

DESK REVIEW

CLAIRE ROWLAND

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**WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN SOLOMON ISLANDS**

**ACRONYMS**

**CEDAW** Convention on the elimination of discrimination against women

**CSO** Civil society organisation

**FLOW** Funding leadership opportunities for women programme

**INGO** International non-government organisation

**IWDA** International Women’s Development Agency

**MWYCA** Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs

**NGO** Non-government organisation

**SINCW** Solomon Islands National Council for Women

**WDD** Women’s Development Division

**WFPG** Women for Peace Group

**WISDM** Women in Shared Decision Making

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# INTRODUCTION

The *Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women* (FLOW) program is a four-year multi-country and multi-partner program in Melanesia managed by International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) in partnership with FemLINKPACIFIC, Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM) and Women’s Action for Change (until 2012) in Fiji, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Solomon Islands, Bougainville Women’s Federation (BWF), Voice for Change (VfC), Bougainville Women’s Human Rights Defenders (via Nazareth Centre) and Jiwaka Women’s Human Rights Defenders in Highlands in PNG, and Women’s Rights Action Movement (WRAM) in Solomon Islands. The program commenced on January 1 2012 and ended on December 31 2015.

The objectives of FLOW were to build women’s representation in decision-making processes and positions of civil and political leadership, strengthen women’s organisations and networks, and enable the sharing of ideas, strategies and resources across the Pacific region. This desk review was commissioned to assist IWDA in reflecting on future directions, approaches and partnerships for FLOW program activities in Solomon Islands.

# PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This desk review on ‘Women and leadership in Solomon Islands’ was commissioned to assist IWDA to reflect on the potential direction, approach and suitable partnerships for the FLOW program development in Solomon Islands.

Drawing from journal articles, local news reports and grey literature, this review has sought to address the following questions:

* What are the enablers and barriers to women’s (and young women’s) political leadership and participation in Solomon Islands?
* What are the avenues for women’s leadership outside of formal politics? How are these roles and opportunities perceived?
* What work is being undertaken by CSOs/women’s networks and agencies in Solomon Islands to promote leadership?
* What lessons have been learned from existing women’s leadership programs in Solomon Islands that can be drawn from in the development of new programs?

Cross cutting considerations of this review include (where literature is available):

* Young women’s experiences of leadership
* The intersection of culture and custom on definitions of leadership and opportunities for women and young women to engage in different types of leadership, and
* Ways in which men can be actively engaged to support women’s leadership.

This review draws from three leadership classifications in Melanesian vernacular to explore women’s opportunities and contributions: the *Big Man*, the *Chief* and *Lida.* The *Big Man* archetype is used to explore women’s political engagement at a national level, the *Chief* refers to a village leadership and customrole. Under the *Lida* classification, four areas of women’s leadership are discussed: women leading peace, women land owners, women leaders of church fellowship groups and women in the public service. Whilst there are numerous other areas where women have demonstrated leadership in Solomon Islands, the scope of the study did not allow for further exploration: selection of the four *Lida* roles was made on the basis of available literature, areas of women’s proven leadership, and current priority areas in the nation’s development.

Enablers and barriers of leadership roles within each category are discussed along with current activities being undertaken to promote women’s leadership and voice within the sector/issue. These activities range from community led actions to government, donor and non-government organisation (NGO)/civil society organisation (CSO) programs.

On the basis of analysis of key themes identified in the literature during this desk review, the consultant has included a summary of key issues, and a table on program opportunities within Solomon Islands.

# IWDA’S FLOW PROGRAM

The FLOW program is a four-year multi-country and multi-partner program in Melanesia that commenced on January 1 2012 and ended on December 31 2015. In partnership with local agencies, IWDA seeked to build the **capacity and confidence of individual women** to participate in decision making processes, and assume positions of civil and political leadership, building on existing successful programs in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Bougainville. It aimed to **strengthen the capacities of women’s organisations** and networks in each country and the legitimacy of their participation and voice. It is also focused on **sharing ideas, strategies and resources across the Pacific region**, believing that strengthened agencies and networks is critical to enabling women’s political engagement, advocacy for change, and safe spaces that support collective action.

The FLOW Program is worked towards the following five outcomes in Fiji, Solomon Islands and PNG:

1. Increasing women's civil society engagement and representation,
2. Mobilising young women to participate in decision-making,
3. Increasing gender equality commitments at the local government level,
4. Increasing voter willingness and community support for women in leadership positions, and
5. Supporting women in PNG to lead responses to violence against women.

The first four areas will be used to explore future program options in Section 7.

# CONTEXT

## WOMEN’S STATUS

Solomon Islands consist of approximately 990 islands, over 80 different languages, and “a complex, diverse, and dynamic culture and ethnicity” (JICA, 2010). The overwhelming majority of the population live a semi-subsistent lifestyle in rural areas, with limited experience of state institutions or the constitution (Corrin, 2008). Women made up 49% of the total population of 572,171 in 2014 (The World Bank), and in 2011 70% of the population was aged under 30 years old (PIFS, 2011).

Women maintain family and community life in Solomon Islands. Their roles are diverse, relational, localised, subject to custom, religious denomination, and to age (IWDAb). Their responsibilities include care-giving and reproductive tasks, engagement in church and community activities, food production, animal husbandry, weaving mats and string bags, income generation and the provision of hospitality to visitors. Despite contributing significantly to the maintenance of functional communities and traditional economies (including through barter, exchange, gifting and volunteering), women are often excluded from decision-making processes within households and communities (Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012). Young women are particularly marginalised in the family and in community development processes, where:

*“Cultural norms make it difficult for young people to express their views openly and reach their full potential”* (SPC, 2010; p21)*.*

The ways in which women can achieve status and respect vary across Solomon Islands. Some of the pathways documented in literature include through chiefly family status, acquisition of wealth, marriage to foreigners (Whittington et al, 2006) education, employment, age (IWDAb), motherhood, hard work, contribution to and expertise in community life, demonstrated skill in preparing for feasts, as mediators in conflict, as custodians of the land, and from their husbands’ status (Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012). For young women, limited high school places, fees, workload, and widespread beliefs that women do not need to be educated, limit their opportunity for education and paid employment (two pathways for status accumulation) from a very young age (NGO Shadow Report, 2012).

Although historically women were highly valued in Solomon Islands, they now face widespread discrimination, gender based violence and inequality (Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012). Colonialisation and Christianity have contributed to women’s confinement to the private sphere, their loss of mobility, public voice, land rights, traditional positions of power and leadership roles (Huffer, 2006). A study in 2009 highlighted that 64% of women aged 15-49 had experienced physical and/or sexual violence (SPC, 2009). Women have only one representative in parliament, and have very limited representation in the justice system, private (formal) and public sector. Their paid work opportunities are largely confined to the informal sector, mostly in small-scale businesses (JICA, 2010).

In the recent ethnic tensions[[1]](#footnote-1) women were subjected to widespread domestic and sexual violence and rape, resulting in long term trauma, unplanned pregnancy and family breakdown. According to the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2012), the conflict “wiped out” many gains made by an active and strong women’s movement prior to the tension. Women were not only victims of the tensions, some also actively contributed to the conflict, and others played significant peace building roles (see section 5.4). In the absence of male family members, many women were also forced to take on new decision-making and economic roles in their families. Changing gender roles as a result of the tension remain an ongoing source of conflict within affected communities (Moser, 2007). Despite the backlash, for some women, these new roles have led to increased confidence and a sense of empowerment:

*“Before the tension, the women in our community did not come out in the open. During those times, only men have the power to speak out in the public, women could not do that due to culture reasons. This time during meetings or public talks, women can contribute and men give their support to whatever they said in terms of planning for the work of the community. After the tension we also formed a women’s group to assist in community activities or church activities. We have a few women elected as members of our parish. Now whatever the same responsibilities held by men in the past can be shared by women”* (Marasa Focus Group participant inSolomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012; p622).

The failure to involve women peace builders in peace building processes post-tensions, despite their demonstrated skills and impact, was indicative of the government’s poor resourcing of gender equality during that time. In a diagnostic report of the 2006 elections, the Women’s Development Division (WDD) of the government (tasked with addressing gender inequality in Solomon Islands) was heavily criticised for being out of touch with the women it intends to serve, and for their failure to create any substantive change:

*“WDD has no strong links to the provinces or at the village level, and thus can neither be representative of women nor an agency for women’s advancement. This agency is not an avenue for women’s representation at all levels of government and across all issue areas, because it has neither the charter nor the resources to support women’s upward mobility into key decision-making areas and unable to introduce gender equality issues into government policy debates*” (Whittington et al, 2006).

This criticism was not new. Alice Pollard, former director of the Women’s Welfare Division (prior to the WDD) of the government wrote in 2000 of WDD’s lack of transport, inadequate staffing and poor rates of pay, and insufficient budgetary allocation (P ollard, 2000).

In 2008, the Solomon Islands government committed itself to gender equality as “one of the core principles and objectives for development in the country” (PIFS, 2011; p101). The Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs (MWYCA) was formed in 2010, with responsibility to act as the national machinery for the advancement of women in Solomon Islands (the WDD was moved under this Ministry). Cabinet also approved the ‘National Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Development’ in the same year (PIFS, 2011). According to JICA (2010), however, in 2010 the Ministry had limited financial resources, staff capacity and technical skills – presenting yet again a significant challenge for the delivery of the nation’s commitments to gender equality. The 2012 CEDAW Shadow Report also alluded to the limited capacity of the MWYCA. It is unclear whether support provided by RAMSI will enable the Ministry to deliver on promises in the future. The activities of the Women in Shared Decision Making (WISDM) group (described in section 5.2) may indicate the growing capacity of MWYCA.

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW), established in 1983, has Provincial Women’s Councils in all provinces and a focal point for the Women’s Council at the ward level in most parts of the Solomon Islands (Quay, undated). The Council has also been subject to heavy criticism during its lifetime. Its detractors include some churches, government members, women and men who are unhappy with challenges made by SINCW to the patriarchal status quo. Available studies hint at dysfunction and internal conflict within the Council in the not too distant past (i.e. Whittington (2006) pointed to dysfunctional Provincial Councils as a great risk to the ability of the SINCW to implement its Strategic Plan), and of poor coordination between WDD and SINCW (Whittington, 2006). Literature reviewed by the consultant did not provide insight into the current operating environment or effectiveness of the Council.

Both the WDD and SINCW are focused on promoting women’s parliamentary representation and provide training to women in leadership skills (Pollard, 2010).

## CUSTOM, CULTURE, AND LEADERSHIP

Custom refers to place-based knowledge, practice and structures, which differ remarkably between the multitude of matrilineal and patrilineal societies existing in the 900+ islands of Solomon Islands. Custom dictates the way in which people live day to day in their village, the opportunities and roles they have, and the ways in which community and family conflict is resolved.

In Solomon Islands custom is often perceived to be something from the past that does not change (IWDAb, 2012). Social change and external influences, however, have affected custom principles over time. Attempts to determine and prove the authenticity of custom are difficult due to multiplicity of influences over time, and differences between custom practice throughout Solomon Islands. This has led to contested practices, abuses and inventions, many of which serve to marginalise women (White, 2004).

Patriarchal structures brought by missionaries and colonialists have significantly influenced custom practice in Solomon Islands. Leadership structures of churches and the colonial administration were male dominated, and foreign administrators and missionaries brought with them assumptions about women’s rightful place. These attitudes resulted in the demarcation of women to the private sphere, marginalising women’s existing leadership roles and preventing the development of new leadership roles accessible to women. These practices also inculcated beliefs of men’s superiority over women (Pollard, 2003). The 2012 Solomon Islands CEDAW Shadow Report summed up the continued impact of these beliefs on women’s leadership opportunities as follows:

*“Distortions of both custom and Christianity maintain inequality by perpetuating the belief that men are supposed to be the leaders and decision-makers in the family, community and country* (NGO Shadow Report” p17).

Prior to colonisation and Christianisation, women’s and men’s roles were more fluid, crossed the public and private sphere, and women of status had access to leadership roles equal to that of men in some communities. There are numerous examples of women being respected, holding leadership roles equivalent to men, and being involved in decision making on community and land issues in custom*,* particularly in matrilineal communities (White, 2004; Huffer, 2006).

