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WAVE: WOMEN AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN SOLOMON ISLANDS - LITERATURE REVIEW

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RESEARCH REPORT

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Introduction and Background

The following review considers literature on women and political leadership in Solomon Islands. It was undertaken in 2018 in preparation for the *Public Perceptions of Women as Leaders* research to be conducted by Women's Rights Action Movement of Solomon Islands (WRAM) and International Women's Development Agency (IWDA). The focus of the review is on women and political leadership. The document was updated in October 2019 to reflect changes.

Solomon Islands is a sovereign state in the Melanesia region of the Pacific. A 'protectorate' of both Germany (northern islands) and Great Britain (southern islands) during the colonial period, Solomon Islands remained under British colonial rule until independence in 1978. The colonial presence was accompanied by extensive missionary activity. British colonial administration and Christian values have strongly influenced formal and informal structures for decision making and representation in present day Solomon Islands.

The population of Solomon Islands has grown from around 200,000 at independence to an estimated 642,000 people currently, with a large proportion of young people.¹ The agricultural base of the economy has historically seen export of natural resources including copra, palm oil and timber as an important source of income. However, in the past 15 years Solomon Islands has been highly dependent on aid from foreign nations including the largest donor, Australia, as well as New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan and the European Union.² Challenges for the government include providing services to a highly

rural population, strengthening the education system and identifying new sources of income.

Women comprise 49% of the population.³ The Constitution of Solomon Islands makes indirect reference to equality between women and men in several articles. These include the *Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the Individual*:

Whereas every person in Solomon Islands is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, the right, whatever his [sic] race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex...⁴

Further articles provide for Protection from discrimination on grounds of race, etc.:

... no law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect

... no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any written law or performance of the function of any public office or any public authority

... the expression "discriminatory" means affording different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another such description are not made subject or are accorded privileges or advantages which are not accorded to persons of another such description.⁵

Formal barriers to women's participation have been limited. Women were granted suffrage and the right to stand as candidates at the same time as men. However, the Constitution does not contain explicit

¹ Number retrieved October 2019 at statistics.gov.sb.

² See <https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/>.

³ Percentage retrieved October 2019 at data.un.org. IWDA refers to designations of women and men

acknowledging that these categories are not fixed and recognising diversities in gender identity.

⁴ National Parliament of Solomon Islands, *The Constitution of Solomon Islands, 1978*, Chapter II, Article 3.

⁵ *The Constitution of Solomon Islands*, Article 15.

statements about women and men being equal in status, being equally able to stand for election and having equal rights to elect political representatives. Women's participation in public decision making is significantly lower than that of men at national, provincial and community levels. At the time of writing, two of 50 seats in national parliament (4%) and 4 of 172 seats in provincial assemblies (2.3%) were held by women.⁶ The significant under-representation of women in public decision making in Solomon Islands has been characterised by researcher and women's rights activist Alice Pollard as "paddling the canoe on one side":

It refers to the frustration resulting from a situation that is one-sided and lacking in balance and co-operative effort, thus leading to a failure to move forward. It captures succinctly the experience of women in many parts of Melanesia, a scenario in which women are so often seriously under-represented in public decision-making."⁷

The extremely low number of women in parliament is widely recognised as a problem of both human rights and development, with strong global evidence that higher numbers of women in parliament deliver better development outcomes.⁸

WOMEN IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

There are significant gender disparities in Solomon Islands. The most recent country gender assessment was completed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2015.⁹ This report was coordinated by the

Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and draws on data from 2009-2013. It outlines important progress towards gender equality in a number of policy areas. However, the report also describes a general environment in Solomon Islands where the experiences of women and girls are strongly differentiated from those of men and boys. Women are less likely than men to have participated in formal education at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary). Women are less likely than men to have paid employment and work available to women is often highly precarious in nature, for example, subsistence agricultural work. The ADB report also documents high levels of violence against girls and women.

International and national legal frameworks

Solomon Islands is a signatory to the *Pacific Platform for Action* (1994) and the *Beijing Platform for Action* (1995). It ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) in 2002 and submitted its combined first, second and third periodic report to the Committee in 2013.¹⁰ The fourth periodic report was due in November 2018.

The *Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy*, endorsed in 2010, provides a framework for implementing these international commitments. A 'Women in Shared Decision Making' (WISDM) coalition was formed as a "strategic component" of this policy. The original aim of WISDM was to improve the quality of national governance by supporting women's participation in elections and raising awareness of electoral and voting processes.¹¹

⁶ See <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=9&year=2019>. Number of women in provincial government supplied by Women's Rights Action Movement.

⁷ Quoted in Heather Wallace, 'Paddling the canoe on one side: women in decision-making in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands', *Development*, 54(4), 2011, p.505.

⁸ Pilar Domingo et al, *Women's voice and leadership in decision-making*, pp.86-88.

