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**PACIFIC ISLANDS  
STAKEHOLDER  
PARTICIPATION  
IN DEVELOPMENT:  
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka

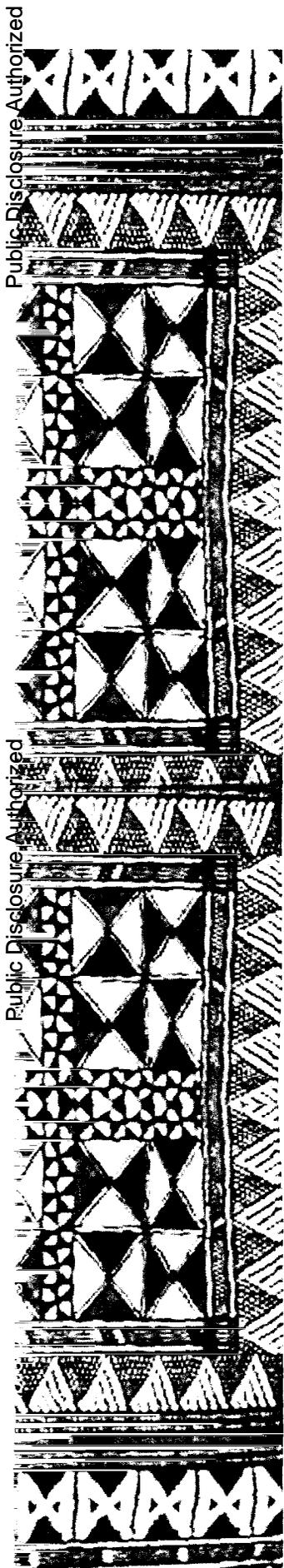


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STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION  
IN DEVELOPMENT:  
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

**September, 1998**

**A Report for the World Bank**

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**Prepared by: Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka**

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## FOREWORD

As in all societies, prospects for economic and social development for Pacific Island economies are conditioned by the country's social fabric, cultural heritage and traditions, all of which exert a powerful influence over the pattern and prospects for development. Recognising this, when providing analytical advice and support for policy makers in Pacific economies the World Bank is obligated to move beyond a perspective that focuses merely on economic factors to one that incorporates each society's social and cultural dynamic and which acknowledges the influence these aspects play in social change and economic decision-making.

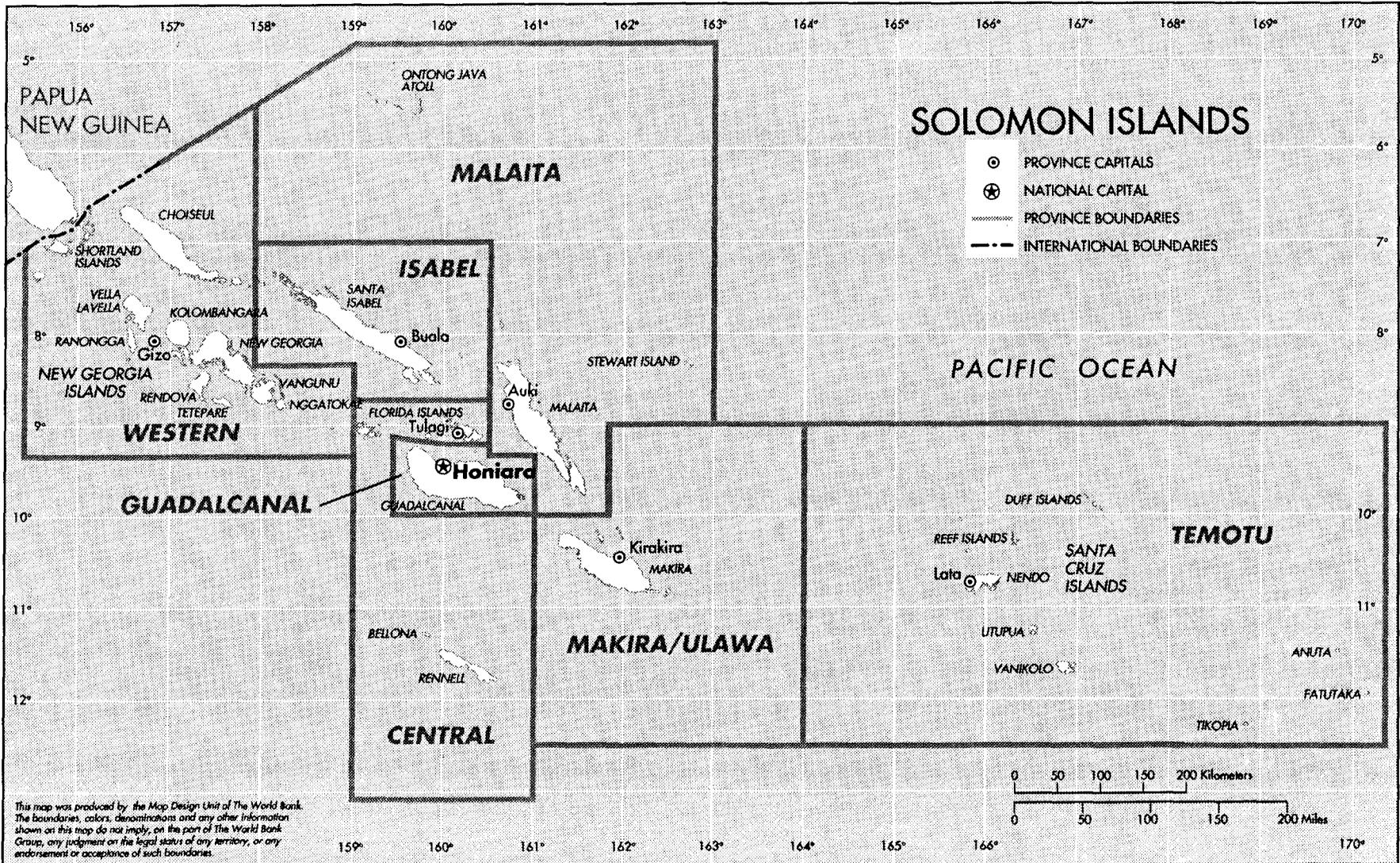
The series of Stakeholders studies was initiated in 1996 in order to provide a basis for this broader approach and, over the ensuing twelve months, reports have been prepared for Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati. For each country the form of the study has varied, reflecting differences in the social and organizational characteristics of each culture. In some, the role of traditional or customary organizations is stronger and more pronounced; in others, formal community structures and organizations may be less defined or play a different role in various parts of the country and in relation to different spheres of social life. The linkages between traditional and introduced structures of power are also different in each country: in some, the boundaries may overlap quite clearly; in others, the functions of the government, the role of the church and the strength of traditions, for example, may continue to be quite distinct.

We also wanted to consider in more detail the social patterns as well as the political dimensions at work in influencing social change and to understand better how Pacific Island societies function. Who are the important players in a community or society and how do they interact formally and informally? What are the structures that define their roles and how do they manage the interface between the needs of the in-group and those of the wider society? How do different social groups define their values and set their priorities and to what degree does the articulation of traditional or customary values influence decisions about economic development and the distribution of the benefits of development? These are some of the questions we wanted to explore.

Each country study has been prepared by a consultant who has extensive familiarity with and knowledge of the social and political dimensions of that country and who could readily provide information about the culture and analysis of the issues surrounding key aspects of the society, such as leadership, decision-making and community perceptions of government and development. The studies have provided timely and valuable input into the economic and sector analyses undertaken as part of the World Bank's program in the Pacific during 1996 and 1997. I hope they will continue to be critical in informing such work in future years.

Klaus Rohland  
Country Director, Pacific Islands





FEBRUARY 1998

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## INTRODUCTION

In all Pacific Island countries, cultural tradition plays a significant role in national affairs. It influences people's understandings, reactions and expectations of political and civil institutions. Cultural traditions are salient in defining and influencing the goals for development and the how these can be achieved. Consequently, in order to fully understand the development process in Pacific Island countries, one needs to have an appreciation, not only of the economic factors that influence development, but also of the cultural and traditional issues that are equally important. Economic parameters are not necessarily the most significant in influencing decisions about development.

This study focuses on Solomon Islands. It seeks to identify the general characteristics of the country, and then explain how socio-cultural and traditional factors such as the Big-Man leadership system, the *wantok* system, cultural diversity, land tenure and the politics of land ownership, kinship ties and domestic political culture can influence decisions about development. It attempts to draw attention to the importance of culture and tradition by analyzing the nature of the interactions among different stakeholders in development. First, the paper provides an overview of the country's land, history, people and culture. Second, it explains the relationship between culture, tradition and development and draws examples from various sectors of national affairs to illustrate. Third, the paper identifies and explains how the public sector influences national development. The discussion on the public sector includes an analysis of the role of the state as well as that of international and regional organizations. Fourth, it identifies the various organisations, movements and institutions that fall under the broad category of civil society. These include: i) churches; ii) non-government organisations (NGOs); iii) unions; and iv) the media. These are often very influential in informing opinions and ideas of development. Fifth, the paper discusses private sector involvement in the development process in Solomon Islands.

The major stakeholders in the development process in Solomon Islands interact and impact on each other in a complex relationship and the role of culture and tradition in this interaction must be considered. Solomon Islanders are motivated and influenced greatly by the rich cultural tradition from which many of them came. Solomon Islands society functions and transforms as a result of continuous interaction between both external and domestic forces. However, while international factors such as foreign governments, international organisations or multinational companies, are individually important they are only part of the picture when considering development. The operations of state and international institutions are greatly influenced by domestic socio-cultural values and norms. One reason development projects of

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ten fail is that the dynamics of the local culture is ignored, and the factors that influence people's ideas, choices, and perceptions of the wider world are not included in the development process.

Stakeholders in development come from all parts of society. In Solomon Islands, the power of the state and its capacity to deliver development services may be less effective than that of other institutions in civil society, such as the churches, non-government organisations, and popular community organisations. Development agencies should consider these institutions in the design and implementation of programs. The capacity of institutions such as the media and traditional social and kinship groupings to influence political power and economic decisions must be recognised. As important is the traditional leader in influencing development decisions, particularly concerning resource extraction where land owning groups own and have control over the resource. It is only when the nation is viewed holistically, and the importance of its cultural traditions and socio-political stakeholders is recognised along with modern institutions, that the task of development organisations can be more successful and meaningful.

The report is divided into three general sections: (i) Culture and Tradition; (ii) the Public Sector; and (iii) Civil Society, which also includes the private sector. These are the general categories within which Solomon Islanders tend to organise their national and personal affairs.

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# SOLOMON ISLANDS

## THE LAND

Solomon Islands is an archipelago of 922 islands about 1,860 kilometres north east of Australia and located between 5 and 12 degrees south latitude and 155 and 170 degrees east longitude. The group consists of six large islands (Choiseul, Isabel, Malaita, New Georgia, Guadalcanal and Makira), twenty medium sized ones, and hundreds of smaller islets and reefs that stretch in a double chain for over 1,800 kilometres from the Shortland Islands in the west to Tikopia and Anuta in the east, and nearly 900 kilometres from Ontong Java atoll in the north to Rennell Island in the south. Of all these islands, only 347 are presently inhabited. The total land area is 28,369 square-kilometres, which makes Solomon Islands the second largest insular nation of the south Pacific, after Papua New Guinea (Stanley, 1993).

The climate is usually hot and humid all year-around and the heaviest rainfall season is between December and March. This is also the tropical cyclone season. The worst in recent years was cyclone Namu in 1986 which devastated some of the islands, particularly Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira, Rennell and Bellona.

In comparison to the Polynesian islands to the east and Micronesia to the north, Solomon Islands is endowed with relatively rich natural resources such as timber, minerals and fisheries. Most of the islands are covered with thick tropical rain forest which provides timber, one of the country's most important natural resources. In 1996 it made up about 50 per cent of Solomon Islands total exports (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 1996). There is, however, a continuing topical and controversial debate in recent years surrounding the rates of exploitation, sustainability, logging practices and transfer pricing (Fraser, 1997; Roughan, 1997; Dauvergne, 1996; Baird, 1996; Price Waterhouse, 1995; Montgomery, 1995; Duncan, 1994; Grynberg, 1994).

Another important natural resource is minerals. Gold will become economically important since the Australian-based Ross Mining Company began mining at Gold Ridge on Guadalcanal in June 1997. Gold Ridge is estimated to hold about US\$1 billion worth of gold (*Solomon Star*, 7 February, 1996). It has, therefore, been viewed as a project that will salvage Solomon Islands' currently deteriorating economy. There are other gold deposits at Poha in west Guadalcanal and Vangunu Island in the Western Province which are still undergoing prospecting to determine their economic viability. Also, there were intentions to mine phosphate and bauxite on Rennell and Bellona island. However, this never eventuated because the deposits were not big enough to be economically viable, and there was resistance to mining from the land owning groups on the islands.

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Large scale commercial agriculture, on the other hand, is not a major development alternative because of the rugged mountainous feature of the islands. The only large scale commercial agriculture is limited to the Guadalcanal plains where the British company, Commonwealth Development Cooperation (CDC), owns huge oil palm, and cocoa plantations. In 1995 palm oil and kernel made up about 12.6 per cent of the country's total exports (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 1995). Apart from on the Guadalcanal plain, there are very few other parts of the country where commercial agriculture could be carried out on a relatively large scale.

