services and products targeted to women. In addition to lending and savings products offered to rural women, SPBD also offers a number of financial literacy trainings. In 2017, the Central Bank of Solomon Islands reported that 7 000 women had opened savings accounts with deposits of SBD 4.66 million and a total loans disbursement of SBD 23.66 million (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 2017).

For most rural women in Solomon Islands, access to micro-credit schemes is critical since legal regulations of commercial banks and customary practice tend to marginalize women in access to and control over assets such as land and livestock (ADB, 2015).

At the micro level, a number of organizations are supporting rural women through the establishment of savings clubs/groups as well as implementing systems within the groups to enable women to access small loans for anything ranging from agricultural projects to purchasing uniforms for children. Based on Table 10, a rural volunteer-based women’s organization in Solomon Islands – West Are’Are Rokotanikeni Association (WARA) – is leading the way in terms of numbers of its members registered in savings clubs for women. Through training and awareness, rural women

learn to manage their finances, budget for household items and save for their family’s future. WARA is supporting rural Solomon Island women through financial literacy trainings that teach basics such as managing a budget and saving for school fees and household expenses, as well as setting up savings and lending schemes for women.

Analysis revealed that the MRDL can access the Constituency Development Fund to support farmers. Under this fund, MRDL (with support from the Members of the Parliament) has the discretion to fund income-generating agricultural projects such as pig or poultry farming or the supply of gardening tools.

However, MRDL does not collect any data on the beneficiaries of these funds, as reports from the constituencies (provinces) are only given verbally. Strategies to collect information such as the names of farmers and the types of agricultural activities financed would allow MRDL to design and implement gender-sensitive targets and enable it to allocate a certain percentage of funds to, for example, women livestock producers and women’s or youth groups.

#### 4.9 Access to local markets

“In Solomon Islands, the annual turnover at the Honiara Central Market is between USD 10–16 million, with women responsible for about 90 percent of this marketing activity – both as bulk-buyers from farmers and as retailers.”

*International Finance Corporation, 2010.*

With 84 percent of Solomon Islanders in rural areas and 51 percent in urban areas such as Honiara relying on the informal marketing of food and betel nut, local markets play a vital role in the lives of most Solomon Islands women. However, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure (including transport to market) and harassment constrain women’s business growth. Insufficient market locations also require rural women to travel to access markets. Safe local marketplaces

**Table 10: Recorded number of savings groups by province according to the Central Bank of Solomon Islands 2017 Annual Report**

Province	Organization						Total
	World Vision	MWCFA	WARA	ACoM (Anglican Church of Melanesia)	Live and Learn	SIWIBA (Solomon Islands Women in Business Association)	
Honiara	8	2	2	10		1	23
Guadalcanal	24	5	3	4			36
Malaita	108		16	29			153
Makira	49	5		39			93
Temotu	26						26
Western		29	20	1			50
Choiseul		14					14
Isabel		6		22	1		29
Central		6	1	1			8
Renbel		5					5
<b>Total number groups</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>437</b>
<b>Total number members</b>	<b>3 212</b>	<b>1 673</b>	<b>3 465</b>	<b>2 668</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>11 120</b>

Source: Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 2017

are integral for the enhancement of rural livelihoods, particularly for women. Expanding and improving market operations would substantially increase economic opportunities and contribute to the economic empowerment of rural women in Solomon Islands (Pacific Community, 2018a).

Women sell fruits, vegetables, tubers, betel nuts, tobacco, and fisheries products at their local markets or satellite markets (improvised marketplaces along the roadside or on wharves). This activity not only generates income for women and their families, but is also an opportunity to network with other market vendors and learn new business skills. For many women who earn their incomes from selling produce in a market, transport to the market, adequate infrastructure and good governance systems within

the market are essential for their safety and sustainable contributions to this sector (see Box 2).

Support for female market vendors in Solomon Islands is provided by development partners (UN Women and UNDP), the private sector (Bank of the South Pacific) and the Solomon Islands Government in collaboration with the vendors themselves. Projects focus on the provision of trainings in basic financial literacy, budgeting, savings and record keeping. There is also a focus on increasing knowledge and skills in mobile banking services and opportunities to access different types of financial services. Such training is usually coordinated by local and provincial governments responsible for management of marketplaces in Honiara and Auki.