⁹ Asian Development Bank, *Solomon Islands: Country Gender Assessment*, ADB, 2015.

¹⁰ This report can be found at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=SLB&Lang=EN.

¹¹ Asian Development Bank, p.64.

Solomon Islands was amongst 14 countries to commit to the 2012 *Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration*. This declaration articulates a commitment to accelerating the full and equal participation of women in decision making at all levels.¹² The Public Service Commission has designated all permanent secretaries of ministries as leaders in gender mainstreaming.¹³

A number of key policy and political commitments relating to women and girls have been made in recent years. The passing of the *Solomon Islands Family Protection Bill* in 2014 is a significant milestone in terms of increasing awareness of and criminalizing domestic violence. This legislation suggests a shift in public understanding of violence against women and girls.

The 2014 *Political Parties Integrity Act* requires parties to include at least 10% women on candidate lists at elections. Loopholes in the legislation allow parties to bypass this requirement without penalty.¹⁴ The Solomon Islands *National Development Strategy 2016–2035* includes a medium term strategy to ‘improve gender equality and support the disadvantaged and vulnerable’.¹⁵

In the lead-up to the 2019 general elections, a Women Leaders Support Network, comprising national women leaders and aspiring candidates, was established.

In the literature reviewed, there is a general consensus that there are good and appropriate legislative frameworks in place in Solomon Islands to promote the status of women, both generally and in relation to political representation. Successive parliaments have ratified international instruments

intended to protect women’s rights both as citizens and as political leaders. The general perception amongst observers, however, is that the government has been slow in implementing any action plans generated from the commitments listed above. The Asian Development Bank’s assessment in 2015 was that “the government lacks technical capacity, skilled staff, and adequate resources to implement major policy changes.”¹⁶ Analysts generally agree that, while the formal protections in place for women in Solomon Islands are to be commended, they have not been strongly enforced and as such have not resulted in greater gender equality. This is partly due to the influence of informal rules, norms and practices that impede women’s full participation in civic life as citizens and leaders.¹⁷

One measure that can increase women’s political representation is the use of gender quotas, commonly called temporary special measures (TSM) in the Pacific region. In 2008 WISDM, on behalf of women’s groups in Solomon Islands, made a submission to the government to argue for TSM for women in parliament. The government expressed in principle support for this idea and a task force was established to consider options. In 2010 the *National Coalition for Reform and Advancement’s Policy Statement* proposed introducing reserved seats for women.¹⁸ However, this proposal was rejected in parliament and no legislation has been introduced to date.

In recent years the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Women’s Rights Action Movement (WRAM) and UN Women have been working closely with members of several provincial

¹² Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, ‘Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration 30 August 2012.’

¹³ Asian Development Bank, p.vii.

¹⁴ See National Parliament of Solomon Islands, *Political Parties Integrity Act 2014* and Kerry Baker, “What did the winning candidate have that I don’t have?’: gender, politics and elections in Solomon Islands,’ *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 56(4), 2018, pp.427-445, p.431.

¹⁵ Solomon Islands Government, *Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2016-2035*, 2016, p.13.

¹⁶ Asian Development Bank, p.xiii.

¹⁷ Baker (2018b), pp. 428-429.

¹⁸ The National Coalition for Reform and Advancement (NCRA) Government, *Policy Statement*, 2010, p.12.

assemblies to gain support for TSM at the provincial level. Review of the *Provincial Government Act* in 2019 has presented an opportunity to include a special measure for additional seats in provincial assemblies. At the time of writing, four provincial assemblies have made an in-principle commitment to introducing TSM, with a further two provincial assemblies also exploring this.

Development partner support

In the past two decades, international agencies have dedicated substantial resources to working with organisations in Solomon Islands to increase the number of women in political leadership. *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development*, known as *Pacific Women*, was launched by the Australian Government at the 2012 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting. This 10 year program supports Pacific Forum countries to meet commitments articulated in the 2012 *Gender Equality Declaration*. Managed by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in close working relationship with regional agencies and Pacific Island Governments, a key objective of the program is that “women and women’s interests are increasingly and effectively represented and visible through leadership at all levels of decision making.”¹⁹ *Pacific Women* has supported a range of activities aimed at increasing understanding of the barriers to women’s public leadership and decision making in the region, including Solomon Islands.²⁰

There has been a strong focus in the work of international development partners on supporting individual women candidates to improve their chances of being elected. This review does not have the scope to document the range of activity that has taken place in this field over time. However, the

literature reviewed suggests that while this work may have been highly valuable in other ways, it has not resulted in substantive change in terms of the representation of women in political leadership.²¹ Researcher Terence Wood analysed outcomes for women candidates who both did and did not participate in training over time in 2014 and found no significant difference in outcomes, suggesting that candidate training alone is unlikely to increase the number of women in political leadership.²² Factors nominated by analysts include the focus of candidate training to date (technical issues related to elections and campaigning rather than political economy issues), a tendency towards generic rather than tailored leadership training and the use of international consultants with limited experience in Solomon Islands.²³

National women’s groups

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW) was formed in 1983 as an umbrella organisation for women’s groups. The vision of the Council is *Women as equal partners in the development of Solomon Islands*. The Council makes explicit reference in this vision to promoting the participation of women in formal decision-making.²⁴ SINCW is in a unique position amongst gender-focused civil society organisations in that it is officially mandated by the national government. While SINCW has facilitated women’s participation in public policy debates and raised awareness on gender issues, it has struggled with a lack of funding

¹⁹ See <https://pacificwomen.org/>.

