Solomon Islands
Social Welfare Needs Analysis

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Solomon Islands: Social Welfare Needs Analysis

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Defending children ● connecting families ● across the world

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Foreword

The Solomon Islands (SI) is stunningly beautiful and rich in natural resources. However, the reality for the vast majority of the country's half a million inhabitants is poverty and unemployment.

SI experienced a long period of gradual improvement in the standard of living, from achieving independence in the late 1970s, until 1999 when a period of conflict and tension commenced. Since then, the ability of children to access their rights and protection has declined, including a period of rapid decline during the conflict, from 1999-2002. Gender, family and child violence has increased dramatically, significantly impeding the economic capacity of SI. The weakness of government outside provincial centres has negatively affected gender equality and child rights (AusAID, 2004:8). This has resulted in an environment where children are not afforded their rights and thus are impeded from participating fully in the promise and positive future of the SI.

SI has experienced a growing demographic 'youth bulge' with 70% of the population under 24 years of age (Save the Children. 2010). This coupled with youth (18-24 years) unemployment rates being twice as high as other working age groups have a major impact (AusAID, 2004:8). The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2010) has identified the following child right's issues:

- Children are often sent away from the immediate family to the capital Honiara, to stay with relatives for schooling. Although the impetus behind this trend is one seeking a better future for their children, they often have little supervision and there is a higher chance of abuse, particularly sexual abuse and exploitation.
- High rates of substance abuse, particularly local homebrew and marijuana.
- Risky sexual behaviours, resulting in high rates of sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) and teenage pregnancy.
- Sexual abuse statistics are higher than those for physical abuse (SI is the first country to complete the WHO methodology Gender Based Violence study to have found this).
- Lack of family counselling facilities and no mediators to speak of.
- Shortage of trained counsellors at all levels.
- The Department of Social Welfare has no qualified Social Workers or Caseworkers, and is in urgent need of capacity building.

There is Government support in the area of child protection. The CRC was ratified in 1995 and child protection duties were delegated to the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. However, there are a range of physical and cultural complexities that also act as barriers to change. In addition, financial resources, staff and capacity are extremely limited, with only a small number of social workers, with at best informal training, attempting to uphold this serious responsibility.

This paper analyses the urgent social need that is present in SI.

i. Executive Summary

The Solomon Islands (SI) experienced a long period of gradual improvement in standard of living, from achieving independence in the late 1970s until the beginning of the civil conflict in 1999 subsequently referred to as the tensions. Since then, the ability of children to access their rights and protection has declined, including a period of rapid deterioration during the tensions, from 1999-2002 (Pacific Secretariat, 2009). As a result, gender, family and child violence increased dramatically from already high levels, significantly impeding the economic capacity of SI. The weakness of government outside provincial centres has negatively affected democratic governance and gender equality (AusAid, 2004:8). This has arguably enabled an environment where children are not afforded their rights, under the pretext of upholding a stable, tranquil and collective society. This argument fails to acknowledge two points. Namely, perpetrators of abuse and violence are acting contrary to the notion of a true collective. As a result, women and children are subjugated in a patriarchal hierarchy where the notion of the collective conceals a dominantly male power structure that affords individualism to the men, often the leaders of the community. Violence against women and children is often compartmentalized such that speaking out is seen as threatening the societal fabric and is thus unacceptable (Pacific Secretariat, 2009). Notably, SI communities and social structures are influenced both by the period of white colonialism and by traditional Melanesian notions of power, leading to a clash between collectivist ideals and liberal individualism. These issues significantly affect governance in the area of children's rights and family violence. A more detailed breakdown of the responses and services available to combat these issues is detailed in the attached tables.

The significant lack of economic development in SI is impeded largely by the failure to ensure children have the right to an education, limiting current and future capacity in services provision and creating intergenerational transfer of violence, most notably in a gendered context. A significant proportion of gender violence is committed against girls, indicating the strong links between this and children's rights. Government support in the area of child protection and rights exists in the form of a small number of social workers with at best informal training. This does, however, indicate at least a nominal desire to effect change within this issue. The publication of a government supported study that details levels of gender and family violence and evidence of commercial sexual exploitation of children in remote areas has brought previously taboo topics to the forefront of discussions on development in the Solomon Islands. This paper details the structural and community needs and behaviour concerning family based violence and child protection and outlines available support services, whilst highlighting significant areas of need for the development of children's rights and welfare frameworks.

ii. Methodology and Research

This report was commissioned by International Social Service Australia, for the purpose of conducting a community needs assessment and evaluation of the state of women's and children's rights in the Solomon Islands, and services and support associated with these issues. This was aimed at considering the impact of violence against women and children, and its interlinked nature with economic, social and political development at all levels of society. Gender considerations were applied at all stages of research, which was particularly pertinent given the status of women and their children in SI, and the implications this has for national development.

It is important to note the difficulty in obtaining specific research and data, for example regarding the economic cost of violence, for the Solomon Islands. With that in mind, this article to an extent was shaped at first by the anecdotal reports of expatriates in SI and employees of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, in terms of what kind of research to undertake and which areas were of most need. Clive Moore's *Happy Isles in Crisis* (2004) provided political context and information associated with the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and research on kastom and its role in the political unrest was also taken into account (Fraenkel, 2003).

As desk-based research, it must be taken into account that the lack of written information in this area means that fieldwork gathering interviews and surveying Solomon Islanders may have produced different analysis to what is presented. Quantitative research undertaken by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community for the SWD (2009) and joint research undertaken by UNICEF and AusAid (2008) formed the basis for facts and figures relating to violence against women and children. As well, AusAid's 2008 *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor* provided further background more specifically regarding available support networks. To provide context into factors impeding improvement in the status of women and children, research was undertaken into technical recommendations and reviews of work undertaken into SI (Asian Development Bank, 2009; Jalal, 2008; McMurray, 2005; and Upton, 2006).

The work of church organizations in the Solomon Islands in the area of social welfare, and research undertaken into commercial sex exploitation of children were used as part of the community needs analysis (Bird, 2007, Herbert, 2007). The role of the church in maintaining community and church leaderships as predominantly male and thus not necessarily reflective of the needs of the women and the children of a community was considered when reviewing these documents.

Part 1: Violence Against Women and Children in the Solomon Islands: Current Contexts of Culture and Practice

1.1. Background

The Solomon Islands is an archipelago positioned south east of Papua New Guinea in the Pacific Ocean. A constitutional monarchy and member of the Commonwealth, SI ranked 135th out of 182 countries surveyed for the 2009 Human Development Index. Since 2000, the government has experienced economic difficulties related to entering bankruptcy, and budget shortfalls of approximately 40% of total funding necessary to meet spending (United Nations, 2010:3). Most budgetary needs are met by overseas aid, most notably from Australia and New Zealand. The effects of globalization have meant that a population previously existing largely through subsistence means has had to adapt to a growing cash economy, a process that has been fraught with difficulty and tension.

1.1.1. The tensions and violence against women and children

The civil conflict beginning in late 1999 and culminating with the 2003 RAMSI intervention was the result of ongoing conflict between the Gwale people of Guadalcanal and immigrants from nearby Malaita (ATTACH MAP). As well, the June 2000 coup by the Malaitan Eagle Force ousted the government of Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, claiming he had failed to prevent deaths and crimes committed against Malaitans as a result of the civil conflict (Moore, 2004). Whilst the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army dominated the countryside, approximately 20,000 Malaitans fled to the capital Honiara, whilst some left Guadalcanal and returned to Malaita (Braithewaite et al, 2010). This period arguably exacerbated an already strong environment of violence particularly against women and children.

During the tensions… girls were being picked up by the military in dark cars, and no one could say anything
Female activist, Honiara
AusAid, 2008:122.

