



A black and white photograph of a woman with long braided hair, wearing a light-colored t-shirt, speaking into a microphone. She is holding a small object in her left hand. In the background, there is a large, carved wooden mask with a wide, open mouth and a small eye. The scene appears to be outdoors, possibly at a cultural event or performance. The image has a dark, moody tone with some light flares.

CHAPTER

6

**Honiara,
Solomon Islands**

6

Chapter Six: Honiara, Solomon Islands

6.1 Introduction

This Urban Centre Case Study discusses youth crime and violence in Honiara, Solomon Islands. The research team conducted focus groups discussions and interviews in Solomon Islands with young people, government actors and civil society organizations which provided the main basis for the findings. Additionally, a desk review of available reports and statistics was conducted. Drawing together these findings, this case study recommends a number of key actions to strengthen and support resilient capacity among young men and women.

The *Solomon Islands National Youth Policy 2010-15* defines youth as people between the ages of 14 to 29 years of age. However, the Policy states that due to cultural and traditional contexts the policy can cover young people less than 14 and above the age of 29.¹⁸⁹ In the justice system juveniles are considered to be aged between 14 and 17 inclusive.¹⁹⁰

The large youth population, which will grow into the political leadership and economic engine of the country, is the key to the sustainable recovery and development of the Solomon Islands after years of conflict (1998-2003), political rioting (2006) and natural disasters (2007 and 2010). The country has begun a slow recovery but the on-going high youth unemployment rates, trauma, and social disruption that remain as a fall out from the conflict or “the Tensions” as it is commonly known still need to be addressed. Young people must be part of this recovery process and be involved in the development process if Solomon Islands is to continue to make progress.

Young people have many aspirations to contribute to the long term sustainable development of the nation and are eager for opportunities. However, during consultations for this report, a number of risk factors were identified that increase the likelihood of young people becoming involved in crime and violence: lack of employment; the continuing post-conflict recovery process, including the need to address reintegration and rehabilitation of young people affected by the Tensions; and substance abuse. At the same time there were many resilience factors that encourage young people not to engage in crime and violence: parental support; opportunities for meaningful activities, and positive role models and peers.

“I’m very happy to be given this opportunity. This is the first time in my life to experience this type of interview”

Young woman



189 MYWCA 2010.

190 Juvenile Offenders Act 1972.

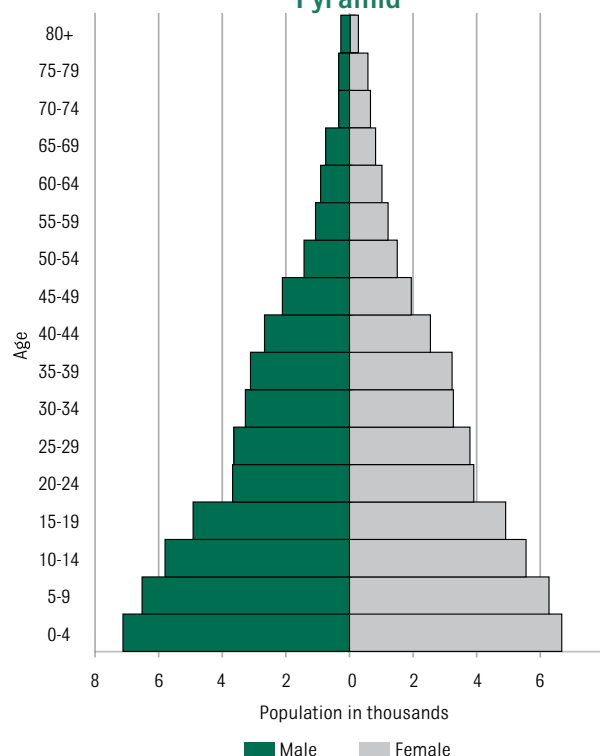
There is an immediate need for better coordination amongst stakeholders to support young people and prevent duplication and/or gaps within youth development initiatives. Government strategic planning for young people should be prioritized, in particular in the areas that encourage young people's involvement in community safety and crime prevention programmes. There are some structures and services already directed at supporting young people, which are implemented by government, civil society and faith based organizations. However, demand outstrips supply and a more strategic focus is required.

6.2 National Context

In 2009 the population of Solomon Islands was approximately 515,870, with a growth rate of 2.3 percent per annum.¹⁹¹ In 2010, the proportion of the national population aged between 15–29 years was 29 percent, with young women making up 48 percent and young men 52 percent (Figure 6.1). The median age is 19.7 years.¹⁹² More startlingly, 40 percent of the population is under the age of 14 – a demographic bulge which makes the need to address youth issues even more imperative. The youth population is expected to continue its rapid growth until at least 2025.¹⁹³ Eighty per cent of the population lives in the rural areas.¹⁹⁴ However, the rural-urban migration of young people in search of employment, education and training continues to grow, such that they make up one-third of the total population of Honiara (Figure 6.2).¹⁹⁵

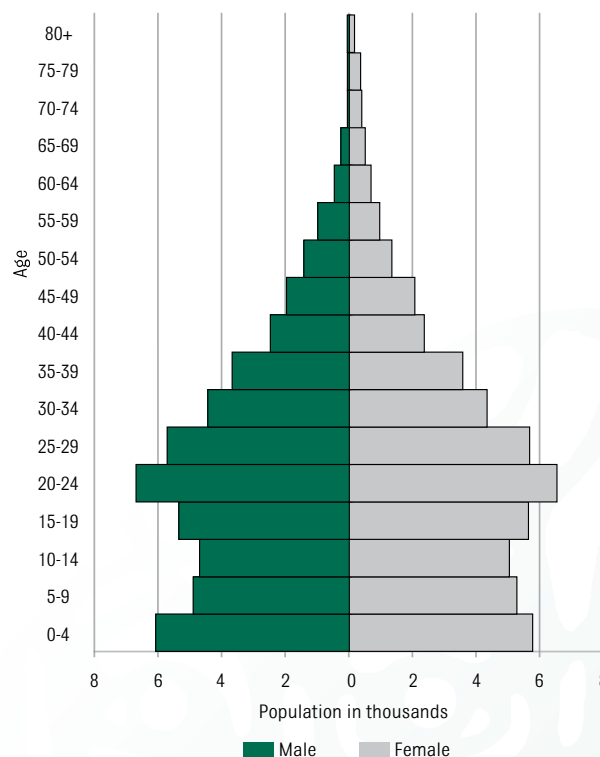
The 2010 UNDP Human Development Index ranks Solomon Islands 123 out of 169 countries. The rate of development is lower than the regional average.¹⁹⁶ The country's *2004 Millennium Development Goals Report* indicated that it is on target to meet two MDGs by 2015: Goal Two on universal primary education and Goal Five on improving maternal health.¹⁹⁷ However, more broadly progress has been mixed and achievement of other MDGs is unlikely without substantial further investment. In this context, poverty is usually described as hardship in the Solomon Islands, which signifies a lack of access to services and opportunities. While many people in rural areas are considered 'cash poor', generally the population has access to sufficient nutrition and housing due to subsistence agriculture and extended family social