Another important resource-based industry that has a lot of potential for development is fisheries. Solomon Islands has an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which covers an area of some 1.34 million square kilometres of ocean and holds some of the world's richest tuna fishing grounds. This provides an invaluable opportunity for the development of the fisheries industry which so far, has been dominated mostly by Solomon Taiyo Ltd (STL), a joint venture operation between the government of Solomon Islands and the Taiyo Gyogyo of Japan, one of the world's largest multinational fishing companies. (See the section on the private sector for a discussion of Solomon Taiyo Ltd and fisheries in general). The fisheries industry still has tremendous potential for development.

Like many other developing countries, Solomon Islands' economy is heavily dependent on natural resource extraction. Therefore, understanding the socio-cultural factors that influence large-scale resource development is tremendously important if one is to make appropriate development policies. As will be discussed later in cases where companies negotiate directly with customary landowners, such as forestry and mining, the power of the state becomes minimal. This is because about 85 percent of land in Solomon Islands is under customary ownership.

## **HISTORY**

There are a number of different explanations about how the Solomon Islands was first peopled. The one most commonly accepted by historians, archaeologists and other social scientists is that Solomon Islands may have been first inhabited about 10,000 years ago by Papuan-speaking hunters and gatherers who journeyed down from Southeast Asia. They were followed some 4,000 years ago by Austronesian-speaking agriculturalists who subsequently displaced or absorbed their predecessors. Then, within the last 1,500 years, there may have been a wave of back-migration to Anuta, Tikopia, Bellona and Rennell from Wallis and Futuna, and to Taumako (Duff Islands), Pileni (Reef Islands), Sikaiana and Ontong Java from Tuvalu. However, the earliest date of known human habitation, provided from radio carbon dating of remains from Vatulumu Cave near the Poha River (Guadalcanal), is 1,300-1,000 BC (Campbell, 1989; Stanley, 1993).

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Indigenous Solomon Islanders have their own versions of how they came to these islands. The details of origin stories (oral traditions) differ between tribes, islands and regions. However, a characteristic found in nearly all origin stories throughout the group is the belief that they originated from within rather than from some place outside the Pacific, in contrast to the linguistic and archaeological record and as assessed by historians, archaeologists and other social scientists. There is usually no reference to the first inhabitants' traveling in from some far off land. In a version of the origin story of Guadalcanal, for example, the island of Isatabu (as Guadalcanal was then known) was created by gods and the people originated from the god Irogali (O'Connor, 1973; Davenport and Coker, 1967). It is only in the origin stories of the Polynesian outliers of Rennell, Bellona and Tikopia that one finds references to canoes coming in from some far off land. The fact that traditionally Solomon Islanders believe they originated from within the islands is important to note because it has salient implications to issues of identity and claims of ownership over land and other resources. Oral traditions are often used to gain and legitimise claims of ownership over resources and positions of power and authority. Those who have access to and control oral traditions can become powerful in society. In fact, a criterion for being recognised as a Big-Man is to have wide knowledge of oral traditions (Strathern and Goddier, 1991; Sahlin, 1970).

In contemporary formal education curricula, however, oral traditions are not regarded as significant sources for understanding history. Instead, history as taught in Solomon Islands' schools puts emphasis on the post-European contact era - the period after 1568 when the Spanish explorer, Alvaro de Mendana, first sighted the island group. Mendana was followed by generations of European missionaries, traders, labour recruiters, beachcombers and castaways, and then by colonial administrators and other professionals (Bennett, 1987). There were also some Asian traders and labourers who today play an important role in the country's economy.

All these people had varying degrees of influence on indigenous Solomon Islanders. This is manifested today in the widespread inclusion in Solomon Island culture of elements of European and Asian cultures, ideologies, material goods, and in a genetic heritage of European and Asian origin. Solomon Islanders of Chinese extraction, for example, presently make up about one per cent of the population, and although they are found mostly in urban areas such as Honiara, Auki and Gizo, their economic influence penetrates to even the most remote rural areas. They own most of the shops and many other businesses in the urban areas. There is even a China Town in Honiara. One of the most influential businessmen, Thomas Koh Chan, is of Chinese extraction. He owns the Honiara Hotel, Tamba Tourist Resort, Wing Shipping and Chan Wing, a major supermarket in Honiara. Others of prominence include Moon Pin Kwan and the Quan brothers who own retailing and wholesale businesses in Honiara.

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Intermarriage between Chinese-Solomon Islanders and indigenous Solomon Islanders is rare; the former group tending to keep mostly to themselves.<sup>1</sup> Two of the prominent ethnic Chinese mentioned above, Thomas Koh Chan and Moon Pin Kwan, were elected into Parliament in the general election of August, 1997. Thomas Koh Chan was elected as member of Parliament for the West Guadalcanal constituency which surprised many observers because that part of the country has no ethnic Chinese population. Moon Pin Kwan, on the other hand, was elected for the Central Honiara constituency. This is the first time ethnic Chinese have actively participated in Solomon Islands politics.

Other institutions that have a significant historical impact on Solomon Islands and Islanders includes the colonial administration, multinational companies (MNCs), churches and schools. These will be dealt with in more detail later.

It was not until 1893 that Britain declared a protectorate over some of the islands in the group (New Georgia, Guadalcanal, Makira and Malaita). This was in response to German annexation of New Guinea and the North Solomons, and to pleas from missionaries to control the labour trade. It was hoped that this would limit the German advances, and also protect resident Europeans. In 1896 C. M. Woodford was appointed first Resident Commissioner and soon after set up Headquarters at Tulagi in Ngella. The Santa Cruz group, Rennell and Bellona became part of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1898 and 1899. In 1900 Germany ceded to Britain the Shortlands, Choiseul, Isabel and Ontong Java in exchange for a free hand to annex Samoa in the eastern Pacific (Bennett, 1987). Colonialism and Christianity were later followed by an influx of MNCs and European and Asian business interests.

Another important landmark in Solomon Islands history is the Second World War. On 7 July, 1942 the Japanese landed on Guadalcanal and quickly started construction of an airstrip which could be used to strike at Australia and the American base on Espiritu Santo in the (then) New Hebrides. However, in August of that year 10,000 United States Marines went ashore at Red Beach on Guadalcanal and quickly captured the partly completed airstrip. The months that followed witnessed one of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific war. For Solomon Islanders, it was not just the war but the aftermath that was significant. World War II left deep scars on the Solomons and set a new era in the country's development. Tulagi was destroyed by Japanese bombardment and so a new capital was established at Honiara out of what was left of the war infrastructure. In fact, a large percentage of Solomon Islands early roads and airstrips date from the war.

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More importantly, the post-World War II period was characterised by the rise of proto-nationalist movements such as the Ma'asina Ruru Movement,<sup>2</sup> dubbed "Marching Rule" (Laracy, 1983). Although the Ma'asina Ruru Movement had cargo cult characteristics<sup>2</sup> and was, therefore, often referred to as a millenarian movement, its contribution to the development of early nationalist sentiments in Solomon Islands cannot be disregarded. Ma'asina Ruru Movement and other similar movements, such as the Moro Movement of Guadalcanal (Kabutaulaka, 1990; O'Connor, 1973; Davenport and Coker, 1967), contributed significantly to the early development of a national consciousness and a push towards independence.

The Second World War also had a profound impact on Solomon Islander perceptions of themselves and the colonial administration. It was after the war that Solomon Islanders started to question and resist colonial rule. Post-war resistance of colonial rule engendered nationalist movements that eventually led to independence, thus beginning the quest for national consciousness in Solomon Islands - a quest that in large part is still being pursued. Constitutional independence on 7 July, 1978 was only part of the journey towards national consciousness.

Throughout the country's history the most important players in influencing social transformations were colonial government officers, churches, other civil institutions and corporate businesses. History also has played an important role in influencing the process of development in Solomon Islands. The structure of the government Solomon Islands now has its roots in the colonial era which has an important bearing on the implementation of development programs.

### **CULTURAL IDENTITY**

An important feature of Solomon Islands, as with Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, is the tremendous range of cultural diversity. This is exemplified by the fact that there are 87 distinct languages and numerous dialects shared by a population of about 400,000 people. This population is further divided by ethnicity - about 94 per cent are Melanesians, 4 per cent are Polynesians, with the other 2 per cent Micronesian, Chinese, European and other. Because of the diversity of languages, Pidgin (*Pijin* as it is known in the Solomons), developed as a *lingua franca* and, although English is the official language of education, commerce, the media and government administration, Pidgin is spoken by the majority of the population of Solomon Islands for everyday communications. *Pijin* is similar to Papua New Guinea *Tok Pisin* and Vanuatu *Bislama*.

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This cultural and ethnic diversity has salient implications for nation-building and the authority of the state and its capacity to implement national policies. It is important to note that despite strong rhetorical statements such as "unity in diversity", the divisions along linguistic, regional and ethnic lines are real and influence public opinion and decisions about development. On the other hand, it is important to be aware of an increasing national consciousness, especially amongst the educated, urban dwellers where social groupings often cut across linguistic, ethnic and regional boundaries, and the emergence of a national culture is evident (Jourdan, 1995).

Today, the 400,000 Solomon Islanders of diverse cultural backgrounds share some common national problems. These include rapid population growth, increasing urbanisation, unemployment, crime and social disintegration. The rapid population growth rate is important for Solomon Islands because of its limited land size and slow economic growth. At 3.5 per cent per year, the country has one of the most rapidly growing populations of the world. At this rate, it will double in two decades. This problem has been further exacerbated by the fact that 52 per cent of the population are either below the age of 15 or above 60. About 47 per cent of the population are in the age group of 0 -14 while 48 per cent are in the age group of 15-59, and 5 per cent 60 years old and over. The rapid growth rate and young age structure of the population means that there is an increasing probability of high unemployment, insufficient schools, prostitution, rising crime and other related social problems. These problems are especially profound in the rapidly growing urban centres such as Honiara which has an annual population growth rate of around 6 per cent. A large percentage of prostitutes in Honiara, for example, are between the age of 13 and 25 (Tara, 1996).

Social break-down in urban centres can also be attributed to the absence of traditional and cultural forms of control, particularly of the youth. The following section highlights the integral relationship between culture, tradition and development and discusses how Solomon Islands has either benefited or suffered as a consequence of this interrelationship.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> There is another group of Asians who recently entered Solomon Islands, mostly beginning from the late 1970s and early 1980s. These are Asian (Malaysian, Korean, Indonesian, Japanese and Philippino) business men involved in resource extraction. Most of them have invested in the forestry and fisheries industries. This report will consider them later in the discussion of corporate powers in Solomon Islands.

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## CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

In discussions of development, culture and tradition are often regarded as secondary or insignificant. However, this is changing and many planners, policy makers and development agencies now realise and acknowledge the salience of cultural traditions in influencing the process of development.

Here culture is defined in a very general way as the body of shared understandings which govern how members of a group interact with each other. It includes the rules, norms or customs that regulate behaviour within the group and society. Culture directs how these shared understandings evolve and are sustained through time. Tradition, on the other hand, is used here to refer to a model of a past way of life (Hooper, 1993). However, it does not imply something which has existed unchanged since contact with the wider world even though it is sometimes represented (particularly in statements of the *kastom* kind) as being immutable. Rather, the term is used here to refer to the set of social behaviours and ways of doing things that have emerged and continue to have connection to the past (Hooper, 1993). Cultural traditions in Solomon Islands, as elsewhere, have changed because of contact with forces or belief systems such as colonialism, Christianity and globalisation, as well as in response to internal shifts and forces.

Throughout Solomon Islands the idea of culture and tradition is described and conceptualised as *kastom*, a Pidgin term derived from its near English equivalent of 'custom'. For most Solomon Islanders national life can be dichotomised as the '*kastom* way', defined by culture and tradition and, the 'whiteman way' represented by European ideas, material goods and institutions. The concept of *kastom* often involves an attempt to preserve cultural traditions by reviving and re-enacting what are regarded as past ways of life. For most, the term *kastom* denotes the past as defined by the period of pre-European contact. *Kastom*, as distinguished from the 'whiteman way', implies the existence of a uniquely authentic Solomon Islands 'way'. This is something similar to the Samoan concept of *fa'a samoa* or the more general concept of 'the Pacific way' used as a means of denoting a Pacific identity (Crocombe, 1976). Consequently, social movements that encourage the revival of past ways of life are regarded as *kastom* movements. The Moro movement of Guadalcanal, for example, which encouraged the notion of 'back to *kastom*' (O'Connor, 1973) is identified as a *kastom* movement although it emerged as a reaction against colonial subjugation. In contemporary politics, this idea of *kastom* has become useful in forging a sense of identity necessary to creating nationalistic consciousness at the time of decolonisation. On the other hand, it may also be a disintegrative factor because of the existence of the diversity of traditional customs throughout Solomon Islands.

