

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

a) Solomon Islands does not have a gender equality policy but has implemented the Beijing Platform for Action and Pacific Platform for Action through its Solomon Islands National Women's Policy. The National Women's Policy has 13 critical areas that are aligned with the areas of focus of the Beijing Platform for Action. Some of the specific implemented programs include:

- Women in Decision Making and women's participation in politics
- Women and natural resources and land development
- Women in economic empowerment and skill development
- Women in Education
- Women and Children's health
- Women in government
- Rural Women and Church women

The CNURA government in its implementing strategy has put in place mechanisms to update the policy to elevate its status from a national women's policy to become a gender policy. This has been

in parliament the gender equality in decision making has gained a lot of national and public attention. The lack of support by national male leaders is however undermining women's empowerment.

c) The following are major policy and legislative achievements in the past decade:

CNURA government policy for women: In 2007 the CNURA government recreated a separate Ministry to address women, youth and children's issues. This was a major achievement on its own by the government.

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d) Solomon Islands is not ready as a country for gender budgeting. Capacity wise few women and men are gender sensitized at decision making levels. Budgets towards women and gender development for 2009 are:

Other ministries have very little programs designed for women and budgets have been undermining the participation of women in different sectors:

For example:

However, attention given to minimum increase for women's activities in the Ministry for Women Youth and Children Affairs (MWYCA) has shown that government is concerned for gender and development activities. The bulk of support for women and gender related activities come in the form of projects supported by funding agencies like AUSAID, NZAID, UNIFEM, SPC, and programs like Community Sector Program (CSP) /AusAID.

There has been a stakeholders meeting facilitated by UNDP at the beginning of 2009 to look seriously at Gender Budgeting in government programs. However, it has not been implemented. This may be due to the political environment of Solomon Islands and the capacity of human resources to implement gender sensitive budgets. Additionally, Solomon Islands do not have a gender policy that all gender sensitive programs would cascade from.

e) MDG Goal 3: Although national data is not sufficient to monitor the implementation of MDG 3, Solomon Islands national census is now underway which will greatly help with providing baseline data and mechanisms to assess MDG indicators. For instance, it would be realistic to evaluate the increase of girls in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions whereas, present assessment is still done on 1999 census which may be a little outdated. Yes, MDG goals have taken increased consideration of gender perspectives because of the fact that gender is a cross cutting issue.

f) There were two recent bills in the process for approving by Cabinet and parliament and WYCA are actively engaged in these processes.

- Political Party Bill 2009 still pending Cabinet decision.
- Temporary Special Measures Policy 2009 has not been successful.

Major Reforms:

There are three main Reforms that have taken place in the country under the Law Reform Unit and the Constitutional Reform Unit of the central government.

- i. **Law Reform Unit:** works on the civil law reform of the country which has taken major discussions and consideration of gender issues. For eg..... A woman was appointed Commissioner for Law Reform Commission.
- ii. **Law Reform Unit:** works on the new draft federal constitution 2004. Consultations have included women and the Ministry for Women has been involved in making submissions -2(o -0 0 .a d(>.a d(>.a)Tj

- *Access to legal processes* by both men and women at the community level is lacking causing a lot of pocket tensions. A Land Unit has been established in 2009 within the Public Solicitor's Office (Solomon Islands Government) to deal with land cases. Programs have been designed to consult women and include gender considerations in program design and implementation.
- *Resettling of communities programs* by companies requires discussions around gender considerations- As a result some advocacy work has been done through the CSP, Oxfam and Live and Learn livelihoods programs.

iv. Fisheries and Fisheries Management

Problems in the fast decline of fish and other marine resources result in shortage of protein at the community level. Actions have been taken by the Ministry of Fisheries to address the need for strengthening its network with NGOs in Western Province and other provinces to safeguard marine protected areas (MPAs) and more support given to gender sensitive programs for fisheries project recipients, provincial fisheries officers and fish/clam farmers.