Figure 6.1 Solomon Islands Population Pyramid



Source: Solomon Islands Government

Figure 6.2 Honiara Population Pyramid



Source: Solomon Islands Government

191 NSO 2010.

192 MYWCA 2010.

193 World Bank 2008.

194 MYWCA 2010.

195 This has potential positive implications in terms of growth and development with a large and energetic workforce available but is also creates challenges such as increased likelihood of violent conflict and unrest if economic stagnation and lack of opportunities continue. Urbanization is also changing societal and family structures leaving youth with less support and guidance from elders.

196 UNDP 2010a.

197 SIG and UNDP 2005.

Figure 6.3 Attendance in Formal Education by Age



security nets. It is perceived that the hardships experienced are higher in Honiara, with almost one in three people considered 'poor', compared to less than one in five people in rural areas.¹⁹⁸

The country is on target to meet the MDG on universal primary education by 2015.¹⁹⁹ Primary school is free, but not compulsory.²⁰⁰ As of 2007, half of seven year olds and 29 percent of eight year olds were not attending school. In the urban area, over 70 percent of children aged six to twelve are enrolled.²⁰¹ Problematically, only

about half of those who attend primary school can be placed in secondary school due to limited places. Amongst those who enter secondary school, as many as 60 to 85 percent are 'pushed out' through failed compulsory examinations and/or because of an inability to pay school fees.²⁰² The gender gap in education becomes increasingly wider the higher the grade. For example, of the total population of young men aged 18, 47 percent are enrolled while only 34 percent of young women are enrolled (Figure 6.3). The literacy rate in the age group between 15 to 29 years is 88 percent for males and 80 percent for females.²⁰³ In 2009, only 30 percent of government scholarships were awarded to female students.²⁰⁴

Only one in six school leavers find formal employment.²⁰⁵ The Central Bank estimates that about 7,500 young people enter the workforce each year, but the maximum increase in formal employment since 1982 has been only 3,800 people per year.²⁰⁶ According to a 2009 report of the Asian Development Bank, the youth unemployment rate is 45 percent.²⁰⁷ In Honiara, the need for full-time employment is even greater, as young people do not have the ability to fall back on subsistence agriculture. Almost 80 percent of household heads are formally employed in Honiara compared to only 17 percent in rural areas.²⁰⁸

The 2007 *Solomon Island Demographic and Health Survey* revealed that there is significant gender disparity in the employment sector.²⁰⁹ There are no laws guaranteeing equal pay or opportunity for women, or laws that address sexual harassment or discrimination in the workplace.²¹⁰ The government has recently initiated several efforts to improve gender equality in society. In a policy statement in early 2008, government committed itself to gender

¹⁹⁸ NSO and UNDP/PC 2008: 2.

¹⁹⁹ UNDP 2010b.

²⁰⁰ In practice most primary school charge at least a small fee to help with the operational cost, while parents must also meet the cost of transportation, uniforms and education material.

²⁰¹ SPC 2007.

²⁰² World Bank 2008.

²⁰³ SPC 2007.

²⁰⁴ JICA 2010: iv.

²⁰⁵ ADB 2009.

²⁰⁶ World Bank 2008.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ NSO and UNDP/PC 2008: 4.5.

²⁰⁹ The Solomon Island demographic and health survey (2007) conducted by SPC found that a small number of currently married women (42 percent) in the age range of 15 - 49 were employed in the last 12 months compared to (87 percent) currently married men had had employment in the last 12 months. The economic vulnerability of women was exacerbated by the fact that more than half (56 percent) of women employed were not paid, either in cash or in kind, for their work.

²¹⁰ JICA 2010: iv.

equality as “one of the core principles and objectives for development in the country.” Moreover, in January 2010, cabinet approved the “National Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Development” developed by the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Family Affairs (MWYCFA).²¹¹ Finally, high rates of violence in the home and sexual violence in the Solomon Islands remains a serious concern and a risk factor that pushes youth to crime and violence.

The major health issues for young people include poor diet, the increasing prevalence of non-communicable disease, high level of substance use (e.g. *kwaso*,²¹² alcohol, betel nut, marijuana and tobacco), mental health issues, teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and poor access to health services and information. Studies on sexually transmitted infections and HIV in the country revealed low condom use among sexually active young people.²¹³ In 2007, the rate of teenage pregnancy was at 12 percent for girls aged 15 to 19 years of age.²¹⁴ That figure is probably underestimated given anecdotal evidence that many pregnancies amongst young women are under reported. Mortality and morbidity related to unintended pregnancy and child birth, including unsafe abortions remain a significant health risk for young women.

6.3 Young People as Victims and Perpetrators

Many young people living in Honiara contribute to the nation’s social, economic and cultural development. However, meaningful partnerships between government, civil society and young people require strengthening to assist young people to access support and services that would empower them to achieve their potential and effectively engage in community matters. The effects of the Tensions and other unrest are still impacting on the lives of young people with many experiencing a sense of community dislocation and some engaging in criminal activities. A number of young people are also at risk of becoming victims of violence both inside and outside the home.