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*Kastom* is also distinguished from 'modernity', defined by the dominance of European ideas, institutions and material goods. Modern institutions such as the state, churches (Christianity), schools, unions, professional and sports clubs are categorised as belonging to the 'whiteman way' of life. State structures and institutions represent a system of government entirely different from the Big Man or chiefly systems of *kastom*. Christian churches pray to the modern God and condemn ancestral worship as paganism and satanic; schools teach people 'modern' knowledge and how to use new technologies.

Because *kastom* is an important aspect of every day life for Solomon Islanders, it's power must be acknowledged when formulating national policies. National policy-makers and implementors often have to take into consideration the sensitivity of each community's cultural traditions. In the tourism industry, for example, brochures often warn potential visitors about the kinds of dress that offend or are regarded as culturally insensitive and where they can or cannot be worn. Planners in the tourism industry are often conscious of how the industry could affect *kastom* and that has had an impact on the development of tourism in Solomon Islands.

In contemporary Solomon Islands, however, cultural traditions and introduced ways of life continuously interact and impact on each other. This is despite the fact that some believe they are distinct and unrelated. Social transformation and the making and implementation of development policies are influenced greatly by both ways of life. For example, in domestic politics, the question of why it has been so easy for the former Prime Minister, Mr. Solomon Mamaloni, to retain his parliamentary seat in his West Makira constituency is as much a consequence of modern electoral systems as it is of Mamaloni's traditional and cultural ties to the area and how he manipulates his Big-Man status in this context. Members of Parliament gain and maintain their position by using the techniques of the traditional Big-Man leadership system. Campaigns for elections are often dominated by the exchange of goods between candidate and voter - a kind of patron/client relationship is established that characterises the Big-Man leadership system. A good example of how this manipulation is effected was in the use of the Constitutional Development Fund (CDF) which entitled each Member of Parliament personal control over SI\$200,000 per annum. As the name suggests, this fund was for development projects in each constituency, however, in nearly all cases politicians used the money to gain personal support by distributing the wealth, just as a Big-Man would, in the *kastom* way.

Because of the importance of the interaction between *kastom* and modern systems, there have been attempts to integrate the two. A classic example is the Provincial Government Act of 1996 which proposed the inclusion of chiefs as members of Area Assemblies. This will be discussed later in the report when we consider government

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structures. However, what is important to point out here is that the inclusion of traditional leaders in the formal government structure means that *kastom* will continue to be influential in national affairs. It is, therefore, necessary to understand both ways of life and the nature of their interaction in order to understand the impact each has on national development.

## **KASTOM AND DEVELOPMENT**

Many Solomon Islanders understand that *kastom* and development are inter-related, and should not necessarily be dichotomised as opposites. However, to better understand the interaction between *kastom* and development, we should first discuss the factors that influenced and dominated development thinking in Solomon Islands.

The dichotomy between cultural tradition (represented by *kastom*) and modernity emerged as a consequence of the influence of neo-classical economics which had significant impact on both colonial as well as post-independence development policies. The concept of development became important in Solomon Islands in the period after the Second World War. As a result, from the 1950s Solomon Islanders have not only demanded political independence but also attempted to improve their social and economic independence and well-being. From the early proto-nationalist movements such as the Ma'asina Ruru Movement to the floor of the modern parliament Solomon Islanders have voiced their desire to develop. This is partly a consequence of a world-wide trend in the quest for development as well as a result of rapidly changing values and needs in Solomon Island societies.

However, what has not often been clear is the answer to such questions as what is the goal of development and what are the processes and means of achieving it? Since gaining constitutional independence, Solomon Islands, like many of its Pacific neighbors, strived to emulate the examples of its former colonial power in the quest to develop. The events of the past eighteen years have shown that for many Solomon Islanders, development is mainly an attempt to imitate and become more like industrialised Western nations. This is despite the fact that at the time of decolonisation many emerging national leaders had said that they intended to develop the country their 'own way'. A leading Solomon Islander writer, educationist, diplomat and public servant, the late Francis Bugotu, writing about decolonisation in 1975, stated that "the task is to find a design for a future which serves our interests, and need not necessarily be patterned on western lines, nor serve western strategic, economic or political aims" (Bugotu, 1975:77). Subsequently, however, it was assumed that the answer to development lay primarily in economic growth and stable public policy.

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However, the economic, political and social problems presently faced by Solomon Islands call for a rethinking of previous strategies and a new approach to development. There is a need to acknowledge that although economic growth and stable public policy are paramount variables in the development process, they cannot be achieved in isolation from the cultural and traditional dynamic of the society.

What is of interest are the interactions between the conventional ideas of development and cultural tradition as embodied in the Solomon Islands concept of *kastom*. In Solomon Islands most people see the institutions, organisations and activities which make up national affairs as falling into three broad categories, *kastom*, public/government sector, and the civil or private sector, and are aware that these categories of national life interact and impact on each other in creating national programs. Here, we identify and examine some events in Solomon Islands that illustrate that interaction.

In the past many national development projects failed because of mismanagement, often exacerbated by the lack of capital, trained personnel and the insufficient knowledge and appreciation of the cultural traditions of the communities for which the projects were planned. Poor project design is also a consequence of misunderstanding the roles that should be played by the state and civil society in the development process. In fact, until recently, many Solomon Islanders thought that development was a task that should be left exclusively to the state - it was the responsibility and domain of the government. Thus, the participation of local communities in the development process is usually limited. A good example is the Solomon Islands Rural Services Project (RSP). This was a SI\$14 million government project funded by a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This project failed to achieve the benefits proposed primarily because it was designed in such a way that it limited community participation. In fact, many villagers regarded it as 'project blong gavmane' (a government project) rather than viewing it as a project that should enhance development in the rural areas (Kabutaulaka, 1993). In politics some people perceive their role in the process of governance primarily as voters; after elections they have no influence over the person elected or the policies made by government.

As stated above many development projects failed because planners misunderstood (or did not understand at all) the cultures and traditional social organisations of the communities. Another good example is the history of village trade stores throughout the country which have failed despite the support of business advisers. In most village trade stores there is usually a credit book in which one finds the names of debtors. They are normally close kin and relatives indebted to the store owner by virtue of kinship relationships and associated obligations. The debtors may have no intention of meeting their debts, thus hastening the commercial demise of many village trade stores. Throughout the Solomon Islands there is usually a close interplay between business practice and cultural traditions (Gegeo, 1994).

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Development projects often ignore traditional social organisations and the nexus to decision-making. The establishment of cooperatives during the late colonial era is a case in point. Community businesses, mostly trade stores known as 'Societies', were established throughout the country. The idea developed from the belief that traditionally Solomon Islanders lived and organised themselves as a community, that they worked, played, fought etc. as a group. Hence it was assumed that, to start a successful business all one needed to do was make people work together within the traditional social structures as a community and, that cooperatives would merely make use of and mirror the communal nature of the traditional social organisation.

However, within a short time most of these 'Societies' (cooperative businesses) failed and disappeared because the scheme was founded on a misunderstanding. While it is true that in the traditional Solomon Islands context people work together for certain purposes, it is certainly not correct to assume they work together for all purposes. People do not work together in the accumulation of community wealth measured in monetary terms. Moreover, the concept of community wealth that cooperatives advocated was foreign to most Solomon Islanders. The cooperatives defined community to include people of different families, clans, and villages, membership effectively cutting across the social boundaries within which people normally cooperated for the accumulation of traditional wealth (shell money, feather rings, porpoise teeth, etc.). Likewise, communal or cooperative business schemes failed to acknowledge that Solomon Islanders can be very competitive in the accumulation of monetary wealth. In the traditional context people come together to work for a Big-Man in return for goods and valuables. Each person benefits immediately from the Big-Man's distribution of wealth; he in return gains the status that legitimises his position. In cooperative savings and business ventures, however, individuals did not benefit immediately and the formation of a committee of executives to manage the fund raised concerns about whether members of this committee would take advantage of their position to control community wealth.

The following section will identify some of the major traditional social groups and discuss how they affect national development. These include clans, landowners and ethnic, language, and kinship groups. They are all important stakeholders in Solomon Islands' development.

### **TRADITIONAL SOCIAL GROUPS**

Traditionally Solomon Islands was a society marked by diversity scored along kinship, clan, ethnic, language (*wantok*) and residential lines. This diversity has been made more complex in this century with the emergence of churches, unions, profes-

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sional and sports clubs and other forms of social groupings which can often have profound impact on the types and nature of political alliances and other aspects of local and national affiliation. They serve particular interests and purposes and have different roles in influencing national development.

### **The Family/Kinship Group**

Throughout Solomon Islands the most basic and fundamental social group is one's kin or family unit. Most people identify with the family and immediate relatives in political, economic and social activities. The family is defined as the extended family. It is with the family that gardens are made, wealth is accumulated and feasts are given. And increasingly today, it is from within the family that businesses emerge. Political alliances are forged around family kin before being extended into the wider kinship group. In elections the foundation for political support is the kin group. A candidate gets the backing of close kin members before he or she moves to gain support from the rest of the constituency. This is often the same in the establishment of a commercial business.

Strong kinship ties have tended to weaken the effectiveness of the public service and other state structures. Nepotism is widespread in the Solomon Islands public service as public servants face pressures to give priority to the demands of kin members above those of others or the society at large. Unfortunately, this practice has become the norm in the public sector culture and has had a negative impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of public servants; it has also led to widespread corruption. For example, in February, 1996 the country's then Finance Minister, Christopher Columbus Abe, asserted that fraudulent appropriation of government payments was a widespread practice throughout the government system, not just confined to the Treasury Division of his ministry (*Solomon Citizen*, 22 February, 1996). In April and May, 1996, thirty-five public servants were suspended on half pay for allegedly misappropriating SI\$10 million (*Solomon Star*, 8 May, 1996). To date, none of these public servants has been formally charged. However, if the allegations are true, the important question is : What are the social forces which would cause public servants to embezzle? Economic pressures on those in secure employment to meet the increasing demands and expectations of kin often force them to look for additional sources of financial supplementation.

Politicians are probably more susceptible to bribery because of pressures to meet traditional social obligations.<sup>2</sup> The expectations of politicians by members of their kin group, clan, constituency and others are often beyond their financial capacity to fulfill. Politicians are expected to pay for school fees, contribute to feasts, pay for chartered flights and boats when people are sick or to transport those who have died

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in town back to their village. They are pressured to contribute funds or goods to nearly every activity in their constituency. In fact, politicians are expected to show-off and distribute wealth that they often do not have. Many politicians end up being bankrupt and forced to borrow from business friends or to accept bribes to enable them to meet these social obligations.

Finding ways to meet or avoid such expectations regularly take up much of a politician's time. This means that less time is spent on the tasks on which a politician is supposed to be engaged. Most of Solomon Islands' politicians rarely read or listen to important radio programs or research issues. This affects their ability to participate in and contribute to debates on policy matters which has a negative impact on the implementation of development policies. The society's expectations of political largesse has its roots in the traditional Big-Man system although the practice has been moulded to accommodate the kinds of material goods and wealth to which people assume politicians have access.

### **The Clan or Line**

A second important group is the clan. This is an extension of the kinship group and is referred to in Pidgin as *line*. It is bigger than the immediate kinship group and the population of a clan is usually spread out over a larger geographical area. There is usually a strong political alliance within a *line* although some activities carried out by an immediate kin group may not necessarily incorporate the entire clan. For example, it is rare to see the establishment of a business venture that includes an entire *line* although people often have businesses within the family. The *line*, however, is the basis or the defining group for land ownership. In Solomon Islands the traditional land owning group is an extremely important stakeholder in development. Customary landowners (clan/*line*) control about 85 percent of the land. Customary rights are generally determined by clan (*line*) membership with unwritten rules that vary from clan to clan across the country.

Customary land tenure system affects the power of the state in the development of land-based resources such as forestry and minerals. In forestry, for example, about 80 percent of logging is on customary land (Montgomery, 1995). Landowners, therefore, often deal directly with logging companies, making the state a less prominent party in logging negotiations (Fraser, 1997; Bennett, 1995; Corrin, 1992; Larmour, 1979). Coupled with the government's lack of capital and the shortage of highly trained forest officers makes the task of monitoring logging practices and the implementation of forest management policies difficult. There is often insufficient consultation between landowners, the state and logging companies, sometimes resulting in confrontations among the parties. Throughout the history of the forestry industry

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in Solomon Islands, landowners have always been important stakeholders. In some cases frustrated landowners have sabotaged equipment and burned logging camps. Two prominent examples are in Pavuvu (Roughan, 1997; Rose, 1995; Tuhonuku, 1995) and in North New Georgia where landowner demands eventually led to the withdrawal of Levers Pacific Timber (Fraser, 1997; Tausinga, 1992).

In the mining industry, the establishment of the Gold Ridge project illustrates the prominence of landowners as stakeholders. This project was delayed for many years to allow the government and mining companies to negotiate with landowners. In 1996 a series of agreements was signed between Ross Mining of Australia and the Gold Ridge Landowners Association representing land owning clans at the proposed mine site. The final agreement was signed in January 1996 (*Solomon Star*, 7 February, 1996) and the project commenced in July 1997. Landowners featured prominently in the agreement and at the beginning of 1996 Ross Mining paid Gold Ridge landowners a total of SI\$90,000 in access fees and started a resettlement scheme that will cost the company SI\$6 million (*Solomon Star*, 31 January, 1996).