AusAid reported in 2008 that approximately 65% of women aged 15-49 had experienced sexual assault, with real figures thought to be higher due to underreporting (AusAid 2008). Of those women and girls surveyed, 37% experienced sexual violence before the age of 15, indicating the relevance of gender violence when examining child violence and prospects for change. Moreover, ongoing low status of women and children in society has affected economic prospects as women are inhibited from fulfilling their capacity and most children do not attend school above the primary level. The effect of the tensions on women's rights movements, which had endured a period of growing support during the 1990s, was wholly negative (AusAid, 2008:133). Much labour and economic capacity remains significantly underexploited, and there is an absence of economic and entrepreneurial activities, exacerbating links between family violence and socioeconomic capacity. The ratification of treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has been met with apprehension in the Pacific community (Jalal, 2008:4). Adopting universal human rights norms such as those outlined in these treaties was in direct conflict with the collective nature of traditional Pacific village societies. Issues such as domestic violence and its effect on women have not been correctly

labeled as affecting the girl child also. This places severe limitations on the use of significant statistical indicators of child abuse in SI.

1.1.2. Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

The 2003 launch of RAMSI was preceded by a request from the Governor General of the Solomon Islands and a unanimous vote in parliament for outside military help. Prior to this, Prime Minister Ulufa'alu in April 2000 had unsuccessfully requested stabilizing security forces be sent from the international community (Braithewaite et al, 2010). The Malaitan Eagle Force and its spokesperson Andrew Nori forced Ulufa'alu's resignation in June after seizing control of arms stores and instigating a period of instability until mid 2003. In July of that year, as a result of central government ineffectiveness and evidence mainly in rural areas of the use of traditional Melanesian methods of leadership and governance rather than the colonial model adopted by Honiara, the situation had again escalated. The Governor General of SI requested intervention in what was perceived by the international community as a situation quickly descending into a potential civil war. Australian Prime Minister John Howard and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer quickly responded by leading a mission with other governments in the region aimed at restoring order to what quickly became known as a 'failed state' (Fraenkel, 2004:181). Howard had previously refused to send a force to SI when Ulufa'alu had requested it in April 2000, and then relented later in 2003 with the installation of RAMSI. This was arguably evidence of the existence of the intervention as more a result of the newly perceived threat to regional stability that a complete breakdown and potential descent into civil war in SI may have had than a strictly humanitarian, peacebuilding exercise. Essentially, RAMSI aimed to restore law and order and aid the government in regaining the confidence of the SI population.

The instigation of RAMSI in 2003 had mixed implications for the status of women and children. Previously, prior to the 2000 coup, women had formed a Reconciliation and Peace committee, aimed at pacifying grievances between forces engaged in sporadic fighting (Braithewaite et al, 2010:31). In one of the more positive developments of the RAMSI intervention, accountability institutions have been reportedly strengthened (Allen, 2006). This may arguably have had positive affects on reporting of violence against women and children, though more rigorous quantitative analysis of reporting of incidences versus charges and convictions would be required to support this. The work of RAMSI is reported by the mission itself as overwhelmingly positive, with a 2007 survey carried out on approximately 5,000 Solomon Islanders in Honiara and surrounds found that 90% felt that RAMSI should remain in the country. Aidwatch produced a more rigorous analysis of this survey, however, which also indicated that whilst nearly all the respondents knew of RAMSI, only 12% had spoken to an officer, even though 63% had seen one (Aidwatch, 2008:9). Coupled with this, in 2006, Prime Minister Sogavare accused RAMSI personnel of engaging prostitutes and covering up the deaths of Solomon Islanders in road accidents (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007). These charges coupled with Aidwatch analysis indicate the context in which the perceived successes or failures of RAMSI must be considered, particularly concerning violence against women and children. Prostitution is illegal in the Solomon Islands and engagement in it by RAMSI staff, if correct, gives rise to the threat of exploitation of the very people they are engaged to protect.

1.1.3. Social structure, culture and prospects for community engagement

Social norms in SI are best considered on a village-to-village basis rather than a one-size-fits-all national or even provincial approach. Village culture in Melanesia has persisted for approximately 12,000 years whilst national structures of governance are of recent colonial import (circa 1890). It is in this context that greater national consensus on development aims has been achieved. Specifically, cooperation and discourse via the church structure have more similarities with the power structure of a village than more traditionally democratic vehicles of information transfer (Bird, 2007:6). Village leaders are often the local church leader also, creating a system of overlap which is both advantageous and disadvantageous depending on the aims of that leader. Most importantly, the small size of SI may actually be positive in terms of social change in the presence of political will and greater mobilization of support in preventing gender violence and abuses of children's rights, though the disparate, scattered nature of the population is problematic.

In social terms, lack of dialogue due to the shaming effect of public knowledge of abuse and violence against children has mitigated accurate reporting (Herbert, 2007:4). This indicates the issue may be much more prevalent than what is presented in current statistics. Different church organizations, including a number of evangelical churches that have enjoyed growing support, have influence at all political levels and on development efforts. The Church of Melanesia, for example, produced a landmark report on the commercial sexual exploitation of children in remote areas of SI, whilst SI religious organizations have collaborated with AusAid funded studies of the involvement of religion in services provision and widespread governance (Herbert, 2007, MacDougall, 2008). Christian concepts feature heavily in political discourse. Christianity is interpreted through the lens of Melanesian culture, such that aspects of religion may appear manifestly different from Western perspectives of Christian norms and values. Aspects of *kastom* such as the potential to gain status as chief of the village through brute force clash directly with Western human rights norms, as do attitudes toward young girls and bride price, or the sexual exploitation of children for financial gain (United Nations, 2008). Despite the ingrained nature of church organizations in SI, aspects of *kastom* remain dominant in social structures and community.

1.1.4. *Kastom, wantok* and public attitudes to violence

Collection of information about 'tabu' topics, such as sexual activity, can be extremely difficult in the Solomon Islands, particularly in communities which are in remote areas and which have strong kastom and religious values and practices.
Herbert, 2007:6

Kastom is the traditional way of being and operating within SI cultures, as distinct from colonial or 'whiteman' notions of culture and behaviour (Hassall and Associates, 2003). Avoiding shame and not losing face is very important. In the western sense of family, the Solomon Islander notion of family responsibility and negotiation may be regarded as nepotism; a request from a family member cannot be denied (Unicef, 2010). Similarly, *wantok,* meaning 'one talk' is fundamental to Melanesian culture, indicates bonds of culture and languare, but may also mean in a broader sense from the same island within SI or simply being a citizen of SI if travelling overseas (Fraenkel, 2004:206). The different demands of *kastom, wantok* and more recent imports in culture and behaviour create underlying tensions. This is reflected in national corruption and misappropriation issues particularly in national governance, and is thought to occur heavily on both provincial and village levels also. When considering the necessity for social transformation in terms of development, 'the state is not always neutral and should not be left to be the prime agent of social

transformation' (Dhanraj et al, AWID 2004). Inasmuch as this is true in SI, the state to date has made some attempts at effecting improvements in the rights of women and children from a legislative standpoint. Despite this, judicial and regulatory advances are painfully slow, arguably in some part due to cultural constrictions and values (Jalal, 2008:12).

Representatives of government have publicly acknowledged the prevailing social problems in SI. The development of the Social Welfare Division (SWD) at the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs is evidence of this acknowledgement. Despite these efforts, implementation of preventative and remedial measures is problematic. This is due to the segmented nature of village systems in SI. The sheer lack of reach of government renders these efforts somewhat ineffective outside Honiara, indeed, 'some communities have now almost forgotten' government borders and jurisdictions (Hassall and Associates, 2003:20). The government began a process of withdrawal from rural areas in 1997 (UNDP, 2002). Since this time, outside Honiara and some large provincial towns, little official presence is felt. The SWD did introduce a Community Welfare Volunteer Scheme following the earthquake and tsunami in 2007, as well as the coordination of the Taskforce Addressing the Commercial Exploitation of Children, which also involved RAMSI, UNICEF and other organizations, which engaged in awareness raising of CSEC associated with the logging industry (Solomon Times, 2008). The local government tier, however, has largely disappeared save for some medical clinics and policing. Villages have little to do with government and there is much more emphasis on village chiefs whose authority lies in their accumulation and distribution of wealth and associated influence. Much more than national policy, values regarding children's rights and protection are derived from the idiosyncrasies of each individual village and its culture, leading to significant differences between national policy direction and issues manifested at the community level.