Common Crimes

Predominant criminal offenders in Honiara are males and females aged between 12 to 45 years of age, however, sex disaggregated statistics were not available to permit gender analysis.²¹⁵ A Save the Children Australia study and police records indicate that the main crimes involving children and young people in the Solomon Islands are alcohol-related crimes (including production and sale of homebrew or *kwaso*), drunk and disorderly behavior, marijuana sale and use, assault (including domestic violence), theft and property damage.²¹⁶ This was also confirmed during consultations where participants identified breaking and entering (business and residential properties), family-related violence, assault and theft as the most prominent crimes committed by young people.

“I think some young people get involved in thefts, burglary or other crimes because they follow young people in their community and work as a group to involve in criminal activities”

Young man

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² A home-brewed potent local spirit (alcohol) that is popular in the Solomon Islands

²¹³ MYWCA 2010.

²¹⁴ SPC 2007

²¹⁵ Crime Statistic & Records Division 2010.

²¹⁶ Save the Children Australia 2009.

The majority of participants consulted stated that many of the crimes committed by young people were perpetrated by young men. However, participants also indicated that many of the risks factors pushed both sexes to engage in crime and violence. According to the stakeholders consulted, men were more likely to be the perpetrators of violent crimes such as assault whereas women were more likely to be involved in opportunistic crimes, such as theft. From the consultations it was also suggested that men would more likely to execute a crime, whereas women played a more supporting role.

Assaults

Physical fights, which constitute assault under current criminal law, were highlighted during consultations to be prominent amongst young people. Many participants explained that alcohol and other substances was one of the main contributing factors to young people engaging in fights. Physical fights usually occur between different youth groups from different geographical areas around Honiara and amongst drunken nightclub patrons. The fights occur due to insults, rivalries, and control over geographical areas. According to participants consulted, young women were more likely to be involved in physical fights due to personal relationships or other family matters. In general these fights usually involved physical violence such as punching and kicking their opponents.

The use of makeshift weapons such as stones, bottles and sticks was also reported.

"Most young people are involved in fighting and other activities because they are drunk and on drugs... Most of them are unemployed"

Community member

Drug Related Crimes

According to the Crime Statistics and Record Divisions of the RSIPF, alcohol-related cases that include the production and sale of homebrew or *kwaso* have been on the rise in Honiara from 2005–2010. For this period, RSIPF recorded a total of 3057 alcohol related offenses for the 12 to 45 age group. These alcohol offenses included disorderly behavior, drunk and disorderly conduct, consuming liquor in public places and selling liquor without a license. Relating to substance use, for the 2006–2010 period, a total of 327 marijuana related offences were recorded by the RSIPF for the same age category.²¹⁷ Marijuana related offences included possession, sale, growing and smoking marijuana. The statistics received from RSIPF were not disaggregated by sex therefore this research could not distinguish between the crimes committed by males or females.

"I remember my most violent moment when I was 8 years old boy that's when my father chase me and hit me several times until I was badly harm and cry ... I feel that I am not a particular child in this family, I think am an adopted son from this moment"

Young man

Domestic and Sexual Violence Crime

Domestic and sexual violence is a common crime that is widely under-reported. It is understood that young women are particularly most vulnerable to all forms of violence and abuse. A year after the Honiara riots in 2006, an AusAID report on Melanesia and East Timor cited crimes against women as a key issue in Solomon Islands.²¹⁸ The most heinous of crimes are sexually based offences. During the period of 2005 – 2010, a total of 230 cases of sexual offences were reported for Honiara.²¹⁹ These offences included attempted rape, defilement, indecent assault, incest, insulting modesty and rape. According to RSIPF, these

²¹⁷ RSIPF 2010.

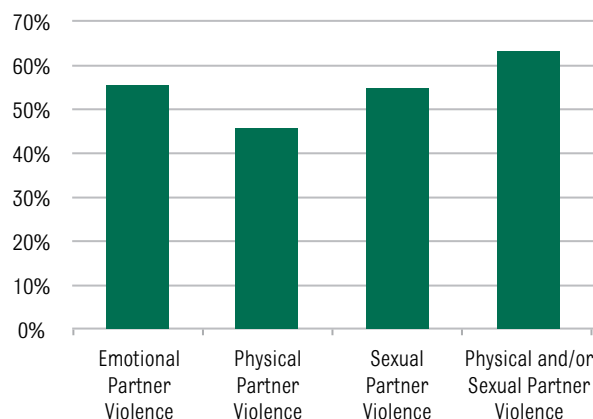
²¹⁸ AusAid Office of Development Effectiveness 2007.

²¹⁹ Crime Statistic & Records Division 2010.

statistics represented only reported cases as many cases go unreported due to fear of further victimization of the victim and their families. In other cases, these offenses were dealt with by the Chiefs of the community.

Nearly two-thirds of Solomon Islands women surveyed in 2008-9 reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse from an intimate partner in their lifetime (Figure 6.4). Of these, 30 percent have been injured by physical violence. Seventy percent of victims had never told anyone prior to the survey about their experiences of violence demonstrating a strong culture of silence around the issue. In the same government survey, more than one third of women between 15 and 49 years of age reported being sexually abused before 15 years of age. Moreover, 38 percent of women reported that their first sexual experience was either coerced or forced.²²⁰ Further to this, young people are not only victims of violence, but are also perpetrators. Between 64 to 83 percent of women reported experiencing intimate partner violence with partners aged between 15 and 29 years of age, demonstrating the need for immediate and targeted intervention aimed at young people.²²¹

Figure 6.4: Women Reporting Types of Intimate Partner Violence



Source: MYWCFA 2009

6.4 Institutional Responses in Support of Youth

As the Solomon Islands Government continues to strengthen its capacity, it is positive that some initiatives are already in place which attempt to address the range of needs and challenges facing young people. However, government and civil society organizations need to continue to address the major gaps, which hamper the progress in effectively supporting young people to achieve their full potential.