One cannot over-emphasise the importance of including landowners as key stakeholders in large-scale resource development in Solomon Islands, and indeed throughout Melanesia. If any reminder were needed of the fundamental political, social and economic implications of large-scale resource development in Melanesia and of the priority of involving landowners, the current tragic events in Bougainville provide a graphic illustration.

### **The *Wantok***

There are other social groups that have an impact on national affairs. The *wantok* is a relatively new mode of social identification which emerged in response to the need for some form of group identity for individuals who found themselves in situations where large numbers of people from different language groups come together, such as on plantations, in schools, the civil service, factories or in other institutions. The term *wantok* literally means 'one language' and thus refers to or includes those who speak the same language. Wantoks operate within the concept of the *wantok* system; *wantokism* advocates cooperation amongst those who speak the same language. It is similar to *kerekere* in Fiji (Ravuvu, 1983) and *fa'a samoa* in Samoa (Meleisea, 1987).

However, increasingly the term *wantok* has been used to identify people from the same region and island to distinguish them from outsiders, even if they speak a different language. *Wantokism* can be a confusing concept because there are no set boundaries or criteria for group identification - it changes with the context and

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depends with whom one identifies (Premdas, 1986). Thus, two Malaitans in a Guadalcanal village may call each other *wantok* although they may speak different languages. In another context, a Malaitan and a man from Guadalcanal may join with a ni-Vanuatu, a Papua New Guinean and a person from Kanaky (New Caledonia), for example as students at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji, and all call each other *wantoks* by virtue of the fact that they all speak Pidgin and come from Melanesia. However, the same students when at home in the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) or the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) would tend to identify more with those from their own language group and call only these others *wantok*. What this illustrates is that the membership of ones *wantok* group differs in different contexts and serves different purposes with differing audiences.

In some situations the *wantok* reference can serve as an important prism through which national consciousness can be expressed or developed. However, at the same time such a discourse could also serve as a destabilising factor if people demarcate the referential group by ever smaller perimeters.

In Solomon Islands identification is primarily manifest through language. *Kasi, Ghema, Kula, Tio, Ngoela, Ngwaed, Waneagu, Saeagua, Porau, Forau, Gitzz, Kebo, Ko'o, Wale* and many others, are all important points of reference for people. Language creates a consciousness of one's local and regional identity but not necessarily a national identity. In urban centres such as Honiara most people identify with their *wantoks* as the primary social group; then comes membership in groups associated with sport, professional work or worker affiliations. The *wantok* identity is most relevant in Honiara where people from different regions converge to live and work and who speak different languages. However, in an area in which everybody speaks the same language, the notion of the *wantok* loses its significance as a useful means of social identification.

Political alliances, particularly in Honiara, are based around the concept of *wantok*. In the East Honiara constituency, for example, it has nearly always been the case that a candidate of Kwara'ae origin (from Malaita Province) has a better probability of winning the seat at elections because of the large number of Kwara'ae speakers who live in that constituency in the squatter settlements in the valleys behind Honiara. *Wantoks* are important in influencing discussions of national development, particularly affecting political alliances within Parliament, especially when it comes to supporting issues that are regionally sensitive. *Wantokism*, like regionalism, has influenced the selection of national leaders, including the Prime Minister, the Governor General and the Speaker of the National Parliament.

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*Wantok*-ism has fueled regional consciousness, especially in urban centres such as Honiara where many identify themselves as belonging to either Malaita, Guadalcanal, Reef Islands or another region. This regional based or geographic identification can have serious consequences as it fosters polarity which often leads to instances of regional/ethnic riots. For example, in 1989 a row between the Malaitan and the Rennell and Bellona residents of Honiara ended in a riot in which Malaitans rampaged through Honiara breaking into and looting shops and demanding compensation. The compensation was for an incident at the Honiara central market in which a Rennellese allegedly offended a Malaitan in writing on the market wall. The national government and the Central Islands Province intervened and paid compensation up to SI\$300,000 to the Malaita Province. In another incident, in 1994 Malaitans rioted through Honiara after the Malaita soccer team lost to the team from the national capital. In early 1996, there was a confrontation between Malaitans and Reef Islanders in Honiara and in late 1996 Malaita soccer supporters rioted through Honiara after their team again lost to the Honiara side. These violent confrontations are manifestations of the strength of regional and *wantok* identification.

Similar regionally-based cleavages can also be found in the country's Parliament, ironically itself a symbol of national unity and identity. Because Malaitans tend to be dominant in the public service and in other national institutions, there has been a conscious attempt by Members of Parliament from other parts of the country to ensure that Malaitans do not also dominate important elected positions of power, such as the Governor General, Speaker of Parliament and Prime Minister. An effort is made to share political power among representatives of different regions. This has had the result that no Malaitan has so far been elected to the Governor Generalship, despite the nomination of Malaitans as candidates at every vacancy. Following independence in 1978, the post was held for two consecutive terms by Baddley Devesi, who comes from Guadalcanal. He was replaced by George Lepping from the Shortland Islands in the Western Province and the present Governor General, Moses Pitakaka, is from Choiseul Province. The post of Speaker to the National Parliament has also never been held by a Malaitan. The first Speaker, Loyd Maepeza Gina, is from the Western Province and his successor, Waeta Ben Tabusasi, is from Guadalcanal. The present Speaker, Paul Tovua, is also from Guadalcanal. The selection of Prime Minister has also been influenced dramatically by these regional and islands based cleavages. The only Malaita since independence who has become Prime Minister was Peter Kenilorea who led the country to Independence. He was later replaced by Solomon Mamaloni from Makira who has been the country's most outstanding and influential politician. The other Prime Ministers have been Ezekiel Alebua from Guadalcanal and Francis Billy Hilly from the Western Province.

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Within the chamber of the National Parliament regionalism often influences debate and decision-making. This regional division within parliament is something most Solomon Islanders are conscious of, but only some are willing to acknowledge it is important, much less willingly engaged in a debate about it; it is culturally a very sensitive issue. Nevertheless, now and then it flares up on the talk on streets of Honiara, or, as illustrated above, often erupting into riots over a soccer match or confrontations between drunken youths.

These divisions between social, ethnic, regional, *wantok* and other groups are important to understand in discussing national development because they can influence the process of nation-building and affect people's thinking about national affairs. Not least, they affect national policy made in the country's highest political institution - the National Parliament.

### **TRADITIONAL LEADERS (BIG-MAN AND CHIEFS)**

Unlike the Samoan *matasi* which can be easily identified as the traditional leadership system, or the Fijian chiefly system, the Ratu or the *Ariki* system in the Cook Islands, Solomon Islands does not have a universal identifiable traditional leadership system. This is so because of the cultural and ethnic diversity but also, in contrast to many of the Polynesia islands to the east, in Solomon Islands no one group was ever able to exert its control or dominance over all the islands. As a result, there are many Big-Men and chiefs who ruled over limited geographical enclaves with relatively small populations.

Anthropologists describe the leadership systems in Solomon Islands as falling into two general categories: those groups which foster the Big-Man form of leadership, and those which operate under a more formal chiefly system (Strathern and Goddier, 1991; Sahlins, 1970). There is a tendency to dichotomise these traditional systems along wider geographic lines, to denote the Big-Man leadership system as practiced mostly amongst those of Melanesian origin and the chiefly systems exclusively restricted to the Polynesian outliers (Strathern and Goddier, 1991; Sahlins, 1970). However, the specifics of the leadership patterns differ from polity to polity and it is not possible to describe a traditional socio-political system that would be true for the whole of the Solomon Islands. As one would expect, the cultural diversity has generated varying political systems. The two main cultural groups, those of Melanesian origin and those who settled back into the archipelago from Polynesia, thus have different leadership systems. Even this is a generalisation, for there are also differences within these broad groups (Bennett, 1987).

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For simplicity, we shall place the leadership systems into the two broad categories of Big-Man and chiefly systems. The Big-Man leadership system is found only amongst the Melanesian population but this is not to say that all Melanesian communities practice the Big-Man system. For example, North Malaita, Shortland Islands, and New Georgia have a system more closely resembling the Polynesian chiefly system than the Big-Man pattern (Bennett, 1987).

In the Big-Man system the leaders supervise their group members with strict traditional codes of behaviour, handed down from the elders through word-of-mouth, experience, and demonstration. In this system, society is organised into relatively small political units with no fixed hierarchies which would distinguish the ordinary folk from those considered grander, such as nobles. The Big-Man emerges as leader from within the group by proving his capabilities for leadership in feasting or war, through his natural abilities as an orator or through his achievement in gardening or exchange or mastering certain forms of magic or healing. The position of Big-Man is not hereditary but is acquired through personal efforts - a meritocratic rather than a hereditary or ascribed system. One aspires to be a Big-Man by accumulating wealth and then distributing it, not only among one's immediate group but to others outside the clan, creating a network of allegiances and obligations that can extend far beyond the village or even the island. Thus, the prestige and influence of the person can be enhanced. Power and prestige is measured not so much by the wealth one accumulates, but rather by how one distributes it.

A Big-Man is expected to possess skills in areas such as oratory, hunting and/or fishing, and be in command of information about land tenure, genealogies and other *kastom* knowledge. He may also be a sorcerer or have the allegiance and service of someone who is. (Strathern and Goddier, 1991; Sahlins, 1970). Before contact and even today the Big-Man was ubiquitous in the Solomon Islands.

Those of Polynesian culture and origin in the Solomon Islands have generally maintained the hierarchical leadership systems found in the Polynesian islands of the eastern Pacific. The Polynesian outliers of Rennell, Bellona, Ontong Java, Tikopia, Sikaiana, and Anuta have chiefly families who dominate the political arena and social. The whole community usually follows the chief's decisions.

Although these traditional leadership systems are not formally integrated into the contemporary government structure in the same way as is the *matai* system in Samoa or as with the *Ratu* who form the Great Council of Chiefs in Fiji, they still have a profound impact on the nature of politics. Voters have the same expectations of politicians today as the community had of the traditional Big-Man and most politicians react to these expectations as the village Big-Man would have - distributing wealth to members of the group and participating financially in nearly every community affair. This response tends to confirm voters in their misconception that this

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is the proper task of a politician, the modern version of the traditional Big-Man. Unfortunately, it makes the politician vulnerable to bribery and other forms of corruption. Most of the present Solomon Islands parliamentarians are perceived by the voters as Big-Man - the traditional Big-Man in a modern political system.

In the chiefly societies, the chiefs also have a profound impact on modern politics. Chiefs are very powerful in influencing public opinion in their communities. They often direct people as to whom they should vote for in elections, and decide for them what their opinions should be on issues of national concern.

The Provincial Government Act of 1996, which replaced the Provincial Government Act 1981 proposes that, as part of the restructuring of the Provincial Government System, Area Assemblies will be established to replace the Provincial Assemblies. Membership of the Area Assembly will include 'chiefs', raising the question of how a chief would be selected in a society which traditionally did not have them. In many parts of Solomon Islands, the concept of a paramount chief has been introduced. Critics of the new legislation fear it may lead to the selection of people who do not deserve to be chiefs or Big-Man and thus lead to a weakening in the credibility and integrity of the traditional system.

In contemporary Solomon Islands there is also the emergence of a new type of Big-Man or chief. These persons have gained status and popularity because of their involvement in new institutions such as the church. One effect has been the increasing number of pastors, priests, and other Christian church leaders who have been elected into parliament.

What is important to note here, though, is that traditional leaders and leadership systems have had significant influence on the nature of politics in Solomon Islands and how decisions on national affairs are made. This will continue to be the case for a long time. Therefore, development planners and agencies must take care to be aware and make use of these traditional systems and structures.

Another important factor that often influences national development initiatives is the land tenure system. Traditional land tenure systems vary from one part of the country to another. However, there are some general characteristics that can be found throughout the country.

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## TRADITIONAL LAND TENURE

In Solomon Islands, the prominence of cultural traditions in national affairs is most conspicuous in the relationship between development and traditional land tenure. Large-scale resource development is often made difficult by a land tenure system in which about 87 percent of the land is in customary-ownership, leaving only about nine per cent government owned and the rest by individual Solomon Islanders. Only two per cent of the land is leased to foreigners. The small percentage of government-owned land means that the state has limited access to land for the purposes of national development. It also means that state power over land-based development initiatives can be (and has in the past been) seriously undermined. The role of land-owners has been discussed earlier in this report. However, the politics of land ownership (the interactions within land owning groups) is important to consider, and this can best be understood by looking at the traditional land tenure system.