At the commercial development level, the Tuna industry employs women in its only cannery at *Noro* in Western Province. Recent redundancy program in 09 affected many families and the temporary closure of the cannery in May minimized other economic activities for women in the area.

v. Gender Based Violence

A national study on Women's Health and Child Abuse was completed in 2009 by SPC in partnership with the Ministry for Women Youth and Children Affairs (MWYCA). Results have been staggering to place Solomon Islands in global agenda. According to the study every 2 out of 3 women have experienced violence. However, the report is yet to be released by government. This called for an increase in national discussions and program development to support intervention plans and activities as well as rehabilitation work and education in this area. This has put gender on the agenda in many gatherings and programs.

g) Yes. Women were leaders in the period 1998-2003 in conflict mediation and conflict resolution roles. As a result of women's contribution, Solomon Islands law and order was restored and their contributions resulted in the devolving of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) through its bilateral relations through the Forum Secretariat. Women continue to play a major role in reconstruction, repatriation and resettlement processes. Rehabilitation work also requires a lot of work and women continue to engage. A positive aspect of the conflict is it brought out the opportunity for the gender agenda to receive priority attention in many forums and discussions. Through the RAMSI, the Machinery of Government Program (MOG) Women in Government Strategy (WIG) partners with the MWYCA to address gender matters in decision making at the political level, government (public service), boards and commission, mentoring for young women leaders, rural women development and capacity building and strengthening of networks. For instance, they also assist women groups in development of short and long term strategic plans.

h) Through the activities of ILO women and girls have access to entrepreneurship opportunities. Commonwealth also provided an avenue through CETC SPC in *Narere* Fiji for women's empowerment. There are no efforts being made to reduce potential risks and to build on opportunities for women because of the lack of capacity amongst people interested in this area. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade are the focal point for any global programs and is responsible for coordinating these programs through line ministries.

I) there are gender focal points within the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Women youth and Children. The *Sogavare* government which ended in 2007 had a gender focal point within the Prime Minister Office (Policy Development Unit) but at when it ceased the gender focal point was removed. Any gender consideration at the policy and legislative level is only done through the Ministry for Women Youth and Children. **See Attachment B (Submission on the Evidence Bill).**

- i) Another consideration of this question may also include the establishment of the Women in Law Association in 2007 which is a legal achievement for women in Solomon Islands because this means the association takes the lead in gender in legislative considerations and development of policies and legislation. The WLA involvement in processes led by the Ministry has been an achievement for Solomon Islands.
 - ii) The employment of a gender/CEDAW officer within the MWYCA is also a plus for the government because it shows its commitment to gender equality. The gender and CEDAW desk is responsible for gender considerations where there is need in its policy and legislative implementation. This has been effective in that awareness on gender issues within policy and legislative development has increased. Additionally, gender officer's engagement in government processes shows that government is more aware of the need for gender mainstreaming in its activities and programs.
 - iii) Through the CEDAW reporting process, efforts have been made to strengthen links with other sectors within the government set up to encourage a participatory process in facilitating its initial report. For instance, stakeholders in the CEDAW reporting process include, WLA, MFAT, Ministry of Forestry and Mining, Ministry of Public Service, Public Solicitor, Magistrates Office, AG's Chambers, PMO, Electoral Commission, Leadership Code Commission, Ministry of Provincial Government, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, Culture and Tourism, Parliament Office, UNDP, UNIFEM, and prominent NGOS.
- j) As in (i) significant partnerships have been built and maintained with major development partners like AUSAID, NZAID, EU, SPC, UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNDP, Community Sector Program, Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW) , Vois Blong Mere Solomons (VBMS), Solomon Islands Christian Association Federation of Women (SICAFOW) and smaller women groups. One must understand that Solomon Islands social structure is strengthen upon the church structure which also allows the MWYCA and other public service providers to highly dependent on church organized groups to implement many of its activities include gender related activities and skill development activities.

Because of its strong network with NGOS, gaps within government gender programs and activities are also carried out by other NGOS and church women groups. Groups like the Solomon Islands Women in

Business Association have strong links with the Women's Division of the MWYCA in strengthening entrepreneurship and economic empowerment activities for women in Solomon Islands.

k) There are programs like the GBV/VAW stakeholders monthly meetings facilitated by the SPC and MWYCA to include men on GBV discussions. Intervention programs through SPC again include men as advocates for violence against women by giving them opportunities at the national level. However, this is very minimal and is difficult to monitor since its recent and is still in its initiation stage.