1.2. Current Issues

1.2.1. Lawlessness

The withdrawal of government from rural areas after 1997 removed to an extent the cultural clash between colonial notions of rights and responsibilities derived from being a Member of the Commonwealth, and *kastom*. Specifically, the removal of local governments enabled villages to continue as they had been previously in terms of community structures and rules. The withdrawal led to the reemergence of village corporations, however, renewing tensions over land rights and other issues, particularly in areas dominated by the forestry industry.

Even more than during the tensions, efforts at legislative enforcement have become less and less successful as the influence of the government has faded, with the obvious exception of legislative enforcement carried out by the RAMSI intervention. Certainly, the withdrawal has led to an absence of faith in government as the provider of social stability at the village level due to financial incapacity, coupled with a prevailing view of government as not concerned with rural priorities and needs (Hassall and Associates, 2003). Women and children, in particular, do not have their opinions and problems heard, and influence is usually confined to older men. In the past year, women have been voted into and returned to provincial assemblies, and a Women's Party has been established, but progress is slow. In terms of violence against women and children, as is the case with the rest of the Pacific, there is a paucity of reform driven in no small part by the lack of governmental cohesiveness and the breadth of governmental reach outside Honiara and provincial centres (Huffer, 2006).

1.2.2. Cultural conflict with the rights and protection of women/children

Debate regarding development in SI has emphasized the difficulty in adequately defining the direction in which non-formal education systems, prevalent particularly in rural areas, should take (AusAid, 2003). Specifically, whether time and resources should be devoted toward production for fiscal benefit, or toward broader social goals. When considering community harmony, these two points become significantly interrelated. Typically, one family member may be supporting up to fifteen other members of his or her family as the only recipient of monetary income. This has had an impact on the desire of the courts to prosecute alleged domestic violence cases, as it would mean loss of a 'breadwinner' (United Nations, 2008:7). The fact that this is only implemented during domestic and child violence cases, rather than mainstream crimes, indicates the lack of reliability on the judicial system to support victims and enforce law and order. Village councils remain the most common forum for hearing complaints and are often more geared toward reconciliation than punishment. This is inherently problematic given violence against children, particularly sexual violence, is a recidivist crime. Failing to prosecute the breadwinner in the courts is often also a result of the cultural incapacity of the Solomon Islander to refuse the demand of a relative or friend. This aspect of SI culture has implications for stability at all levels of society, but conversely, is considered imperative in the village sense to uphold collective stability. It is this peculiar function of Melanesian village society that, in conjunction with the allowance of liberal individualism amongst male village members, has contributed to many of the problems for children's rights in SI. In its recent gender violence study, the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs acknowledged the excusing away of family violence as the result of a misinterpretation of traditional collectivist notions held in regard by many rural Solomon Islanders, and the financial incapacity of the government to remedy this without significant aid. On the other hand, church organizations as part of the community structure have experienced some success in community education and facilitating learning and change in this area, as has the Community Welfare Volunteers Scheme, implemented by the Social Welfare Division, which involved community members 'creating awareness' on issues such as child abuse (Basi, 2008).

Traditional methods of organizing contribute more directly to peoples well-being than do institutionalised systems of formal government
Upton, 2006:14

As has been demonstrated, the clash between collectivism and women's and children's rights in SI is exacerbated by the absence of government at the local level. The intrinsically linked nature of church organizations and community structures in SI has proven beneficial for the introduction of education regarding the negative nature of a lack of access to rights for children. However, this must be considered in the context of many church and community leaders being male, and often being perpetrators of violence themselves.

1.2.3. Violence: contributing factors

A lack of income producing opportunities may arguably be considered a cause and a result of high levels of violence. This is particularly evident where there are few engaging in paid work, and the structure and attitude of the judicial system may uphold socio cultural norms that promote violence against women and children. As is the case with informal village councils, the current judicial structure emphasizes the importance of 'family reunification' rather than accountability and criminal charges (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009:169). This creates problems as women and children who do not wish to have their complaint heard before a usually all male village council are

often met with a similar, albeit more official situation when taking matters before official courts. In order to circumvent these issues, accurately defining how to best implement measures to encourage more widespread income producing activity would mean that the breadwinner defence may hold less sway in informal and formal judicial systems. Appropriate development and improvement in this area is particularly complex in the context of a still largely subsistence economy with few major export and production opportunities outside logging and *copra,* or coconut kernel. Economic capacity at all levels in SI requires substantial innovation for successful sustainable development.

1.2.4. Priorities, needs and issues affecting men and male youth

The *Family Health and Safety Study* reported that 64% of women aged 15-49 who had ever been in relationships had experienced physical or sexual assault by an intimate partner (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009:v). Further, men who engaged in physical violence against other men were more likely to engage in sexual or physical assault against a partner or children (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009:61). Very few women and children escape these situations, due to the negative social stigma attached to leaving the family unit. There are a number of factors that appear to create the disaffectedness amongst men and boys that contributes to violence, factors which have been raised by men themselves. Young men in the rural Solomon Islands are often left out of decision-making in village activities and suffer from a lack of income generating activities. 25% of the total population of the Solomon Islands is aged from 15-29, the vast majority of which have attained primary level education only. Unemployment is a pervasive issue amongst young men, particularly in Honiara. Young men participating in a rural youth needs study overwhelmingly expressed their desire for greater income-making opportunities and access to community development schemes (Hassall and Associates, 2003:28). It is this point that correlates with the tendency within informal and formal justice systems to allow a breadwinner guilty of abusing the rights of children and women to walk free.

1.2.5. Priorities, needs and issues affecting children

The level of abuse experienced by women at the hands of their partners in the Solomon Islands is prescient when considering rates of child abuse and violence; for example, 36% of women who reported incidences of rape and violence perpetrated by an intimate partner had a child or children who had been 'emotionally, physically or sexually abused' by the partner concerned (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009:87). Approximately 42% of girls involved in the same study had been abused or not consented to sexual acts prior to the age of 15. As mentioned in Table One, the *loci* consideration of young girls as objects of sexual fulfillment is prevalent and threatens their educational, social and emotional development. In isolated rural areas, attempts at fostering export industries in logging, for example, have actually contributed to a rise in violence and abuse of children's rights in the form of child commercial sexual exploitation or CSEC (Herbert, 2007). A 2007 study of the logging industry in Arosi province found incidences of child prostitution, children being sold into marriage, sexual abuse and pornography. In at least some of these cases, men from logging companies, predominantly Malaysian nationals, were responsible (Herbert 2007:5). Despite these findings, however, it is important to note the limited geographic region and sample size from which research findings were taken. The driving factors behind CSEC in this instance were reportedly money for non-essential use, indicating issues associated with the conflict between traditional subsistence and the growing cash economy. As well as these immediate issues affecting children, logging in SI is an unsustainable practice that threatens future economic

development and prospects for exporting. In this sense, children are victims of both sexual exploitation and robbed of future economic capacity and prospects. Besides the immediacy and seriousness of issues relating to violence and abuse, there are a broader range of issues in SI that threaten child protection and children's rights both now and in the future.

The situation faced by many children and youth, boys and girls alike, raises serious concerns for future development prospects. Children who are victims of violence and abuse are much less likely to realize their academic potential. Moreover, the intergenerational nature of violence is such that high levels of normalized violence persist, as attitudes regarding what is and is not appropriate are not really challenged via formal or informal educational avenues. The stunted reach of government exacerbates these problems, as does the continued lack of representation of women on village corporations, though there are some exceptions. Services that deteriorated as a result of the tensions have not been reinstated, and women's groups remain burdened with the bulk of domestic violence cases, as indicated in Table Two. Depending on the economic status of the perpetrator, a court may refuse to punish him. This has particular ramifications for the protection and rights of women and children because of the recidivist nature of crimes commonly perpetrated against them.