To appreciate why a large percentage of land remains in customary-ownership, one needs to have an understanding of the traditional value of land to Solomon Islanders. For them, land is much more than a mere economic commodity, it cannot be bought and sold like other marketable commodities. Traditionally land is of great significance and indeed the most valuable resource. Not only is it a source of food, but it also has historical, political, and religious significance. The land holds burial grounds, sacrificial sites, and monuments that are important to a society's history and culture. It is not only a resource for the living, but also a vehicle for providing a link with dead ancestors. In this sense land has a religious significance which makes it the most valuable heritage of the whole community and one that is not often lightly parted with. It is usually owned by the clan or *line*, and not just by an individual. Traditionally land also has a political importance that is embedded in the role that it plays in binding together the land-owning clan or *line* (Zoloveke, 1979). It is a source of political and economic power for those who can successfully lay claim over large areas of land. One can do so by having knowledge of oral traditions which legitimate ownership of different portions of the land or successfully manipulating such oral traditions to legitimise one's own claim over land. For Solomon Islanders, land is the centre of life. People have use-rights over portions of land because of their membership in a clan or *line*; traditionally there was no individual ownership of land. (Zoloveke, 1979). The traditional land tenure system is based on the close relationship between land and people and is similar in effect to land tenure systems found throughout Melanesia and the Pacific Islands (Ballard, 1996; Ward, 1996; Crocombe, 1987).

However, since European contact and the colonisation of the islands, land tenure has changed. The concept of individual ownership with the right to sell land was

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introduced and in the early days of the British administration a large percentage of the best and most accessible land was alienated. In the 1960s the colonial government introduced a 'land settlement' program which involved the survey and registration of customary land, documenting ownership, use rights and boundaries. This program was later severely criticised for being ineffective and too centralised. By 1984, only thirteen percent of the land area of Solomon Islands had been registered, the boundaries surveyed and tenure regulated by statute. The rest remained in customary ownership and used according to custom (Larmour, 1984; Bennett, 1995).

The arrangements made during the colonial era have been the cause of some present-day conflicts over land. In Pavuvu in the Russell Islands in the Central Province, in 1905 the British colonial government leased Pavuvu Island to Levers Pacific Plantations. The original owners of the island, the Lavukal people of the Russell Islands, for many years demanded that the island be returned to them. However, their demands were ignored (Rose, 1995). On 10 March, 1995, the executive of Central Province granted Marving Brothers, a Malaysian registered logging company, a business license that allowed the central government to issue a logging permit for Pavuvu Island. The island's forest was worth about US\$120 million (Roughan, 1997). The Lavukal people, assisted by non-government organisation (NGOs) such as the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), Soltrust, Greenpeace, and Development Services Exchange (DSE) resisted the logging of Pavuvu. Company machines were sabotaged and workers were threatened. However, the central government sent in police officers to protect the company, as the government claimed the company was logging on government land (Roughan, 1997; Tuhanuku, 1995). Today, Pavuvu Island remains the centre of intense confrontation between landowners, the central government, Central Province and Marving Brothers. In November, 1995, Martin Apa, a Russell Islander anti-logging campaigner, was murdered but to date the police investigation has failed to find his killers. Many suspect that the murder was connected to the Pavuvu Island logging issue.

This is only one example of disputes over land and boundaries that are now common throughout Solomon Islands, particularly in areas where there are large-scale resource developments such as logging, mining, and plantation development. It highlights the need for landowners and traditional land tenure systems to be taken seriously when planning national development programs. The large percentage of land in customary control has implications for the state's capacity to manage land-based resource developments. One of the major arguments in the logging industry is that the government in reality does not have control over landowners' decisions to exploit the forest resource in the way they wish. Two things are evident in the case of the forestry industry. First, in Solomon Islands the state is weak in comparison to civil society (Migdal, 1988). The state does not possess the kind of power and authority

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over society as one would find in, for example, the hierarchical chiefly system of Samoa. Second, the nature of current logging practices in Solomon Islands indicate that despite customary ownership of resources this does not necessarily mean that the resource will be well managed. In fact, the history of forestry in Solomon Islands proves the opposite.

Cultural traditions undoubtedly have a tremendous impact on national affairs. However, to further understand national development in Solomon Islands, it is necessary to look at, not only the traditional systems and structures, but also the formal public sector system - that structure we often refer to as the state. This will give us a better understanding of how national policies are made and the factors that influence the way these policies are implemented. This next section deals with the public sector, one of the most important stakeholders in national development. It outlines the structure of government as it was, and the changes brought about by the Provincial Government Act 1996.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> One of the characteristics of the Ma'asina Ruru Movement was the expectation that the Americans, who came during WWII with massive supplies of 'cargo,' would one day return with more cargo and free Solomon Islanders from the British colonial government (Laracy).

<sup>2</sup> The allegation was that four Cabinet Ministers in the National Coalition Party (NCP) government led by Francis Billy Hilly defected and joined Solomon Mamaloni's National Unity, Reconciliation and Progress Pati (SINURPP) after receiving bribes from Robert Goh, the Director of Goh and Partners Public Accounts Ltd. The event resulted in the collapse of the NCP government.

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## **THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

The structures and institutions of the public sector influence both the process of development and the economic and social life of Solomon Islanders. The public sector is defined as embracing the state and its structures and institutions - the apparatus of government. It includes the entire set of political and administrative organisations that make up the governing institutions. This is distinguished from civil society which is made up of voluntary (or at least non-coercive) affiliations like schools, churches, non-government organisations, unions, and clubs. Although the state is not the only organisation that impacts on the development process, it is one of the most important.

In Solomon Islands, as in other Melanesian countries, in order to understand the state, its capacity and how it functions, one needs to first consider the process of nation-building. In Solomon Islands the nation and national consciousness are factors which are still in the process of being consolidated.

### **NATION-MAKING**

The nation of Solomon Islands was made; it did not exist naturally. It is a product of colonial creation - a process which involved bringing together people of different languages, ethnic backgrounds and stages of development. The process brought together formerly autonomous communities under the authority of a state created and nurtured by the former colonial power (United Kingdom). Today, Solomon Islands is a state exercising authority over boundaries carved during the colonial era. At the time of independence the new nation-state assumed the centralised administration created by the former colonial power. The idea of maintaining the colonially established boundary was embraced by a growing Solomon Islander elite who shared this discourse in a very fundamental way. They presented themselves as 'modern' people, committed to the state, in spite of its being a colonial creation. Many of these Solomon Islanders still occupy positions of power and authority. They include personalities such as the former Prime Minister, Solomon Mamaloni; former Leader of the Opposition, Ezekiel Alebua; the Ombudsman, Sir Peter Kenilorea; former Speaker to the National Parliament, Paul Tovua; the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Waeta Ben; and many others.

It is relevant that, since Independence many of the most senior official positions, positions of substantial power and authority in Solomon Islands, have been occupied by and swapped amongst the same few individuals. Kenilorea vacated the Prime Minister's position and Alebua took over; Mamaloni became Prime Minister and Alebua

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took over from him as Leader of the Opposition; Waeta Ben vacated the office of the Speaker of National Parliament and Tovua took over; and Waeta Ben became Chairman of the Public Service Commission. This is the generation of leaders who have managed to survive through the pre- and post-independence period. It is ironic that, although Solomon Islands' politics is often described as unstable because governments change regularly, there is also a degree of stability as the same leaders are maintained in authority.

Solomon Islands leaders who inherited power and authority from their colonial predecessors continue to consolidate this power at the core of the state and create a national consciousness. This is manifested in such symbols as the flag, the national anthem and the parliamentary building. However, even after more than eighteen years of independence, Solomon Islands leaders are still struggling to forge this national consciousness and the task of legitimizing the role and authority of a centralised state from such a diversity of cultures and peoples is a difficult one. This has a number of implications for the implementation of policies.

In contemporary Solomon Islands there are a variety of forces working to create a national consciousness and to foster the idea of nationhood. Educational institutions are a key force in this direction as schools are primary vehicles for inculcating a national consciousness and creating a common frame of reference for the young generation. The development of a common lingua franca, Pidgin English (*Pijin*) also provides a medium for the spread of concepts associated with nationality. More ephemeral is the development of popular culture, particularly evident in Honiara, in which is redefined old, traditional symbols and the creation of new ones that mediate geographic, cultural and religious boundaries. More effective, however, in bridging the diversity is inter-marriage among different island or ethnic groups, which is beginning to create a generation of Solomon Islanders who do not primarily identify with any one group above another. The role of churches in bringing together people despite regional differences and customary barriers is also important in this process of nation building. Not least, membership of sporting teams, especially in soccer or football, can be a potent force binding Solomon Islanders together in a form of collegiate identity and national pride. (Jourdan, 1995).

## **THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT**

The most dominant organisations in the public sector is the civil service and government instrumentalities. The institutions of government are found throughout the country controlling vital services such as education, health, and economic management. This section outlines the structure of government and its role and impact on national development.

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In Solomon Islands the Westminster model of government continues to have relevance decades after independence (Steeves, 1996). The Westminster system of government was, however, slightly changed to fit the needs of a new nation-state particularly the task of keeping together the diverse groups under the control of a central state authority. This was especially critical in managing the threat of secession by the islands of Western Solomons just before independence in 1978 (Premdas et al, 1984). The extent of state power and authority in Solomon Islands has been limited by its inability to bring the entire civil society under its authority. The country has been characterised as a weak state within a strong civil society (Migdal, 1988).

It was argued by the leaders at the time of independence that the best way to prevent secession was to establish a decentralised system of government and the idea of the Provincial System of Government was therefore copied from neighboring Papua New Guinea. The introduction of provincial level government meant that Solomon Islands had a three-tier system : (i) the Central Government, (ii) the Provincial Government, and (iii) the Area Council. I shall briefly discuss each of them noting the role each level of government plays in the implementation of development programs and how they influence development processes.

### **The Central Government**

The Central Government is the main national legislative or policy-making institution of the state in Solomon Islands. This is where national laws and development policies are created and where budgetary decisions on allocations for development activities are made. The Central Government includes the Parliament, the national legislative body. Presently parliament is made up of forty nine elected members and a Speaker elected by the Members of Parliament (MPs). The MPs are elected from fifty single member constituencies throughout Solomon Islands. The members elect the Prime Minister from amongst them and he subsequently appoints Cabinet Ministers from amongst his followers or supporters in the Parliament. The Government's Executive is made up of the members of Cabinet and the Prime Minister. There is a general election every four years at a date set by the government in power.

However, the most interesting and important characteristic of the Central Government in Solomon Islands is in the process whereby a government is formed following elections, particularly the fact that individuals rather than political parties have become influential in this process. There is a general lack of stability in Solomon Island politics, with weak political alignments and loose allegiances. Party systems become especially problematic at the time of forming new governments and rarely has one party been able to capture a majority through the electoral process. Hence, government formation has been driven by coalition arrangements that include combinations of multiple parties as well as a range of independants with very little alle-

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giance to ideologies or platforms. These coalitions find it difficult to stand the heat of political battle on the floor of Parliament; they tend to be highly unstable, continually in flux, and open to persistent challenge through the mechanism of votes of no-confidence, which feature throughout the term of most elected governments. Political activity operates in a climate of uncertainty in which political parties are not sufficiently strong enough to bind the loyalty of even their own members to ensure that the party controls their legislative behaviour. It is even more difficult to control the allegiance of any independants who may be necessary for the coalition to govern. There is a tendency for members to defect from the party if it is seen to be to their political advantage, especially if their regional support base may be threatened. In a society like Solomon Islands, divided by ethnic sympathies and regional identities, instability in politics is an ever-present modus-operandum and political intrigue and shifting allegiances thrive in the wake of each new crisis (Steeves, 1996).

The only time in Solomon Islands history when one party managed to win a clear majority and form a government was at the 1989 general election when the People's Alliance Party (PAP), led by Solomon Mamaloni, assumed power. However, this was a brief period of stability. By October 1990, the People's Alliance Party was in disarray with a no-confidence motion before the party's national executive seeking Mamaloni's removal as PAP's parliamentary leader. Unusually, he was being challenged from within his own party rather than on the floor of Parliament and the bonds of party unity, loyalty, and discipline were fractured for all to see. However, in a dramatic and bold stroke, Mamaloni headed off the challenge by resigning from the party and, using his power as Prime Minister, forming a Government of National Unity and Reconciliation, in doing so displacing five members from his Cabinet, including his Deputy Prime Minister, Danny Philip, to make room in the ministerial ranks to build a new governing coalition (Steeves, 1996).

The socio-cultural and political factors that influence the formation of government within parliament are also important to consider when talking about development initiatives and programs. These factors include personality, regionalism, church membership, *wantokism*, ethnicity, and party affiliations. Those who have achieved high office, such as Prime Minister, have been elected not only because they belong to a party, but also because of their personality, their regional affiliation, and to some extent (although not as significant as the other factors) the church to which they belong.

The political instability that characterises the central government affects policy-making and implementation. Many governments come to power with grand national development programs which could not even begin to be implemented because they were forced out of office in motions of no-confidence not long after forming govern-

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ment. Politicians and governments spent far too much time trying to stay in power rather than making and implementing national development programs.

Nevertheless, it is evident that although political parties continue to play a role in Solomon Islands' politics, they are not a significant force affecting national development. The absence of a strong party organisation has, however, influenced the country's political and national affairs, particularly in its effect on structure and character of the provincial governments.

### **The Provincial Government**

The Provincial Government in Solomon Islands is the level of government responsible for specifically defined regions known as provinces, established by the Provincial Government Act 1981. The constitution states that in making provisions for the establishment of the Provincial Government, the Parliament should also 'consider the role of traditional chiefs'. This is a recognition and legitimisation of the traditional leadership system. Presently there are nine provinces : Guadalcanal, Malaita, Western, Isabel, Central Islands, Rennell and Bellona, Choiseul, Makira/Ulawa, and Temotu (See Map). Under the Act each province has an elected Provincial Assembly, led by a Premier with Provincial Ministers (which make up the Provincial Executive); the Assembly has an elected Provincial Speaker. The administrative link to the national bureaucracy is through the Provincial Secretary and other staff seconded from the public service.