For young women especially, the hierarchical, patriarchal systems evidenced in much of custom today are particularly restricting. In a recent evaluation of the YWCA Rise UP program in Solomon Islands, interviewees stated that Customwas major barrier to young women’s leadership and rights (Lomaisa, 2013). In research into youth perceptions in Solomon Islands, both young women and men were identified as having limited opportunities to participate in community governance except through appointment to committees, where they would theoretically have a say but have to display considerable confidence to do so. In the context of public meetings, the research highlighted that:

*“Young people often expressed the active undercutting by older males of their assuredness to speak in public meetings. Attempting to ‘mainstream’ youth, especially young women, into village governance systems that are if anything even more conservative now, will be difficult” (*Hassall and Associates, 2003, p22)*.*

An increase in the average age of marriage for women and men has also resulted in a prolonged period of ‘adolescence’ or ‘youth’, a category not commonly recognised in custom. The increased number of young unmarried women without clearly defined roles or responsibilities in custom presents a challenge to community leaders, who are tasked with guiding and policing their behaviour and social role without historical precedents (Hassall and Associates, 2003). This presents an opportunity for leaders to carve out new custom practices that support young women’s greater role in public spaces and leadership roles. However, it is also presents a risk to young women (and men), as it could mean being relegated to the category of ‘child’, with associated limitations on opportunities and voice until marriage, or result in new and unfavourable custom practice designed to crack down on the behaviour of a segment of society increasingly perceived to be wilful and disrespectful.

In Solomon Islands women’s ‘rights’are often perceived to be foreign concepts and at times, contrary to custom(Monson, 20011). Attacks on women parliamentary candidates for being divorced (Whittingham, 2011) and on secular women’s organisations for being anti-men and pro-divorce, are closely tied to the notion that 'human rights' and 'feminism' are 'western' ideas in opposition to both custom and Christianity. Religious organisations pursuing a gender equality agenda are less likely to be labelled in the same way (Monson, 2011). The former Secretary General of the SINCW, Ruth Maetala, when asked about the relevance of the recently ratified Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) stated that the country had been ‘‘*flooded with international instruments’’* and CEDAW would require modification to be applicable to the local context (Corrin, 2008). Mataela (2008) talks of “gender equality” being perceived by men as a direct threat to their authority within their clans. However, men were open to the idea of greater respect and better treatment for women when discussed in context of custom:

*“At the Guadalcanal workshop, male attendance showed that it is far better to revisit the traditional roles of women that promoted gender equality. They [male participants] showed much more sympathy towards customary equity than towards the human rights discourse of gender equality” (Mataela, 2008; p60)*.

Customary notions of equity have been captured in the Alternative Indicators of Well-being for Melanesia (described in Malvatumauri, 2013). This indicator set is based on a Melanesian framework of wellbeing, which recognises the importance of traditional economy, reciprocity, interdependence and knowledge of custom*.* This framework provides insight into gender equality priorities acceptable within current iterations of custom, with measurements forwomen’s voice in community decision-making, and displays of respect to women for the work they do within the community featuring in the indicator set.

Custom based concepts of equity have the support of many women and men in Solomon Islands. There is a danger in dichotomising human rights and customas itcan serve to silence Solomon Islander women and deny the “*legitimacy, authenticity and effectiveness of their feminisms”* (Monson, 2013).

Schevvens (1998, 2003), Corrin (2008) and Pollard (2000) all discuss the ‘subtle strategies’ used by women in Solomon Islands to promote practical improvements in women’s lives, greater autonomy, and greater opportunity to contribute to resolving social issues and participate in public life. Scheyvens (2003) provides examples of women using church groups, which are socially sanctioned and draw from an international morality, to promote women’s involvement in education and training workshops and public actions, including protests, travel and networking in other villages. Corrin (2008) speaks of women’s use of perceptions of an inherent connection between women and peace in order to justify involvement in peace building roles in the recent tensions. Pollard (2000) discusses women peace builder’s strategic use of quiet diplomacy in their work. According to Corrin (2008):

*“Female commentators are pragmatic enough to realize that radical strategies may be at the cost of the limited but steady progress they have made to date”* (p182).

On this basis, according to Wallace (2011), an appropriate approach to promoting equality in Solomon Islands is one that is paced to enable culture to adjust, focusing on the achievement of small gains over time.

# WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

## LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES

According to Mcleod (2007) there are two dominant typologies of leadership that are widely used in Melanesian vernacular: the *Big Man* and the *Chief*. An additional leadership category, loosely referred to as ‘*lida*’, is often used when discussing a person with specialist skills or focus (such as athlete or pastor) and is increasingly used to account for the variety of leaders present in a community setting.

This review will explore women’s leadership opportunities and contributions drawing on these three categories of leadership*.* The *Big Man* archetype is used to explore women’s political engagement at a national level. Under the *lida* classification, women leading peace, women land owners, women leaders of fellowship groups and women in the public service are discussed.

Leadership in Solomon Islands is diverse, fluid and contested. For example, a church *lida* could demonstrate characteristics of a *Big Man*. The use of these categories is simply an attempt, with qualification, “to understand some of the basic variations in leadership patterns throughout the Pacific, which are clearly manifest in contemporary institutions” (Mcleod, 2007, p 10).

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### The Big Man

According to White (1978 in Pollard, 2006) the Big Man title is derived from three roles and associated personality traits: the warrior, the feast-giver and the priest. Warrior personality traits can include strength, oratorical prowess and bravery. The Priest demonstrates connection with spirits that will ensure success with fishing, fighting and hunting. The feast-giver demonstrates generosity, care and love for his people. For a big man leader to be able to gain his title and dignity he has to prove it by his strength, capabilities of leadership, knowledge in culture, his wealth and achievements (Kabutaulaka, 1998). The Big Man archetype could be considered ‘well-rounded’ – he demonstrates aggression when faced with war, love and thoughtfulness for his followers, and a pious selflessness. He can exert control over his people, but also protects and cares for them; he is a heroic figure worthy of respect:

*“A big man title is earned only through hard work and demonstrated leadership skills, not by birth. He is selected amongst others as a leader by consensus. He is not necessarily of a chiefly lineage but an ordinary man who could relate to the ordinary people. His leadership is characterised by courage, aggressiveness, strength, love, service, knowledge, hard work, health and fitness, a good personality and relationship with people. He becomes a big man leader because of who he is and what he has achieved”* (Pollard, 2006, p14).

Forming coalitions with other big men enables a Big Man to amass significant power and influence, attract followers, supporters and material goods (Pollard, 2006). The relationship between Big Men and his followers is reciprocal. In return for his charity and generosity, the big man gains status and reputation (Douglas, 1989; White, 2006). In the event that a Big Man fails to provide goods, services and feasts to *wantoks*, he will lose status and support, and face very real sanctions. Examples of sanctions outlined by Mcleod (2007) include withdrawal of future financial support for family needs (doctors, school, festivals), sorcery and social ostracism.

Mcleod (2007) claims that the term big man is “unreservedly male”. Pollard (2006), however, asserts that Melanesian women already demonstrate the warrior, feast-giver and the priestly role, but this is rendered invisible in literature. Pollard points to women’s recent critical peacemaking efforts (which she aligns to the ‘warrior’ role) in Solomon Islands and Bougainville. She also highlights women’s critical role in feast giving (as producers of food and ceremonial gifts, and breeders of animals to be eaten). This role not only proves their capacity to lead, according to Pollard, but also is a source of power and negotiation for women, who can sabotage big man feasts by refusing to cooperate.

Whilst Pollard (2006) believes the archetype embodies many admirable leadership qualities, she also points to the fact that a combination of these character traits is rarely evident in Big Men leaders today. Big Man style leadership is clearly evident in parliament and in electoral campaigning practices in Melanesia today (McLeod, 2007; Cox et al, 2007; Steeves, 2011). According to Cox et al (2007) and Steeves (2011), many MPs build loose coalitions designed to amass influence and provide access to state resources so that they are able to reciprocate voter support in direct and material ways. Campaigning draws on existing wontoks to build reciprocal relationships with constituents, and involves promises of support, goods and services to constituents in exchange for votes (Pollard, 2007). Vote buying[[2]](#footnote-2), and block voting[[3]](#footnote-3) was also prevalent in the 2004 (Pollard 2007) and 2010 elections (McMurray, 2012), often involving wives and kin groups or associations following instructions from the male ‘head’ of household and/or of the community/village leader (Huffer, 2006). In addition to the distribution of cash and gifts prior and post election, elected candidates work to ensure that supporters gain appointments to influential positions post election that will assist in amassing further resources and influence.

Election is necessary for Big Men to attain access to contentious high-stake local resources, such as land, that can secure their financial and leadership positions over time (Scales et al, 2006). Opportunities for amassing wealth or influence result in MPs shifting alliances mid-term, leading to party instability and frequent changes of government. As a result political parties can be fluid, focused on the short-term, and generally lack national policy agendas (Morgan, 2007; PIFS, 2010; Cox et al, 2007; McLeod, 2007). Political party affiliation is more important for the candidate’s financial support and to attain a government position post election, than in gaining votes by subscribing to a particular policy platform (Scales, 2006).

Political parties and indeed national political issues have little meaning at local level (McLeod, 2007; Cox et al, 2007; Steeves, 2011). The performance of legislators has historically been assessed on the basis of wealth distribution, not on the basis of legislation passed or national policy developed. Morgan (2007) asserts that lawmaking, oversight and representation are de-emphasised in favour of reciprocity. Once elected local ‘development’ commitments (patronage) can be operationalised through the unregulated *Rural Constituency Development Fund,* whichprovides funds for MPs to use, with next to no guidelines or accountability mechanisms (Scales, 2006; Huffer, 2006; Pollard, 2007). The Solomon Star newspaper provides a recent example of the type of commitments promised by candidates, with a reader writing to the editor to publically chastise the MP for Gela for his failure to deliver on election promises of 3,000 solar panels, and $2,000 per voter (Voo, 2014).

Financial demands of campaigning and voter expectations about candidates’ education and social status have led to an overwhelming majority of candidates hailing from urban rather than rural areas. In 2009 and 2010, 71% and 60% respectively said in the *People’s Survey[[4]](#footnote-4)* their MP had not visited their community in the past year (RAMSI, 2009 and 2010). Scales describes Big Men in today’s politics as *“prestige-oriented male politicians living like absentee lords and playing political games in Honiara while delivering few benefits to their constituencies”* (Scales et al, 2006, p68).

Perceptions of the role of MPs may be slowly changing in response to voter education: the percentage of people stating that the role of an MP was to *‘Assist individual people in the electorate’* dropped from 71% in 2007 to 42% in 2009 according to People’s Surveys conducted in these periods. Perceptions of MP’s national development role, however, remained stagnant. When asked to prioritise the responsibilities of an MP, 80% of respondents surveyed in 2007 and 2009 identified individual and local issues above national issues (McMurray, 2012). Limited understanding of the purpose and role of MPs is not restricted to community members, MPs have also been accused of having little understanding of the Westminster Parliamentary system:

*“I have worked in the government for 32 years and there is still no understanding whatsoever, in my opinion, of what is your role as a parliamentarian in the national parliament….That you are going there in the national parliament to legislate for the wellbeing, for the advancement, and peace and security of this country [is little understood]”* (Liloqula, 2012).

Cox (2009) writes of ways in which politicians have moved beyond from ‘Big Man’ archetype in Solomon Islands to what some refer to as ‘Big Shots’. These leaders no longer play a strong role in protecting local communities (in many cases having very limited connection to them), or in redistributing resources to villagers, except when required “to placate clients with petty gifts that ensure on-going support”(p969). The opportunistic nature of community members perpetuates this system. The ‘big fish’ (or select few) controlling national resource distribution are far more self-interested than the ‘Big Man’ archetype. Purposely minimising their patronage obligations to wantoks by hiding their wealth, these leaders often damage the communities that support them by enacting patronage obligations to their new clients - big business, mining and/or logging companies (Cox, 2009).

### The Chief

Today, the titles of ‘chief’ or ‘traditional chief’ and ‘paramount chief’ are widely used for respected leaders and elders in clans and local communities in Melanesia (Pollard, 2006). There are two types of Chiefs in Solomon Islands: the tribal (or head of clan) leader and the community or village chief.

The Tribal Chief is a life long position available to women or men born to a land owning line. Opportunities for women to lead a clan depend on the woman’s position in the land owning family and whether she is from a chiefly (royal) family. There are currently women in Isabel, Guadalcanal and Makira (Santa Ana) who are leaders under this category. Issues that are raised with the tribal chief are generally related to murder, adultery and land disputes (Mataela, 2008). Women heads of clans can also become community chiefs or Council of Chiefs (CC) members.

The Village Chief is an appointed leader whose authority stretches further than a Tribal Chief. The Village Chief is normally selected on the basis of character and leadership qualities demonstrated within the family, tribal or community level. The appointed leader has greater influence than the tribal chief, who may be very influential at the clan level but less so at the community or village level (Mataela, 2008). The village Chief’s authority is considered by McLeod (2007) to be inherently more stable than ‘big man’ authority, which is subject to fluctuations in influence. Chiefs possess authority over permanent groups and mobilise support on the basis of their position (McLeod, 2007).