1.2.6. Prospects for change

Despite the isolation of some areas, there are aspects of SI power structures and information dissemination that may be considered advantageous to social change in the presence of political will and greater mobilization of women's NGOs. The persistence of church structures and high levels of attendance means that an avenue for distribution of information and support is already in existence. The impressive self-reliance of many Solomon Islanders means that the capacity to form networks of support and education is extremely positive, perhaps due to the absence of official structures. It may be argued, then, that the effective enfranchisement of village corporations and church organizations may prove the most successful avenue to provide education and support for women and children who are victims of violence, and, importantly, for men also. Problems also persist; specifically, an over reliance on the NGO sector to bring about change and development in fact negates its own efforts in the realm of violence against women and children; as the government effects little legislative change and there is a de-emphasis on the ongoing responsibility of greater social democracy and its role in services provision (Bird, 2008). The overwhelmingly positive evaluations of church work in the literature used (produced by the churches themselves) must be considered in the broader context of predominantly male church structures that mirror the community leadership structure, and of church missions and the clash they may have or have had with traditional SI cultures. It has been noted that Solomon Islanders have little faith in the government and many see it as an ineffective, overarching structure with little concern in their business, impeding its already limited capacity to influence societal opinion and therefore positive change via national governance (Moore, 2004). Conversely, however, Fraenkel noted that the state was 'historically introduced…but becoming ever more indigenous', indicating the growing role national government has had in SI culture (Fraenkel, 2004). The impact of RAMSI on the perceived role of the state for Solomon Islanders may not be fully realized until its exit from the country.

1.2.7. Educational issues

As demonstrated, there is a lack of emphasis, or perhaps a lack of understanding, of the damage violence against women and children causes, at all levels of society, but most notably at the village level, and in Honiara. Reunification tactics of dealing with family violence and ineffectual policing structures coupled with the societal opinion that women do not belong in community affairs has ramifications for not only women's rights but also has a serious impact on children's rights. Whilst RAMSI has acted as a stabilizing force within SI since 2003, continual failure to recognize this in the name of preservation of community stability does not achieve its end, but rather, impedes it. At present, most children achieve primary education levels only and secondary and tertiary education is out of the reach of most people, particularly in rural areas. In this context, violence and abuses of children's rights will persist at least in terms of deprivation of the right to an education and the persistence through generations of violence and protection issues. A lack of capacity to continue education feeds directly into the problem of the 'youth bulge' in rural provinces, an issue blamed in part for the conflict and tensions of the late 90s/early 2000s. This is poignant because of low levels of income earning capacity and educational attainment amongst women. A correlation may be made between a desire to attain further education or a good job and the danger of enduring violence in that capacity. A 2009 national government policy aimed at enrolling more girls in primary school made enrolling in education free, but at present, there are few high schools and opportunities for tertiary education, with those available being accessed by a select few due to financial limitations.

1.2.8. Conflict and violence against women/children

Some women reported that there was a decrease in violence during the tensions period. The main reason for this, according to surveys, was that it became more important for families to work together and protect each other (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009:84). Despite these reports, however, the literature overwhelmingly indicates that violence including gang rape of both women and girls became more prevalent during this period, as mentioned in Table Two (AusAid, 2008). The gradual rollback of government services during this time may arguably have also contributed to an increase in violence following the conflict; but this can only be applied to the village context. Family violence is most prevalent in Honiara, arguably the best serviced area in the entire country. It is important to note, however, that the prevalence of violence in Honiara as compared to the countryside may be attributed to more vigilant reporting and access to support and justice. This indicates the complex nature of child protection in SI and the need for a more nuanced approach supported by national policy frameworks and recommendations, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

There are economic implications both for the implementation of policies aimed at providing support to victims of domestic and child violence and also for the failure to implement legislative changes. SI has persistently endured a 'intractable situation'; lack of finance impedes social development, whilst social development impedes the economic development needed for generating these funds (Hassall and Associates, 2003:52). Despite this being a national problem, however, the solution and capacity for circumventing this problem arguably lies at the local level in the enfranchisement of youth in new opportunities. The sense of uselessness felt by many youth is undoubtedly a major cause of violence perpetrated against women and children, and a lack of capacity to obtain income is mirrored in the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Arosi Province. Economically speaking, the government is dependent on the forestry and logging industry but this has implications both in terms of the sexual exploitation of children and for future environmental issues,

as well as being an extremely finite resource. Outside Honiara, decision-making is dominated by male community members, whose authority and status may be threatened by attempts to change the power structure in a way that is beneficial for the rights and protection of women and children. As such, many decision makers may have a vested interest in continuing to uphold negative and unequal socio-cultural attitudes. The re-encroachment of national and provincial governments at the village level threatens this. Despite these tendencies, however, national leaders have acknowledged that widespread violence against women and children is not in keeping with traditional values of 'the health and well-being of family' as vitally important in SI culture (Pacific Secretariat). On the other hand, church organisations have had some success in educating people of the need to uphold the rights and protection of women and children. This becomes problematic, however, when considering that within church organizations themselves, unequal power structures may exist and colour their work in the broader SI community. Table Two indicates the most serious issues and current dialogue at different levels of governance and society in the Solomon Islands.

Part 2: Structural Needs Assessment: Analysis.

2.1. Declining Quality of Life, the Status of Children and Government Attempts at Effecting Change

Since the Solomon Islands achieved political independence in 1978, living standards and income for the vast majority of the population have barely improved, with real income per capita in fact trending downwards (Asian Development Bank, 2008:1). This was sharply exacerbated by the tensions. SI remains one of the world's poorest nations, and children remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy despite the professed collective nature of society. Further to this disadvantage, amongst children, girls are considered of less valued. Girls, more so than boys, are frequently taken out of school to perform work within family income producing activities and high rates of teenage pregnancy, fueled by high rates of sexual violence, exacerbate this. The disconnect between government and local communities, particularly in remote contexts, has created further difficulties with regard to strengthening institutions and enhancing the rights of women and children. Despite these issues, however, at the national level, work has been undertaken in the area of women and children's rights. The Government has outlined improvements to Social Welfare as one of its top immediate priorities (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009). Perhaps the most important factor impeding progress on prevention of violence against women and children is the relative fluidity with which governments have changed in SI: prior to the vote of no confidence which ousted Sogavare in 2007, there had been a children's rights bill before cabinet for consideration. Government instability is a significant factor because it has prevented, and may continue to prevent, progress in children's rights that needs to be undertaken slowly and in an environment of stable governance. A lack of funding, coupled with incidences of mismanagement also impact negatively, but funding received from UNICEF and other organizations such as AusAid is tightly accounted for and has been utilized to undertake nation wide research, statistics from which are referenced in this article. Further to these issues, the tsunami and earthquake of 2007 meant that in order to coordinate disaster response, the previously used Social Welfare Division Strategic Plan suffered due to necessary redirection of resources. Despite this disruption, however, the SI Government launched a Child Protection Program for 2008-2012 in partnership with UNICEF (UNICEF, 2009). Thus, despite real attempts at the enhancement of children's rights and violence prevention in SI, significant and arguably unavoidable factors have made steady progress difficult.

2.2. Power, Ownership and Decision-Making: Shifting Emphasis

Whilst there have been changes in more recent times following the tensions of the early 2000s, political structures on a local, provincial and national level in the Solomon Islands act at times in a contrary fashion to the positive promotion of community development, particularly in terms of child protection and the creation of social work networks. The retraction of local governments following the tensions hampered any opportunities available for building grassroots models of governance converse to the traditional power structures of a chief or community leader. Coupled with this, notions of community ownership of land were proven somewhat difficult to facilitate due to a lack of documentation (Larden and Sullivan, 2008). The conflict between traditional communitarianism and the need for national regulation of land led to the ownership of land eventually being delegated to a community leader for administrative purposes, exacerbating inequality for women and

children. This means that ownership of land in SI provides power, and that women's and children's rights and social work and support still lie in the hands of predominantly male village authorities. Women's participation in Parliament has been limited to only a handful of members at the provincial level and just a single female member of the national parliament since 1978 (Hilda Kari). Given the lack of representation in government and on a village leadership level of women, it is fair to argue that the SI governments at all levels will continue to have difficulty in formulating responses to child protection and domestic violence in the context of social welfare provision. Access to resources such as land and capacity for decision-making are intrinsically linked to economic capacity and thus current and future status of children's welfare.