There has been an important restructuring of the Provincial Government system since it was first established, when the National Parliament passed the Provincial Government Act 1996 which repealed the Provincial Government Act 1981 and made provisions for restructuring the Provincial Government system. The reform establishes a Provincial Council to replace the Provincial Assembly, and Area Assemblies to replace Area Councils. The Area Assemblies will be made up of elected representatives as well as non-elected chiefs. The Provincial Council consists of the Chairpersons of all the Area Assemblies and a President who replaces the Premier in the old system. In effect, the Provincial Government Act 1996 brings together the two lower tiers of government (the Provincial Government and the Area Council). The reform also provides for the registration of chiefs and elders from amongst whom some will be appointed members of the Area Assembly.

The underlying strategy of this reform is to involve a greater number of the community in decision-making. This has influenced the inclusion of chiefs and Big Men in the Assembly as they are assumed to represent the opinions of a majority of their people. It is also a recognition of the importance of traditional leaders and an at-

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tempt to formally include them in the government structure. With this new provincial government system development planners and agencies will have to include in their dialogue and acknowledge the influence of traditional chiefs and Big-Men in discussions about national development. There was some opposition to the reform of the Provincial Government Act from a number of Provincial Governments. One, the Guadalcanal Province, took the matter to the High Court of Solomon Islands and, in February 1997 the Court ruled that the 1996 Provincial Government Act was unconstitutional. <sup>1</sup>

### **The Area Council**

The lowest level in the previous three-tier system of government was the Area Council. An Area Council was responsible for a much smaller region within the province and members of the Area Council were elected, one for each Area Council. They work in consultation with the Provincial Government. However, under the Provincial Government Act 1996, the Provincial Assembly and the Area Council will be amalgamated into new Area Assemblies and the chairperson for each Area Assembly will become a member of the Provincial Council. As noted above, chiefs will be included in these decision-making bodies. This was challenged by the Guadalcanal Province and the High Court subsequently ruled in the Province's favor. With the High Court ruling it is now difficult to speculate on the future of proposed changes to the Provincial Government system. What is likely, though, is that the bill will be reintroduced in parliament and may be re-debated. However, since the High Court decision in February 1997 the government has not made any statement to indicate its intentions regarding the bill.

### **THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

The Public Service is an important institution of the state. It is the machinery which implements government policies and the largest single employer. Of the 34,211 formal jobs in the economy in 1995, the Central Bank of Solomon Islands recorded that 6,254 of them were in the Public Administration sector. The Solomon Islands Public Service resembles the British Civil Service, divided into Ministries according to areas of administrative responsibilities. Officers are generally recruited on a permanent basis but there are also a number of contract and technical officers employed from overseas. A Minister is responsible for the ministry and its administrative structure is headed by a Permanent Secretary, usually a career public servant. Some government activities are performed by statutory agencies and commissions that usually have a specifically defined role. Statutory institutions include the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) and the Solomon Islands Electricity Authority (SIEA).

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In Solomon Islands there has been a continuing debate regarding the size of the bureaucracy as well as its efficiency and effectiveness, however, so far no firm steps have been taken for reforms.<sup>2</sup> There are those who consider the Public Service is too big and too expensive. This argument is relevant if one considers that a significant percentage of the government budget is absorbed by public service salaries rather than on development activities. Since independence the public service has grown from 2,493 officers in 1978 to nearly 6,000 in 1996. In 1996 public service salary expenditure took up nearly half of the national budget : in a total government expenditure of SI\$361 million, SI\$125 million was for public service salaries. In 1997 an estimated SI\$135 million was allocated for public sector salaries from a total budget expenditure of about SI\$412 million.

The public service in Solomon Islands has been severely affected by nepotism and *wantokism*. A public service culture has developed which is greatly influenced by client/patron relationship, not unexpected in a society where family, clan, *wantok*, and regional affiliations form the basis of social existence. The client/patron nature of social existence makes public servants vulnerable to bribery and other forms of influence. The most dramatic evidence of corruption so far was uncovered in April and May, 1996, when Prime Minister Mamaloni ordered the suspension of thirty-five public servants on half pay for having allegedly misappropriated SI\$10 million of government money. It was later revealed that the amount was even larger at SI\$35 million (*Solomon Star*, 8 May, 1996). The influence of such cultural expectations from the public service may be difficult to eradicate because of the strong patron/client relationships that characterise traditional social systems.

The role and influence of international and regional inter-government organisations is important in influencing development decisions within the public service. The following section identifies some of the organisations that have an interest in the development process in Solomon Islands.

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Solomon Islands has diplomatic ties with forty-six states and is a member of fifteen international and regional organisations. Its foreign relations are influenced by the concept of "friend to all and enemy to none". Generally this could be said to be true of Solomon Islands foreign relations, however, this policy has been greatly affected by deteriorating relations with Papua New Guinea in recent years as a consequence of the Bougainville crisis. Relations with Australia and with some international organisations have been strained by the present Government's (1997) policies on logging. Despite this, foreign governments, aid donors and regional and international organisations continue to play an important role in Solomon Islands develop-

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ment. This section discusses Solomon Islands relations with Papua New Guinea and Australia, and then goes on to outline the impact of regional and international organisations on the country's development.

### **The Bougainville Crisis and Relations with Papua New Guinea**

Throughout its almost ten year history, the civil war between the rebel Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and the Papua New Guinea Government has directly affected the Solomon Islands. The island of Bougainville is immediately north-west of the Solomon Islands border with PNG and there are close traditional and kinship ties between the peoples of the two countries in this region. Refugees from the war have become commonplace in the Western Province of Solomon Islands. On an official level, the Solomon Islands Government recognises the crisis as an internal matter for Papua New Guinea. However, diplomatic ties with Papua New Guinea have been affected by the Bougainville crisis and Solomon Islands' direct involvement has become inevitable. The number of Bougainvillean civilians fleeing the war-torn island into Solomon Island territory has continued to increase over the years, with many Bougainvilleans crossing the border to seek medical assistance, many with bullet wounds (*Solomon Star*, 11 December, 1996). Papua New Guinea has continued to accuse Solomon Islands of helping the BRA.

From February 1997, relations were further strained by Papua New Guinea plans to hire South African mercenaries to be used for training Papua New Guinea soldiers and in combat in Bougainville. Tensions were raised by allegations made in a controversial report by the PNG Government that the Solomon Islands Government had bought arms and ammunition for the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) from Australia (*Solomon Star*, 5 March, 1997). The situation has been further exacerbated by the presence in Honiara until 1996 of the BRA representative, Martin Miriori. In January 1996, Miriori's house in Honiara (which also housed the BRA office) was burned down. Two Bougainvilleans were later arrested and charged with arson. Fearing his and his family's safety, Miriori was later given political asylum in the Netherlands after negotiations by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In June he was flown out of Honiara in a specially arranged Australian military aircraft in a dramatic operation aimed to avoid suspected assassination attempts on the BRA spokesman's life.

The Papua New Guinea Defense Force (PNGDF) personnel have conducted military incursions into the Solomon Islands, and on a number of occasions there were armed confrontations between the PNGDF and the Solomon Islands Police Field Force. In 1992 two Solomon Islands civilians (a man and his eight-month pregnant sister) from the Shortland Islands in the Western Province were killed and a child wounded

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by the PNGDF (*Islands Business*, October, 1992). The crisis has resulted in an increasing militarisation of the Solomon Islands economy and society. In commenting on the spillover effects of the Bougainville crisis, Prime Minister Mamaloni admitted that the government has shifted its economic eyes towards national security, with the effect of militarizing the Solomon Islands economy (*Solomon Star*, 5 July, 1996). This means further strains on the country's budget. There is an increasing acceptance within the civil society of the need for a military capacity, particularly in the Western and Choiseul provinces that share the border with Bougainville. This raises the important question of the role of the military, not only on the Bougainville-Solomon Islands border but also in civil society. What is the future role of the military in Solomon Islands?

The Bougainville crisis continues to be an important agenda item affecting Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea relations. When twelve PNG soldiers were killed on Kangu Beach in South Bougainville in September, Solomon Islanders were accused of supplying the arms to the BRA. Some Solomon Islands students in various Papua New Guinea institutions were allegedly threatened and the decision was taken to repatriate them. Most were later sent back to PNG after assurances that their security was guaranteed by the PNG Government which expressed disappointment over the repatriation decision (*Solomon Star*, 11 October, 1996). Diplomatic relations between Solomon Islands and PNG deteriorated so far that officials from the two countries refused to talk to each other. Prime Minister Mamaloni, in particular, refused to meet his PNG counterpart, Sir Julius Chan. However, this improved in early 1997 when the PNG Prime Minister had talks with Mamaloni in Honiara on his way back from the state funeral of Marshall Islands President Amata Kabua. The two countries agreed to establish joint border surveillance which would allow PNGDF personnel "to be based on border posts in the Solomon Islands, allowing them to police the movement of Bougainville rebels between Bougainville island and the Solomons" (*The National*, 10 January, 1997). Sir Julius later told reporters in Port Moresby that "these talks have ensured that recent strains in the relationship caused by the crisis do not derail our friendly relationship" (*The National*, 10 January, 1997).

Because of the troubles on Bougainville, former diplomat and foreign minister Francis Saemala was appointed as the government's special envoy on the Bougainville crisis in June, 1996. His terms of reference included "to pursue a more determined effort for a constructive and cooperative approach to resolving the crisis . . . and to seek to establish a peace plan . . ." (*Solomon News*, June/July 1996 Vol.8, No.6). However, by the end of the year the Bougainville crisis was far from being resolved and the Solomon Islands perspective had not changed.

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## **Forestry and Australia-Solomon Islands Relations**

Relations with Australia have been strained by issues in the forestry sector and logging practices, specifically the refusal by the Prime Minister, Solomon Mamaloni, to reform the Government's unsustainable logging policies despite widespread criticisms from Australia, aid donors and development agencies. In 1995, the Australian Government canceled funding for the Timber Control Unit which was established as part of assistance to the forestry sector. Throughout 1995 and 1996 diplomatic relations with Australia were at their lowest since independence.

However, relations began to improve by the last quarter of 1996. The Foreign Minister, David Sitai, visited Canberra in November and met his Australian counterpart, Alexander Downer. They discussed, amongst other things, the logging issue. Sitai stated after the meeting that there is now a better understanding between the two governments (personal interview). In February, 1997, a delegation from Solomon Islands, which included the permanent secretaries to the Public Service and National Development and Planning, and the Chairman of the Public Services Commission, visited AusAID officers in Canberra to prepare for a high level delegation to visit later that year.

## **International and Regional Organisations**

There are a number of international and regional organisations that influence development initiatives in Solomon Islands and most of these are important as funding agencies and implementers of development programs. The international organisations include the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the European Union. A number of foreign governments also influence development projects through aid programs and the policies associated with development. The biggest aid donors to Solomon Islands are Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Traditional donors such as Great Britain and the United States have reduced their aid assistance. (The United States closed its consular office in Honiara.) The importance of powers such as China and Japan which are increasing their interest and influence in the region may change the profile of aid relations in the Solomons. Japan already has tremendous economic and political interest in the area.

There are numerous inter-governmental regional organisations that play an important role in development in Solomon Islands. These include the South Pacific Forum, the South Pacific Commission, South Pacific Tourism Council, the University of the South Pacific, the Forum Fisheries Agency, Forum Line, South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and others.

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The South Pacific Forum provides a venue for Solomon Islands, with other Pacific economies, to raise issues of concern and to negotiate with outside powers on matters that affect the region. The Forum has been influential on issues of trade, nuclear testing, and decolonisation. It has proved useful in trade negotiations with international organisations, for example in the negotiation of the Lome Conventions with the European Union, from which Solomon Islands has benefited enormously.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) provides an important educational service for Solomon Islanders. The importance of USP is evident in the fact that Solomon Islands students make up the largest population of students (other than Fijians) at the University's Suva campus and the number continues to increase every year. The USP also has a Centre in Honiara which provides extension studies for students who are unable to attend the Suva campus because of work commitment or the costs of overseas study. Enrollment at the centre has also increased over the years and the demand has exceeded the Centre's ability to provide educational services.

The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) is of paramount importance, given Solomon Islands economic reliance upon fisheries. The FFA headquarters is located in Honiara and has proved useful in the negotiation of multinational fisheries agreements with the United States, Japan, and other national fishing fleets. The organisation has also played an important role in the surveillance of the Solomon Islands' huge exclusive economic zone.

These examples illustrate the important role regional organisations play in the development process in Solomon Islands. Other regional bodies include the non-government regional organisations such as the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC), Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organisations (PIANGO), Pacific Islands News Association (PINA), Pacific Concerns and Resource Centre (PCRC). These all have an interest and play significant roles in the development process in Solomon Islands.