Political Institutions' Engagement with Youth

Both patrilineal and matrilineal inheritance is practiced in Solomon Islands. Despite this, power and authority is most often assumed by the men.²²² Most notably in this context, women's participation at the parliamentary level has been virtually absent.²²³ Out of 50 members of Parliament, none are women and since independence, only one woman has been elected. Women's representation is slightly better at provincial government level, with five women elected in provincial assemblies. In the public service, women only hold six percent of key decision making positions.²²⁴ In the Solomon Islands most legislators are older men, with the result that young people's voices are rarely heard in national decision-making forums. Despite this, there has to date been no consideration as to whether it would be useful to reserve any seats for young people in the National legislature.

*"My friends
and I want to build a
good community where it
is safe and we help young
people and work together"*

Young man

²²⁰ MWYCFA and NSO 2009: 61.

²²¹ Ibid: 145.

²²² JICA 2010.

²²³ Since independence, there has only been one woman elected and only one woman to hold a Ministerial portfolio. In the 2010 elections, 25 women ran as candidates compared to 484 male candidates however no women were elected.

²²⁴ JICA 2010.

In a positive move, the Solomon Islands Parliament, with support from the UNDP Solomon Islands Parliamentary Support Project, conducted a Youth Parliament in 2010 for the first time. They also hold a regular Annual Open Day and conducted a schools outreach programme designed to teach young people about parliament, government, active citizenship, and political participation. Most recently, a Youth Leadership Forum was held as part of their outreach programme. This work should continue to be supported by development partners.

National and Provincial Youth Policies

In November 2010, the *National Youth Policy 2010-2015* was launched. The 2010-2015 Policy is the result of the review of the *2000 National Youth Policy* which had limited implementation and impact due to the Tensions of 1998-2003 and the Honiara riots of 2006.²²⁵ The review of the previous youth policy was initiated by MWYCFA supported by Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), SPC, United Nations, World Bank and bi-lateral donors (Australia and Japan). The review captured critical issues faced by young people and youth development organizations.²²⁶ The 2010-2015 Policy has two parts: the *National Youth Policy* and the *Strategic Plan of Action* (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Key Issues and Outcomes in National Youth Policy

Key Issue	Outcomes
Youth and Career Pathways	Improved and equitable access to education, training and employment opportunities for young women and men.
Youth and Governance	Increased and equal opportunities for young women and men to participate in decision-making and leadership.
Youth and Wellbeing	Youth health improved through equitable access to health services for young women and men.
Youth and Peace-building	Increased number of young people participating in activities that promote peace building and conflict prevention.
Youth and Sustainable Development	Increased number of young people promoting sustainable development.
Youth Mainstreaming	Improved capacity to implement this policy.

In November 2010, a National Youth Summit that focused on 'Mainstreaming the Solomon Island Youth Policy' was held. Permanent Secretaries, senior government officials and non-government organizations assisted in creating a detailed plan of programmes and activities that would align to the Policy's *Strategic Action Plan* and identify responsibilities for particular activities.²²⁷ A similar mainstreaming workshop is scheduled for 2011 at the provincial level.

Alongside the national review, provincial consultations were also carried out throughout the country resulting in the development of the first provincial youth policy and plans of actions.²²⁸ During 2009 and 2010, six of the nine provinces in Solomon Islands have launched their *Provincial Youth Policy* with accompanying Action Plans, with the exception of Malaita, Makira and Renbel Provinces which will be launched later in 2011.²²⁹ In 2009, the youth division of the Honiara City Council also reviewed its urban youth policy which was developed

²²⁵ MWYCFA 2010: 3

²²⁶ Carter 2010.

²²⁷ MWYCFA 2010: 9.

²²⁸ The provincial consultation was led by National Youth Congress (NYC) in partnership with OXFAM, Save the Children (Australia), AusAID (Community Sector Programme) and MWYCFA

²²⁹ Fox, Charles. Email to Charles Fox, January 20, 2011

in 2006. However, as of December 2010 the finalized new youth policy has yet to be launched. While it is commendable that youth policies and actions plan have been developed at national, provincial and local level, the challenge will be to ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are allocated for the implementation of these policies at all levels.

Youth Institutions and Key Organizations

Under the newly launched *2010-2015 National Youth Policy*, the following implementation mechanisms are set to be put in place as of December 2010 to realize the policy:

- The MWYCFA is the lead government agency responsible for youth development across the country. It is tasked with maintaining regular dialogue with civil society organizations (including youth organizations) and across government. MWYCFA is also responsible for the facilitation of the implementation of the Plan of Action.
- The Youth Development Division of MWYCFA is specifically tasked with: implementing programmes to meet the policy outcomes; working with youth development partners; and, providing advice and information to relevant stakeholders on youth issues.
- The National Steering Committee for the National Youth Policy (NSC-NYP) is the highest decision-making body for implementing the policy and is to be comprised of Permanent Secretaries of relevant Ministries. It is planned that it will meet annually to assess the state of youth development in Solomon Islands.
- The National Youth Congress (NYC) is a semi-governmental body that is affiliated with MWYCFA. The NYC operates as an independent body, however, most of its funding is from the Government. The NYC primarily advocates to government on behalf of young men and women, and is responsible for monitoring with the Youth Development Division. is also responsible for monitoring.
- A National Youth Stakeholders Committee is comprised of representatives of the public and private sector agencies implementing youth programmes and activities, and is chaired by the Undersecretary of MWYCFA. It meets on a quarterly basis to receive updates from government on the implementation of the policy and the accompanying plan of action. The Committee reports at least once a year to the NSC-NYP.



It is positive that the implementation mechanism of the policy has been designed to ensure that a collaborative approach is taken.²³⁰ However, there are many committees and potentially complex layers of bureaucracy to be set up and it is yet to be seen whether such an approach will be implemented.

At the provincial level, the provincial youth policy lays out the implementation mechanism that has been endorsed by the Provincial Governments. Development partners will need to work alongside these provincial implementation mechanisms.²³¹ The challenges in implementing the provincial youth policies include limited capacity and resources. Provincial government infrastructure also remains at very basic standards.