## Box 2: Supporting women in the marketplace

Between 75 and 90 percent of market vendors in the Pacific region are women. The hours are long, the profits are often low and the working conditions difficult. Women often come from rural areas and they sleep at the market for three to four days, exposing them to higher risks of violence and theft.

UN Women's Markets for Change programme is confronting these challenges. Roofing, secure accommodation for rural market vendors, toilets and clean drinking water are making markets safer and more responsive to the needs of rural women vendors who travel long distances to sell their produce and crafts. Workshops sponsored by the Markets for Change programme, focused on women's leadership and participation, marketing, financial literacy and entrepreneurship, are resulting in women increasing their sales, increasing their representation in market committees and raising their voices to ensure that their needs are heard and prioritized when it comes to allocating market fees to improve economic opportunity, safety and health and wellbeing of market vendors.

This six-year multi-country initiative, launched in 2014 in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, is primarily funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Australia (DFAT).

Source: UN Women, 2015

However, there are other markets in Solomon Islands that are not included in such programmes supporting women. These require a similar approach to ensure that women are safe in their place of work and able to benefit from economic opportunities. In some places such as Tulagi in Central Province, selling in the market is a family affair where men, women and children sell their produce and also purchase other goods for the household together. According to a case study of market vendors in Tulagi, men often sell fish in the market while women sell other agricultural produce such as cabbage, kumaro and taro, and home-processed food such as cakes, ice blocks and popcorn. The study also found that decisions around what to sell are often made by men, although women

will often set aside produce needed for household consumption before any other decisions are made (Pacific Community, 2018a).

### 4.10 Handicrafts

Agriculture, the handicraft sector and rural women's livelihoods are inextricably linked. The handicraft industry is thriving in Solomon Islands. The bulk of the handicrafts are found in Honiara town, but come from weavers and other craftswomen from many parts of the country, including Malaita, Western Rennell-Bellona, Makira, Temotu and Guadalcanal provinces. A mapping of Solomon Islands cultural industries in 2011 found that on a typical day in Honiara Central Market, up to 40 craft dealers from Honiara and the outer islands could be found selling their wares, and 80 percent of these craftspeople were women. Craftspeople who sold jewellery or shell money in the market sometimes had a stock of 150–300 pieces at a time and could make between SBD 1 000 and SBD 5 000 (approximately USD 130–160) per day (Pacific Community, 2011).

According to the 2012/13 national HIES, handicrafts make up 1.9 percent of all subsistence income in the rural sector and handicrafts and home-processed food made up 27.6 percent of household business-related income in rural areas (National Statistics Office, 2015). While these contributions might appear relatively low in comparison to other livelihood sources, it is important to consider the multiple roles of women in the rural sector (e.g. in agriculture, fishing and



A market vendor in Honiara Central market

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©FAO/J.L. Kunatuba



Artisan from Morovo holding up one of her creations

livestock) and the complementary function of handicraft production in fostering multiple earning avenues for women.

A challenge is that since the handicraft sector depends on raw materials such as pandanus and hardwood to weave mats and create wood carvings, unsustainable logging and clearing of land for production of cash crops such as turmeric and cocoa can lead to loss of natural resources for the handicraft industry. This not only runs the risk of loss of complementary income for women and families but could also potentially lead to loss of traditional skills and knowledge in this industry.

#### 4.11 Rural infrastructure

Poor infrastructure is a critical barrier to growth acceleration and poverty reduction in Solomon Islands. Most rural areas in Solomon Islands lack basic public infrastructure such as health centres, local markets with proper shelters, school facilities such as separate toilets for girls and boys, and safe and accessible roads. There have, however, been some interventions in the Honiara Central, Gizo and Auki markets to improve toilet facilities and provide clean and safe shower rooms.