²⁰ See <https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/locations/solomon-islands/>.

²¹ See Julien Barbara and Kerryn Baker, ‘Improving the electoral chances of Pacific women through an evidence-based approach,’ ANU, 2016, p.6.

²² Terence Wood, ‘Why can’t women win?: impediments to female electoral success in Solomon Islands’, Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2014, p.12.

²³ Barbara and Baker, p.10.

²⁴ See <http://www.solomonislandsinfocus.com/sincw.html>.

and capacity, especially in strengthening its network outside the capital, Honiara.²⁵

Researchers acknowledge that women's groups in the informal sector play a critical role in Solomon Islands. There are an estimated 3,000 women's groups at provincial and local levels, many of these church-based.²⁶ Organisations not officially affiliated with a specific church usually still have explicitly Christian ideological underpinnings.²⁷ While church-based women's groups in Solomon Islands may appear to be conservative, they can facilitate political participation and women's leadership in a progressive way.²⁸ Further, they are highly valued by communities.²⁹

Several researchers make the point that women are highly active as leaders in church and community spheres in Solomon Islands and that this work should be not be disregarded as leadership work.³⁰ Nicole Haley and Kerry Zubrinich suggest that rural women do not necessarily think of 'political participation' as only or primarily about being in national or provincial government.³¹ Although these groups are very close to communities and understand their realities well, observers suggest that they are not adequately recognised for their insights or involved in formal interventions to address key community issues.³² In addition, while "involvement in church and peace initiatives may be important ground for women leaders, work in these areas does not

automatically lead to success in politics."³³ Alice Pollard suggests that even in community and church spheres where women are extremely active, women "tend to dominate the implementation domain rather than the decision making domain."³⁴

Academic Kerryn Baker suggests that leadership in women's groups is not necessarily seen by voters as salient political experience.³⁵

A notable recent exception to the characterisation of women in Solomon Islands as important but not highly visible leaders relates to the critical role played by women in the civil conflict from 1998-2003. Alice Pollard writes powerfully about the leadership exercised by women during this period of extreme civil unrest. Women formed coalitions across different ethnic groups, were outspoken in their critique of the violence that was taking place and played a pivotal role in re-establishing peace in Solomon Islands. They worked with men at significant personal risk to establish the dialogue that brought an end to the violence and disruption. Women were highly visible leaders at this time, only to be subsequently excluded from the formal peace talks that took place in Australia following this period of civic unrest.³⁶ The prominent role that women played in peace-making did not translate to access to public space in the post-conflict context. Some writers suggest that women's peace-making activities were conceptualized as the private role of

²⁵ Sherrill Whittington, Sofi Ospina and Alice Aruhe'eta Pollard, 'Women in Government in Solomon Islands,' Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2006, p.21.

²⁶ See Wallace, p.507.

²⁷ Alice Aruhe'eta Pollard, 'Women's organizations, voluntarism, and self-financing in Solomon Islands: A participant perspective,' *Oceania* 74(1-2), 2002, 44-60, p.45.

²⁸ Regina Scheyvens, 'Church women's groups and the empowerment of women in Solomon Islands,' *Oceania* 74 (1-2), 2002, 24-43, p.40.

²⁹ Debra McDougall, 'Fellowship and citizenship as models of national community,' *Oceania* 74 (1-2), 2002, 61-80, p.69.

³⁰ See Alice Pollard, 'Painaha: gender and leadership in 'Are'Are society, the South Sea Evangelical Church and parliamentary leadership - Solomon Islands,' 2006, pp.91-104 and 128-138.

³¹ Nicole Haley and Kerry Zubrinich, 'Women's political and administrative leadership in the Pacific,' Australian National University, 2016, p.1.

³² Wallace, p.507.

³³ Haley and Zubrinich, p.12.

³⁴ Pollard (2006), p.157.

³⁵ Baker (2018b), p.439.

³⁶ Pollard (2006), pp.235-236.