Save the Children Australia has a specific project focused on 'Children and Youth in Conflict with the Law', which is one of the few programmes specifically focused on young people in the justice sector. The project uses child rights programming and a community justice approach to address youth offending in the Solomon Islands. The project is multi-faceted focusing on prevention and modules of support post and pre-release for young people. It addresses issues in urban and rural areas for young people and has potential for sustainable outcomes. The project requires the infrastructure of government to be robust enough to support change, not only in terms of policy and procedure, but also attitudinal change in the overall treatment of young offenders. The project targets the main stakeholders in the justice system, namely police, the courts, and corrective services. However, there have been challenges due to the capacity of some government stakeholders and lack of consistency in their commitment and involvement with the project. The project also works with the community, in particular Crime Prevention Committees at urban and provincial levels, as well as supporting young people through their integration back into the community. One of the dilemmas faced by this programme mentioned during consultations was the limited number of service providers in Honiara for the referral of young offenders.²³²

Justice Institutions and Policies

One of the key pillars of the *2010-2015 National Youth Policy* focuses on "youth and peace-building" (Table 6.1). Under this pillar, the Policy lists the following activities as performance indicators:

- Increased civic education activities especially those focused on youth;
- Increased activities for youth to use the arts to express themselves;
- The quality of rehabilitation programmes is improved;
- Programmes for strengthening families that have been successful to be scaled up to reach more youths in provinces;
- No new traumas in Solomon Islands;
- Reduction in youth crime rates;
- Reduced juvenile delinquency;
- Increased opportunities for youth to participate in the construction of the nation through sports, arts, business, community work, youth groups etc.; and,
- Increased counselling available to youths, whether due to traumas from the tensions or from the many pressures that may affect youth.

The main stakeholders in the justice sector in Solomon Islands are the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), the judicial/courts system and the correctional services. Notably,

²³⁰ MWYCFA 2010: 4.

²³¹ Fox, Charles. Email to Charles Fox, April 01, 2011.

²³² Save the Children, Australia 2009.

consultations held by Save the Children Australia in 2009 revealed that there was lack of support in place for young people as they progressed through the formal justice system. This included the lack of counselling for young people in court and correctional centres; lack of support to encourage better treatment by police of an alleged offender; the need to provide a more convincing argument of sentencing that is less damaging to self-esteem than prison sentences; and, better transition into community following incarcerations.²³³

There was a proposal for the establishment and endorsement of a National Crime Prevention Council before parliament at the end 2010, but it does not appear that this proposal has progressed. The National Crime Prevention Council would be required to provide strategic direction, management and support to the provincial community based Crime Prevention Committees.²³⁴ Due the lack of policing in every community, the Crime Prevention Committees intend to build the capacity of communities for crime prevention, problem solving and order maintenance. The proposal is supported by Participating Police Force, RSIPF and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)²³⁵ Law and Justice Programme.

The Juvenile Offender Act 1972, Correctional Services Act 2007 and Correctional Services Regulation 2007 make provision for processes to address some of the needs of children and young people that come into conflict with the law. For example, they allow for a separate juvenile court; protection of young offenders from publication of identifying information; specific consideration in relation to early release, including provisions for a child or a young person to be placed in the care of his or her family instead of placement in detention facilities; requirements for programmes of education for juvenile detainees; juvenile specific sentencing considerations; and, efforts to ensure that children and young people in detention do not mix with adult prisoners.²³⁶ However, according to civil society organizations consulted, most of these special provisions have not been met due to a lack of facilities and funding. There are two juvenile facilities in Solomon Islands namely Rove and Auki. It is understood that the Law Reform Commission is currently reviewing the Penal Code, which provides an opportunity for amendments to existing youth legislation to bring Solomon Islands in line with international standards.

Community Structures

When a young person commits a crime, traditionally the chiefs and other community elders bring the village together for a reconciliation process. The reconciliation ceremony involves apology and forgiveness and sometime some form of (non-monetary) compensation from the perpetrator of the crime to the victim or the victim's family. Throughout the country it appears that these practices still remain strong and in fact still occur even if an offender is facing charges in the formal justice systems.²³⁷ At the local level, these informal systems are seen to be highly effective and legitimate.²³⁸ However, in Honiara the reconciliation ceremony is practiced to some extent but is not as strong as in the rural areas. Furthermore, the tradition of material compensation for wrong doing was abused during the Tension period and was seen by many to be only a symbolic act, lacking in deep lasting meaning.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ SIG and RAMSI 2009.

²³⁵ See section under the Tension for more details on RAMSI.

²³⁶ Save the Children 2009.

²³⁷ Save the Children 2009.

²³⁸ Cox and Morrison 2004.

6.5 Supporting Young People: Reducing Risk and Increasing Resilience

Youth development has been recognized as a priority in the national development agenda.²³⁹ The Government recognizes the importance of youth as a stakeholder in national development and the need to build on already existing mechanisms for youth development.²⁴⁰ The young population can have positive implications for growth and development, forming a large and energetic workforce. Yet a young population also creates challenges such as the increased likelihood of violent conflict and unrest, if economic stagnation and lack of opportunities continue. Unfortunately, in this context, many young people are not catered for by the formal and informal education systems. The economy is not growing as fast as the population and the unemployment rate is high. Other issues identified by young people are lack of participation in decision making processes, limited employment opportunities, and insufficient recreational activities. The combination of these factors, which are all interrelated, increases the probability of youth involvement in crime and violence.