### Other Lidas

According to Mcleod (2007), the term *lida* in Melanesian pidgin(leader) can be used to describe a specialist in a range of areas including (but not limited to) black magic, gang activity, Church, NGO, youth and cargo cults. Lerche (2008) claims that a range of leaders, drawn from different status and power bases are increasingly seen standing alongside chief “figureheads” in villages.

A joint IWDA-PLP scoping study, undertaken in Quay, highlighted a reluctance of senior women from Solomon Islands government, civil society and business, to apply the term ‘leader’ to themselves. In doing so, women interviewed reflected the cultural view that the title of ‘leader’ is not commonly used in reference to women, despite their leadership roles and achievements (Quay, date unknown).

There are numerous programs promoting the skill base and opportunities of *lidas* in Solomon Islands, although they tend to be urban focused, poorly monitored and funded (Pollard, 2011). In 2011, a baseline survey of training organisations[[5]](#footnote-5) identified 37 organisations that provide training in leadership, capacity building, management or advocacy to Solomon Islanders. These organisations include churches, civil society networks, community based organisations, national women’s organisations, formal sector organisations, private sector, regional organisations and donors. According to Pollard (2011) there is great need for collaboration, coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and sharing between these agencies along with increased attention to weakening leadership at community level. She also raises the need for increased awareness of women’s rightful role in decision making to be delivered alongside training activities.

According to Quay (date unknown) women *lidas* often wear “many different leadership hats” and undertake a variety of leadership roles across sectors. The scope of this review does not allow for a comprehensive look at all women *lidas* in Solomon Islands. Instead four well-documented areas have been selected for review - women leading peace, women land owners, women leaders of fellowship groups and in the public service.

## BIG WOMEN

Although Pollard points to the *capacity* of women to be Big Women (2006), and the existence of these women in West ‘Are ‘Are society, there are very few other Big Women discussed in literature and the media; they are effectively invisible in the national consciousness (Pollard, 2006). It is clear however, that these women exist. A review of the backgrounds of 26 unsuccessful women parliamentary candidates (in the 2006 election) highlighted that they had traits indicative of ‘big man’ leadership such as coming from chiefly families, or families holding church leadership, and/or having their own business to fund their campaign. Despite their connections and influence, they all faced strong negative reactions from both traditional and religious leaders to their candidacy. Opposition was voiced on the basis that parliament is not a woman’s place and that the women candidates were attempting to undertake a role ‘unsupported by the bible’. Male leaders demanded compensation for the offense they perceived the women had committed, threatened to fine voters if they supported women candidates, and used their positions of power and public speaking skills to influence the vote against women (Whitington et al, 2006).

Since independence in 1978, only three women have been elected to the 50-member parliament in Solomon Islands: Hon Hilda Kari in 1989, Hon Vika Lusibaea in 2012 (PWIP, 2014), and Hon Freda Soria Comua in 2014 (Pacific Women in Politics, 2016). A brief comparison of the stories of Hon Hilda Kari and Hon Vika Lusibaea highlights how matrilineal/patrilineal and patriarchal structures of the MP’s communities affect the type of support they were able to mobilise and expectations of their role as leaders.

Hon. Kari was elected as an independent in a by-election for North East Guadalcanal, a seat in a largely matrilineal society that had experience of women in leadership positions. One of Kari’s stated reasons for standing for election is that she was tired of being discriminated against in the workplace on the basis of being a woman. Her husband provided significant moral support, and also assisted in entertaining the 20-40 people that would visit her on a nightly basis (Theonomi, 2013). She served from 1989-1993, winning the East Central Guadalcanal seat in 1994 and maintaining it through two elections until 2001. During her time as MP, she held the position of Minister of Forests and Conservation for three years and the Minister for Youth, Women and Sport for one year (Hawkins, 2012).

Hon Vika Lusibaea, who was elected during a by-election held for her husband’s seat in 2012[[6]](#footnote-6), won by a large majority, but received mixed public response post election, with many people expressing surprise at her victory (PWIP, 2012). In an interview with Hawkins (2012), Hon. Lusibaea admitted to being a ‘reluctant politician’ vying for the position to assist her husband deliver on promises he had made during his own election campaign, rather than further her own ambition. She explained that her campaign team won the support of chiefs, church leaders and community leaders prior to the election on the basis that there was no other suitable candidate who could be relied upon to follow through with commitments made by her husband:

*“I am just there so we have someone sitting in the chair in order for us to have access to the funding and the projects. Everything else is the same* [as if my husband were elected].”

The MP’s husband, Jimmy Lusibaea, funded, managed and directed the campaign (Solomon Star, 2012). Comments made by Jimmy in an interview with Hawkins (2012) show some of the challenges women face in accessing positions of power in patriarchal patrilineal societies, and how in these contexts the perceived foreign nature of the parliamentary system can be an advantage:

*“When we went home, I already knew how I had to speak to the people there. Because Tobaita, the name of our region itself, means men are bigger or more important than women and this is the mentality of us Tobaitans. I told them three things: first, that the Westminster system of government is a foreign concept with a woman, Queen Elizabeth, at its head.* ***It is not a cultural entity otherwise I would not be putting Vika forward as a candidate*** *[emphasis added]. Secondly, I told them we need Vika to be elected in order for our work and the programs we started to continue, and finally I challenged them to make history by becoming the first constituency in Malaita province to elect a woman to parliament.” (*Lusibaeain Hawkins, 2012).

From this example, it is clear campaigning in a patriarchal patrilineal community required campaign messages focused on reassuring leaders that the woman candidate would not threaten social norms, and that she was in fact carrying out her husband’s campaign rather than developing her own. It is also clear that at the outset there is no expectation that leadership in parliament could in any way influence women’s role in leadership in cultural entities. Only time will tell if Hon. Lusibaea was able to exert any influence in her household and community through her role as MP.Despite her apparently figurehead-only role, Hawkins believes that Hon Lusibaea’s election will have ripple effects throughout Solomon Islands in the forthcoming elections:

*“A woman being elected to parliament from within such a male-dominated society, even at the behest of her husband, has set the wheels turning in the minds of other less radical constituencies and come 2014 will breathe new life into the hopes and dreams of aspiring women leaders.”* (Hawkins, 2012).

### Enablers and Barriers

In the *People’s Survey* of 2008 and 2009 respondents were asked to suggest up to three reasons why male candidates receive more votes than women. In both years the reasons mentioned most often by both men and women was **‘It’s the custom or culture that men are the leaders’,** followed by **‘Male candidates bribe voters’** (McMurray, 2012).

The weak political party system, loose party groupings (Whittingham et al, 2006; Huffer, 2006) and the single-seat-constituency system used in the Solomon Islands, which provides only for one seat per electorate, are also significant structural barriers to women’s representation (Scales et al, 2006). Regionally, political parties are reluctant to nominate women, and women are forced to stand on independent tickets, missing out on training and financial assistance (Donald, 2002; Huffer, 2006). **Whilst candidate training can be (and has been) provided by agencies such as UNIFEM, it is not considered to be sufficient or comparable to the support political parties can render to a candidate’s campaign** (Huffer, 2006).

Deciding to campaign is not an individual endeavour; rather it is *“communal undertaking*” (Pollard, 2007, p232). Yet, **gaining broad level support is difficult for the majority of women**. According to Pollard (2007), personality, connections[[7]](#footnote-7), educational achievements, gift giving, resources, track record, knowledge of culture, a demonstrated interest in people and community, and involvement in village development projects are critical factors in gaining influence and support. Women’s performance in the private sphere is also scrutinised as part of their character assessment as is their capacity to rally family members, tribes, village church leaders and village chiefs to assist in campaigning (Pollard, 2007).

The wealth required to build patronage networks, mobilise block votes, fund expensive and lengthy campaigns, and sustain office in the context of patronage politics is often beyond women’s reach. Relative to men, women face limited and discriminatory economic opportunities and resources, poor levels of education, restricted social mobility, high levels of violence, and networks (and status) that are often confined to women’s circles at the community level (Huffer, 2006; Whelan, 2012). This reality severely limits women’s (particularly young women’s) opportunities to engage in activities that would both build their profile and establish and strengthen patronage networks. Even in the case where women candidates have influential networks and sufficient resources (such as the case for some women candidates in the 2006 elections), negative gender stereotypes about women and beliefs about parliamentary leadership being a male prerogative, can result in poor polling outcomes (Whitington et al, 2006).

Pollard claims that **the development of women’s community-level power base (drawing from their connection to culture, land and community) is critical for an election campaign to be successful.** This requires “an environment where they [women] are seen to do well in community leadership prior to the elections” (Scales et al, 2006). Strengthening informal governance associations in rural areas, such as church based women’s groups, and encouraging women’s participation in decision-making at the local level may be one way of supporting women to achieve significant exposure to develop a power base at the community level (Scales et al, 2006). Promoting young women’s engagement in local governance will be particularly challenging, given social pressure to remain silent in public meetings, and young women’s lack of experience and status which limits their rights to speak (Hassal and Associates, 2003). Importantly, community level governance strengthening programs such as those proposed by Scales, would need to address cultural values that exclude women (and young women) as contestants in national level to change voting behaviour, as explained by Mataela (p43):

*“There is real scope for improvement of women’s leadership roles at the rural level which could provide the basis for women’s increased participation in national politics. If women were able to gain greater respect and roles as leaders in the community it may be less difficult for them to be represented at the national level.* ***However it is currently difficult for the existing support for women in communities to translate into votes [emphasis added].*** *Men may give their support to women as leaders in communities, but when it comes to national elections, women are disregarded. The electoral system is dominated by men and very few women are involved in the whole process.”*

Addressing cultural values that drive voting behaviour would require substantial time and commitment. To date, strategies used by donors and local organisations to promote change have included community education on the concept of democracy, civic rights and the importance of voting independently for the candidates most likely to provide good governance, along with activities to encourage, organise and support women candidates in the lead up to the 2006, 2010 and upcoming 2014 elections. Unfortunately, whilst these efforts have increased the number of women running for election, they have not resulted in any women being elected (McMurray, 2012).

Identifying strategies to promote changes in voting behaviour and an enabling environment for the emergence of women politicians is critical. Scales et al (2006) suggests the use of ‘bottom up’ social change approaches to promote good governance, accountability and leadership within communities alongside the more popular ‘top down’ candidate-based approaches targeted towards women’s empowerment and skill development (such as those introduced by international agencies such as UNIFEM, and adopted by local agencies such as the NCW and Vois Blong Mere). Pollard calls for increased formal and informal education for women, the extension of women’s leadership programs to rural areas, and engagement with church and cultural groups in efforts to strengthen women’s formal leadership roles in the community and church as *precursors* to political representation (Pollard, 2006).

The importance of moving beyond voter education approaches is stressed by Cox (2009). For many, the national political system and election processes have no greater meaning beyond opportunities to access short term benefits from Big Men patrons. This perception is reinforced by the lack of government presence at the community level, and lack of information or awareness about how national policy impacts ordinary citizens (cox, 2009). Many women (and men) do not perceive their vote to be a human right. Instead it is a patronage obligation, one that should be fulfilled, often under the direction of a husband and/or chief. (Donald, 2002). Threats and intimidation can be used to control voting behaviour, as highlighted by Afu Billy, a candidate in the 2012 elections:

*“Many women who wanted to support me didn’t because they were threatened with removal of access to their gardens, which is the source of their livelihoods”* (Billy, 2004: 6 in Huffer, 2006).

Cox claims that **until people have experience of quality government services (i.e. accessible education or health) that make the client-patronage relationship redundant and localise the state’s presence, they are unlikely to change voting behaviour.** Similarly, Morgan (2005) questions the ability of ‘blindly ethnocentric’ institutional strengthening and capacity building programs to improve governance in Melanesia without reference to the resilient and pervasive political cultures that dominate the region.

**Perceived gendered personality traits may become an advantage to women as voters continue to be disenfranchised by elite, urban-based candidates that fail to deliver on promises.** Results from the 2013 People Survey indicated that 72% of respondents said honesty is the main quality of a good leader, 38% said consulting with the community, 29% said good communication skills and 29% said being respected (ANU Edge et al 2013). Focus group discussions held as part of the People’s Survey in 2009 indicated a common view that women candidates had a stronger focus on the family and living conditions, and therefore would be more likely than men to deliver good community outcomes as leaders. Campaign strategies that focus on women’s issues with expectations that women will vote for women however, are not advised; women are not a homogenous group who will automatically support each other (Pollard, 2006). Indeed the **lack of solidarity amongst women is perceived to be a threat to women candidates**:

*“We’ve seen previously that lack of unity amongst women resulted in us not winning any of the seats*” (Lofana, 2014).