'mothers', providing an opening for men to exclude women from the public sphere once the conflict was over.³⁷

In spite of this, researcher Pauline Soaki argues that women's groups have been "a force for change" in Solomon Islands, including following the turbulent 1998-2003 period.³⁸ Soaki suggests that women's leadership in both informal and formal sectors has increased public confidence in women's capacity and that this may be a precursor to leadership at higher levels. Writers generally agree that change is taking place in relation to the status of women in Solomon Islands. Increasing numbers of women are participating in the senior public service and, to a lesser degree, in provincial assemblies.³⁹

Beyond elected positions in formal politics, there is space for women to promote and drive legislative change. The *Family Protection Act* only came about due to the commitment and persistent work of a coalition of women.⁴⁰ A similar coalition was brought together to lobby for the *Child and Family Welfare Bill*.⁴¹ The recent push for reserved seats at the provincial level is another example of effective coalition-building by women outside formal politics. Notwithstanding this, writers widely agree that, at present, men have considerably more say in public leadership and decision making at all levels in Solomon Islands.

Gender norms and social context

Literature on the role of women in pre-colonial Solomon Islands society has been summarised by Alice Pollard in her 2006 PhD thesis on women and leadership. Pollard draws on local oral history and work by anthropologists to describe a pre-colonial context in which women and men occupied separate but complementary arenas of power and influence. She suggests that women and men held leadership roles in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies, albeit with differing degrees of visibility and status.⁴² Other social researchers cite historical documents suggesting that women held significant and visible leadership roles in precolonial society.⁴³ Within patriarchal societal structures and the constraints therein, women were nevertheless able to exercise some power.

The British administration introduced in Solomon Islands following colonisation in 1893 profoundly disrupted existing leadership systems. Administrators established men-only 'Native Councils' and enforced individual rather than communal decision-making on matters of community interest.⁴⁴ Church institutions are also seen as having significantly altered precolonial power structures. The 'traditional' political structures that are commonly used to justify the exclusion of women have in fact been fundamentally changed through interactions with the imperial system.

³⁷ Katherine Webber and Helen Johnson, 'Women, peace building and political inclusion: a case study from Solomon Islands,' *Hecate* 34 (2), 2008, 83-99, p.95.

³⁸ Pauline Soaki, 'Casting her vote: women's political participation in Solomon Islands,' in *Transformations of Gender in Melanesia*, ed. Martha Macintyre and Ceridwen Spark, ANU Press, 2017, pp. 95-109, p.98.

³⁹ See Asenati Liki, 'Women leaders in Solomon Islands public service: a personal and scholarly reflection,' Australian National University, 2010.

⁴⁰ Key figures included Helen Tavola, Afu Billy and Josephine Kama.

⁴¹ Helen Tavola, Afu Billy and Josephine Kama, 'Advancing Australia's work on leadership and decision-making, DFAT, 2016, p.17.

⁴² Pollard (2006), pp.9-33.

⁴³ Ian Scales and Josephine Teakeni, 'Election of women in Solomon Islands: the case for a local governance approach,' *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, 29 (1), 2006, 67-84, p.78.

⁴⁴ Pollard (2006), p.165.

Current gender stereotypes associate men with the public sphere and women with the private sphere.⁴⁵ In the parliamentary era, politics is seen as a forum for men. Researchers describe powerful social constraints for women interested in political leadership and a prevailing view that “women can have public roles but must conform to expectations of being caring.”⁴⁶ Maternal imagery used by women peace-makers in Solomon Islands has been described as an example of strategic action in a context of conservative social norms.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this too reinforces the idea that women derive authority from private rather than public roles. Soaki suggests that, while social change is taking place in Solomon Islands, there is a common view that women can be either ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’, but not both.⁴⁸ In contrast, male political leaders and powerbrokers in Solomon Islands often derive local authority from ‘custom’ but also engage adeptly with modern economic and political systems.⁴⁹ In this way, men can span both worlds in a manner that is significantly more challenging for women.

WOMEN AND FORMAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Electoral system

The Solomon Islands parliament is a unicameral Westminster system. There are 50 seats for

Members of Parliament, covering nine provinces and the capital Honiara. There have been 11 general elections since independence with most governments serving a four year term. The most recent general election took place on 3 April 2019.

Voting is not compulsory in Solomon Islands. Voter turnout, however, has been high in past elections, with voting regarded as an important duty.⁵⁰ National surveys from 2006 to 2013 report well over 70% of people participating in elections.⁵¹ Based on the literature reviewed, voting is seen as a serious obligation in Solomon Islands, with some writers suggesting it is regarded as a ‘virtuous’ thing to do, perhaps more “a Christian duty rather than a right of citizenship.”⁵²

Solomon Islands uses the ‘first past the post’ voting system: voters cast one ballot indicating a single preference for a Member of Parliament in their electorate. The person with the most votes becomes the MP. Terence Wood cites a median of seven candidates per electorate averaged over elections from independence to 2014.⁵³ This means that competition is strong and that the candidate who wins in any given electorate may not have a very high number of votes. Most successful candidates gain less than half of all votes.⁵⁴

The British parliamentary model was imposed at independence with little effort to incorporate local political customs.⁵⁵ A sudden transition meant there was no opportunity for any system to establish deep

⁴⁵ Whittington, Ospina and Pollard, p.8.