However, national development can be influenced by other groups within the country. Other categories of stakeholders in Solomon Islands' national development are discussed under the general grouping of civil society and the next section explores how civil society is active and influential in the development process in Solomon Islands.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Following that discision the 1996 Act has been suspended; the 1981 Act is currently in effect, pending a review and likely revision of the provincial government system.

<sup>2</sup> The Government elected in 1997 has undertaken a major reform program which includes significant reductions in the size of the civil service and a substantial restructuring of the central government administrative system.

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## **THE CIVIL SOCIETY**

Civil society refers to a loose collection of individuals who identify themselves as belonging to or being members of a social unit. The boundaries of this unit are defined by a variety of factors and characterised by disparate forces and ideas. Civil society is usually distinguished from the state and is not necessarily a homogeneous unit.

In Solomon Islands, civil society includes a variety of organisations and institutions that have no specific characteristic except that they are distinct from the state. These include churches, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), professional and sports clubs, unions, the media, and women's organisations. Civil society also includes private business interests such as multinational companies and local businesses. This discussion explores here how these organisations and institutions influence national development by interacting with each other and the state and play an important role in national development.

### **CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

The influence of Christian churches on Solomon Islands is extensive. About 95 per cent of the population belongs to one denomination or another and it is perhaps true to say that Christianity has had a greater impact on society and people than any other institution. In Solomon Islands even the state is not as influential in people's lives as their church. The churches are regarded highly and play an important role in development mainly because they have a strong impact on the way people think. In nearly every village in Solomon Islands one finds either a church building or church leader, and prayer meetings can be as frequent as once or twice a day.

The history of the establishment of Christianity in Solomon Islands can be traced back to Alvaro de Mendana's 16th century voyages. The earliest attempts to implant Christianity in the Solomons were by Catholics : first Mendana in the 16th century, then the Society of Mary in the 1840s. Mendana failed and the Marists withdrew in 1848. A decade later, the Anglicans of New Zealand began to take an interest in the area. Instead of sending white missionaries, they used more cautious methods such as bringing Solomon Islanders to New Zealand to be trained and using other Pacific Islander missionaries, especially those from Polynesia, to work in the Solomons. Through these means they established the Melanesian Mission. The Catholic missionaries returned at the end of the 19th century and around 1900, Solomon Islands labourers returning from the cotton and sugar plantations in Queensland brought back another Protestant religion, the South Seas Evangelical Mission (SSEM),

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commonly known today as the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC). Solomon Islanders who had worked in Fiji returned as Methodists and today the United Church (Methodist and Congregationalist) is active in the western Solomons. Somewhat later, in 1914, the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) came (Hillary, 1978; Laracy, 1976).

Today, 95 per cent of the population profess to being Christians : 34 percent belong to the Church of Melanesia, 19 percent are Catholics, 17 percent SSEC, 11 percent United Church and 10 percent SDA (Stanley, 1993). The Bahai faith is also active in Honiara, and there some Solomon Islander converts to Islam.

The churches banished as satanic and backward most cultural and traditional values and norms that belong to the pre-Christian era. There was a prohibition on performing traditional dances and ceremonies because these were regarded as contrary to the Bible and Christian teachings. Western ideas and ways of living were promoted by churches as more ethical and Godly than indigenous cultures and values. Most churches in Solomon Islands present Christianity as the battle against tradition, an expression of the neoclassical lineal view which argues that traditional cultures are synonymous with backwardness or the lack of development. Such conceptions still influence development thinking in Solomon Islands.

Despite this negative impact, the churches have had a significantly positive effect on Solomon Islanders well-being as they were pioneers in providing education, health care, and communication to the villagers. Through the education system Christian doctrine became widespread, along with the notions of Heaven and Hell, of good and bad and of what is regarded as best for society. Churches, therefore, have a salient impact on people's perceptions and ways of thinking about development. In many instances, the churches contend that development is either equal to or synonymous with Westernisation and industrialization and most Christian denominations portray Christianisation as a progression forward, synonymous with Westernisation.

Hence, the Church is a prominent stakeholder in the development process, evident not only in Christianity's teachings, but also in the Church's involvement in providing education and health services. There are a number of well-established Church-owned and managed schools, including St. Joseph's Tenaru (Roman Catholic), Selwyn College (Anglican), Betikama and Kukundu (Seventh Day Adventist), Su'u (South Seas Evangelical Church), and Goldie College (United Church). The churches are also active in the area of rural and vocational training and have established centres for such training in various provinces. In the 1980s, private schools such as Bishop Epalle and Florence Young in Honiara were founded by churches - the Roman Catholic and SSEC communities respectively. In the health sector, two of the country's four major hospitals are church-owned and managed. The Atoifi Hospital on Malaita and

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the Goldie Helena Hospital in the Western Province are managed by the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the United Church respectively. Churches also operate smaller clinics and health services throughout the country.

Apart from education and health, the churches are active in many other community projects. For example, in 1994 the United Church started a timber harvesting project known as Solomon Western Islands Fair Trade (SWIFT) with the objective of organising an alternative for landowners to signing agreements with logging companies for the sale of their timber. SWIFT provides support for the development of forest management plans for village communities which provide for small-scale and sustainable harvesting of timber resources. In this way village communities are provided with an alternative to large-scale logging. SWIFT also encourages landowners to take responsibility for the management of their forest resources, incorporating the aims of “.. to enable (empower) people economically (financially) to say ‘no’ to offers from logging companies; and to promote sustainable timber production for community needs and to facilitate earning a good cash income by selling these sawn timbers to local and export markets” (*SWIFT Newsletter*, June 1996, No.1). The involvement of the United Church in this project is an example of how the churches can play an important role as stakeholders in the development process in Solomon Islands.

In general, the church has become so powerful that development agencies and the state cannot afford to ignore this institution as an important vehicle for implementing development programs. In nearly every community churches are capable of mobilising community support in a way that government institutions have not been able to do. Church-based organisations such as youth groups, women’s club, choirs, singing bands, etc. are important bases for social mobilisation. Churches are also very influential in politics and can influence election outcomes. Church membership is seen as an important criterion in the choice of candidates for important positions such as parliamentary membership. In the constituency of East Honiara, for example, two important factors in influencing election results are: i) regionalism, and ii) church membership. Regarding the first of these because of the large Kwara’ae population living in the squatter settlements behind Honiara, the only candidates with any chance of winning an election in this constituency are those who are of Kwara’ae origin. As most of the residents belong to the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC), membership of that church would therefore be a strong criteria for winning that seat.

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## **NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS**

In addition to the Christian churches, there are other important civil society organisations that influence national affairs in Solomon Islands. One such rapidly growing group is non-government organisations (NGOs). This section identifies some of the major NGOs in Solomon Islands and discusses how they influence national development.

Non-government organisations have played an active role in development in spite of the fact that the concept of NGOs is relatively new in Solomon Islands. It was only in the 1980s that NGO organisations became commonplace but by the beginning of the 1990s many Solomon Islanders had become familiar with the role NGOs and associated NGO movements can play in the development of the country.

By the 1990s NGOs had moved from having a peripheral role to one that was more central in providing leadership and initiatives for national development. In writing about NGOs in Solomon Islands, John Roughan stated that NGOs "were actively working front stage in Solomon Islands public life. They now made a difference in how the country was run" (Roughan 1994:143). This shift from a peripheral to a central role in development was away from the traditionally perceived role of NGOs as being relief- and project-oriented organisations that are seen as independent of politics and have no influence over policy-making.

The historical development of NGOs in Solomon Islands can be viewed as having three periods through which different waves of NGO movements emerged. The first wave of NGOs came to Solomon Islands during the colonial era and continued to exist and operate in the post-independence period. These included organisations such as the Red Cross, Foundation for Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP), the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides Movement, and church-based organisations. These NGOs were known for bringing in often much needed material assistance, especially during natural disasters which were not uncommon in these islands prone to cyclones, earthquakes, and flooding. But the relief and welfare approach, as much as it was needed, also tended to strengthen the conventional development strategy. It emphasised capital transfers, formal planning, specialisation, and central government control of the whole development process.

Even the second wave of NGO-presence, which funded development of community projects, believed that these activities would be sustained beyond the period of NGO assistance. These NGO-funded activities carried an added attraction. There was a conscious effort to remove projects from the political scene which was welcomed by colonial authorities and even more so by the newly founded government. Aid, not critique, was what the newly established country wanted.

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In the early 1980s, however, a third wave of NGOs began to take root in the Solomon Islands. These new groups were not local versions of overseas NGOs but were indigenous organisations responding to local problems directed by local leadership. Government reaction to this type of NGO was mixed but fundamentally, at least in the beginning, distrustful. Some of these important and active NGOs, led by Solomon Islanders, are the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), SolTrust, and Iumi Tugeta Holdings. There are also international NGOs such as Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), and Red Cross (see Table I for a complete list of NGOs).

The largest of these advocacy NGOs is the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) which was first set up in 1982. From its early days, SIDT questioned the prevailing idea that development could only take place with the transfer of goods, services and knowledge from western industrialised countries to developing countries. The underlying argument by SIDT is that development should be defined "...as 'empowerment' rather than the discredited notion that the North/South resource transfer was the solution" (Roughan 1994:146). The present Director of SIDT, Abraham Baeanisnia, is also the Chairperson for the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO).

NGOs subscribe to a local umbrella NGO group, the Development Services Exchange (DSE), headed by Judith Siota. "At present DSE boasts a paying membership of more than fifty NGOs which work in literacy, community-based rehabilitation, development work, rural training centers" (Roughan, 1994:145). Other areas in which such NGOs are active include family planning, rehabilitation of commercially logged areas, sanitation and health.

The role of NGO movements in politics and in the task of decision-making is an important one. Some national leaders balked at the thought of NGOs assuming certain public leadership roles considered to be the responsibility of elected officials. Development was a government prerogative and governments were installed by a public, more or less democratic, selection process. In this context, there is concern that NGOs assume the authority to work in the area of development and leadership. Nevertheless, today NGOs have become important players in national development in Solomon Islands and they are no longer just relief and welfare agencies but have become active participants in influencing policy and in creating and moulding public opinion. Whatever the thoughts people had of NGOs in the 1980s, what is obvious today is that NGOs are important participants in development in Solomon Islands.

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## TRADE UNIONS

Another group important in influencing policy-making are trade unions. The trade union movement in Solomon Islands is a recent development. Trade unions first emerged in the 1970s with the establishment of the Solomon Islands National Trade Union. Over the years, trade union movements became influential not only in regard to worker interests, but also in broader issues of national issues. Solomon Islands trade unions have been outspoken on issues ranging from nuclear testing and waste disposal to the government's controversial debit tax which, if implemented, would impose a two per cent tax on every withdrawal from bank savings.

It is anticipated that the influence of trade unions in the Solomon Islands will continue to grow as workers become increasingly aware of their rights, despite the decline in formal sector employment by 5 per cent in 1995. Presently, there are more than ten major trade union organisations in Solomon Islands, a large number given the relatively small number of employees in the formal sector (34,211 in 1995). The largest of the unions is the Solomon Islands National Union of Workers (SINUW) which represents workers in the private sector, statutory organisations, and the non-established workers in the public sector. Other large unions include : the Solomon Islands Teachers' Association (SINTA), which represents teachers; the Solomon Islands Public Employees Union (SIPEU), a Public Sector employees union; the Solomon Islands Nurses Association (SINA); and, the Solomon Islands Medical Association (SIMA). Most unions are affiliated with the Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions (SICTU), the umbrella body for all trade union organisations in Solomon Islands. SICTU in turn is affiliated to the South Pacific and Oceania Council of Trade Unions (SPOCTU), the regional umbrella body.

From the time they were first established, trade unions have been influential in politics. The founder of the SINUW, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, for example, later became Member of Parliament with union support (in 1997 he was elected Prime Minister). The trade unions were instrumental in the establishment of the Labour Party led by Joses Tuhanuku, the former General Secretary of the SINUW and the trade union movement was also important in mobilising political support for candidates in constituencies such as North Guadalcanal where there is a large population of union members working at the Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd. (SIPL) oil palm plantations on the Guadalcanal plains. The current member for this constituency contested the last election on the Labour Party ticket.

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**TABLE I:**

**List of important Development Stakeholder Organisations in  
Solomon Islands**

**1. THE STATE :**

The Central Government  
Nine Provincial Governments  
Area Councils  
The Public Service  
The Judiciary

**2. RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

**CHRISTIAN CHURCHES :**

Anglican (Church of Melanesia);  
Roman Catholic;  
South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC);  
United Church  
Seventh Day Adventists (SDA)  
The new Pentecostal/Evangelical churches

**BAHAI FAITH**

**ISLAM**

**3. NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS :**

Development Services Exchange (DSE)

The NGOs affiliated to DSE :

Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT)  
SolTrust  
Iumi Tugeta Holdings  
Solomon Western Islands Fair Trade (SWIFT)  
Red Cross  
Greenpeace  
World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF)

**4. TRADE UNIONS**

Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions (SICTU)

Unions affiliated to SICTU:

Solomon Islands National Union of Workers (SINUW)  
Solomon Islands Public Employers Union (SIPEU)  
Solomon Islands National Teachers Association (SINTA)  
Solomon Islands Medical Association (SIMA)  
Solomon Islands Nurses Association (SINA)  
College of Higher Education National Lecturers Association (CHENLA)

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## THE MEDIA

Another group in civil society which is still developing but which will inevitably grow in influence is the media. Although it now has limited force or impact, with increasing literacy among the population,<sup>1</sup> and the growing hunger for information, the effectiveness of the media as a key stakeholder in social and political discussions is expected to increase and become more influential in shaping public opinion, disseminating information, and creating a national consciousness. An important stimulus will be the establishment of television in the Solomon Islands.