Spark and Meki, (2013) suggest that marketing women’s capacity as good wives, mothers and household managers may have positive impacts for women’s status and influence at community level. Afu Billy, who nearly missed winning a seat in 2002 by two votes, highlights how characteristics ascribed to the female gender aided her campaign:

*“… Many of the voters felt that I would not be dishonest because I was a woman…. Voters appreciated … my honesty, simple image, caringness [sic] approachability (this was especially important to many women voters)….*” (Billy in Huffer, 2006).

Douglas (2003) raises concerns about women’s reliance on apparent virtue (by nature of being a woman) and ‘motherliness’ as a position of influence, as these may further confine women’s opportunities. Monson (2013), provides a counterpoint to this argument, showing how women peace-builders used perceived qualities of motherhood to both justify their engagement in peace-building activities during the recent tensions whilst simultaneously disrupting perceptions of motherhood as being confined to the domestic sphere. She claims that drawing from stereotypes of mothers, and applying these to the context of the tensions, enabled women to expand their opportunities for public engagement. Whilst Monson discusses women’s opportunities in the peace building rather than political context, the principle may broadly applicable.

In 2013’s People Survey 91% of respondents agreed that women make good leaders and 89% agreed that there should be women MPs in National Parliament. Of those who supported women in Parliament, 80% thought there should be reserved seats for women candidates (ANU Edge et al 2013). The Prime Minster of the Solomon Islands, however, has publically stated support for a ‘development based approach’ instead of special measures. He defines this as providing education and scholarships for women as avenues to increase their numbers in parliament (Whelan 2012). The lack of special measures means that support for women candidates (as documented in the *People’s Survey)*, is unlikely to be reflected in voting practices in 2014 due to the dominance of patronage obligations.

**Tension between women’s community and household responsibilities and additional work linked to campaigning, is a large impediment to women’s greater political engagement**. Women’s extensive involvement in food production, caregiving, domestic work, and community and church activities contribute significantly to their status within their community and leave little time for political activity. Women’s status can be lost if their attention is directed elsewhere and responsibilities are left unfulfilled. Candidacy requires women’s constant availability (and free mobility) to build networks within and outside the community, engage in public roles, and to mediate community and personal problems. Action to access networks dominated by men may be particularly difficult and time consuming. This prospect may not be appealing to women who are significantly time poor, manage a house and provide care for children and the elderly. Balancing traditional roles whilst taking on the responsibilities of ‘modern women’ in the workplace is difficult, with no evidence of a reduction in women’s household responsibilities as a result of their increased external engagement (Huffer, 2006; Mere Blong Iumi 3, 2012). The experiences of candidates during the 2006 election demonstrate the intimidation and threats that can be directed towards women who have the gall to contend. Given this reality, many women may avoid public leadership as a further burden (Douglas, 2003).

Scales et al (2006) suggest that **improving women’s political representation will have positive impacts on the political culture within Solomon Islands**, because “reforms necessary to bring more women to parliament will be the same reforms that increase public participation, awareness and accountability in governance overall” (p69). As such, women’s participation in parliament is both dependent on better governance at the local informal level (and can be used as an indicator to assess local governance) and can also drive governance improvements (Scales et al, 2006).

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### Recent Activities Undertaken to Promote Women’s Political Leadership

Below there are a range of activities that have recently been undertaken to strengthen women and young women’s leadership opportunities and capacity, as well as to promote women’s networks, inclusive governance and accountability. This list is in no way exhaustive, merely providing insight into some of the most publicised activities currently being undertaken.

* **Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in Solomon Islands Project:** This UNDP Project in a partnership with the European Union and a planned partnership with AusAID, will run until 2015, with over US$8.9 million (SBD$65 million) in funding, (UNDP, 2013). Activities undertaken include:
* **Electoral reform:** development of a sustainable, cost effective and inclusive voter registration system. Working closely together, the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, Ministry of Home Affairs, UNDP, European Union and AusAID together designed the current electoral assistance project. The project will also help strengthen the legal capacity of the SIEC, aiming at supporting electoral and legal reform in line for the 2014 election.
* **Young Women's Parliamentary Group:** This group was established by the Speaker of National Parliament of Solomon Islands in December 2011 in an effort to promote young women’s leadership. It has since been promoted by UNDP. The group’s aim is to identify and develop emerging young women leaders, and link these women to national leaders and forums. Selection of members was based on the level of community work undertaken by hopeful participants. Data from 2011 indicates that the group grew from 20 to 40 members since inception and has the public support of the Prime Minister, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands’ Parliamentary House Committee, the Speaker of National Parliament of Solomon Islands and the Chairman of the National Council of Women who are all patrons of the group (SIG, 2011).
* **Mock parliament for women:** In February 2014, a mock parliament involving four days of parliamentary training for women followed by a televised debate, was held at the National Parliament. This event was organised by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in close collaboration with the UNDP Pacific Centre, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands and the Solomon Islands Government. The activity had the dual purpose of preparing candidates for the upcoming election, whilst raising their profiles and perceptions of their capacity (PWIP, 2014b).

**Voter education.** The FORUM Solomon Islands International has been recently selected (in January 2014) to provide an extensive voter education program on behalf of the Solomon Islands government in partnership with the electoral commission (Solomon Star, 2014). Information about the content of this training is not available online but may be worth following up.

**Improvements to voter registration.** The National Parliament Electoral Provisions (Amendment) Bill 2013 was introduced to address voting irregularities, through the use of a biometric process of electoral enrolment. This will clean up the electoral roll and provide a level of integrity to the system, by capturing fingerprints and photos of voters (National Parliament of Solomon Islands Bills and Legislation Committee , 2013). The Solomon Islands Development Trust and UN Women, the Electoral office are providing support to the educational process of voter registration, with special attention to women (Carter, 2013).

**Campaign for temporary special measures (TSM) for women in parliament.** In 2009, the Women in Shared Decision Making (WISDM) coalition proposed that government legislate for 10 reserved seats for women at the National Parliamentary level, and 10 seats at the provincial basis. A 10-point national strategy was developed to promote adoption of this proposition into national law. In 2011, the National Women’s Convention on Temporary Special Measures supported by UNWOMEN, which involved 50 women and men from government agencies, civil society, donors, church and provincial councils, reviewed the 2009 TSM approach and outcomes. It determined that the TSM campaign to date had been limited by a focus on urban women. A strategy was developed to promote electoral reform, support for candidates in the 2014 election, and civic education at the provincial and ward levels in order to achieve a broad base of support necessary to progress TSM (NCW et al, 2011).

According to Tung (2013), the work of the Temporary Special Measure Working Group is a good example of a program that links community and policy spaces, by raising awareness through media and lobbying activities of the need for TSM, whilst also trying to influence parliamentary perspectives on women’s leadership.

**Vois Blong Mere candidate training (2013).** This UN Women funded training, held in 2013, was provided to 15 potential women candidates over five days. It covered leadership styles, campaigning messaging, public speaking, election strategies, planning, advocacy, coalition building, and networking.The trainers received positive feedback and calls for further training, information and support for the candidates (Vois Blong Mere 2013; Radio Australia, 2012).

**Gender Equality and Political Governance Project (GEPG) program.** Between2008-12, training for women candidates and gatekeepers (i.e. chiefs, political party members, and members of the churches) was provided through the UN WOMEN (formally UNIFEM) Gender Equality and Political Governance Project (GEPG) program, co-financed by AusAID.

## WOMEN CHIEFS

There are precedents in Solomon Islands’ traditional governance systems of women leaders, particularly in matrilineal societies. In Isabel, women have served as tribal chiefs and on the Isabel Council of Chiefs (ICC), but have rarely served as village chiefs. In 2004-5 the Paramount Chief on the ICC took direct action to increase the number of women chiefs in the eight houses of chiefs in Isabel, and a total of nine chiefs were appointed. Action to address the gender imbalance on the ICC was driven by its chiefs (Marau, 2005). Unfortunately further information about the impact of the appointment of these chiefs was not found online.

In Guadalcanal, women have also served Guadalcanal Council of Chiefs (GCC). Maetala (2008) points out that whilst women have had opportunities to sit on the ICC and GCC, their representation is rarely equal. Women chiefs still need to be careful about the ways in which they broach gender issues in their positions. For example, a woman chief from Isabel stated:

*“Although I was appointed by the Paramount chief of Isabel Sir Dudley Tuti to serve on the ICC, I cannot address issues affecting women of Isabel in a radical way. I have to look for ways to bring an issue to the table. But I am thankful for the opportunity because before women of Isabel sat in the kitchen, today we sit at the table”* (Dasipio in Maetala, 2008; p56-57).

### Enablers and Barriers

There is very limited information available on the enablers and barriers to women becoming chiefs. White (2007) points to the relative absence of women chiefs in Melanesia today as evidence of the **growing rigidity of gender associations to traditional leadership roles**; public leadership roles are increasingly considered to be men’s domain.

Pollard, in her doctoral thesis (2006), explores the West ‘Are ‘Are auaapa (women's) traditional leadership structure, which had woman chiefly positions equivalent to male chiefs. At the time of Pollard’s thesis, the West ‘Are ‘Are community were **exploring ways to reinstate this leadership structure to improve governance** in West ‘Are ‘Are. There may also be other communities in Solomon Islands with similar structures and experiences that could provide insight into ways in which women’s chiefly roles can be promoted and strengthened. Further research into this area is warranted.

### Recent Activities Undertaken to Strengthen Women’s Role in Chiefly Governance

Below there are a range of activities that have recently been undertaken to strengthen women’s leadership roles in chiefly governance. This list is in no way exhaustive, merely providing insight into some of the most publicised activities currently being undertaken.

**Isabel Province Development Project (IPDP).** This project, a partnership between the Solomon Islands government, UNDP and Isabel Province operated between 2003 and 2008, focusing on capacity building in traditional leadership institutions including the ICC (Marau, 2005). In an evaluation report in 2006, project activities undertaken with the support of the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) that were focused on governance were credited with following changes (amongst others):

* Involvement of women in chiefly roles and/or officially chosen to be a chief;
* Women were recognised as legitimate representatives of the Isabel Council of Chiefs;
* Women have started to talk and express themselves during meetings
* In Kia, the chiefs and other community members are supporting a female candidate (Jane Tozaka) in her national election campaign.

The final project evaluation in 2008 also found that:

*“With the support of the project, Isabel women were able to negotiate more effectively with international logging companies, and blocked developments that were likely to have negative environmental and social consequences” (Hodge et al, 2008; p23)*.

## WOMEN AND LAND MANAGEMENT: THE CASE OF MATRILINEAL COMMUNITIES

*“Women need to know their legal and custom rights and to participate in decisions which so deeply affect them, their families and communities”* (Wale in Huffer, 2006).

The majority of land is Solomon Islands is collectively owned by clan groups, with access and decision making rights determined on the basis of matrilineal and patrilineal land tenure systems. As discussed in the previous section, women can achieve the title of Tribal Chief with responsibility for their clan, murders and land disputes, in cases where they have a strong position in the land owning family, or a chiefly (royal) family.

Women have a range of experiences in representing their and their family’s interest in land discussions and leasing agreements. In matrilineal communities, women have more opportunity to engage in land based decision processes (and show leadership in this area) than in patrilineal communities. Five of Solomon Islands’ 10 provinces are currently practicing matrilineal land tenure systems: Guadalcanal, Isabel, Makira, Central and Western. The basics of the matrilineal land tenure system are outlined by Maetala, (2008: p44-45):

*“Matrilineal land tenure systems provide automatic ownership of land to women and men who are born to the landowning women. Land succession occurs through the descendants of the first-born female, who heads the family clan. Her descendants become responsible for the inheritance and administration of the land. When the first-born female’s time comes to pass on land she chooses her oldest daughter, but she also appoints a male child or brother to be the spokesman for all land-related issues……A woman’s ownership is inclusive of her tribe – meaning that her brothers have access rights. However, her brothers’ children cannot inherit land.”*

Land ownership in a matrilineal society can provide women (in some contexts) with the right to exercise power in decision-making at both the family and tribal level. Women’s special knowledge and skills include the ability to deliver feasts (i.e. knowing what and how much to harvest when, in order to produce enough appropriate food for feast ceremonies), contribute to house building, about genealogies and land rights. Women leaders have responsibility for:

* Determining the positioning of new houses upon land and gathering of materials to facilitate the building of the family home
* Managing crop and marine resources
* Teaching the younger generation knowledge of their histories and land rights within the clan.
* Mentoring younger women in these skills and in land cultivation, care giving and household management
* Managing the household and contributing to community level decisions about community feasts, church-related activities and the general livelihood and harmony of the village life. In some places women were also participants in land disputes (Maetala, 2008).