⁴⁶ Soaki, p.102.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Monson, ‘Vernacularising political participation: Strategies of women peace-builders in Solomon Islands’, *Intersections* 33 (2013).

⁴⁸ Soaki, p.101.

⁴⁹ See Siobhan McDonnell, ‘Exploring the cultural power of land law in Vanuatu: law as a performance that creates meaning and identities’, *Intersections* 33 (2013) for exploration of this idea in relation to Vanuatu.

⁵⁰ Soaki, p.102.

⁵¹ As reported in the ‘People’s Surveys’ conducted by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands 2006-2013.

⁵² Soaki, pp.102-103.

⁵³ Wood (2014), p.3.

⁵⁴ Wood (2014), p.3 and Soaki, p.106.

⁵⁵ Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, ‘Westminster meets Solomons in the Honiara riots,’ in *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*, ed. Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth, ANU Press, pp. 96-118, pp.99-101.

roots in the local political environment.⁵⁶ In spite of the fact that ‘traditional’ leadership practices have a significant influence on politics, there is no constitutional means for incorporating these into the formal political system.⁵⁷ This has important implications in terms of the interaction between formal and informal political institutions.

Analysts commonly describe the political party system in Solomon Islands as “fragile” or “fluid”.⁵⁸ There are many different parties, some formed immediately prior to an election. According to Wood, political parties in Solomon Islands tend to be “weak and lack ideological beliefs or identity bases around which to cohere, with Members of Parliament changing parties frequently.”⁵⁹ Governments to date have formed as coalitions of multiple parties, with some authors suggesting that significant time is spent by those in government keeping these coalitions in place.⁶⁰ A weakly institutionalised party system as in Solomon Islands makes election outcomes obscure to voters, with the eventual formation of a coalition government not necessarily visibly related to their actions at elections.⁶¹ In this context, other groups, including “wantok groups, tribes, political supporters, businesses and individuals” can emerge as powerbrokers.⁶²

Widespread violence associated with elections in Solomon Islands is relatively rare, although incidents

have occurred. Voter intimidation is more common. Research suggests that voting is not necessarily experienced as an act of autonomy by all individuals, with some evidence that women and young people in particular may experience pressure to vote a certain way.⁶³

Pauline Soaki argues that there are “significant challenges to women’s autonomous voting decisions”.⁶⁴ Overt or subtle intimidation can occur on election day or before in the form of influence or instruction from a family member, church leader or other influential community figure.⁶⁵ Asian Development Bank cites former women candidates reporting that “despite positive feedback from women in response to their campaign messages on gender-specific issues, women voters often followed the instruction of male relatives on voting day and cast their ballots for male candidates.”⁶⁶ Pointing to both gender dynamics and the influence of churches in elections, Soaki quotes a rural woman saying, “When it is election time, my husband tells me who to vote for, because it’s announced at the church gathering.”⁶⁷ It is not well understood how widespread the various forms of intentional influence on voting practices are, with several

⁵⁶ Sinclair Dinnen, ‘Dilemmas of intervention and the building of state and nation,’ in *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*, ed. Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth, ANU Press, 2008, pp.1-38, p.6.

⁵⁷ Kabutaulaka (2008), p. 102.

⁵⁸ Pollard (2006), p.217.

⁵⁹ Wood (2014), p.3.

⁶⁰ Kabutaulaka, Tarcisius Tara, ‘Parties, constitutional engineering and governance in the Solomon Islands.’ In Roland Rich, Luke Hambly and Michael Morgan (eds), *Political Parties in the Pacific Islands*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2006, pp.103-116, p.109.

⁶¹ Matthew Allen, ‘Politics of disorder: the social unrest in Honiara,’ in *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*,

ed. Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth, ANU Press, 2008, pp.39-63, p.40.

⁶² Kabutaulaka (2008), pp. 103-104.

⁶³ Karlyn Roughan and Lysa Wini, ‘Report on voter behaviour towards women candidates before and after the 2014 SI national general election’, National Parliament of Solomon Islands, 2015, p.18. See also Kiri Dicker, Afu Billy and Alison Barclay, ‘The influence of gender attitudes and norms on voter preferences in Solomon Islands’, UN Women, 2016, p.24.

⁶⁴ Soaki, p.97.

⁶⁵ Haley and Zubrinich, p.3.

⁶⁶ Asian Development Bank, p.64.

⁶⁷ Soaki, p.103.

writers suggesting that further research into these dynamics would be valuable.⁶⁸

Women in parliament

The Pacific region has the lowest representation of women in parliament globally. As at October 2019, approximately 6.5% of all parliamentary seats in Pacific Island countries excluding Australia and New Zealand were held by women, compared to a global average of 24%.⁶⁹ The three nations globally that do not have any women in parliament are all in the Pacific region.⁷⁰ The electoral environment for women is difficult and women who are elected often struggle to be re-elected for subsequent terms, meaning that short parliamentary careers are the norm for many women in politics.⁷¹

Only four women have been elected to the Solomon Islands Parliament since independence. Prior to independence, Lilly Ogatina Poznanski was elected to the Legislative Council in 1965 for one term.