2.3. Emphasising Balance in Narratives on Children's Rights

In terms of child protection, given the responsibility of the child is left largely in the hands of the mother, a more prominent female perspective would do well to shift current values and provide an environment in which support networks may be developed. As mentioned, access to power and decision-making would further permit this. The Health and Safety Study surveyed male Solomon Islanders with regard to issues preventing development in the area of family violence and support networks, and the four most prevalent were alcohol, gender inequality, acceptability of violence for disciplinary purposes, and gender inequality. The recent creation of a political party comprised of women indicates the changing power basis in the Solomon Islands, but threats received by its members indicated there is much to be done to improve the status of women and children (Solomon Star News, 2010). The National Children's Policy Strategy and Outline Plan of Action For Children (Draft 2003) highlighted the importance of children's welfare but a bill has yet to pass parliament (Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, 2003). Thus whilst the government has publicly indicated its desire to adopt child rights and protection measures, no action has been taken. While there is a lack of balance in parliament and political mechanisms, advancing the case for children's rights and protection will remain difficult in the wake of vocal opposition to the adoption of human rights norms at 'the expense' of traditional SI culture.

Building governance and making structural reforms that enhance political processes that are inclusive and participatory is vital in order to promote children's welfare.
'Plus 5' Review of the 2002 Special Session on Children and World Fit for Children Plan of Action, Solomon Islands Country Report.

2.4. Narratives, Children's Rights and Traditional Culture in Remote Regions

The use of culture as a defense or reason for continuing practices of abuse or subordination is weak, particularly given the manner in which the SI government has recently emphasized the need for a shift in attitudes to children's rights and protection. The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child removes any real defense of rights abuses as being cultural given the objective. Moreover, there are conflicting attitudes as to whether the level of emphasis traditional culture or more recently imposed colonial culture have had on family violence and children's rights. The context of culture as 'part of the process through which any social organization develops or reproduces itself' indicates fluidity and capacity to adapt to change (Phillips, 2010:57). This is further upheld by commitments in recent years to institutional and community change in how women and children are treated before the law and as citizens in the Solomon Islands. Poignantly,

however, this has not filtered to the community or grassroots level, with the exception of work undertaken by church groups, or by organizations such as the Family Support Centre in Honiara. Given the need for effective child protection at the grassroots in SI, most notably for young girls, problems of gender inequality prove more pervasive than at first glance. As noted, there is a lack of representation of women at all levels of government, with the exception of five members at the provincial level (Solomon Star News, 25/8/2010). The male population is almost solely responsible for the construction of dominant narratives in public discourse, particularly regarding social welfare. This, coupled with the customary nature of governance at village level and the dislocated nature of communities, reinforces dominant paradigms regarding children's rights, sex and power. Global discourse regarding violence and child protection indicates that relying on the state to be 'the prime agent' of social transformation and development is disingenuous(Asian Development Bank, 2009:4). Given inequality in representation between the sexes in SI, this has particular relevance to the concept of children's rights and welfare. Working collaboratively with communities, the challenge lies in creating social welfare networks that are in the power of the government, strengthening and furthering its reach into rural communities. The Community Welfare Volunteer Scheme was positive in this respect because it allowed communities to select a volunteer not involved in the local church leadership, potentially circumventing the concentration of power.

Already, the work of NGOs at the grass roots and the growing efforts of the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs have made some inroads via the CWVS but in many cases, sheer inaccessibility and remoteness makes progress in some regions slow (Bird, 2008). Certainly a recent UNICEF study on violence in SI found that in only 15% of cases of violence or abuse against children, formal authorities were involved (UNICEF, 2010:121). In the Arosi region reports of child brides and prostitution painted a stark picture of the issues which arose in the face of changing paradigms of material expectations and the growth of the international logging industry, issues which remain largely out of the reach of both national and provincial governance simply due to the remote nature of the region (Herbert, 2007). Other NGOs such as Save the Children and Oxfam International provide fundamental support to growth in government involvement in child protection.

Development work in the Solomon Islands was slowed most notably by the conflict and tensions of the early 2000s though there was a drop in incidences of violence. The absence of gender equality coupled with severe resource scarcity at all levels of government has exacerbated this issue. Unemployment remains a serious and pervasive issue in Honiara today amongst young men, a significant factor in incidence of child violence (UNICEF: 2010). As demonstrated, gender violence and violations of children's rights and protection are not mutually exclusive in SI. When viewed as interlinked issues, a broader picture of root causes becomes apparent. Whilst women and children remain of a lower social status than men, this will persist.

2.5. Social Work, Support Networks and Prospects: Analysis

In terms of the existence of social work networks in SI, there are conflicting reports. Recently UNICEF indicated that there were no social workers in the country; though there are social workers employed by the Social Welfare Division, they do not have formal social work qualifications, rather having participated in informal training and workshops. From a formal perspective this may be the case. However, the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs reported that some social workers existed on an often voluntary and ad hoc basis, indicating that capacity for further development is most certainly available but financial support is sorely limited. The need for a

gender-based assessment of the situation is also significant given the unequal representation of men in official roles and the effect this has on policy making.

Countries with a Parliament that has more balanced representation of men and women are generally less corrupt, more peaceful and make more effective government decisions for the benefit of all their citizens.
The Women in Shared Decision Making Group of the Solomon Islands, 25th August 2010 (Solomon Star News).

As indicated, traditional culture in the Solomon Islands may in fact improve official child rights and protection policies due to the capacity of the village power structure, often aligned with church structures, to provide a system of knowledge and skills transfer. There is conflicting evidence as to the status of women prior to colonial imposition in Melanesia, certainly, in some provinces, such as Malaita, property is handed down the matriarchal line. Some of the more worrying aspects of violence and subordination are arguably products of white missionary intervention into traditional culture. The capacity of the government to effectively harness this remains an impeding factor. As well, traditional culture has proved something of a hurdle to effective implementation of government and non-government measures to improve social work support to meet community needs. Thus implementation of community child welfare measures may be more difficult due to the conflicts within various power structures that could otherwise be utilized effectively. The Community Welfare Scheme has, however, managed to connect local communities with the SWD via scheduled SWD visits to volunteers within communities (Fawcett, 2008). Previously, the use of the Church system to provide support and assistance in issues such as family violence has proved successful. This is due to the close relationship many Solomon Islanders have with religion, and the way the church structure often mirrors the traditional village structure. The main problem associated with this is that men still dominate head roles in the church, providing another barrier to gender equality and often reinforcing negative community stereotypes, particularly of women and girls. This imbalance must be rectified before the church structure can be utilized so that women's voices are heard.

2.6. Social Work Education

Further capacity development may be best undertaken through the establishment of social work education and training within SI, creating an additional avenue for young people to access further education in this respect. This may be impeded, however, by the lack of capacity amongst the technical colleges in SI to cope with the establishment of new courses in the social sciences as well as a lack of government funding in this area and limited nongovernmental funding availability. The SI Government has provided scholarships for students to study abroad previously, but there has been no emphasis on social work or social welfare. The Solomon Islands College of Higher Education has a social science department but its capacity for expansion into the social work sector is very limited. The church groups and NGOs remain the most important facilitators of change, through support to government departments or their own projects, for example the support Oxfam has provided to the Family Support Centre, or the work of Save the Children. It would be worthwhile for these organizations to consider in-country training to build the existing capacity of schemes such as the Community Welfare Scheme. Given the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs has produced the Family Health and Safety Study, significant capacity exists in this organization to implement a child protection and social work position aimed solely at

developing volunteer networks, and with further funding, enhancing these networks already in place.