Only the Ministry of police and national security has a sexual harassment policy but there is no national gender and violence policy. Promotion of HIV AID is done through the Ministry of Health.

l) The impact of climate change on low lying islands and coastal communities must be addressed. For instance, king tides in 2009 forced islands like Kwai, Ngongosila , Walade, Fanalei, Sikaiana, Lord Howe and many other coastal villages in Solomon Islands previously affected by the Tsunami in 2007 have been forced to seek land for relocation. This has created other social issues in terms of conflict, population increase, and food security. The question raised by the National Disaster Council when interviewed is whether the Ministry of Agriculture could support atolls in developing agricultural techniques that would assist communities in generating their own food security programs. Ministry of Agriculture confirms that there are plans and policies in place for food security programs in our atolls but staff has no capacity in following through with these plans. National Disaster Council is responsible for taking steps in reducing risks for and impact on women in disaster prevention.

m) The global financial crises have much impact on many working families and public servants. More and more women resort to micro projects and skills development and production to generate income at the micro level. At the macro level, women programs are affected in that government budget and processes delay all programs undermining the rural and urban links. However, measures taken by the Women's division to address this problem is train church women leaders in income generation and skills so they could work within their own network which reaches to the rural areas. This is found to be very effective. Some emerging women's groups and association have established micro finance programs to counter the lack of economic empowerment.

PART TWO: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty third special session of the General Assembly

A. Examples of successful policies, legislative change and programs and projects

i) So far there is no successful specific gender policy for Solomon Islands. However, government policy like the Fee Free Education Policy by the CNURA government in 2009 allows more girls access to enroll in primary schools for free. The next national elections will be held in 2010 thus sustainability of such efforts is questionable. Another example would be the implementation of the Fisheries Community Management Approach by the Fisheries Ministry which advocates management of marine resources and Marine Protected areas at the community level. This would encourage both men and women to participate equally in decision making. In practice, already there village MPA committees which encourage a thirty percent women participation- Lauru

Land Conference is enforcing a 30% quota for women in decision making. The national picture however does not reflect such efforts as there are 50 male MPs in the Solomon Islands Parliament and only 5 out of 18 women permanent secretaries.

- ii) *Temporary Special Measures for women in parliament policy* – this was a policy developed in accordance to CNURA policy 10.24 on women in decision making. Application of the Article 3 & 4 CEDAW through the MWYCA has gone through all legal process only to be turned down by government at the Cabinet level.

This policy proposed a ten additional seat for women in Solomon Islands parliament by the 2010 national elections. Ten elected seats in ten provinces including Honiara the capital. This means that there will be two ballots voting for the current fifty seats but a second ballot to vote for the women's provincial seats.

This policy has been withdrawn by Cabinet in May 2009. Further strategies now include projectising programs targeting an increased participation of women in parliament through the Solomon Islands national Council of Women and training support for women candidates.

- iii) *Government has specific commitments:*

- a. The participation of women in national parliament and decision making
- b. Gender Based Violence and legislative and policy development to ensure the issue is addressed in legislation.
- c. Government is also committed to review its penal code
- d. Government through its Electoral Commission is committed to improve the electoral processes, administration and management to ensure women participate in not only voting but election administration and management as well.

However, areas for improvement to ensure gender considerations are taken on board would be in the areas of resource allocation (including gender sensitive budgets), legislative change (at the constitutional level) and programme development which cater for the target groups.

B. Examples of obstacles encountered and remaining gaps and challenges

- i) *Obstacles:* In policy development within Solomon Islands context, there are so many obstacles to implement gender sensitive policies. Some obstacles would include:
- Lack of gender mainstreaming
 - Shortage and lack of resources eg. Transportation specifically allocated to the Women's Division responsible for gender mainstreaming.
 - Under qualified staff to develop and implement policy.
 - The slowness of the payment process to actually support development programs to happen in a timely manner.

- Overload of staff – shortage of technical staff
 - Little knowledge about legislative and policy processes of the Government.
- ii) Other examples include male dominance in all levels of decision making, lack of understanding of gender issues by male MPs, laws are gender biased, policies depend on the political environment and political will of politicians, culture, and finance and election practices.¹ This requires a lot of awareness on legislation and processes which could impact policy development. Additionally, national programs need to research a way forward for women based on the local perceptions of

4. **National Women's Machinery**: strengthen NWM to be robust and proactive in its approach to improving the situation of women and families.
5. **Working collaboratively with other Ministries**: working towards gender equality through collaborative and multi-sectoral government approach.

Other Action areas for WDD includes: research and data collection, monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities, identifying gaps in gender development programs, awareness raising on the rights of women and the national women's policy, celebrating women important days, promote women in decision making, and CEDAW reporting.

WDD's objectives are outlined above. However, it also realized with only 7 staff, 2 being in management level, the capacity to implement the program are very minimal. This could be a challenge rather than an achievement.²

SI National Council of Women: An umbrella women's NGO with a vision to provide a forum for women on any issues affecting women at the national and local levels. Activities including nominating women to boards and meetings, working with Provincial and Area Councils of women, promoting and advocacy work in the area of rights of women, human rights. SI national council of women is proactive in supporting women candidates in elections and preparation for political leadership as well as a main stakeholder for WDD.