The first woman elected to the Solomon Islands Parliament in the post-independence era was Hilda Kari, in the seat of North East Guadalcanal. Hilda Kari placed second in the 1989 general election but won a by-election later that year. She went on to successfully contest the newly created seat of East Central Guadalcanal in the 1993 and 1997 general elections. She lost the seat in the 2001 general election.

There were no women in parliament between 2001 and 2012. In 2012, Vika Lusibaea was successful in a by-election in the North Malaita seat previously held

by her husband. In the 2014 general election, Freda Tuki Soriacomua was the one successful woman, winning the seat of Temotu Vatud with just over 25% of the vote (22 more votes than the incumbent). Freda Soriacomua was initially appointed Minister for Rural Development, subsequently moving into the position of Minister for Women, Youth and Children's Affairs.

In a May 2018 by-election, Lanelle Tanangada was elected in the Gizo/Kolombangara seat, also previously held by her husband. For the first time in Solomon Islands parliamentary history, two women served concurrently in parliament from May until October 2018, when Freda Soriacomua was required to vacate her seat on legal grounds.⁷²

In the April 2019 election, Freda Soriacomua regained her seat and Lanelle Tanangada was re-elected in Gizo/Kolombangara. This is the first general election in which more than one woman candidate won a seat, bringing the longstanding 2% proportion of parliamentary representation up to 4%. Both women were allocated ministerial portfolios: Freda Soriacomua as Minister for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and Lanelle Tanangada as Minister for Police, National Security and Correctional Services. As of October 2019, Freda Soriacomua was the sole woman Minister after Lanelle Tanangada resigned her ministerial position.⁷³

While the number of successful national women candidates in Solomon Islands' political history is

⁶⁸ See Asian Development Bank, p.64; Dicker et al, p.29.

⁶⁹ See <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=9&year=2019>. The average for the Pacific region including Australia and New Zealand as at October 2019 is 16.7%. The figure of 6.5% is derived by averaging all Pacific Island nations excluding Australia and New Zealand: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

⁷⁰ Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.

⁷¹ Kerryn Baker, 'Great expectations: gender and political representation in the Pacific Islands', *Government and Opposition*, 53(3), 2018, 542-568, p.544.

⁷² See <https://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/368273/woman-mp-ousted-from-solomons-parliament>).

⁷³ See <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/400070/new-solomons-ministers-sworn-in-after-cabinet-sackings>.

low, other women candidates have lost by very small margins, with ten women placing second in elections between 2001 and 2019.⁷⁴

Given the highly competitive nature of elections in Solomon Islands, it is helpful to understand the number of women candidates compared to men over time. In the first nine post-independence general elections, a total of 72 different women stood compared to 1,696 men.⁷⁵ Analysing the number of women candidates and their outcomes from independence to 2014, Terence Wood suggests that, statistically speaking, women candidates in Solomon Islands have become less competitive over time. This analysis is supported by others, with Pauline Soaki suggesting in 2017 that, “viewed from a historical perspective, it would seem that women’s parliamentary political participation has declined.”⁷⁶ Twenty-six women stood in the 2019 election, an equal number to the 2014 election.

Women’s representation at provincial assembly level is similarly low, with 4 out of 172 provincial seats (2.3%) held by women as at October 2019.⁷⁷ Provincial assemblies in Solomon Islands are relatively under-funded and many struggle with capacity. Provincial election campaigns tend to be cheaper and logistically easier to manage; this is seen by some as an opportunity for women who aspire to political leadership.⁷⁸ While research suggests that provincial government is not a ‘pipeline to parliament,’ there is some evidence that, conversely, a competitive but unsuccessful national

campaign can set the stage for provincial election.⁷⁹ Writers note that increasing women’s representation at the provincial level is an important goal in itself.⁸⁰

Models of leadership

Recent research on leadership and voting in Solomon Islands has focused on how political leadership is understood in communities. There is a shared view amongst writers that the dominant model of leadership held in mind in Solomon Islands is ‘transactional’.⁸¹ Work in this area has been informed by research on electoral politics by Ian Scales and Josephine Teakeni in 2006. Scales and Teakeni suggested that ‘block voting’ and ‘vote buying’ were common practices throughout Solomon Islands. Block voting is “a pre-arranged agreement by a number of people to vote in a certain way.”⁸² A group may be an extended family, a village or a church congregation. Vote buying is the transfer of gifts (cash or goods, large or small) from a candidate or candidate’s agent to the voter. Vote buying strategies may target individuals seen to have influence on the voting of others - often male heads of households.⁸³ The research suggested that these practices were having a distinct impact on election outcomes.