As mentioned, the main issue in SI regarding social work provision and development for children's rights is the fact that the government may have overemphasized the role of non-government organizations, in order to release itself from the responsibility and thus associated costs of community provision. The significant financial incapacity of the government is certainly not in question, but what has evolved as a result of this is a lack of official presence regarding what is right and appropriate in terms of children's rights and protection issues. It must be noted, however, that despite these shortcoming, the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry for Women's, Youth and Children's Affairs has and is working with UNICEF and non government organizations to try to remedy this. International organizations such as UNICEF accept that developing nations such as SI will not effectively adopt children's rights and protection measures instantly upon ratification of the Hague Convention. What is important is that the government is seen to be actively engaging itself in constant efforts at improvement and encouragement of discourse around pacific notions of human rights paradigms in the broader universal context.

2.7. Kastom and Child Protection in SI

2.7.1. *Wantok* and globalization

The *wantok* system previously provided for the safety of children via reciprocal responsibilities between families and collectivism. The rise of the cash economy has led in some areas to the commodifying of young girls via 'bride price', most notably demonstrated in the commercial logging areas of Arosi (Herbert, 2007:5). Save the Children and UNICEF have worked within communities inclusively to build on this cultural strength and endeavour to reduce the negative aspects of globalization in this respect. In Government terms, child protection policies are not strong and the capacity of the government to apply social work, legal judgements and family intervention is limited (See Table Two). The middle layer of NGO activity in SI is under-utilized. Specifically, work at the grassroots level and support to the national government is not connected at the middle level across the provincial governments. The lack of employment for youth in SI is perhaps the primary factor contributing to continuing child protection issues coupled with a lack of opportunities to access education and health services. This may get worse given the median age of the population is twenty years and will double within three decades (Booth et al, 2006). These factors place pressure on resources and hamper future capacity.

2.7.2. Child Protection and rights in the context of *wantok*

Western-centric notions of child protection have been met with barriers in the Solomon Islands, perhaps due to their liberal individualist view and the conflict that has with the collective nature of village cultures in SI. The dominant western concept of the 'single body as a biological entity' may conflict with the Melanesian notion of the body as 'socially and collectively constituted' (Knauft, 1999:26). It is this particular cultural schism that has not boded well for the concept of children's rights and protection in the Solomon Islands. Despite this, the issue is much more complex than a simple question of the idea of the individual person versus the collective community. In the case of the Herbert study on the logging industry and the resultant commercial sexual exploitation of children, it may be prudent to consider this in the context of the body as part of a collective group of biological entities rather than a single child (Herbert, 2007). Where this is dangerous, however,

is that it paves the way for a kind of explaining away of the need for real progress in social welfare frameworks for children in SI. Justification is provided for the continually high levels of child abuse and family violence without retribution on the basis of maintaining community tranquility and stability. What that creates, however, is an environment where the collective, or women and children, are subjected to a patriarchal hierarchy, the leading members of which enforce the notion of the collective whilst failing to uphold it in personal terms. Despite the danger in using collectivist notions of culture to explain away high statistical reporting of child abuse and family violence, it is true that this has had a negative impact on efforts of the SI government to introduce child protection frameworks into SI legislation. A draft framework was drawn up in 2008 but since then the bill has yet to enter parliament. The SI Government has, like other Pacific governments, previously argued that the community focus of Pacific cultures directly diverges from the notion of universal human rights, which are pursued in communities at the expense of the collective good. The economic cost of failing to address problems of children's rights and protection via education and welfare provision will be felt for decades if not quickly addressed.

Culture ought to take precedence over human rights because it preserves identity and the good of the community in an uncertain and rapidly changed world
Pacific Culture and Human Rights, 2006:12

The debate around Pacific cultures versus the introduction of universal human rights norms such as those outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child is often fueled by the misconception that authoritarian rule may promote economic success (UNICEF, 2010:15). This particular view of authoritarianism may be developed when considering the economic achievements of Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew. The idea that individual freedoms cannot coexist with Solomon Islander notions of collectivism fails to consider the fluidity with which culture changes and renegotiates in a society. Solomon Islanders themselves have indicated their desire to develop a child rights and protection system. Often those who oppose the uptake of universal human rights norms may themselves benefit from a refusal to recognize universal human rights paradigms. This view is slowly changing amongst national governments in the Pacific. The slow rate of progress in understanding the relationship between the adoption of human rights norms and future economic prowess can in some part be attributed to the low status of women and the failure of the makeup of Pacific parliaments. Indeed, the SI national and provincial governments, as almost totally comprised of male representatives as they are, do not reflect the makeup of society. It is fair to conclude from this point that their decisions may not necessarily reflect the rights and responsibilities then, of society as a whole. As well as government, within the collective societies of SI there still remains a professed environment of patriarchal hierarchy at the bottom of which is children. The idea that preserving cultural and community stability must come at the expense of a child's right to a life free from abuse is rendered somewhat futile in the context of the economic instability family and domestic violence causes in the SI. The challenge for advocates of universal human rights is to demonstrate to the government the economic cost both in current and future terms of child abuse and domestic violence. There is no data available to quantify the cost to the economy of violence against women and children in SI. However, in Australia, for example, in 2003, it was estimated to have been $9.9 billion (Access Economics, 2004:p.vii). Given the much higher levels of incidence per capita in SI, as a proportion of GDP it would arguably be higher.

Realistically, the most significant problem gripping SI is the level of Government revenue and income versus the funding needed to effectively grow and manage national infrastructure, particularly in terms of health and education. In a nation where one person's income may support

as many as 35 people, the significance of resource scarcity is reflected in every aspect of daily life. Importantly, UNICEF reported that the Convention on the Rights of the Child would not have been ratified in SI if additional resources from NGOs and interested groups had not been provided, along with years of advocacy efforts (UNICEF, 2010). The government has itself acknowledged the poor quality of public administration and structure fragmentation (Pacific Secretariat, 2009). A lack of accountability emphasizes this problem. Child protection statistics usually collated by UNICEF are not available in the Solomon Islands, indicators such as child labour and child marriage. Coupled with the view of violence and protection issues as being 'tabu' under Kastom, this makes a clear picture difficult, exacerbating accountability problems.

2.8. The Tensions:

Apathy and lack of trust in national machinery and its effect on government capacity in future services provision

The removal of local government machinery during the tensions arguably diminished any faith in national government capacity at the grassroots level, particularly outside Honiara. Coupled with this, the centralized Westminster system of government in SI was not suited to the many different *wantoks* and desired regionalism by provinces such as Makira-Ulawa, some of which had expressed the wish to secede, particularly under the Sogavare government (Moore, 2004:159). Any capability or lack thereof in encouraging or evaluating cohesiveness between levels of government must be considered in this context, as well as in the context of *wantoks.* Certainly, the government is disenfranchised not only by these issues but also by financial and technical incapacity. More importantly, this lack of confidence in the government as the vehicle of capacity development is further impacted in the private sector by high unemployment levels and a general lack of motivation (Hassall and Associates, 2003). It is important to remember, however, that high unemployment and lack of motivation in this instance are not considered cultural idiosyncrasies, but rather are to an extent the result of the tensions period. Certainly in the context of violence against women and children, action to negate these issues had been gaining traction prior to the tensions, but government instability and security also impeded progress.

Outsiders working in the Solomon Islands who encounter these symptoms need to think very carefully about the causes. It should never be assumed that they are simply personal deficiencies that can be tackled by stricter management and endless repetitive training.
Christine McMurray, 2005:22.

Part 3. Conclusion: Prospects for Change

Countries with a high respect for human rights and more specifically, children's rights and protection, achieve better economic outcomes and good development progress (Pacific Secretariat, 2009). As well, however, it must be considered that a situation of economic prosperity and continual increases in the standard of development also provide a good environment in which to consider the pursuit of greater human rights and children's rights standards, indicating the complex relationship between these two outcomes. The most notable exception to this argument is China, though it may be argued that better standards of living and development in parts of that country have encouraged its citizens to pursue human rights norms. Certainly, increasing economic and social development in the Chinese example has highlighted the lack of respect the Government has towards human rights and democratic freedoms. If children are able to access a broad range of social services, economic progress and societal wellbeing benefit.