“The Tensions”

The internal armed conflict, or “the Tensions”, that occurred between 1998 and 2003 and the riot of 2006 in Honiara have seriously affected the country, and with it numerous young men and women. This is true particularly for those in Honiara, and the provinces of Guadalcanal and Malaita.²⁴¹ It is largely understood that the conflict drivers were associated with inter-island migration; informal settlement on land and disagreement over customary land ownerships; the clash of traditional and non-traditional authority structures in relation to land and justice sectors; limited and unequal access by communities to government services; and unequal formal and informal economic opportunities for different communities.²⁴²

Approximately 35,000 men, women and children became internally displaced, losing their homes and livelihood as well as access to basic services such as access to water.²⁴³

Young people were heavily involved in the Tensions as both victims and perpetrators of violence. While it is largely understood that politicians and allied militants were responsible for “mobilizing and politicizing” (or ethnicizing) the violence, a subgroup of young people acted as agents in the looting and violence.²⁴⁴ This involvement of mainly disenfranchised young men resulted in them becoming perpetrators of violent acts that were fuelled by resentment and grievances against the state and other groupings.²⁴⁵ Young people who did not join the fight or did not take advantage of the social unrest suffered as well. Many school and colleges ceased functioning when teachers stopped receiving their wages. Families also reported no money to pay for school fees and therefore children and young people had to stay home.

239 MWYCF 2010: 3.

240 Ibid: 1.

241 World Bank 2008.

242 World Bank 2008.

243 JICA 2010.

244 World Bank 2008.

245 World Bank 2008 & JICA 2010.



Fear became a fact of life and this restricted young people's activities and freedom of movement.²⁴⁶ Many became isolated from their network of friends. During this period, there were many cases of women, particularly young women and girls, suffering high levels of sexual violence by militant groups and by intimate partners.²⁴⁷ The 2008 *Youth and Mental Health Study for Solomon Islands* highlighted the impact of the Tensions on young people, including loss of trust in national institutions due to years of unsatisfactory governance, struggle over resources, corruption at all level of government and having limited opportunity to constructively contribute to the social and economic development of their country. The Report also revealed that the trauma created by the Tensions should not be underestimated.²⁴⁸

On 24 July 2003, RAMSI, an Australian-led, Pacific Island Forum-endorsed state-building intervention was put into action and continues to date. It has been greeted with a mix of acclaim and criticism. RAMSI has been effective in bringing law and order problems under a level of control, but broader efforts to strengthen Government capacity, in particular in the context of economic growth and the machinery of government, has had variable impacts. The long-term recovery process remains challenging, and efforts to implement policies and programmes to address the reintegration and rehabilitation of people affected by the conflict have had variable success. The issues around marginalized youth, land disputes, rural-urban migration and high unemployment rates remain problematic to the full recovery process.²⁴⁹ Women have been under-represented in the formal peace processes and continue to be absent from national decision-making via the national legislature, even though women in Solomon Islands were instrumental in suspending the violence between Malaitan settlers and the indigenous people of Guadalcanal.

Growing the Employment Opportunities for Youth

The Tensions also severely affected the economy of Solomon Islands. Since RAMSI's arrival, annual growth has averaged almost six percent and economic stability has largely been maintained, although the food and fuel crisis and the global economic crisis have impacted negatively on recovery to a degree.²⁵⁰ Problematically, a large part of the growth in 2004-2008 was due to logging revenues, which many believe is unsustainable and may also be attributed to a surge in aid.²⁵¹ Logging activity experienced a downturn in early 2009 due to low prices in the key Asia markets but then recovered in 2010 by 24 percent.²⁵² Per capita income is the second lowest in the region. In 2007 aid made up 63 percent of GDP, but with around two thirds of that used to support RAMSI.²⁵³ This means that any change in aid flows could severely impact the economy.

As stated earlier, an estimated 7,500 young people enter the workforce each year however the formal economy since 1982 has only been able to absorb 3, 800 people per year.²⁵⁴ In 2005, the unemployment rate amongst 15 to 19 year olds was 75 percent.²⁵⁵ During consultations,

*"I would like
to become a teacher,
I have a good teacher, I
want to be like her and teach
and learn more"*

Young woman

246 JICA 2010.

247 Jourdan 2008.

248 World Bank 2008.

249 Ibid.

250 ADB 2009.


251 Ibid.

252 Roughan and Wara 2010; ADB 2009.

253 ADB 2009.

254 World Bank 2008.

255 MWYCFA 2010: 7.



young men and women frequently identified paid employment as a strong resilience factor. At the same time, they expressed disillusionment toward their future dreams and aspirations due to their limited opportunities to gain formal or informal employment and/or engage in income generation activities. The stagnant economic growth, strains in social services, and fewer traditional safety nets in urban Honiara have added to the juvenile delinquency rates.²⁵⁶ The vast majority of Solomon Islanders are engaged in subsistence farming with only about 16 percent of people employed in formal employment.²⁵⁷ However, in Honiara opportunities to engage in agriculture are limited. A commonly expressed view by those consulted is that there is a lot of potential for young people to earn good income in the rural areas with most provinces implementing various strategies to encourage young people to stay in villages.

It is interesting to note that a number of the young people participating in the interviews stated that they had not given their future career and possible sources of employment much consideration. Many suggested that they did not expect to have the opportunity to choose and just assumed that they would undertake whatever work they could find.

To date the Government has focused few resources to tackling youth unemployment, although the *National Youth Policy* specifically recognizes the importance of “improved and equitable access to...employment opportunities for young women and men.” The Rapid Employment Project (REP) is one of the few projects specifically focused on employment for young people. It is implemented by the Honiara City Council and the Ministry of Infrastructure Development to provide short term employment and training to Honiara’s young urban unemployed. With support from the World Bank, Australia, and New Zealand through the Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility, the REP began in 2010 labour-based works in various places around the capital. The programme involves participants cleaning up Honiara City and improving the infrastructure. As of December 2010, in Honiara a total of 17 community groups have started working in the REP and over 400 people have already benefited from the project, while more people are going to the project office to register their community groups. The REP is expected to directly benefit roughly 7,500 people over its five year period through work and training.

Improving the Quality and Relevance of Education

The *National Youth Policy* specifically recognizes the importance of education as a key issue for ensuring “career pathways.” It specifically identifies “Improved and equitable access to education, training and employment opportunities for young women and men” as a priority.²⁵⁸ However, the education system continues to orient young people towards a formal economy and insufficiently prepares them for alternative options, including informal livelihood options. Increasing population numbers have resulted in the current situation where the numbers of vacancies in this sector are few and cannot meet the demand for employment of school leavers.