Women’s leadership roles within a matrilineal land tenure system have typically not been celebrated or even acknowledged publicly, although it is implicit to the system. Influential land owning women often work behind the scenes to mobilise support and influence decisions regarding land matters, whilst maintaining unity within the clan. The perceived strength of women from matrilineal societies was once prized, and marriage to one was considered desirable. In some parts of Solomon Islands today, this is still the case (Maetala, 2008).

Matrilineal land tenure today has eroded in many places due to multiple external influences and social change. These include but are not limited to the influence of the church, colonisation, urbanisation, migration between islands, intermarriage, increased access of men to land rights through good deeds and feasting and as sons of chiefs, and the growing influence of the cash economy. Women’s increased participation in formal employment and in money-earning activities has also reduced the time they have to engage in land affairs, and learn and teach critical knowledge related to genealogies, land management and feasting that ensures their status and maintains their relevance in traditional land practices (Maetala, 2008). The growing rigidity of gender roles and associations between public leadership roles and men, created and sustained through church and colonial hierarchies (i.e. see White, 2007), also threaten to undermine women’s traditional high status (Whittington et al, 2006).

Men have historically acted as spokespersons for women land owners in public discussions and negotiations about land issues, ostensibly to protect women against enemy clans:

*“In the dark days before peace in Isabel the identities of women were hidden. This was to reduce the risk that they might be identified by an enemy who wanted to wipe out a group of women so that their kokolo or tia would become extinct and there would be no one to inherit the land. In this way the enemy could take the land. So, women were kept hidden, with men in front – to protect clan and land. We’ve had over one hundred years of peace but this old habit of men-in-front is still used even though the reason for it is gone”* (Tetehu, 2005).

In many cases ‘middle men’ and/or relatives living in other communities have actively used their role as spokesperson (or have appointed themselves as such) for the clan’s land for personal benefit. The number of cases of abuse has been growing in a context of increasing opportunities to profit from land leases negotiated with mining or forestry companies:

*“There is anecdotal evidence that women are rarely consulted in large scale fishery and forestry and mining projects. Increasingly, male relatives are claiming full rights to negotiate and they are not sharing the profits with women and the extended family members. Yet, the aftermath of logging vast tracts of land undermines land for food gardens – women’s key resource”* (Wale in Huffer, 2006)*.*

Despite these challenges, women continue to show leadership on land issues. The following two stories from the Solomon Star, highlight women’s active involvement in land disputes:

*“Women on Boloboe land on Vella La Vella Island, Western Province went into the forest to demonstrate against logging by Omex Industry Limited. Their demonstration was suppressed by the Company’s security guards.*

*Ten women from Guadalcanal Province blocked the road through their land to a logging camp in protest against the use of their land” (*(Hedditch and Manuael, 2010: p54).

An example exists of women being both the decision makers and the spokesperson for clan land. Tethu (2005) describes how a male clan head in Isabel passed responsibility for these tasks to his four sisters (including herself) in recognition of their tireless campaigning through the court system against a land grab attempt made by a male clan member. The four sisters shared the task of managing the land for the clan, and immediately began educating clan members in genealogy and clan history in order that knowledge would not be lost. Their court case against the attempted ‘land grab’ sets an important precedent on women’s rights to speak as owners of the land, and also draws attention to the fact that women will not keep quiet when their rights are abused (Whittington, 2006). Sharing this story more broadly in communities across Solomon Islands may serve to promote women’s confidence in taking on public roles in land management.

The Gender and Investment Climate Assessment (Hedditch and Manuael, 2010) highlighted the need for ongoing reforms to land legislation and dispute resolution systems in Solomon Islands to engage women and women’s NGOs with grassroots connections on taskforces and discussions of land reform. It also recommended legislating to protect and enhance women’s rights to own land, and increasing women’s understanding of their land rights using innovative techniques such as drama and radio. The Assessment also called on civil society organisations to:

* *Consider taking forward challenges in the Courts to assert women’s land rights and aim to establish precedents in superior Courts that uphold women’s land rights.*
* *Establish a “women’s land legal aid fund” to enable women to challenge infringements of their land rights in the Courts”* (Hedditch and Manuael, 2010: p58).

Voice in relation to land use is important and relevant for young women as well as their mothers and grandmothers. With limited paid work opportunities and growing expenses, agricultural entrepreneurship is increasingly a realistic and critical economic opportunity for youth. The Pacific Youth in Agriculture Strategy (2011-2015) highlighted the challenges young people face in building agricultural businesses, including access to land, resources, and time available from household and community commitments to work the land. This is particularly the case for young women in patrilineal societies, given their marginalised position on the basis of their age and sex and their responsibilities for subsistence food production. Relatively, young men have more available free time than young women of the same age (due to relatively less level of responsibility for household activities) and whilst equally unable to contribute to decision making in public spaces, they have the expectation that once of age, opportunities will open up for their voice to be heard. Young people (both women and men) engaged in the strategy development expressed a great desire to express their views and their needs within the family environment and at the community level (SPC, 2010). Similarly in a study undertaken by Hassall and Associates (2003), young women highlighted a desire for support to be given to young people to participate in and lead community affairs.

### Enablers and Barriers

Maetala (2008) speaks of the significant “scope for maximising women’s present roles and potentials for positive contribution” (p42), by building on the strength of women’s leadership and complimentary decision-making roles within matrilineal society in Solomon Islands. **Building on women’s leadership at the community level is a strategy more likely to be supported by men and women in Solomon Islands** according to Maetala (2008), than advancing women in institutions - a strategy used by Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

**There is limited public awareness of positive stories of women’s leadership on land issues.** This is a great risk, given the increasing association by the populace of men and decision making/leadership roles. **There is a range of programs, however, (many of which are working on environmental issues), that are promoting inclusive decision making processes in relation to land ownership and are likely to have knowledge and case studies of women’s leadership** (i.e. IWDA’s TTFT program). Stories and case studies could be used to raise the profile of women in land management nationally.

According to Maetala (2008),**“where the community is weakened, so are women’s roles”** (p43), due to the inseparability of women’s roles with community harmony.

The introduction of cash to community economies, and an increased identification with individualism over communalism, has led to changes in family and social structures, and a devaluing of subsistence, family and community roles and therefore of women and their positions of power in matrilineal societies (Huffer, 2006; Maetala, 2008). According to Huffer (2006) women’s exclusion from land matters has the potential to de-legitimise their role in other forms of public decision-making.

**Women’s low self esteem can be a barrier to their engagement in land issues,** **even in matrilineal communities**. Oral histories and genealogies were in the past critical for maintaining the matrilineal system and the role of strong tribal women. With a decline or absence in mentorship, women’s confidence can be shattered, and very real risks of clan knowledge loss, with implications for clan harmony, can arise. In some communities, the tradition of teaching this information to boys as future spokespeople has raised questions as to what women should learn, with the result that they are learning very little, and this acts to further undermine women’s power as landowners. Women’s lack of education and knowledge on their legal rights and land legislation can also reduce their confidence to attend and participate in clan meetings discussing land.

The implicit ownership or transferal of land by women to their eldest girl child in matrilineal communities has not traditionally being marked by feasting. Indeed **there is no tangible evidence of women’s ownership of this land – it has simply been implicit to the system.** This anonymity with respect to land ownership constrains women’s roles in decision-making in contemporary structures and processes in matrilineal communities, and makes it difficult for younger generations to understand the process and protocols. This is likely to be particularly evident in families where women no longer have the time to pass on their knowledge of genealogies, land management and feasting to young people. Maetala (2008) recommends that women’s organisations focus on developing processes to aid in the passing down of information and skills between generations.

Large-scale mining and forestry companies’ demand for land leases (alongside other development projects) is strong and growing in Guadalcanal, Isabel and Makira. The income opportunities are significant from these land negotiations, and **men are increasing abusing their role as spokesperson, to become trustees, signatories and beneficiaries of royalty payments, without proper consultation with women**. This has generated conflict between clan groups, particularly when benefits are not shared, false claims are laid to land, and environmental damage affects the work of women and men who are still trying using the land (Maetala, 2008). **Men supportive of women’s right to participate in land based-decision making and leadership roles need to be identified and supported to champion women’s leadership and decision making roles in both matrilineal and patrilineal contexts.**

**Women’s limited representation in parliament, and the lack of legal frameworks to support women’s ownership rights in matrilineal communities, serve to further marginalise women in land management processes.** The Solomon Islands National Women’s Policy, developed in 1998, highlighted the need for state recognition of the rights of women in matrilineal societies. In 2008, Maetala claimed that the policy, over 10 years old, was yet to be implemented. According to the Climate Investment Reform Assessment (Hedditch and Manuael, 2010), the formal land registration system is in disarray with opaque land allocation processes that are likely to marginalise women (and poor men) due to their limited education and lack of access to male dominated decision-making processes:

*“Women at the Business Women’s Forum unanimously stated that you should forget it if you were thinking about dealing with the government about land, and the system is weighted in favour of the rich and influential*” (Hedditch and Manuael, 2010, p56)*.*

**Opportunities exist to address the growing marginalisation of women in land issues through reigniting mentorship within clans, and providing training for matrilineal women in land rights, legislation, advocacy, lobbying and in understanding and negotiating company agreements**. The Guadalcanal Council of Women, for example, have articulated the need to prioritise training for women leaders (particularly church women leaders and women chiefs) on traditional land knowledge and roles as landowners.

**Focus on young women’s roles as agricultural entrepreneurs could strengthen their leadership opportunities, and their rights to engage in decision-making regarding land use more generally.** The Pacific Youth in Agriculture Strategy (SPC, 2010) highlights a range of pathways to do this including (but not limited to) the following:

* Create awareness and understanding among community elders about the importance and longer-term benefits of actively seeking the views of young men and women on issues relevant to the development of the community. Develop mechanisms to transfer and document traditional knowledge on land management and agriculture.
* Provide leadership and mentoring programs that build the self-esteem of young people and youth groups so that they can contribute actively and positively to community development.
* Ensure young farmers (women and men) and youth groups are targeted in agricultural extension, enterprise development /rural development programs, financial literacy and microfinance schemes.
* Establish young farmers’ clubs in communities and a national association, which can provide a way for young people to share experiences, support each other and socialise.
* Engage the media in disseminating positive messages about the importance of agriculture and the opportunities it offers, and showcase success stories of young men and women farmers.

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### Examples of Activities Undertaken to Strengthen Women’s Role in Land Management

Below are a range of activities that have recently been undertaken to strengthen women’s leadership roles in land management. This list is in no way exhaustive, merely providing insight into some of the most publicised activities currently being undertaken.

**Tugeda Tude fo Tomoro.** IWDA and Live & Learn are jointly managing a five-year program to support sustainable natural resource management & livelihoods through the promotion of inclusive decision-making and alternative income generation projects in rural patrilineal and matrilineal communities. Tugeda tude fo tomoro focuses on:

1) Providing women and young people with accessible information and creating pathways so they can contribute to decisions about the management and use of their community’s natural resources and make informed choices about sustainable livelihood options, and

2) Creating development opportunities in rural communities that don’t rely on unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. In their 2012 report, IWDA and Live and Learn reported the following outcomes:

* Women are organising to stop logging in Kolombangara
* Increased participation of women in community meetings
* Men and women are sharing domestic work
* Men are supportive of women’s programs at the community level
* Chiefs and elders in some communities are more open to women’s participation
* Women taking up higher level roles in community organisations – chairwoman, treasurer, etc.
* Men have talked to each other about gender issues and admitted that they have mistreated women and are trying to improve.

**Isabel Tok Stori**. In 2005, a forum was hosted by the East West Centre to providing an opportunity to discuss the importance of traditional leadership from local, national, and regional perspectives. Community members and leaders from the Province, Church, and Council of Chiefs present, the Buala Tok Stori allowed for open discussion of traditional leadership in Santa Isabel as well as possible futures for indigenous governance in the Solomon Islands and beyond. Women’s role in land decision making was discussed during this forum.

**Gender mainstreaming project of the Ministry of Forests**. In partnership with the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Natural Resources, AusAID funded a workshop for gender mainstreaming in forestry contracting in 2002. The workshop explored ways in which the National Women’s Policy could be translated into forestry activities, using a case study from the matrilineal society of Mangikiki, West Guadalcanal. On the basis of interviews undertaken in 2008 with men and women from Mangikiki, Maetala concluded that despite the workshop, women had not been involved in development decisions concerning their land, had limited access to land resources and very little control over benefits derived from the logging and reforestation programs operating there. Matrilineal protocols for decision-making that had been established during the workshop had not been used. Despite being matrilineal, men dominated decision-making processes and resource management in Mangakiki. In order to prevent similar circumstances arising elsewhere Maetala (2008) recommends legalisation of matrilineal land rights and multi-sectoral training for women and men on land rights and roles of different players within land negotiations and resource management, a code of conduct of women and men leaders, and resource management processes and priorities. She also recommends that women are involved in land reform committees and within the land records office to ensure that matrilineal protocols are used in new policy and legislation.