Currently, the media in Solomon Islands is represented by a short wave radio station (the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Cooperation [SIBC] which is a government statutory body), an FM private radio station and three English-language newspapers. The newspapers are *Solomon Star*, the biggest which publishes three times a week, *The Solomon Voice* which publishes biweekly, and *Solomon Citizen*, a weekly publication. In early 1997, a pidgin newspaper, *The Grassroots*, began publication although it wound up after only a few issues because of financial problems. Despite some government control the media in Solomon Islands is relatively free.

For the majority of Solomon Islanders who live in the rural areas, their only link with Honiara is through the SIBC. The radio station has programs on a variety of development issues such as agriculture, fisheries, and health. It also runs both international and local current affairs and news, broadcasting in both English and Pidgin, making it the only media organisation that reaches the majority of Solomon Islanders. However, SIBC is government-controlled and most of what is produced is monitored by a Board of Directors appointed by the government.

The FM radio station was owned by an Australian company, Unitel, and its reception is limited to Honiara and the immediate surrounding areas. This station provides programs dominated by entertainment with very little emphasis on news or development issues. Its impact on the large Solomon Islands population is, therefore, limited although this may change in the future. Unitel pulled out of Solomon Islands after it was unsuccessful in securing investment at the proposed Anuha Tourist Resort on Ngella in the Central Islands Province. In mid-1997 the station was taken over by an Australian businessman.

The print media, on the other hand, plays a critical role in development and often reports on and highlights important issues and has a greater influence on public opinion about national development issues. For example, in 1995 *Solomon Star* blew the whistle on cabinet ministers' corrupt involvement in the logging industry. The story eventually led to court proceedings although, so far, none of those indicated

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have been reprimanded. In contrast, however, the journalist who broke the story was dismissed from his job and the newspaper has since censored its coverage of logging issues.

The impact of the print media in Solomon Islands is impeded by a number of factors. First, all are Honiara-based and, therefore, the reportage tends to be oriented to Honiara issues with very limited coverage of issues concerning the rural population. More significantly, very few copies of the newspapers, if any, find their way to the rural areas. As all are published in the English language the number of readers is limited as only about 40 percent of the country's population are literate but a much smaller percentage reads and understands English. However, this may change with the increasing rate of literacy.

There is, however, another form of print media which is designed to reach to the majority of villagers and illiterate population and is owned and distributed by NGOs and churches. These include newsletters published in Pidgin, simple English and in the form of comic strips. The most well known of these publications are the *LINK* and *komik* books published by the Solomon Islands Development Trust. These are easy-to-read publications that discuss issues directly related to villagers. *LINK*, for example, is a magazine for and about village life which gives villagers and resource owners the opportunity to make known their thoughts, aspirations, and plans for the country's future. The interesting thing about *LINK* is that it is produced in a form of comic strips in Pidgin and is produced along with the *komik* book. It has become popular and is widely read in Solomon Islands. *LINK* and the *komik* book publications address a variety of issues such as family planning, the downside of commercial logging, life in town, planning a feast, AIDS, malaria and many other subjects (Roughan, 1994).

SolTrust publishes its monthly newspaper, *SolTree*, which discusses logging issues and encourages landowners to harvest their timber sustainably. It has proven useful in providing information about alternatives to large-scale logging. *SolTree* also provides useful and practical tips for villagers on how they should manage their timber resources and the possible alternatives to round log export. The SWIFT project also publishes a monthly newsletter highlighting its activities. Churches play an important role in the media. The Catholic Church, through its Catholic Media and Communications Department, produces *Voice Katolika*, a monthly newsletter published in both Pidgin and the English language. It often addresses social issues such as unemployment, urbanisation, and village community development. Other church denominations also publish newsletters.

Another form of media is the extensive and successful use of the village theatre to perform in rural areas throughout the country, established as a communication

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medium by SIDT. A village theatre team was established in 1988 and the group prepared skits and short dramas about topical national issues, such as the effects of commercial logging, the value of local rather than imported food, immunisation and other health issues, population growth, urbanisation, increasing unemployment. The SEI theatre group has put on performances both in urban and rural areas and has become successful in mediating messages, especially to the majority of the population many of whom are illiterate.

## **THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

The private sector is important in Solomon Islands development, because it provides the capital needed for investment, a prerequisite for economic growth, employment creation, and the generation of national income. However, in recent years the general growth in the private sector has been retarded by inconsistent government policies which undermine investor confidence in the economy. Many major companies have expressed reservations about further investment, relating to uncertainties concerning government policies in important areas such as taxation, incentives, labour relations, infrastructure, general costs, and the technical skills of the workforce. These reservations emanated from what the Central Bank of Solomon Islands described as the lack of consultation between government and private sector, and the consequent lack of government responsiveness to private sector concerns (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 1995).

Notwithstanding the small size of the private sector, its role in Solomon Islands is very important. The sector is currently dominated by multinational companies (MNCs) and other foreign interests and local investment in the country is limited despite attempts by successive governments to encourage Solomon Islanders to invest in various industries. Multinational companies dominate a number of important industries such as fisheries, agriculture, mining, and forestry.

The fisheries industry is dominated by the Solomon Taiyo Ltd., a joint venture between the Solomon Islands government and Taiyo Gyogyo of Japan, one of the world's largest multinational fishing companies. Solomon Taiyo Ltd. was established in 1973 with a 75 percent share held by Taiyo Gyogyo and 25 percent by the Solomon Islands government. As of 1992, however, the Solomon Islands government held 51 percent and Taiyo Gyogyo 49 percent. Solomon Taiyo Ltd. now operates a cannery at Noro in the Western Province. In 1995 the company reported a total catch of 35,000 tons, in the total national catch of 56,000 tons, which was up 45 percent over the previous year (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 1995). Solomon Taiyo Ltd.'s activities came under scrutiny during 1995, when the Investment Corporation of Solomon Islands (ICSI) engaged consultants to review the performance of the company. The

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report on the company included recommendations to address the weakness in the company (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 1995:19).

In addition to ownership in Solomon Taiyo Ltd. the government was involved in the National Fisheries Development (NFD), which was established with the objective of eventually nationalising the fisheries industry. However, it closed operations in the late 1980s because of poor management and was bought by British Columbia Packers, a Canadian-registered company, which has since concentrated on exporting unprocessed tuna. The fisheries industry provided for 2,651 jobs in 1995 as compared to 2,588 in 1994, and made up 25.3 per cent of the country's exports in 1995 (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 1995). The government believes it has potential for further development.

With the help of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) Solomon Islands benefits from multilateral agreements such as the 1988 treaty with the United States which pays for access to the EEZs of FFA members. While multilateral agreements are important, it is also certain that Solomon Islands will continue to benefit from joint ventures and, in the long run, multinational companies such as Taiyo Gyogyo will continue to be important in the fisheries industry. However, a concern of the Solomon Islands, shared by other South Pacific island countries, is whether they are getting a fair return for their fisheries resource. It has been estimated that the landed value of all fish taken from the South Pacific EEZs is about \$US1.5 billion a year. However, the countries which under international law own the resource get about 5 percent of this or less (Barber, 1997).

Agriculture is another sector that has been dominated by multinational companies. The history of commercial agriculture in Solomon Islands is dominated by foreign investment, such as Burns Philp, Lever Brothers, and the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), which have monopolised commercial agriculture since the colonial period (Bennett, 1987). These companies have been involved mainly in the coconut and oil palm plantations. The Lever Pacific Plantation Ltd., for example, owns most of the large coconut plantations in the country and in recent years the company has invested in cocoa plantations. The Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd. (SIPL), a subsidiary of CDC, owns the oil palm plantations on the Guadalcanal plains. In 1995, copra, palm and cocoa made up for 5.7, 12.6 and 2.3 percent of total exports respectively. Agriculture provide 3,984 jobs in 1995, a decline from the high of 4,518 in 1992 (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, 1995). The decline in the sector is partially due to the limited government finance or private investment in the sector in the last ten years.

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Mining is a relatively new industry which will undoubtedly become more important, particularly with the new mineral discoveries at Poha and Koloula on Guadalcanal and Vangunu in the Western Province. The Gold Ridge mine owned and managed by the Australian Mining Company began production in July 1997 and will bring into the country much needed finance. Because of the huge capital needs of the sector it will likely continue to be dominated by foreign investment. To ensure the country and the landowners receive the benefits of the industry negotiations with foreign companies will be an important factor.

The forestry sector has attracted widespread attention over the years because of government policies and role of multinational companies in the forestry industries. Over the last five years the industry has been dominated by Malaysian and Korean investors, backed by Japanese and Korean buyers. Log production in Solomon Islands has been pushed to more than three times higher than sustainable levels. In 1994 and 1995, log purchases by Japan were alone greater than the sustainable yield. The trend started in 1981 under the first Mamaloni government when the number of logging licenses issued to foreign companies quadrupled (Fraser, 1997). If log production continues to escalate at the current rate, it has been estimated that Solomon Islands commercial trees could be depleted in less than a decade (Montgomery, 1995; Fraser, 1997).

The role of multinational investors on forest management in Solomon Islands must be changed if the forestry resource is to contribute to long term sustainable development. It can be asserted that Asian multinationals have taken advantage of the structural defects in the management of the industry in Solomon Islands to benefit significantly. Insufficient finance and lack of technical and human resources to monitor logging operations, poor national forest policies and weak environmental rules are some of the factors which have contributed to this situation in the industry. Of equal concern, is the inability of the Solomon Islands Division of Inland Revenue to prevent or counteract corporate schemes to evade taxes (Price Waterhouse, 1995, pp.39-40; Duncan, 1994).

Multinational investors are one part the network of players in the forest industry in Solomon Islands. Other relevant factors include the politics of landowner groups, state policies and structures, concepts of development and changing consumption patterns. Customary land ownership can sometimes restrict the state's capacity to enforce national forest policies and plans and informal ties and lucrative financial arrangements between the state, community leaders, and timber companies further undermine enforcement efforts. However, it is true to say that multinational investors in Solomon Islands forestry sector have ignored, skirted, or undermined many

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formal policies and as a result, formal environmental and forest management guidelines can hide corporate practices rather than improve timber management. The fact that about 50 percent of the country's export revenue comes from timber is a manifestation of financial dependence on an industry dominated by corporate powers.

The private sector and in particular, multinational companies, will continue to be an important stakeholder in the Solomon Islands development process. The best the leaders can do is to learn to deal with them in a way that will bring maximum benefit to the country.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although presently only 40 per cent of Solomon Islands population is literate, the percentage is increasing because of improving access to schooling as well as Adult Literacy Programs administered by NGOs such as the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) with government support.



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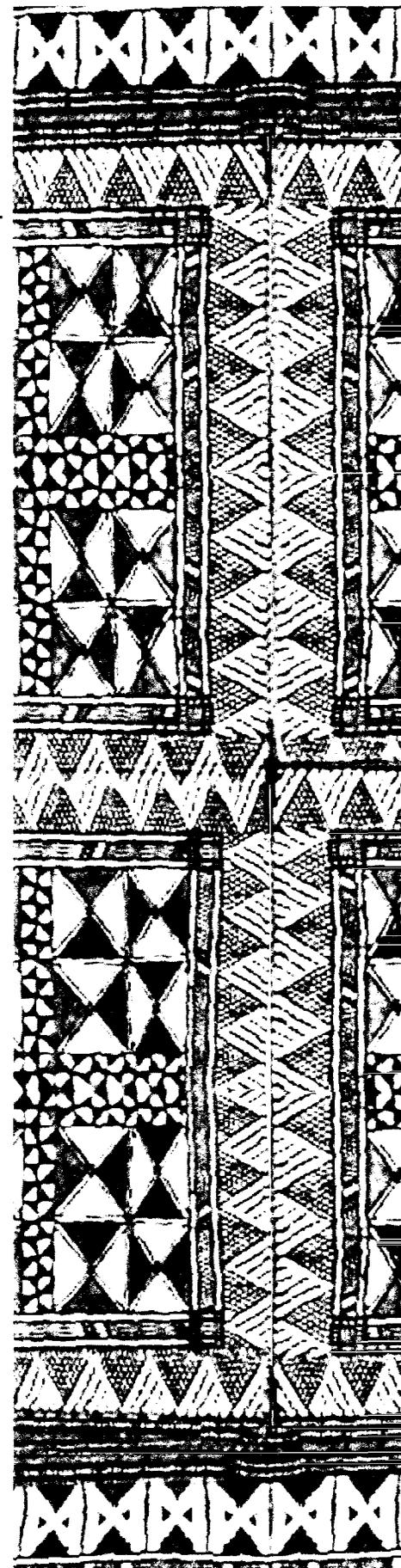
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