The consensus amongst political observers of Solomon Islands today is that the activities identified by Scales and Teakeni, understood as part of the ‘transactional’ model of leadership, continue to have

⁷⁴ These are Hilda Kari in East Central Guadalcanal (2001), Afu Billy in East Malaita (2001 and 2006), Sarah Dyer in West Honiara (2006), Rhoda Sikilabu in Gao/Bugotu (2010), Julie Gegeu Haro in West Honiara (2014), Janet Hatimoana in Nggela (2014), Alice Pollard in West Are’ Are (2014), Cathy Launa Nori in Maringe/Kokota (2019), Caroline Laore Gorae in Shortlands (2019) and Choylin Yim Douglas in Ngella (2019). See Terence Wood, *Solomon Islands Election Results Database 1967-2019, 2019* at <http://solomonselections.org/>.

⁷⁵ Wood (2014), p.4.

⁷⁶ Soaki, p.97.

⁷⁷ Information provided by Women’s Rights Action Movement.

⁷⁸ Sloan, Tom, Kerryn Baker, Chris Chevalier, Louise Vella, Nicole Sweaney and Terence Wood, *Research on women’s leadership and political participation in selected constituencies of Solomon Islands: synthesis report*, UNDP, 2019, p.38.

⁷⁹ Sloan et al., p.39.

⁸⁰ Sloan et al., p.56.

⁸¹ See Wood 2014, p.10 and Dicker et al, pp.21-23.

⁸² Scales and Teakeni, p.72.

⁸³ Scales and Teakeni, pp.72-73.

significant influence.⁸⁴ In the transactional model, the political leader is seen as someone who can bring material and immediate benefits to a local community or family. This could be in the form of resources, assistance with school fees or health expenses and future practical aid. The transactional model of political leadership sits in opposition to a 'transformational' model, where the political leader is viewed as a person whose role is to engage with national and international policy issues and to bring about broad social change. The transformational model of leadership is based on the idea of the voter and the candidate sharing a big picture vision for the future.⁸⁵

Based on interviews conducted in both urban and rural settings, Pauline Soaki suggests that most voters in Solomon Islands experience the national government as remote and do not necessarily look to this level of government for services or resources. For this reason, voting may be seen less as a contribution to the direction of the nation and more as an opportunity to obtain benefits via a local candidate. Soaki argues that this has implications for how the role of Member of Parliament is seen. Decisions with positive outcomes for communities are commonly "conceptualised as personal favours rather than duties inherent in the MP's office."⁸⁶ Researcher John Cox suggests that "the idea that the MP's primary role is that of distribution is now deeply embedded in Solomon Islands political culture."⁸⁷

Limited interaction with the formal economy and the state can support a 'clientelist' style of politics, whereby voters are provided with material benefits in exchange for supporting a particular candidate, a

dynamic described by Terence Wood as a 'clientelism trap'.⁸⁸ Development challenges and the limited capacity of the national government to provide services create incentives for voters to practice clientelist behaviour. Wood suggests that, in this environment, seeking material benefits is a rational choice:

Voting locally is a sensible act in a poorly governed state. In Solomon Islands, the government is both weak and cumbersome; its reach into most people's lives is minimal and, because national political movements are non-existent, the outcome of political contestation in any individual electorate is decoupled from the potential to change this. Under such circumstances, the only way elections are likely to bring improvements for voters is if they vote for a candidate who will help them or their community directly.⁸⁹

If the transactional model of political leadership is as widespread as researchers suggest, this has important implications for the electoral chances of women candidates. Women are disadvantaged in a transactional political environment because they are less likely than men to have access to material resources.⁹⁰ This is particularly relevant following the establishment in Solomon Islands of the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF). Introduced in 1992 and initially based on grants from Taiwan, the RCDF allows for discretionary expenditure by sitting Members of Parliament. The RCDF has increased exponentially over time and is now primarily funded from the national budget. A range of issues of transparency and accountability have been raised over time in relation to this fund and its

⁸⁴ See Wood 2014, pp.12-14; Roughan and Wini, p.20.

⁸⁵ Dicker et al, pp.21-23.

⁸⁶ Soaki, p.102-104.

⁸⁷ John Cox, 'Kindy and grassroots gender transformations in Solomon Islands' in *Transformations of Gender in Melanesia*, ed. Martha Macintyre and Ceridwen Spark, ANU Press, 2017, pp.69-93, p.76.

⁸⁸ Terence Wood, 'The clientelism trap in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, and its impact on aid policy,' *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, 5(3), 2018, 481-494.

⁸⁹ Terence Wood, 'The causes and consequences of local voting in Solomon Islands,' SSGM In Brief 2013/17, p.1.

⁹⁰ Baker (2018b), p.436.

use as a political resource.⁹¹ It arguably strengthens the position of incumbent members who have access to significant resources through the program and therefore have a distinct advantage during elections.