The rural electrification programme is ongoing with the support of donors and the national government. The Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification (MMERE) is responsible for the implementation of the Energy Policy. Rural electrification is still a major



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challenge, with only 0.22 percent of rural households connected to the national electrification grid. However, 86.4 percent have access to renewable forms of energy such as solar energy (Solomon Islands Government, 2013). Only 1.56 percent of the rural population has access to clean and modern forms of cooking equipment such as liquefied petroleum gas, kerosene, biogas or electricity. A large percentage of the rural population still depends on firewood, and rural women spend a large amount of time collecting firewood for the preparation of family meals.

The Solomon Islands Government, with funding and technical support from the Asian Development Bank, invested in the development of the National Transport Plan (NTP) to guide transport sector investments through a prioritization of transport needs. Of particular importance are rural roads and interisland travel by boat.

In the province of Malaita for instance, roads connect Auki township to West AreAre, Sulufou, North Malaita and East Malaita. Safe and accessible roads are therefore an imperative not only for farmers transporting their produce but also for everyday activities such as accessing schools or healthcare centres. Rural infrastructure improvements would shorten women's travel time, allowing women farmers to return home during daylight and enhance their ability to transport more crops to the market places as well as expand their marketing options. On the other hand, weak infrastructure increases the burden on rural women. Lack of quality roads, for instance, means that

some women must undertake the arduous daily task of carrying crops on their backs or on their heads to the main roads in order to sell their crops.

While rural roads and other infrastructure connect main towns in some areas, the key means of transportation for most interisland travel is by outboard motor boat. For example, farmers on outer lagoons need an outboard motor to get to and from Western Province's main town of Gizo to transport produce. Safe and accessible water transport is therefore another necessity for rural women and men.

#### 4.12 Climate change and disaster risk management

Climate change is affecting the frequency of extreme weather events in Solomon Islands as well agricultural yields and fish stocks. Changes in seasonal rainfall and temperatures have contributed to droughts, floods and changes in coral reef populations, all of which affect women's and men's subsistence food sources, livelihoods and security (ADB, 2015).

Development partners and civil society groups working in conservation and forest management are supporting the government in climate change adaptation and disaster response. Gender-related impacts of climate change are difficult to assess on Solomon Islands as there is limited sex-disaggregated data available on women's and men's distinct roles in resource management and on gender-responsive adaptation strategies. Tools have been developed to explore these issues, but generation of clear evidence and integration of findings into action are critical (Pacific Community, 2012).

Climate change and food security are inextricably linked, and the ability of agricultural producers, especially rural women, to adapt to the risks brought on by climate change is of urgent importance (FAO, 2016). Gender analysis of climate change and adaptation measures is identified as an area for action in the government's 2012–2017 National Climate Change Policy. Gender-sensitive measures that address mobility constraints for rural women, create credit opportunities and safe and accessible markets for women, and ensure that government consultations and projects include women's perspectives may buffer against the impacts of climate change on the agriculture sector and rural livelihoods in Solomon Islands.

Interviews with farmers in two villages in Malaita found that women possessed knowledge of various wild-grown leafy greens and marine life that families could live on during times of natural disasters, when agricultural produce might be damaged. Further assessment of results from interviews conducted in sites in Malaita Province found differing experiences in relation to climate change and related disasters. According to farmers on Langalanga in Malaita, during periods of bad weather such as continued rain and flooding, swamp taro grown by farmers on swampland comes in handy for family consumption. Women agricultural producers highlighted that in times of natural disaster, food is scarce, as is income because there is less produce to sell. However, families are able to survive on swamp taro and other vegetables growing in the wild or in gardens.

In contrast, in West Kwara'ae, a village with fertile agricultural land, the mountainous land and lush forests two kilometres inland have been depleted after years of unsustainable logging and slash and burn agriculture. As such, the land of those areas is now used for planting sago palm trees, cocoa and coconut plantations. These provide sources of income for the village but leave fewer natural areas available to turn to for food security needs in times of crisis. Another village, Kakara, a coastal community in Malaita known for melon farming on a range of hills, has experienced harsh, dry weather conditions, which require more manual labour by women. The women farmers of Kakara often need to carry water uphill in the mornings and afternoons for their hillside farms, which is laborious and time consuming. While the women farmers highlighted this meant less time for other farming activities, they expressed that melon farming remains a priority because it is lucrative.