## WOMEN LEADING PEACE

Historically women in Solomon Islands have played a critical role in conflict resolution and peace-building. Maetala lists women’s traditional wartime responsibilities as the mobilisation of logistical support for warring parties, information provision and negotiation and mediation between parties. Huffer (2006) speaks of Melanesian women playing roles of bridge-builders and peace-makers, valued for giving life and solving disputes. Higgins (in Greener et al, 2011), highlights the role of mature women in resolving conflicts and keeping the peace in the communities of Malaita and Temotu. Pollard (2000) documented a strategy used by ‘Are ‘Are women of standing between warring parties as a means to stop violent conflict. As customary rules forbade male contact with a woman’s body, men were unable to pass the line of women.

In the recent ‘tension’ (1998-2003)[[8]](#footnote-8) women were actively involved in non-formal peace-building roles (Pollard, 2000 and 2003). Most notably, the Women for Peace Group (WFPG) was formed under the National Council for Women in 2000, in response to violence arising from the ‘ethnic tension’. Drawing on the symbolism as mothers of the nation and that of ‘good Christians’, the groups 300-500 members used non-violent methods (including crossing boundaries to talk and pray with the warring groups, meeting with police and the Prime Minister, exchanging food baskets, weekly prayer meetings, and visiting displaced families) to gain trust of opposing parties, appeal for disarmament, contribute women’s ideas on issues such as compensation and security to the authorities, retain donor attention on the issue, and support victims. Whilst the WFPG contributed significantly to enabling a space for peace talks in August 2000, they were excluded from the Townsville peace conference in 2002 (Pollard, 2003). Since that time, the exclusion of women from peace processes has continued and the Women in Peace Group profile has significantly declined (Monson, 2013).

Peace-building is often pitched an inherent skill of mothers in Solomon Islands, on the basis that peace-building requires ‘motherliness’ and that mothers have a special connection to life and the land which drives them to sustain their safety and health (Corrin, 2008). These ideas are evident in the writings of Pollard (i.e. 2000 and 2003), who describes peacemakers as ‘mothers of the nation’ and women’s recent approach to peace building ‘motherly’. Although symbolism of motherhood was used to justify women’s engagement in the recent ‘tensions’, women of all age groups were involved in peace work. Young women were also victims of the recent tensions, and experience ongoing trauma, social sanctions and unplanned pregnancies from sexual violence, rape, and from witnessing killing in the recent ‘tensions’ (Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012). Securing young women’s equal participation in achieving peace and security was a critical area highlighted in 2011-2014 Pacific Young Women’s Leadership strategy (World YWCA, 2010).

Both Charlseworth (in Greener et al, 2011) and Corrin (2008) among others, raise concerns about subscribing to the suggestions that mothers in Solomon Islands are inherently peacemakers. For Charlseworth the concern is founded on the basis that the concept fails to account for women’s diversity. Recent research by UNIFEM highlights that women actively engaged in conflict (as well as peacebuilding) during ‘the tension’, participating in fighting, encouraging men to fight, ‘gossiping’ in ways which were perceived to fuel conflict, and they also stored weapons in their homes (Moser, 2007). Corrin’s reservations stem from the belief that the concept may inadvertently serve to confine women to the domestic sphere, rather than justify their aspirations to equality. Monson (2013) rejects this last argument, focusing on ways in which the peace-builders used this discourse strategically to both justify their engagement in peace-building activities whilst simultaneously disrupting perceptions of motherhood as being confined to the domestic sphere. By linking motherhood and good governance, Monson claims that women peacebuilders in Solomon Islands carved out new space for women in peace processes (Monson, 2013).

Strategies used by women peace-builders, according to Pollard (2000), demand subtlety and quiet diplomacy, requiring women to work behind the scenes in influential roles that are not publically acknowledged. This need to act behind the scenes may contribute to a lack of formal recognition of their roles, and exclusion from formal peacebuilding processes (i.e. in the Townsville peace conference in 2002). Despite having strong non-formal peace-building and conflict prevention roles, women have had low levels of representation in formal law and order institutions such as the police and the legal system. Prior to the tensions, there were only 50 police women, two women magistrates out of nine, and one female Local Court appointment out of a total of 940 (Corrin, 2008).

As a result of action taken by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), numbers of women in formal peace and justice roles increased. According to Corrin (2008), numbers of lawyers increased dramatically post tension, the Women in Law Association of Solomon Islands was formed and in 2008 women police officers represented 14% of the police force.

### Enablers and Barriers

**Precedents of women’s peace-building roles combined with perceptions of the obligations of mothers to engage in peace-building processes open legitimate spaces for women’s voice and influence in times of conflict**. According to Corrin (2008) women should be supported to further develop peace-building skills, and perceptions of women’s innate connection to peace should be leveraged to forge a formal and public role for women in peace processes. **Whilst women without children participated in peace building in the recent tensions,** **it is unclear how they perceive the stated motherhood imperative of women peacemaking organisations, and whether this is a barrier to their involvement or interest over the long term.**

Opportunities for women’s involvement in peace processes build women’s profiles and status. Engagement in these processes, however, does not guarantee genuine participation of women, and is insufficient to achieve gender aware outcomes. **Peace processes need to be redefined from a feminist perspective, to ensure that negotiation and decision-making processes do not perpetuate patriarchal values** (Corrin, 2008).

**Conflict has the potential to relax rigid gender roles.** In research undertaken by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) using a Peace and Conflict Gender Analysis (PCGA) tool in 2005, the tensions were found to have significantly affected gender roles, with women taking on ‘men’s work’, expanding their economic activities, household management and decision-making roles. This was largely due to the absence of men, or their injury or illness. Men on the other hand perceived a short term loss of status due to disruptions to their roles as leaders, decision-makers, and breadwinners due to conflict-related activities. Whilst men reclaimed their roles and status after the conflict, the residual impact of women’s increased opportunity and confidence led to transformative shifts in some women’s perspectives. Shifting and contested gender roles were still a source of tensions within affected communities four years after public conflict ceased (Moser, 2007). It is unclear to what extent women have been able to retain roles and responsibilities gained during the tensions.

**Opportunities arising from expanded gender roles can be harnessed to promote women’s increased leadership and peace building roles**. Before life returns to normal post conflict, Moser (2007) suggests that opportunities are taken to:

* Strengthen women’s expanded engagement in paid work and economic activities
* Build on new skills acquired by grassroots women’s agencies in community organising, leadership, negotiation, and strategy-making
* Leverage the positive shift in women’s status to push for further change at the community level and in national policy.

The experience of RAMSI in trying to integrate a gender perspective into peacebuilding efforts in Solomon Islands demonstrates **the importance of cultural competence, and feminist perspectives that value and promote women’s existing leadership roles (alongside new potentialities) in program planning.** RAMSI’s analysis of law and order systems failed to recognise the limited role of the state (i.e. the police and the justice system) in law and order, missing the opportunity to engage churches, NGOs and non-state actors (including women’s groups) in decision making about order and justice issues that were typically their purview. Women’s important historical role in peace-building remained unrecognised because it was not enshrined in formal institutions recognised by ethnocentric liberal feminist perspectives adopted by RAMSI. RAMSI activities served to weaken the role of custom practicein peace building, and in doing so, negatively impacted on women’s role in peace building activities such as counselling, improving relationships between former enemies, healing, promoting peace awareness, praying for peace, and in some cases, mediating between militants. Finally, whilst land based conflicts had significant effect on women as farmers, women were largely excluded from discussions on resolving these, as implementers did not consider women’s experiences to be relevant outside of the domestic sphere (Greener et al, 2011).

**UN Resolution 1325, which calls for the integration of a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts, has the potential to provide legitimacy to grassroots movements of women peace builders** (Corrin, 2008). However, at a policy and program implementation level, the impacts can be muted by the resistance of security sector representatives to taking gender seriously (Westendorf, 2013).

### Recent Activities Undertaken to Promote Women’s Leadership in Peace-Building

Below there are a range of activities that have recently been undertaken to strengthen women’s leadership roles in peace building. This list is in no way exhaustive, merely providing insight into some of the most publicised activities currently being undertaken.

**Monitoring peace and conflict using gendered early warning indicators project in Solomon Islands.** Spearheaded by UNIFEM, in partnership withthe National Peace Council, the Solomon Islands Christian Association, Vois Blong Mere Solomon, the Department of Home Affairs, and the Department of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, this project developed and piloted a set of 46 gender-sensitive early warning indicators of conflict. The aim of the project was to promote data collection that would assist in the development of gender sensitive policy and programming for conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Corrin, 2008). Moser (2006) has called these indicators “robust” and indicated that they have been widely recognised as appropriate in the context of Solomon Islands. In addition to creating and piloting this indicator set, the project built the research and analytical skills of women’s organisations working for peace, along with their knowledge of early warning systems for conflict prevention. Their increased knowledge and skills raised their profiles in the peace and conflict sector. The lessons learned from the pilot study enabled the engagement of agencies that would not be considered gender focused in advocacy work for gender issues (Moser, 2006). On the basis of information available online, it is unclear whether these indicators are still being monitored systematically and used to drive policy advocacy or program development.

**Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).** Between 2003 and 2013 RAMSI has taken action to promote women’s role in the police and legal profession, as well as women’s engagement in discussions on addressing sexual violence in conflict.However**,** RAMSI has been widely criticised for failure to look to the cultural context and the actual roles of women and men when determining ways to engage them in peace-building, compensation and conflict resolution strategies and processes. They were also responsible for actively blocking women’s participation in peacebuilding discussions in parliament (Westendorf, 2013). The ability of RAMSI to protect women in the post-war environment was poor, perpetrators of SGBV were not prosecuted, RAMSI staff engaged in prostitution and under age sex with Solomon Islanders, and domestic violence resulting from the tensions was not addressed for a number of years. Ultimately, Westendorf (2013) blames RAMSI’s poor performance on the lack of preparedness of the Australian leading force to mainstream gender into its programs, which required an overhaul of policies and processes, as well as the buy-in of key actors to ensure their implementation (Westendorf, 2013).

## WOMEN LEADING FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

Women’s leadership in Solomon Islands is most clearly evident in church affiliated women’s groups. According to McDougall (2008), Christian churches are the only modern bureaucratic organisations in Solomon Islands today that have deep and broad roots in rural areas. The five main church women's groups are the Mothers Union of the Anglican Church, the Dorcas Welfare Society of the SDA Church, the Fikuanakini of the SSEC, the Women's Fellowship of the United Church and the Catholic Women's Association of the Roman Catholic Church. These organisations are well established with village to national links, and present the most accessible opportunity for women to engage in an organisational setting at village level. There are also a range of other women’s associations and groups, many urban based, that also provide opportunities for women’s leadership development. Many of these groups gain credibility on the basis of their connection to churches (Pollard, 2003).

The growth in the number of women’s groups has been linked to the administrative and structural vacuum created by ineffective state institutions, with groups arising to provide structure for local development (Douglas, 2003; McDougall, 2008). As of 2004, the Solomon Islands Provincial Government had the capacity to do little more than pay employees. Today, any initiative that intends to operate outside Honiara or provincial centres must in some way engage with churches (McDougall, 2008).

At the community level, ‘Women often outnumber men in organising community work and are active participants in ensuring the work planned is properly done’ (Pollard, 2003). The success of women’s groups is attributed by women to their organisational skills, developed in the process of balancing numerous domestic, subsistence, childcare duties along with community and peace building responsibilities. These skills, and women’s organisational structures, are valued and appreciated at the village level. In the words of a male pastor from Pienuna:

*“The UCWF* [United Church Women’s Fellowship] *is strong… they have structure in their movement. We say, UCWF is strong, they are strong, but why? They climb with something to help them climb – but we have no ladder to climb – the youth have no ladder, men’s fellowship has no ladder”* (McDougall, 2003, p68).

According to Douglas (2002 and 2003), Melanesian women’s collective action, evident in the formation of women’s fellowship groups, is a practical response to women’s restricted access to resources, opportunities and voice in public spaces. Traditionally, these groups focused on training women in domestic tasks and skills such as cooking and sewing. Development feminists keen on shattering stereotypes of women’s roles and opening up new economic and social opportunities for women have expressed concern over time about this focus. More recently, however, academics in the region (i.e. Douglas (2002, 2003); Erkison (2008) and Schevvens (1998, 2003)) are speaking to the potential empowering aspects of fellowship groups, and the way in which women are leveraging these organisations to achieve broader social goals.