An additional challenge confronting the education system is the quality and the relevance of education in schools. The *National Education Action Plan 2007-2009* identified shortfalls in the quality of education and emphasised the need for school to be relevant to the lives, interests and cultural context of young people in Solomon Islands.²⁵⁹ This is a step in the

²⁵⁶ World Bank 2008.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ MWYCF 2010.

²⁵⁹ Asia-South Pacific Education Watch 2007.

right direction but it does not adequately address the need for technical and professional training for youth.

There are only two tertiary institutions operating in Solomon Islands, the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and a Honiara branch of the University of the South Pacific. There are 30 vocational and technical training institutions called 'Vocational Rural Training Centres' in the country. These vocational and technical training institutions appear geared towards young males; in 2008, there were 24 percent of female student enrolled compared to 76 percent male students.²⁶⁰ In 2010 the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development was in the process of revising school curricula to provide more opportunities for students to acquire vocational skills.

"My father left and married another woman. I did not attend school because no money to pay for my school fee. Now my work is to look after my small sister who is about 2 years old and my mother have to work as a house lady to keep another child who was the same age as my small sister"

Young woman

Tackling Substance Abuse

The rate of alcohol and cannabis consumption amongst young people is reported to be high, with several respondents and reports linking substance abuse with crime and violence, particularly physical fights and bashings.²⁶¹ *The Baseline Report on Understanding HIV and AIDS Risk and Vulnerability Among Solomon Islands Youth* carried out by the UNICEF Pacific Office and Solomon Islands Government found that 44 percent of the sample reported alcohol use, 28 percent used homebrew or *kwaso*, and four percent used *kava*. The rate of frequent alcohol consumption (more than three times per week) was five percent. Substance abuse was reported to be higher for males than for females and a higher percentage of young people in Honiara area used alcohol, homebrew or *kwaso* and *kava*. Sixteen percent of the youth surveyed were currently using drugs including marijuana, ecstasy, speed, ice and prescription drugs.²⁶²

The legal drinking age in the Solomon Islands is 21 years, but in reality there is no age restriction for purchasing and consuming alcohol in both private residences and public places.²⁶³ Youth respondents in the Baseline Report reported that nightclubs and bars did not enforce restrictions related to young people consuming alcohol and said that when nightclubs and bars were closed, ad-hoc bars sprung up.

Recently, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has taken steps to address the increasing levels of cannabis and alcohol use amongst the youth population in the Solomon Islands.²⁶⁴ Currently the Ministry of Health addresses substance abuse as part of the *Mental Health Strategic Plan* and the *Integrated Mental Health Services Plan*. The current focus areas include alcohol, tobacco and cannabis use among secondary school students. In late November 2010, the Ministry of Health and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community held a conference in Honiara to develop a multi-sectorial national alcohol policy. These are all positive steps, but while policies are a good start, implementation remains a challenge. It is essential that sufficient funding and staff are dedicated to these programmes. It is also imperative that a multi-sectoral approach continues to be prioritized.

260 JICA 2010.

261 See ABC Radio Australia: 2010 and Save the Children Australia 2009. On March 22 2010, ABC Radio Australia reported that homebrew alcohol is being blamed for Solomon Islands rising crime rate.

262 UNICEF Pacific Office Forthcoming: 72.

263 Australia National Council on Drugs 2010.

264 Alcohol Related Harm, a Global Issue. 2010.

Opportunities for Meaningful Activity

Young people reported concerns not just with lack of employment, but lack of opportunities to engage in other meaningful activities. Although there are some opportunities with church groups and civil society, not all young people were aware of these opportunities nor are all interested. A number of young people lamented the lack of sporting facilities and organized sporting events. Others wanted more opportunities to learn vocational skills through non-formal educational channels. Avenues of expression through crafts, music and arts were also highlighted. Other participants stressed the need for opportunities for meaningful youth participation not to be limited only to the urban and peri-urban areas; more opportunities for youth participation needed to be made available in the rural areas to lessen the rural-urban drift.

Young people that were interviewed for this study highlighted the positive roles that young people played in society and how these roles served as a resilience factor. The positive roles for young people include students, workers, sports people, volunteers, farmers, and peer educators, active members in community and church youth groups, bible study groups, and youth councils. Young people also participate in cultural events and contribute to their family's welfare through attending to crops, caring for younger siblings, and cleaning and maintaining their home. In many of these roles, young people had a responsibility and were involved in decision making processes. Unfortunately, youth participation in meaningful activities such as sports clubs, non-government organizations, youth associations and the media often involve better educated and connected young people and rarely disadvantaged young people.²⁶⁵

Family Challenges

"Young people do not have the guidance and advice from parents and family this leads many to do as they like"
Youth worker

During consultations, both violence within the home and break down of the traditional extended family and community structures in urban areas were identified by participants as risk factors pushing young people towards involvement in crime and violence. Young people exposed to violence as a victim or witness in their own home were thought by participants to have a greater likelihood of becoming violent and adopting other types of risky behavior threatening their own and other's wellbeing. Studies in the Solomon Islands have also demonstrated a correlation between violence in the home and other forms of violence. Men are more likely to engage in violence with their partner if they were beaten as a child (85 percent), and if their father beat their mother (82 percent). Men that are more violent with other men (82 percent) and those who get drunk at least once a week (83 percent) are more likely to commit intimate partner violence.²⁶⁶

This demonstrates that exposure to violence is a risk factor that may contribute to young peoples' engagement in violence and other risky behavior.