#### 4.13 Extractive industries and exploitation of forests

Solomon Islands is rich in natural resources. As highlighted in Table 7, mining and quarrying contributed SBD 25.7 million to the country's GDP in 2015, although this was a huge drop from SBD 192.9 million in 2013. However, this drop may work in the favour of rural livelihoods given the significant potential impacts of this sector on forests, farms and the agriculture sector in general. Minerals and energy are not highly exploited in Solomon Islands, although there are significant copper, gold, nickel, and geothermal resources in several provinces.

Early colonial administrators were aware of mineral resources in the country, and serious exploration by several foreign-owned companies has been ongoing since the 1960s. Land tenure difficulties, disagreements between companies and the political tensions of the late 1990s have, however, limited development of the industry.

On the one hand, developments may provide positive opportunities for Solomon Islands women in terms of jobs for in administration, cleaning and food services, as well as spin-off opportunities for local businesses and services. On the other hand, mining operations pose similar risks for women as logging camps and fishing ports. Where rural villages are in close proximity to mining and logging camps, camp workers solicit rural women and girls for sex, creating risks of violence, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease (ADB, 2015). Additionally, without proper regulations on the environmental contamination of mining, consequences can be worse than in other resource extraction industries (ADB, 2015).

The Solomon Islands Government notes that many environmental problems result from exploitative and extractive industries and from practices such as logging and land clearing (Solomon Islands Government, 2008). Furthermore, the Government notes that these activities contribute to loss of biodiversity, loss of species, land and soil degradation, depletion of fish stocks, ecosystem destruction and habitat loss, loss of water quality and quantity, coastal erosion and degradation, sedimentation, loss of soil fertility, saltwater intrusion and increase in disease incidence (Solomon Islands Government, 2008). Global and regional evidence shows that extractive industries (especially when led by foreign investors)

can distort gendered power dynamics throughout communities, almost always at the expense of women and girls (UN Women, 2017).

Women use forests for gathering food, firewood and traditional medicines, and as a source of clean water. Such practices are threatened by large-scale forestry and mining, which tend to be environmentally damaging. Soil degradation, chemical contamination of waterways and siltation are common side effects of mining and logging. These impacts increase women's burdens, making it necessary to walk further for fuel and clean water. Where reefs become silted as a result of logging or mining, fish stocks are reduced and food insecurity increases.

Interviews with women farmers in the villages of Vatupilei and Balusuna in Guadalcanal revealed that, despite the royalties earned through logging, many families were eating instant noodles and canned tuna instead of fresh vegetables and root crops because their forests were being destroyed. This information was confirmed by the participants of the validation workshop who stated that this situation was common in other provinces as well. Women farmers explained that their living conditions have become steadily worse because of flooding and loss of arable land.

The voices of women affected by mining operations, including those in Solomon Islands, have been documented by Oxfam Australia. As illustrated in Box 3, this research revealed that loss of access to land contributes to women's disempowerment. Further, payment of royalties in the logging industry went to men, while women had very limited or no access to the financial benefits of the industries that have a direct impact on their sources of livelihood (Oxfam Australia, 2009).

### Box 3: Snapshot of rural livelihoods: Women and mining, Gold Ridge, Guadalcanal (2009)

Nester Endey lives near the Gold Ridge Mine and tells her story. "Negotiations have only been done by the men. The women are not involved. The women really want to be in the negotiations, but the men dominate. Men are more interested in money. When they get money from the negotiations they get into alcohol. Very little [gets back] to the women and children," said Nester. Nester is also concerned that chemicals from a tailings dam upstream will overflow into their water supply. If this occurs, say the women, "it will damage our gardens and drinking water and we'll have nothing to earn money from because one of the ways we earn money is to sell things from the garden at the market."