In addition to providing training on domestic skills such as cooking and sewing, fellowship groups provide a structured environment whereby women members can safely learn leadership and coordination skills, build networks within and beyond their community, learn to manage small amounts of collective income, and experience formal meeting and workshop environments at a community, national and regional level. Increasingly these groups are branching out beyond traditional, spiritual, domestic and welfare activities to build women’s confidence and assertiveness (Pollard, 2003) and explore issues of women’s rights and development (Douglas, 2002, 2003). Group structures can provide a framework for potentially empowering experiences for women, particularly in a rural context:

*“The potential for empowerment comes through collectivisation of women. In addition to teaching women skills and involving them in the administration of the organisation, which builds their confidence and contributes to psychological empowerment, women’s groups can contribute to social or political empowerment by providing a safe environment in which women can articulate their concern, develop solutions to their collective problems, and explore their potential”* (Scheyvens 2003, p28 ).

Young women can participate in fellowship groups, and often also have their own church affiliated youth groups. These groups have been shown to have potential to promote young women’s participation in decision-making roles (i.e. see Rosembaum, 2010 which discusses the issue in the Vanuatu context). In Hassall and Associates’ *Youth in Solomon Islands* study (2003), church leaders were considered to be possible allies of youth in attempts to promote their voice in community decision-making:

*“Church leaders are more likely than traditional leaders to encourage active participation by women and youth, if they themselves are convinced of the need for this and have support from higher church leaders” (p22).*

In a 2003 study by Hassall and Associates, young women in rural areas stated that their highest priority for youth development was for youth leaders and organisations to be supported to gain skills and develop through targeted training. Recent retraction of the cash economy at the rural level, however, has negatively impacted the ability of youth and sporting groups in particular to organise, as they have typically been dependent on fundraising to sustain their activities.

Eriksen (2008) argues that churches open new spaces above reproach in which women can move and operate. Women church group leaders (and participants) achieve a level of pious virtue through association with the church, which is then used to justify their engagement in social justice work, peace building and community governance. The power of this association may be derived from the close connection between Christianity and national identity and/or through connection via their church to an ‘international morality’ (McDougall, 2003). By harnessing this moral authority, women in communities are actively negotiating greater roles within local decision-making processes (Erkison, 2008).

This power of women church leader’s ‘moral authority’ was evident during the tensions. Leaders were able to use social networks, institutional resources and the infrastructure of churches to support and give legitimacy to the efforts of the peace builders. Paina (in Monson, 2011) observed that peace builders using Christian practices and idioms and working within church networks were above questioning, and were left unharmed by conflicting parties. Her reasoning was that women’s commitment to Christianity and the Church, was by extension equated to a commitment to 'Solomon Islands culture'.

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### Enablers and Barriers

**Churches have significant power at the community level, undertaking a substantial community development role**. As such, they often act as gatekeepers, with political campaigns and NGO projects being vetted by churches prior to entering communities (McDougall, 2008). As one of the two types of local moral authority within a community (the other being the chiefly structure), churches have the potential to influence social norms, including gender roles and relationships between people of different ages. Working with church leadership (including men), strategies and programs can be developed to promote opportunities for women and young women to be heard and contribute to decision-making both within the church and the community. Comments made by a facilitator of World Vision’s ‘Channels of Hope’ program (discussed in the activity section below), throw light on ways in which biblical texts are used to justify women’s subordinated role, and how clarification of their meaning by church authorities can promote alternative gender relations:

*“A number of men participants have disclosed that they had used biblical scriptures to validate their view that women are natural subjects and men are natural leaders. As such, women may be treated as inferior and may not be given opportunities to lead or participate in key decision making. Analysis of biblical excepts can help both men and women to reassess the original intent of the text and to realize that they can behave and relate differently.”*

Fellowship groups provide leadership training and modest opportunities for women’s empowerment. Wallace (2011) is quick to point out however that they do not result in formal ‘influence’ within church structures outside the community. **Women rarely achieve leadership positions within churches**, they are usually found providing administrative, meeting and catering support to male dominated church hierarchies (Huffer, 2006). **Similarly, women’s church led community work is often praised but rarely converts into community leadership roles** (Douglas, 2002; Wallace, 2011).

Pollard (2007) suggests three key reasons for women’s limited representation in formal decision-making positions within the churches. Firstly, women have limited time for leadership activities on top of their high daily workload. Secondly, **local level issues and women’s group activities may be prioritised by women more than formal institutions and national agendas, possibly due to the level of effort women place in these to make them successful**, and finally the church has historically emphasised women’s role as wives and mothers, and encouraged men to take leadership positions.

Any efforts to promote greater opportunities for women within the church hierarchy will need to engage male church leaders as champions. These leaders can actively support the dismantling of structural barriers, publically face opposition within the church and community, promote women into vacant positions, and ensure that women receive professional development over time.

**Whilst women’s groups provide an entry point for enhancing women’s leadership and rural development, Pollard (2003) and Douglas (2003) beg caution in working with these organisations when planned activities involve cash management and a heavy time commitment**. Work undertaken by women’s groups is constrained in size and scope by the voluntary basis of participation and group member’s preference for self-financing mechanisms. These systems ensure ownership, self-sufficiency and group unity. Injections of cash and the establishment of paid positions in these largely voluntary groups, can act as a ‘deadly poison’ by creating conflict over opportunity, cash distribution and management. Women’s groups often prefer to take small steps that achieve modest outcomes, but maintain the integrity of the organisation and relationships between members (Pollard, 2003; Douglas 2003).

**Lack of networking between women’s groups can reduce their effectiveness, women’s opportunity and also lead to replication of and competition between programs and activities**. Criticism by members about leaders, other groups and programs often undermine their effectiveness, and the capacity for cohesive collective action. The leadership style used by woman’s group leaders is critical to the group’s success, and differs vastly in style to that expected of national leaders (Pollard, 2003):

*“Leading a women’s group in Solomon Islands is sometimes difficult, always time consuming, and must be performed in a low-key, sensitive and conciliatory manner*” (Pollard, 2003; p57).

**The extent to which fellowship groups focus on women’s leadership and empowerment is linked to the beliefs promoted through individual churches**. Attitudes towards women’s leadership vary greatly across denominations, with some churches connected closely to the programs of the National Council of Women, and others actively opposing both connection to the SINCW (Mangowai 1997) and women’s leadership roles generally (Huffer, 2006). Women’s increased involvement in ‘men’s domain’ has also been met by open criticism by national leaders, men and women, who perceive this as a threat (Pollard, 2003).

### Recent Activities Undertaken to Promote Women’s Leadership in Church Bodies

Below are a range of activities that have recently been undertaken to strengthen women’s leadership roles in church bodies. This list is in no way exhaustive, merely providing insight into some of the most publicisded activities currently being undertaken.

**Community Channels for Hope**. World Vision is currently implementing the Community Channels for Hope program in Solomon Islands, after success using it in HIV programs in Africa. With financial support from AusAID, the Solomon Islands program engages faith leaders, chiefs and heads of women’s groups in facilitated workshops about violence against women. The method encourages personal enquiry and reflection, facilitating faith leaders to challenge their own understandings of biblical texts and reconnect with the message of equality at the heart of the Christian faith. The focus of the workshops are on family relationships rather than gender, as associations people have made with the word ‘gender’ are not positive. The outcomes of the workshops can be quite transformational for the majority of participants. In 2012 World Vision was working on a ‘barefoot’ version of the materials for use in households with limited literacy. This version is designed to engage with men, given their lower church attendance and therefore less likelihood of hearing these messages through that avenue (Kilsby, 2012).

**YWCA: ‘Women Rise Up’** This AusAID funded four-year young women’s leadership program managed by YWCA has reached 700 young women in four of Solomon Islands provinces. The desired outcomes of the program, which utilised peer education models, include:

* Young women are leading positive change in their communities
* Young women are more confident and identify as leaders on their own
* Community members recognise the leadership potential of young women
* Young women are knowledgeable and skilled and are sharing information with their peers in the areas of Human Rights, Women’s Rights, Gender, Public Speaking, and Leadership.

The program’s evaluation (Lomaisa, 2013) reported that 47% of participants became leaders inside their communities or strengthened existing leadership positions. This was usually through formal positions in churches and schools such as women’s/youth group leader, Sunday school teacher or class captain. In addition, 31% of participants reported receiving increased levels of respect from families and communities after the program.

## PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERSHIP

*“Change is not about a lone woman in parliament...Change is about having a critical mass of women who by nature of being females, can bring different ideas, experiences and values to decision-making”* (Ethel Sigimanu, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women, Youth and Children’s Affairs in DFAT, 2013).

In the last 10 years there has been a significant increase in the number of women in leadership positions in the public service in Solomon Islands (Tung, 2013). In 2008, there were significantly more women in leadership positions in the public service in Solomon Islands than in other Melanesian countries; women held 27.2% of top ranking positions in Solomon Islands, 12.9% in PNG and 9.1% in Vanuatu (Thomas, 2009). In 2013, six of the 24 government ministries were headed by women, two of whom have held their position since 2002. Other positions occupied by women include Deputy Permanent Secretary, Registrar, Principal Officers, Directors of Divisions within Ministries, Managers or Supervisors of sections (Tung, 2013). Current Sub-National women include Hon Ilene Sulukonina, Hon Beverly Muva, Hon Anne Pugeva, Hon Rhoda Sikilabu,Hon Victoria Sino Oloratavo, and Hon Nester Marahora (Pacific Women in Politics, 2016).

Strengthening the Solomon Islands public service and supporting those working within all arms of the government is a key component of the Solomon Islands Government-RAMSI partnership. Through this partnership significant steps have been made to raise the profile of women in the public sector, provide training, promote structural change within ministries and support the leadership development of women both within the public service, and in organisations that could groom women for the public service and political leadership in the future (RAMSI).

Attitudes towards women’s role within government are changing slowly in response to the program. Liki (2010) found in interviews with male government officials that there is an increased interest in seeing women take up roles within parliament, and strong support for women’s roles in the public service. Women interviewed by Liki also stated that they had received significant support from men in their Ministries. Ethel Sigimanu, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women, Youth and Children’s Affairs noted:

*“A slight change in the language of government leaders, and we need to keep encouraging them to speak that language, for the sake of the women of this country.”* (Ethel Sigimanu in Liki, 2010)

### Enablers and Barriers

Considerable funding and technical support to the Solomon Islands government, outlined in the next section, has driven **affirmative action policies and campaigns, raised profiles and skills of women in the public sector, and promoted a shift in social attitudes towards the importance of women working alongside men as leaders in this sector** (Liki, 2010).

**A slight increase in women’s educational qualifications** may have also aided women in their journey to top positions in government(Liki, 2010). According to Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey, Ruth Liloqula:

*“We can go on theorising about this women and leadership thing but the groundwork is education. Education for girls from primary to university levels needs greater and serious attention if we are to see real change*” (Ruth Liloqula in Liki 2010, p 11).

In a regional study of women in the public sector, Zubrinich and Haley (2010) **identified a range of challenges to women entering the public service** including verbal abuse, threats of violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, and harassment from the wives and girlfriends of male colleagues. Women also continued to face barriers to job promotions and study opportunities. At home, women’s domestic responsibilities were not shared, and difficulties delivering on both work and domestic responsibilities led to violent responses from husbands and boyfriends in some cases. Political interference was also a concern of women surveyed as they worried about their reputations and being able to undertake their jobs as required.

Achieving sustainable change requires a shift in attitudes: both men and women need to understand how and why women in leadership positions benefit the country. **Persistent campaign and advocacy work, combined dialogue, education and training** is required to achieve this aim (Liki, 2010).

### Recent Activities to Support Women’s Leadership in the Public Service

Below there are a range of activities that have recently been undertaken to strengthen women’s leadership roles in the public service. This list is in no way exhaustive, merely providing insight into some of the most publicised activities currently being undertaken.