Financial Assistance from Bilateral partners and other NGO agencies:

Government bodies have a recurrent and development budget which supports the work of women in general. However, NGO women organizations are constantly looking for financial support for their programs. Although government has a limited grant accessible to women organizations and individual groups this grant is limited and cannot meet the needs of all women organizations or all applicants.

- b) **Focal Points**: At the moment the only focal point we know of is the gender desk officer at the Ministry of planning, AG's chambers, parliament and the officer responsible for CEDAW at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Otherwise we do not have an idea about who is the gender focal point in all line ministries. We have no resources eg. Email or transportation, finances to maintain and update a database or link with other ministries. Communication challenges also undermine the work of WDD to really strengthen its focal points in line Ministries. Effectiveness of the focal points known is very good. The response and contribution to activities and processes involving the MWYCA is very good thus showing the support needed to move things forward.
- c) **Monitoring**: There are no proper mechanisms in place to evaluate and measure gender progress. The highest level of Government is responsible for approving any policy.
- d) **Capacity**: At the national level, there is capacity with each ministry but it is not sufficient and needs building on and better coordination.
- e) **Indicators**: GBV studies for example uses WHO indicators to measure gender status in Solomon Islands. With other programs UNIFEM indicators are used but locally there are indicators like education, health (maternal, child births and deaths etc), status of rural women, women in parliament and decision making positions and poverty indicators aligned to the MDGs are but to mention a few.

Sex disaggregated Data: is still a major problem. Solomon Islands in undertaking a national census in 2009 onwards would provide an updated data base for assessment of sex disaggregated data. This would hopefully help to update any national statistics from 1999 census.

New type of data needs to be collected in the area of women's employment and salaries scale, teenage pregnancies, prostitution growth and urban drift baseline to assess the impact of urbanization on services in Honiara.

Commitment of statistic office to sex disaggregated data: In 2008 we made efforts to network with statistics but have not been successful but recently there has been an improved and strengthened relation through the GBV study in Solomon Islands as a partnership with government and South Pacific Communities.

Any gender related questionnaire to line ministries must be followed up. The problem is we do not know who in line ministries are the focal point for gender related activities. For example, when we sent out questionnaires for CEDAW reporting in November 2008 to all ministries concerned only one set of answers came back from the AG's chambers. Efforts must be made to utilize the links each ministry have with the Women's Ministry.

f) **Roles of Different Stakeholders:**

Parliament – play an important role in monitoring the use of gender sensitive strategies within policies and legislative processes aimed at achieving change. The focal point works with the legal adviser in parliament and clerk to parliament to provide advice as to where the gaps in legislation and whether specific legislation have a clause to advance the status of women or undermine the advancement of women and gender opportunities.

The role of stakeholders: could be strengthened through further training to identify legislative gaps and professional training in gender not just talking about gender in an abstract manner. For example, the gender CEDAW desk officer of the WDD is not trained in gender but only gained knowledge through experience. The Permanent Secretary and Director for women also have the same personal development. Any expert in gender who could be productive for government should be professionally trained. The downside to this is when women are trained professionally; government is not ready to pay for the services provided by gender experts unless they are done through consultancies which in most cases will attract international consultants rather than local experts. Solomon Island is yet to achieve this.

NGO role in follow up activities: This is an important aspect in any life of any policy. TSM in Solomon Islands for example has begun as a government policy but when its life was axed in May 09 by cabinet, SINCW now takes the lead in follow up activities to further the participation of women in political participation in Solomon Islands. This has been very effective strategy for Solomon Islands and the process itself has empowered many men and women and those in this partnership.

Yes. NGOS are active in follow up activities on UN commitments but there is room for much improvement in terms of planning, sourcing funding and other resources to improve service delivery and advocacy. Training and training manuals need development and implemented to test its effectiveness in the Solomon Islands context.

PART FOUR: Remaining challenges and actions to address them

Further actions and initiatives by government are:

- Producing the CEDAW initial and subsequent reports to the UN General Assembly sessions on CEDAW.
- Securing of quotas for women in decision making bodies.

Examples of Measures taken:

- Women made a submission to the Constitutional Review Committee to secure 10 seats for women in the federal parliament. This needs follow up and education awareness to counter the negative attitudes and responses of men and women on the role of women in parliament.