Source: Excerpted from Oxfam Australia, 2009

# 5

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



## 5.1 Major findings

Rural women in Solomon Islands are subjected to social norms grounded in traditional customs that constrain their bargaining and decision-making power at all levels – from the household to the village council to provincial and national governance systems. They also have less control over and ownership of economic and productive resources than rural men. Girls in rural areas have less access to education than rural boys and are less likely to be functionally literate.

Rural women are highly active in subsistence agriculture and fisheries and may sell or barter excess produce at local markets. Rural women and men often engage in similar agricultural work but there is nevertheless a persistent gendered division of labour. Rural women have fewer opportunities than their male counterparts to access wage employment or develop businesses despite their significant involvement in family-run aquaculture ventures and cash cropping of coconuts, cocoa and seasonal crops.

A gendered division of labour is also quite evident within the household, where women have a disproportionate share of responsibilities for domestic and reproductive activities, including cooking, cleaning, caregiving and raising children. While rural women are predominantly engaged in ongoing maintenance activities and day-to-day management of their family and community commitments, rural men tend to focus on physically demanding activities in both their domestic and agricultural work.

From a policy perspective, it is important that the government acknowledge such gendered divisions of labour, including time spent by women on domestic and reproductive work, and the specific needs of women, including child care and skills development, for strategic policy development and planning.

The progress to date on development of gender-responsive policy frameworks is in a positive direction. The Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy (2016–2020) and the National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls (2015) demonstrate a commitment of the Government of Solomon Islands to mainstream gender equality. However, implementation of these commitments, especially at the local level, is still a challenge.

Constraints to implementation include 1) weak accountability and enforcement of Permanent Secretaries' responsibilities to mainstream gender; 2) limited gender awareness and technical understanding of gender issues at the institutional level; and 3) lack of awareness that the integration of gender equality is a responsibility of the government as a whole and not only of one institution with limited reinforcement power and a limited mandate. There is still a widespread institutional perception that the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is solely the responsibility of MWYCF.

Consultations carried out during this CGA-ARS and the findings of the recent SPC gender analysis of the fisheries sector (Pacific Community, 2018a) highlight that governmental officials and CSOs working together with rural communities appreciate rural women's engagement in agriculture and fisheries as well as their contributions to household management, caregiving and community initiatives. However, translating such awareness and appreciation of rural women's work into gender-responsive development processes will require investment in 1) training; 2) collection and analysis of data; 3) creation of straightforward accountability mechanisms; and 4) development of relevant and easy to monitor gender indicators.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this Assessment, the following recommendations are targeted to the Government of Solomon Islands and its development partners, notably FAO and SPC, to align their commitment to address gender inequality and advance efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women in agriculture and the rural economy. The following recommendations also reflect commitments made by the Government of Solomon Islands at the international, regional and national levels, with the objective of supporting their implementation. The recommendations are intended to improve the national policy frameworks and strengthen institutional capacities for efficient delivery of gender-responsive strategies, plans, programmes and services in rural areas.

### 5.2.1 Recommendations for the government

To increase institutional technical capacities and support gender-responsive organizational culture at all levels for a systematic integration of gender equality and rural women's empowerment in public policies, strategies, plans and programmes:

- Create an operational and functioning intra-governmental mechanism for the advancement of gender equality and rural women's empowerment in ARD, to be led and coordinated by MWYCFA/WDD. This intra-governmental mechanism should aim to put in place a gender mainstreaming process at all governance levels within all agricultural line ministries, notably MAL, MFMR and MRDL, and other relevant governmental entities, including MECCDMM, MPS and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration (MCILI).
- Strengthen the governmental network of gender focal points in all agriculture line and ARD-relevant ministries and periodically build the capacities of gender focal points, to be coordinated by the intra-governmental mechanism led by MWYCFA/WDD. Gender focal points should coordinate and promote planning, implementation and monitoring of all work related to the empowerment of rural women and gender equality within their respective ministries and institutions.
- To facilitate better coordination and knowledge sharing among governmental agencies, ensure that terms of reference relating to working groups, councils, committees and expert groups in agriculture, livestock, fisheries and rural sectors include representatives from MWYCFA, and vice versa.
- Foster collaboration and coordination among MWYCFA, MFMR, MAL, MRDL and provincial government departments to increase WDD's technical knowledge on agriculture, including fisheries, while concurrently building gender awareness among agricultural line ministry staff.
- Given the lack of awareness and technical capacity within the agricultural line ministries, build up the capacity of staff at all levels to undertake gender analysis to ensure that women benefit from government-led initiatives across the provinces.
- Utilize research and gender analyses undertaken in ARD to build the institutional technical