**RAMSI’s public sector program.** RAMSI’s partnership with the Solomon Islands Government includes a public sector program which aims to increase the percentage of women at all levels within the public service and improve capacity in organisations that have the potential to foster women’s aspirations to public office. Actions through this program included:

* **Being The First.** This book documents the lives and experiences of 14 senior Solomon Islands female public servants, providing guidance and strong examples for young women. Parts of the book have been included in the Solomon Islands school curriculum, and have been supported by a newspaper, radio and TV series profiling a number the women featured in the book.
* **Women’s Leadership Mentoring program**, ‘Spes fo Umi Gro Lo Lidasip’, which involves over 100 women participating from government, community, church and business sectors developing skills and confidence to take on leadership roles.
* **Gender training for permanent secretaries.** The Solomon Islands Public Service Commission, in partnership with the Ministry for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA), convened the first ever government-wide gender training for all permanent secretaries in the Solomon Islands Government. The workshop was supported by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).
* **Training** for women currently working in the Solomon Islands public service in areas such as report writing, IT, negotiation skills, strategic planning, report writing and public speaking.
* **Database to Improve Women's Leadership Opportunities** In 2010 a database of qualified women for boards and conferences was developed in a joint effort between RAMSI Machinery of Government program and government (Solomon Star, 2010). Shortly after release, the database played a key role in the appointment of a number of women to board positions, including one to the Solomon Islands Economic Advisory Board. Training has also been provided to more than 50 women as existing or potential members of boards and commissions.
* **Leadership training** with emerging women’s groups including the Women in Development division of the Ministry of Women, Youth & Children’s Affairs, ‘Voice Blo Mere’, Solomon Islands Mother’s Union, Solomon Islands Christian Association’s Youth Desk, the Young Women’s Christian Association, and Aoke Langalanga and North Vella Women’s Associations.
* **Performance indicators** Institutional support for gender equity is growing in Solomon Islands, and a recent innovative initiative is the inclusion of a specific performance indicators on gender mainstreaming in the annual performance appraisal of all Permanent Secretaries. These include:
  + Having a gender implementation strategy in ministry corporate plans,
  + The appointment of a gender focal point,
  + Gender sensitising the recruitment processes,
  + Developing gender profiles of the sector,
  + Collecting and disseminating sex disaggregated data, and
  + Developing a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment in the public service (SPC undated).

In 2013, RAMSI’s gender adviser, Emele Duituturaga described the development of performance indicators for gender equality as:

*“A real game changer and a major force for addressing gender equality and women’s advancement in the management and delivery of public services…It is a major achievement and the first of its kind in our region”* (Island Business, 2013).

# SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

The following is a brief list of the issues pertaining to promoting women’s leadership in Solomon Islands, as highlighted in this review.

**Culturally assigned roles and characteristics of women (such as ‘motherliness’ and ‘virtuous’) can be successfully harnessed to create new spaces for women’s voice and leadership.** Care needs to be taken in ensuring that these approaches do not exclude young or childless women, or box women into existing domestic roles. This approach may have applicability to boosting women’s roles in other areas such as in land management.

**Women’s religious networks are organised and very powerful.** Religious groups can support women’s leadership through sociability, organisational training and structures, and by harnessing resources and networks to open up spaces for women’s leadership in areas such as peace building. These groups may have more chance of promoting opportunities for women than secular organisations due to moral authority of the church within Solomon Islands. Campaigns that are framed in a religious context, and draw on church networks and have the potential to have far reaching impacts, whilst minimising opposition from women and men. Whilst working with church networks is desirable, it is important to avoid burdening and ultimately destroying women’s groups through programs of large scope involving significant cash injections. Importantly, work to promote change requires engagement of male church leaders to promote internal leadership opportunities for women as well as opportunities within the community.

**Some churches are beginning to question their religious justifications for women’s subordination.** This presents opportunities to engage men in promoting gender equality, couched in concepts of family unity and mutual respect derived from biblical texts.

**Broad social change is required for young women to have a voice.** Whilst leadership programs for young women can promote positive change in their confidence, knowledge and within families, ultimately social structures and cultural norms need to be addressed to create more space for their voice. A critical issue for young, particularly rural, women is that of accessing income generation opportunities. Supporting their leadership and voice in accessing land, skills and resources for entrepreneurial activities will be critical to future leadership opportunities.

**Women’s leadership is largely invisible.** Women already play critical leadership roles in church groups, land management and peace negotiations. Highlighting these in public spaces is critical to challenging perspectives that only men can take on leadership positions (Morgan, 2005). RAMSI has taken steps, with the release of the book “Being The First” and its promotion within the school system, to raise awareness of women in leadership positions. There is scope to consider how other areas of women’s leadership could be promoted in order to tackle the growing perception that leadership positions are by definition suitable for men.

**Fundamental to women accessing leadership positions is the belief that women can be leaders and have a right to be leaders**. This requires long term attitudinal change at the community level that goes beyond ‘voter education’ and includes women and men. This requires tackling rigidities that have developed around gender roles*,* the invention and abuse of custom, promoting reflexive and adaptable conceptions ofcustom, ensuring custom provides opportunities for young people’ voice (and allows new identities to emerge) and tackling custom practices that are not beneficial to women. Importantly, programs need to focus on incremental change as a realistic objective (Cox et al, 2007).

**Women have traditional leadership roles in communities that are being eroded** (ie. matrilineal land owners). *Part of the work of increasing participation by women in decision-making is to engage in a process of remembering the traditional leadership roles of women* (Scales et al, 2006 p78).

**Dedicated programming can lead to an increase in women’s representation in a formally male-dominated area.** The case of the public sector is a good example to draw from in demonstrating that targeted and strategic interventions can create positive change and opportunities for women, even in a very complex and oppressive environment.

**Numerous agencies are currently putting significant resources into strengthening women candidate’s potential for the 2014 elections.** Women’s Rights Action Movement (WRAN) should carefully consider their point of difference from these programs if they intend to focus on parliamentary leadership.

**The WDD and the SINCW appear to be under resourced.** An in-country assessment of the capacity of the organisations to scale up activities would be required before any joint programming.

# FLOW PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

This section focuses on ways that IWDA could build on the TTFT program, and harness their partnership with WRAN, to integrate some of the issues explored in this review into existing projects and activities. Ideas for program interventions listed below are indicative only and have been included to start a process of reflection and consideration rather than provide an exhaustive list. Some of these activities may already be integrated into TTFT program activities and approach[[9]](#footnote-9).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Desired FLOW Outcomes** | **FLOW Opportunities in Solomon Islands** |
|
| **Increasing women's civil society engagement and representation** | * Promote knowledge exchange processes between TTFT villages to create more space for women’s leadership by reviving traditional leadership roles, social structures that were more egalitarian, and recognising and valuing new leadership opportunities. The exchange processes could focus matrilineal and patrilineal land management systems, positive aspects of women’s involvement in land management based on experiences of people involved, positive and negative aspects of custom practice for women’s leadership, ways young women can be engaged in leadership roles, and custom as a living and changing concept. These exchanges could involve chiefs, and women and men and youth (men and women) leaders. |
| * Focus on the redistribution of labour between women and men (particularly young women and young men) and explore options for affordable labour saving technology (domestic and/or agricultural), to reduce women’s work burden and enable women to have more available time to engage in leadership activities inside and outside of their communities. |
| * Support the development and networking of any groups arising from TTFT communities that are established to promote women’s rights in land issues or peace building, or that enable new leadership roles for women. Link these groups to similar groups working in other communities and at a national level. Engage men in this process as champions and supporters. |
| * Identify pathways for policy influence on land matters and peace building and support women and men in the community to advocate for change that supports recognition and formalising existing roles and responsibilities of women (and men) leaders. |
| * Celebrate women’s leadership in TTFT communities alongside men’s leadership. |
| * Promote women’s leadership (including young women) through employment and representation in TTFT activities |
| **Mobilising young women to participate in decision-making** | * Support women’s fellowship groups involved in the TTFT program to promote decision making and leadership opportunities for young women, and advocate for their representation, alongside older women, in network meetings and opportunities outside of the community. |
| * Gather case studies of young women’s leadership and contribution to decision making within TTFT communities and promote these across the TTFT community network. |
| * Promote a young person’s TTFT network for young women and men to share stories and experiences, attend training and develop confidence and strategies to improve their communities. Promote understanding by young men and women of the importance of shared decision-making and leadership. Promote pathways for young people (men and women) to present their experiences and skills within community forums on a regular basis. This could include examples of collaboration with equal opportunities and voice provided to women and men. |
| * Engage male and female leaders in TTFT communities in discussions on approaches to supporting young women and men to have more leadership and decision making opportunities in the home, community, church etc. |
| * Identify strategies to engage with families to discuss more equal distribution of domestic and agricultural work between young women and men. |
| * Support the development of intergenerational mentoring relationships and processes in matrilineal TTFT communities to ensure that information and skills critical to women’s role in matrilineal communities can be passed on. |
| **Increasing gender equality commitments at the local government level (chiefly leadership and church leadership)** | * Work with male champions of women’s leadership in matrilineal land management systems to support the strengthening of these systems in TTFT communities where women’s leadership is declining. They could also be engaged to share perspectives with men and women in patrilineal systems about the benefits of women’s involvement in decision-making. |
| * Support efforts by TTFT communities/clans to formalise women’s role in decision-making processes and/or leadership roles. |
| * Support meetings between leaders (church and chiefs) of TTFT communities with advocates from outside these communities that believe in women’s capacity to act as chiefs and within the Church hierarchy. Promote discussion about the benefits of women’s contribution as leaders and to decision-making. Consider using ascribed gender roles here as an entry point and justification regarding good governance etc. (i.e. peace makers, mothers, etc.). |
| * **Support work by church groups to use biblical texts to unpack domestic violence and women’s leadership in TTFT communities. Support localised church hierarchies to consider how this may affect their structure/practice. Support church groups to document their experiences and perspectives and use these to advocate for change in the church hierarchy.** |
| **Increasing voter willingness and community support for women in leadership positions** | * Develop a media campaign from stories of women’s leadership in peace building, church groups, land matters etc. drawn from TTFT’s experience, to raise the profile of women and young women in leadership (and in doing so, challenge perceptions of leadership being a man’s role) in rural and urban communities more generally. This could include dramatisation of the stories for radio, interviews with various women and men involved, press releases, letters to the editor etc., posters, church newsletters, booklets etc. (using appropriate media channels). Within this, it would be important to profile a range of gender roles, as a counter point to growing rigidity associated with these. The roles and activities of young women would also need to be articulated clearly. |
| * Explore options for **annual awards (or a celebration if more culturally appropriate) for women and young women demonstrating exceptional leadership in their communities/clans/churches (awards for men’s/young men’s inclusive leadership could be held simultaneously) with nominations made by community groups/church/ village and clan leaders. This could begin as a TTFT activity and expand if successful. It could raise the women leaders’ profile and in doing so make the invisible visible, raise the value of women’s leadership, and draw a range of stakeholders including government, into the process.** |
| * Use case studies and stories gathered through TTFT to work with an agency interested and capable of policy advocacy (*WRAN may be suitable and interested* ***in this role*) to turn these stories into advocacy materials targeted at government and churches. The materials could use creative mediums to focus attention on improving women’s leadership opportunities, recognising their existing leadership roles, and ensuring the maintenance of their rights in a land management context through legislation and participation on relevant boards, particularly (initially) in matrilineal communities where a precedent exists for their leadership role and voice.** |
| * **Work with the education department to build positive stories of women’s leadership into the national curriculum, again drawing from TTFT experience (and drawing from SINPA partnerships with other agencies to expand the scope of stories identified).** |
| * Developing a national event (perhaps aligned to an already existing project or faith based activity bringing together multiple churches) to bring various community members together to share their stories. Explore opportunities for supporting male advocates of women and leadership. |
| * **Working with churches from targeted TTFT communities at a national level to support the development and implementation of training materials demonstrating biblical references to inclusive leadership, the importance of women’s voice etc. (using for example the World Vision model). Support the implementation of these materials in targeted TTFT communities.** |

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1. The tension refers to armed conflict that took place in Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2003. The conflict resulted in 150-200 deaths, extensive rape and sexual assault, approximately 450 gun-related injuries, and more than 35,000 internally displaced persons. The Australian led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) provided policing and governance support at the request of the Solomon Islands government. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Vote buying consists in many cases of the bestowal of simple gifts, like tobacco or flashlights, on the male household heads. A second tier of vote-buying occurs via patronage relationships: candidates may bestow particular largesse upon local men who are known to influence the opinion of many others. Gifts are bestowed on male heads of households with the assumption that they will influence other voting household members to vote for the candidate (Scales, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Block-voting can mean either the appropriation of a wad of validated ballot papers for marking outside the polling station, or a prearranged agreement by a number of people to vote in a certain way [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The people’s survey is an independent annual survey that provides a unique insight into the opinions of Solomon Islanders on a wide range of issues, including business and employment, law and order, public accountability and access to services. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Pollard, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jimmy Lusibaea, Hon Vika Lusibaea’s husband, lost the seat after an unlawful wounding conviction [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Connections include links to family and other networks, church affiliations and membership in associations, links to influential businesses and/or chiefly power (Pollard, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ‘The tension’ refers to armed conflict that took place in Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2003, when the Australian led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived to provide policing and governance support at the request of the besieged Solomon Islands government. The conflict resulted in 150-200 deaths, approximately 450 gun-related injuries, and more than 35,000 internally displaced persons. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The scope of this review did not enable a detailed exploration of IWDA’s current partnerships and programs in the Solomon Islands. Suggestions made are ‘in principle’, and based on cursory knowledge of existing activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)