Respondents also felt that the breakdown of extended family structures was leaving young people with inadequate support mechanisms. The main reasons for the breakdown were identified as: rural to urban migration leaving relatives behind; changes in traditional roles due to external influences; and, parents not living together due to work arrangements or separation. Traditionally, young people could turn to relatives such as uncles/aunts or grandparents to address concerns or gain advice. The members of the extended family also

²⁶⁵ World Bank 2008

²⁶⁶ MWYCA and NSO 2009: 145.



played the role of mentor or role model for young people in their transition to adulthood. The new, more nuclear structure puts greater pressure not only on young people, but parents as well. “Lack of parenting skills” and “low parental monitoring” as well as the “movement of young people from rural areas to cities away from family support networks” were identified as factors in young people coming in conflict with the law.²⁶⁷

During consultations, positive parenting or guidance was highlighted by young people as an important factor in young people playing a positive role in society. Young people highlighted the importance of having strong, guiding and caring parents, or other guidance that served as a positive role model while growing up. Young people felt that with changing times, their roles and accepted social values are in conflict social roles are being redefined and parents are busy with their careers and trying to make ends meet. Parents played a crucial role in monitoring and influencing the life path of a young person providing support, advice and discipline.

Youth also identified having a positive role model as an important factor in influencing positive behavior in young people. It is not just parents who can set a good example for youth. The Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), a non-government organization engages with young people in Honiara through mentoring, using community development perspectives in every part of their work. During consultations, the young people who were met at the SIDT office spoke positively about being empowered through the mentoring and positive activities that SIDT provided. The young people benefitting from the activities of SIDT are potential role models for the young people across the nation.

²⁶⁷ Save the Children Australia 2009; World Bank 2008.



Societal Challenges


According to government and civil society leaders, as well as former police, the Tensions affected young men in particular in a number of ways. They have become bolder and more brazen in their attitude to crime and violence. Due to the experience of a number of young men involved in the Tensions, they have also become desensitized to violence and are more willing to use it in attempts to solve problems. Some interviewees claimed that young people are also more suspicious of other people and that they are less likely to listen and respect elders than prior to the Tensions. Notably however, lingering ethnic tensions as an underlying cause for violence was vocalized by adults, but was not evident when speaking to young people.

Young people spoke about not only the importance of more political stability, but also about their disappointment in the leaders of their country for not prioritizing issues for young people in the post-Tensions period. The trauma created by the Tensions should not be underestimated. It lives on for many young people. In the eyes of young people, there are still many unresolved issues such as poor governance, including widespread corruption and struggles over equal resource distribution. Young people stated that they are looking for leadership and role models to look up to and to successfully lead them.

Young people also highlighted that the increase in rural urban migration and over population have put a strain on them. The competition for jobs has increased and the on-going influx of *wantoks* in their home has made it difficult to deal with everyday life requirements. The limited financial means of individual people also push people in Honiara to live together in crowded conditions in order to make ends meet. These family and community upheavals, coupled with rural-urban migrations have left young people struggling, forcing many to use complicated new pathways in their coping skills to deal with change - including turning away from the family toward friends and outside role models. Many respondents felt that these factors pushed young people to search for new identities and acknowledgement which sometimes involved engaging in risky behaviours that can include acts of violence and/or crime. Peer pressure was seen as a risk factor although some young people pointed out that positive peer pressure also exists and can encourage them to take the "right path" and not commit crime.

The church remains a key community institution which engages young people through youth programmes which use the church's existing networks within communities throughout the country. In the 1999 census, 98 percent of Solomon Islanders identified themselves as being affiliated to a Christian church. Different denominations have different viewpoints on youth issues and the church youth groups prescribe to the religious values of the denomination.²⁶⁸ The church youth groups are therefore guided in which work they undertake and often this needs to first be discussed within higher bodies within the denomination. While some high officials in church organisations recognize that youth programmes need to respond to emerging youth issues, there is concern over the possible reaction of older church members to such activities. Notably, not all young people who are part of a certain church are members of the youth groups. Those not part of church youth groups are more likely to be marginalized. Paradoxically, the church often does not allow young people to participate in church youth activities if they have been caught engaging in behaviour that the church deems as inappropriate, such as smoking, out of wedlock sexual activity or committing criminal offences. During consultations, many young people questioned whether this was the right approach as it alienated many young people.

²⁶⁸ AusAID 2004.



In Honiara, most of the civil society organizations that work with young people do not necessarily work with juvenile offenders. This was highlighted as a key issue due to the lack of consistency in the provision of services to juvenile offenders and other young people at-risk. What is particularly problematic is the referral process from one service to another. At a more specific level, during consultations non-government organizations highlighted the need to improve data collection and project design to better evaluate the impact of projects on young people. Profiling success stories for young people was not evident. Participants consulted spoke about their programmes with pride but did not articulate well the success stories for young people. This would be particularly useful for nation building to inspire and to motivate young people to take part in their citizenship contributions.

6.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

While the bulging youth population in the Solomon Islands could be regarded as a burden on society and a cause for grave concern, it can also be seen as an opportunity. Many regional countries such as Japan, Australia and New Zealand have aging populations and a lack of skilled young people. The vibrancy of youth has an opportunity to shine in the Solomon Islands and to become the foundation for the recovery and long-term development of the nation - but only if the correct investments are made sooner rather than later. The future cost of not providing support and opportunities to the current generation of youth as they transition to adulthood will be much higher than if concrete and sincere policies and programmes are put in place now.

Despite the fragility of current systems and infrastructure, Solomon Islands' recovery has begun to move forward. It will only be sustainable with the assistance and support of young people. The road to recovery entails the active involvement of young people who have a strong sense of identity – provincially and nationally. Their energy needs to be redirected and harnessed into active participation at all levels of government and within the community. For this to happen, it is imperative that the government makes good on its stronger commitment to youth as displayed in the new *National Youth Policy*, thereby facilitating the process of recovery and change. Please note that a number of the recommendations in the Pacific Overview and Regional Recommendations chapter are relevant to Honiara as well.

Recommendations

- Prioritize Government strategic planning for young people particularly in the areas that encourage young people's involvement in community safety and crime prevention programmes
- Enhance employment opportunities in the informal sector such as fisheries, forestry and logging, agriculture and horticulture, and livestock breeding.
- Review justice sector policies and obstacles to full implementation of relevant laws for juvenile offenders.
- Support the government to implement and monitor the new *National Youth Policy* and Strategy at all levels.

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