capacity and awareness of MWYCFA and agricultural line ministries on gender equality and rural women's empowerment.

- Where gender expertise is limited within working groups and committees in agricultural line ministries, seek available gender expertise in the particular technical area from MWYCFA or integrate gender specialists from donor and development partner agencies into the respective working groups.

To generate evidence to support gender mainstreaming in ARD policies, strategies, plans and programmes:

- Promote policy research and analysis on gender equality and rural women's empowerment in the agricultural sector to inform policies and strategic planning, and conduct systematic gender analyses on legislation and policies, including macroeconomic policies, structural reforms, and aid and trade agreements.
- Gender sensitize existing national and provincial data collection efforts by agricultural line ministries, including through existing market surveys such as the Hapi Fis project of MFMR.
- Enhance collaboration with development partners and CSOs to document women's paid and unpaid economic contributions to agriculture (both subsistence and commercial), including fisheries, as a first step in gender budgeting and gender-responsive priority setting. This can include 1) collecting sex-disaggregated data on disbursement of community funds managed by agricultural line ministries to communities and rural institutions; 2) assessing how funds and grants benefit rural men, women, families and communities; and 3) recommending any changes required to increase equity of fund distribution.
- Encourage development partners and CSOs involved in fisheries and agricultural value-chain development to collect comprehensive sex-disaggregated data and document lessons learned about what works in gender-inclusive value-chain development to support improved design of women's economic empowerment projects and increase opportunities for rural women to access and have control over economic and financial assets.

**To practically address gender inequalities in the rural sector and support the empowerment of rural women:**

- Foster collaboration with development partners and CSOs to enhance income-generating activities for rural women, including through the development of value chains, decent work and productive employment, as well as diversification of livelihood opportunities for rural women, including for women with disabilities and young women.
- Strengthen the implementation of concrete measures for meeting the livelihood needs of rural women, such as access to safe markets (with gender-sensitive market infrastructure and proper governance mechanisms), by agricultural line ministries and MWYCFA in cooperation with development partners.
- Increase the gender sensitivity of the extension services provided by MAL and MFMR, including through the incorporation of measures to ensure that rural women and men benefit equitably from these services, the provision of gender-sensitive training for extension officials at all levels and increasing the number of women extension officers.
- Apply gendered perspectives across all priorities of agriculture extension services, as opposed to a limited focus on few selected priority actions for rural women, to ensure holistic and sustainable benefits for rural women.
- Strengthen the collaboration of MAL and MFMR constituency development officers and provincial officers, including through synchronized work planning that integrates gender equality and rural women's empowerment in their activities.
- Increase the budget allocations in all agricultural line ministries as well as in MWYCFA for gender equality mainstreaming in their plans, programmes and projects to specifically assist women agricultural producers.

### 5.2.2 Recommendations for FAO and SPC

- Provide technical support to the operationalization of the intra-governmental mechanism for the advancement of gender equality and rural women's empowerment in ARD, notably MWYCFA.
- Provide technical support to agricultural line ministries, MWCS, MPS and MECCDMM in their efforts to strategically integrate gender equality

and rural women's empowerment aspects in ARD-relevant policies, strategies, plans and programmes.