In SI, limited social welfare provision, particularly in the area of child protection, has been undertaken by the government on a limited ad hoc basis, and by nongovernment organizations (UNICEF 2009, Basi, 2008). Despite the moderate success of programs such as the Community Welfare Scheme, resources are extremely limited, and technical expertise arguably is more confined to NGOs and church organizations. This factor is also affected by the competing objectives of the church structure in rural areas, particularly if it mirrors the community leadership structure. Government is not possessed of the capacity to provide basic social services to children, and as a survey of RAMSI showed, by 2007, still more than 80% of those surveyed did not have a school or basic health services in their village (Anderson, 2008). The challenge, then, is to effect change via skills transfer and resources provision from non-state providers to government. The development of a broader range of social science courses in the country's higher education system coupled with development of child welfare legislation frameworks would create a good base for this.

Debate in this area centres on the preparedness of the SI Government to accept responsibility for the provision of children's rights in the context of *kastom*, traditional notions of culture and societal wellbeing. Despite a belief that the ratification of human rights treaties requires earlier acceptance and upholding of human rights, in fact ratification does not require this. The ratification on the behalf of the SI government of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, creates an avenue of support from NGOs and international multilateral institutions such as UNICEF to aid the government in developing an environment of rights realization. Increasingly, the SWD has worked to exploit this and had some success. The SI government and community will benefit from increased emphasis on child rights and protection because of the additional positives this brings, such as universal education.

Economic growth, and social development in SI is predicated on the capacity of its citizens. Enabling children to realize their full potential will maximize this capacity. This support is available in SI to some extent from the government and non-government organizations via services such as the Family Support Centre, but little is available in remote areas. The disconnect and isolation of many Solomon Islanders will remain a challenge in the presence of scarce government resources.

Until recently, the failure to effectively link the high levels of domestic violence with children's rights in SI means that these issues may be seen as isolated and of less impact than when taken into consideration together. Many victims of gender violence are young girls, and many children of

victims of gender violence find themselves abused also (UNICEF Pacific, 2009). Increasing opportunities and potential for income may arguably remove the perceived economic necessity of allowing breadwinners to violate the rights of the most vulnerable in local contexts. In the community context, a lack of support for reporting, the lower social standing of women, geographic isolation and scarce resources all exacerbate the serious effects violence against women and children has on the broader economic, social and political context. Providing support to achieve these ends at the community level remains imperative for continued improvement for SI women and children.

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Annex One: Demographic Indicators

Demographic Indicators	
Population	Approximately 510,000, 95% Melanesian individuals
Health	
Under-five mortality rate: Probability of dying between birth and five years of age, expressed per 1,000 live births.	36[1]
Infant mortality rate: Probability of dying between birth and one year of age, expressed per 1,000 live births.	30[2]
Prevalence of child malnutrition (children under 5).	21%[2]
Education	
Mean years of schooling for adults (2010).	4.5 years[3]
Total adult literacy rate (2005-2008).	77%[2]
Economic	
Household final consumption expenditure per year.	USD $ 1,243[3]
Attitudes to Violence	
Attitudes: Those who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (2002-2009).	Male- 73% Female- 72%[2]
International Standards	
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).	Ratified in 1995
Human development index.	135 out of 182[2]

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[1] UNICEF, United Nations Population Division and United Nations Statistics Division. 2010. Solomon Islands Statistics. Online Article: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/solomonislands_statistics.html. Accessed: 1 April 2011.
[2] Asian Development Bank. 2011. Solomon Islands: Millennium Development Goals. Online Article: http://www.adb.org/SolomonIslands/mdg.asp/ Accessed: 1 April 2011.
[3] United Nations Development Program. 2010. International Human Development indicators. Online Article: http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SLB.html. Accessed: 1 April 2011.

Table One: Needs Assessment: Infrastructure and Support Networks

at Local and Provincial Levels in Social Work provision and child protection; government responses/efforts.

Issue/Phenomena	Support Networks	Development Initiatives/ NGO responses	Community Response/Local/ Provincial/National	Tier of Government/ Response	Capacity for development/ enhancement
Commercial sexual exploitation of Children	Largely community based, problematic in very low income areas. Save the Children has a presence in the remote Arosi region aimed at providing support particularly for girls aged 10 to 18.	Church of Melanesia produced a 2008 report on the issue which highlighted the need for a government response to the issue and the problems associated with a lack of government presence at the local level.	The rise of a cash economy in largely subsistence based areas as demonstrated in Arosi province via CSEC by international logging workers and increased instance of 'bride price' of young girls has indicated some communities have adopted these practices as societal norms (Herbert, 2007).	There is a Public Solicitor's Office in Honiara that provides a range of legal services including custody and child protection on extremely limited resources.	The Herbert (2007) report indicated that CSEC increased dramatically with the arrival of international logging workers who participated in CSEC largely without retribution. 'Taboo' makes speaking out about this problem difficult, as does the schism between collectivist village cultures and the national government machinery.
Gender inequality in government at village, provincial and national levels.	Family Support Centre, Honiara Public Defender, Honiara	Solomon Islands Christian Association facilitates both youth and women's groups.	Establishment of women's political party.	There have been several women elected to government at Provincial level, and just one woman (Hilda Kari, 1989-2001) elected to the National Parliament.	Capacity is mitigated by severe levels of gender violence reported by UNICEF and SWD, because of the effect injury and limited education as a result have on Gross Domestic Product. It is difficult to quantify the effect this has in SI, but an AusAid report estimated it to be 2% of GDP (AusAid, 2008). Solomon Islands culture remains dominated by patriarchy in spite of its alleged collectivism which inhibits national policies

					particularly due to an absence of government presence at the local level.
Prevalence of access to social work, support networks.	The government has some social workers with informal training who work largely on a voluntary basis with infrequent monetary compensation. This model was found to be successful in the areas it was used (Amalia Fawcett, UNICEF).	The Family Support Centre was set up in Honiara in 1995 to combat high levels of family violence. Support is extended to families and individuals over 15 who have experienced gender based violence and abuse. The FSC was the only local NGO to operate during the conflict period. (OXFAM fund this)	Some communities have voiced their concerns over lack of child protection and its effect on future capacity. Support Networks administered through the church systems have had some success in raising awareness.	Government has established system of social workers who operate on an ad hoc basis. Unicef is endeavouring to aid the Social Welfare Division in drafting children's rights and protection policies on a national scale.	The national technical college has a social science department but it is sorely limited in both financial and practical resources in terms of establishing training programs for child protection/support networks. Capacity exists within the Social Welfare Division as it has endeavoured to provide some social work and child protection frameworks visits ad hoc workers/volunteers.
Domestic violence	There is a women's crisis centre in Honiara. Children are also welcome (and are usually affected by domestic violence also). The Ministry of Police has created a sexual assault unit and a family violence unit.	Domestic violence is commonplace and church groups and NGOs have provided workshops about respect and healthy relationships.	In some cases the issue of 'loss of kastom' is thought to be responsible for the increase in gender violence. National leaders have defended SI culture and point to the conflict, high unemployment and a lack of economic prosperity as the culprits. Rather than punitive measures the guilty party and the domestic violence victim are often given	The removal of local governments only exacerbated the problems of domestic violence that increased following the tensions and are some of the highest rates globally. Gender equality issues are discussed but the national government does little and the provincial governments are largely ineffective.	Dialogue surrounding domestic violence has been mainly centred on its place in Solomon Islands culture and how to negotiate this. The SI SWD put out a study on gender violence and has vocally committed itself to ending high incidence of domestic violence. However the lack of government representation at the local level will severely mitigate this, as will the allegedly corrupt and ineffective provincial

			mediation/reconciliation by village chiefs.	Much of the work is left to ill-equipped NGOS.	governments. There is little respect for women in terms of advancing to roles in governance and until this changes respect in domestic terms will remain limited.
Government responses to child abuse/protection and social work provision	The dominant NGOs facilitating discourse in children's rights and protection in the Solomons remain Oxfam, Unicef and Save the Children. On a more local level the church organizations engage in grassroots work. AusAid provides significant budgetary support to the Solomon Islands government as does NZAID.	NGOs have been critical of the government response to child abuse but a failure to respond on the behalf of the government is due to financial incapicty- the increasing role of NGOs is doing nothing to improve this incapacity. Moreover, there is a distinct lack of official presence in terms of what is right and appropriate in the arena of children's rights and protection. This is changing slowly.	Gaining community consensus is reported as both easy (SWD family and child welfare study) and difficult depending on what area of society it originates from. Women in parliament have received death threats and been forced to step down for their personal security. It is obvious that some groups are significantly benefited by the current environment of the Solomon Islands and that this is, in real terms, severely damaging to the status of women and children.	National: in 2003 a draft *National Children's Policy, Strategy and Outline Plan of Action for Children* was created. Draft legislation on a Child Rights Bill has been undertaken. Despite this, these measures have not been implemented at the local level and governance has thus not advanced in this respect.	Since 2002 little progress has been made in the area of Children's rights/protection. Child welfare and protection policy was part of the 2006 'Grand Coalition for Change Government Commitments' but a bill is yet to be introduced to parliament. The main limitation in the development of a national strategy is financial though there are issues of cohesion in terms of community to community response.