- Support MAL, MFMR and other relevant ARD-related institutions to conduct further research and raise awareness on rural women's contributions to the rural economy and agricultural value addition and their role within agricultural value chains in an effort to transform traditional gender norms, perceptions and practices and to foster better conditions and opportunities for rural women.
- Support research on rural women's roles in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and climate change monitoring and adaptation and on their knowledge of environmental management to strengthen targeted planning and programme design.
- Support the government to integrate gender into all national and ministry-specific ARD policies, strategies, plans, programmes and budgets. Based on research and existing evidence, allocate and expand resources to support rural women's involvement in ARD.
- Ensure sustainable processes for gender mainstreaming when implementing ARD projects in Solomon Islands, including capacity-building activities on agriculture, rural livelihoods and gender for key ministries.
- Support MAL to enhance its women's agriculture extension services through training of male and female extension officers in basic gender analysis and gender-responsive programme delivery methods.
- Strengthen collaboration with MFMR to improve the gender responsiveness of the Community-Based Management Programme through training of community facilitators and fisheries officers in basic gender analysis and gender-responsive programme delivery methods.
- Raise awareness on gender equality in ARD and on rural women's empowerment within the government at all levels and help transform the pervasive understanding that gender is just a 'woman's issue' and, therefore, solely the responsibility of MWYCFA. All training, mentoring and coaching should, where possible, be done in concert with training from MPS on codes of conduct and sexual harassment.

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# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: List of governmental institutions consulted

### **Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock**

Permanent Secretary  
Director, Agriculture Extension  
Field Officer, Women Agriculture Extension Services (WAES)

### **Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs**

Permanent Secretary  
Two Women's Development Officers

### **Ministry of Rural Development and Livelihood**

Director, Rural Development Division

### **Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources**

Director, Inshore Fisheries Division  
Director, Fisheries; Gender Focal Point Officer

### **Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources**

Director Corporate Services

### **Ministry of Health and Medical Services**

Director, Nutrition Department

### **Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology**

Permanent Secretary

### **Malaita Province**

Chief Field Officer  
Principal Livestock Officer  
Research Officer  
Senior Field Officer  
Land Use Officer  
Women's Desk Officer  
Assistant Field Officer (Agriculture)  
Field Assistant (Agriculture)

### **Guadalcanal Province**

Chief Field Officer Agriculture Division  
Field Assistant (Agriculture)

## **Annex 2: List of development partners and non-governmental organizations consulted**

### **FAO (Solomon Islands Office)**

Assistant FAO Representative

### **Live and Learn**

#### **Environment Education**

Country Director

### **Development Services Exchange**

Director

### **Kastom Garden**

Director

### **PHAMA**

Representative

### **Malaita Provincial Council of Women**

President

Vice President

### **Auki Market Vendors Association**

President

## Annex 3: List of community consultation and focus group participants

### Guadalcanal consultations

#### Guadalcanal Province, Guadalcanal Provincial Council of Women

Ward President

Treasurer

#### Balasuna, East Guadalcanal

Village Leader

#### Vatupilei Village, West Guadalcanal

Two women agricultural producers

### Malaita Province consultations

#### Gwaitaba'a, West Kwara'ae

Woman agricultural producer

#### Korol Village Demonstration Farm

Representative (male)

#### Radesifolomae, Langalanga Lagoon

Owner of an integrated farming eco-lodge (female)

#### Kakara Community

Focus group with 25 watermelon producers (24 women and 1 man)

## Annex 4: List of validation workshop participants

### Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock

Chief Field Officer, Agriculture Division, Guadalcanal Province

Senior Field Officer

Field Officer, Women Agriculture Extension Services

Field Assistant, Agriculture, Malaita Province

### Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs

Director

Women's Development Officer

### Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources

Director, Inshore Fisheries Division

Director, Fisheries, Gender Focal Point Officer

### Ministry of Health and Medical Services

Director, Nutrition Department

### FAO

Assistant FAO Representative

### SPC

Gender Equality Officer

### Live and Learn

#### Environmental Education

Country Director

### Guadalcanal Provincial Council of Women

Treasurer

Balasuna, East Guadalcanal

Village Leader (male)

### Vatupilei Village, West Guadalcanal Province

Woman agricultural producer

### Two local consultants





**PACIFIC WOMEN**  
SHAPING PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Representation in Solomon Islands**

FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands (FAO SAP)  
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