Table Two: Violence against children/women and its effects
in current context on personal and governance levels.

Group or level of governance	Current state in community context	Implications	Current preventative measures for VAW/VAC	Dialogue over future
Women (village level)	Women have little community involvement outside the family, women are discouraged from reporting violence, the publicizing of sexual violence may lead to community ostracisation, given these factors social standing is low and precarious. The practice of men undertaking multiple partnerships in the Solomons has become so common in some situations women are referred to as 01,02 and 03 denoting which partner in the relationship they are.	Women's lives and prospects are determined by whether violence is inflicted upon them and whether the community values their input outside the immediate family unit. During and following conflict tensions of 1998-2003 beatings and sexual assaults both within the family and externally became more frequent. Women are objectified and commodified. It is thought that VAW has implications for the education of children in affected families. Most children and youth achieve upper primary education only. Deprivation of the right to education is a form	Little support is available for women in SI. Domestic violence is not always treated by police as a crime. The Family Support Centre in Honiara, run by the Church of Melanesia, is not easily accessed by women from outlying villages. Customary laws within individual villages have meant that the families in which violence is perpetrated may be compensated. If the man is found to be at fault, he must pay compensation to the family of the woman. However, if the reverse is found the battered woman must compensate her husband. Incidences of violence are rarely punished, reconciliation/reunification is considered to be most important.	The national study reported that most women surveyed felt violence perpetrated against them was the direct result of law and order problems. Since 2007 dialogue has indicated the growing recognition of violence against women as a serious impediment to development (AusAid, 130, 2008). Customary laws (Kastom) have meant that speaking out about rape has previously been seen as taboo. The potential of further assaults as the result of this is real. The Federation of Women, part of the Solomon Islands Christian Association, has an extensive network aimed at advancing development as a means of reducing VAW. To date, the most successful dialogue and action in the Solomons has utilized church structures to deliver dialogue and education in this area. Marital rape is not a crime in the Solomon Islands. The UN reports that 'impunity for violence (against women)' creates a higher

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		of violence against children, which means that most SI children given low levels of education attainment have fallen victim to this.		prevalence of its use for control purposes.
Children	Solomon Island cultures have 'from time immemorial' had as their basis the protection of children, and growing violence against children, particularly girls, is seen as the reinterpretation of culture as the basis of introducing violence (Johnson, Study). Underreporting of violence is believed to be widespread indicating the problem is greater than its representation in 2009 data. The normalization of violence became widespread after the conflict.	Children who are victims of violence, particularly girls, are more likely to experience sexual violence as adults. Children of women who are victims of domestic violence are more likely to suffer abuse and violence. Continuing violence against children has implications for future economic and educational prospects, hampering development efforts.	The 2009 Study reported that attitudes toward abuse and violence against children were changing. Policing of international logging boats has increased as the result of a 2007 Church of Melanesia report into commercial sexual exploitation of children by foreigners engaged in the logging industry in rural Solomon Islands.	Save The Children in Honiara aims to engage youth on the issues of gender and child violence. This has encouraged dialogue which directly affects both child and gender violence. The publication of the 2009 government study on violence against women and children produced a number of practical recommendations on the behalf of the government which indicates an increasing recognition of these issues. Women are increasingly forming discussion groups regarding their status in society. Men have expressed their desire to reduce violence against women and children.
Effect of violence on local level	The village culture of the Solomons is often characterized by a high level of violence. The conflict between village societal structures. The encroachment of globalised notions of western society seems to exacerbate this. Rural people form their own methods of government as provincial and national members	Specifically, the growth of a cash economy causes conflict in the familial structure as one person may be supporting a extended family where previously subsistence was sufficient. Moreover, the rise of cash economies has	VAW has the potential to socially disadvantage the victim particularly where sexual assault is concerned. Girls who have been abused are much more likely to be victims of VAW as adults. Decision-making in villages is by consensus; however women are often excluded from this.	As a result of the withdrawal of government from practically all rural areas beginning in 1997 excepting some provincial centres, villages are, for the most part, self governing. Disaffection with government amongst villagers is the result of not receiving state funds at the grass roots. Church organizations have been accused of a similar practice (Youth in Sols final

	rarely visit or consider villages.	led to exploitation of women and children via prostitution and 'paying for favours' (Herbert).		report, 18). Dialogue indicates rural communities would like more government involvement. An increase in multi-denominational communities has led to conflict of sorts between church organizations and village leaders, though often the village leader himself may be a church leader, which has in recent times been positive as church leaders are more likely to encourage dialogue and participation on the behalf of women and children.
Provincial	There have been reports from a number of provinces which indicated views of the role of adolescent females (ie. Between 11 and 20 years) as 'loci of fantasy and desire' which in turn propagated the high levels of sexual assault, incest and informal prostitution at the village level (Herbert 2007). The logging industry of Makira province has been highlighted as the cause of a number of cases of CSEC.	Youth are characterized as 'useless', as distinct from students. There are problems with the clash between the colonial idea of youth with traditional Solomons culture, which does not recognize a transitory period between child and adulthood.	The provincial tier of government has little authority within village borders. Government grants and services have been rolled back as the national government faced near bankruptcy in the period following the conflict.	Dialogue in this area is centred on the choice between productivity to generate fiscal income or toward 'broader social goals' with the village, on a more subsistence type basis. Provincial governments have few funds and are present only via medical clinics and low levels of policing. For women and children, police ignore or are tokenistic towards acts of violence or abuse that are reported.
National	The Solomon Islands is one of the few countries world wide with a parliament composed entirely of men. As a result, political participation is minimal. The Government is a signatory to	The first past the post system of voting in the Solomons means that the government is composed of many parties and independents, rendering it	The prevalence of violence against women has serious implications for national development; whilst their children are more likely to suffer violence in domestic situations, academic	AusAid has indicated the presence of RAMSI has aided the advancement of women's rights. The reinstatement of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs has indicated a desire at least on a governance level to bring about a shift in

	CEDAW and CRC. A 2003 Government draft document indicated the importance of children's health and wellbeing as 'the foundation for national development' (Plus 5 Country Report). The draft legislation was not passed by the national government. Child abuse is against the law in SI but child protection is largely informal. The only investigations of child abuse and neglect are undertaken by churches or NGOs.	somewhat ineffective in passing legislation and effecting change. Since 2003, some efforts have been made toward harmonizing government and non government aims in order to bring about a more positive environment for development of children's and women's safety and rights.	advancement and behaviour in school settings is seriously effected also.	attitudes. National government, however, has little reach beyond Honiara, outside which village power structures are the predominant means of governance. Effective communication between RAMSI and Solomon islanders has been critiqued by locals as ineffective because of a lack of effort on the part of RAMSI officers to build up a system of trust in order to communicate, a cultural necessity in a Melanesian state such as the Solomons. The Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs undertook a nationwide study in 2009 entitled *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A study on violence against women and children.* This publication is indicative of an increasing recognition on the behalf of the SI government of the relationship between development and the reduction of gender and child violence.