A further possible effect of the transactional model of political leadership is “the desire to vote for the winning person.”⁹² That is, people may be more likely to vote for someone they believe has the best chance of winning based on the assumption that, once in office, they will be able to bring benefits to the community. Because so few women have been elected in Solomon Islands history, women are less likely to be seen as competitive candidates, thus presenting an additional gendered barrier.⁹³

Researchers on this topic emphasise that the political environment in Solomon Islands is complex and that the characterisation of political leadership as ‘transactional’ is not sufficient explanation for how people vote. In particular, researchers agree that the longevity of a candidate’s relationship to her or his community is extremely important, with kinship ties to constituencies highlighted as a crucial factor in elections.⁹⁴ Scales and Teakeni suggest there are also complex issues relating to access to land and natural resources at play during elections and that these, in turn, are tied to “complex and highly personal debates about kinship precedence.”⁹⁵

Nevertheless, recent research does support the view that a capacity to provide goods and material assistance is extremely important to a candidate’s success. Analysing outcomes of a mock election, UN Women researchers found that “the vast majority of

men and women voted for the candidate who they thought would most likely give them resources.”⁹⁶ A “willingness to distribute resources directly to families” is important; however, it is also critical that a candidate is seen to understand the “daily realities of constituents.”⁹⁷ The UN Women research suggests that the combination of these two factors may in fact be key to electoral success.

LITERATURE ON COMMUNITY VIEWS ON WOMEN AS POLITICAL LEADERS

There is a significant body of work on voter views of women and political representation in Solomon Islands. Key studies are outlined below.

RAMSI Surveys

The *People’s Survey* was an annual survey conducted from 2006 to 2013 (excluding 2012) by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in partnership with the Solomon Islands Government and local agencies. The objective of the survey was to gather the views of Solomon Island community members on a range of issues including access to services, law and order and public accountability. The survey involved between 3,405 and 5,154 participants each year, with samples representative of the population as a whole.⁹⁸

⁹¹ See Wiltshire, Colin and James Batley, ‘Research into Constituency Development Funds in Solomon Islands,’ *Department of Pacific Affairs In Brief* 2018/4 and Soaki, p.107.

⁹² Dicker et al, p.23.

⁹³ Sloan et al, p.33.

⁹⁴ Tony Hiriasia, ‘Kins and gifts: Understanding the kin-based politics of Solomon Islands,’ *SSGM Discussion Paper* 2016/4.

⁹⁵ Scales and Teakeni, p.74.

⁹⁶ Dicker et al, p.21.

⁹⁷ Dicker et al, pp.16-21.

⁹⁸ Summary and full reports on the *People’s Surveys* can be found at ramsi.org/media/peoples-survey.

The *People's Survey* incorporated a range of questions relating to political leadership. From 2007, it included questions relating to representation of women in parliament. The initial questions were: 'Should women be MPs?' and 'Would you vote for a female candidate?'. Later versions of the survey included more complex questions, such as: 'Why do male candidates always get more votes than female candidates?' (2008 onwards), 'Do women make good leaders?' and 'What makes women good leaders?'. From 2010 the survey asked questions about reserved seats for women. Christine McMurray has written a succinct summary of findings relating to women's political participation from these surveys.⁹⁹

The *People's Survey* had a robust quantitative methodology supported by strong qualitative material. Data from the surveys provides some insights into people's views about women as political candidates. The 2008 survey, for example, includes an extensive list of reasons given by participants as to why men candidates do better than women candidates. Chief among these are leadership 'customs' that favour men and bribery undertaken by male candidates.¹⁰⁰

The RAMSI surveys consistently reported high public support for greater participation by women in political leadership and, specifically, representation in parliament. An overwhelming majority of respondents every year said they supported the idea of women being in parliament, that they would vote for a 'good' woman candidate if one were available in their electorate and that reserved seats were a good idea.¹⁰¹ Researchers on women and leadership in Solomon Islands have drawn on these findings since.

Throughout the time period during which the RAMSI surveys were conducted, only one woman was

elected in Solomon Islands. This raises important questions about the views documented through the surveys and voters' actions at elections over this time. As in any survey research, it is possible that participant responses may have been influenced by considerations of social desirability. Most analysts agree, however, that the difference between participants' stated values and their voting practice more likely reflects complex socio-political factors and requires deeper analysis.¹⁰²

Survey of Honiara voters in 2014 election

This 'proof of concept' study conducted by the Young Women's Parliamentary Group surveyed 101 participants in the Central Honiara constituency immediately before and after the 2014 general election.¹⁰³ Participants were asked prior to the election whether they were in favour of women in parliament and whether they intended to vote for a woman or a man. Following the election, the same people were asked how they voted.

Like the *People's Survey*, this research found that there was very high agreement that there should be more women in parliament, with 98% of participants saying they supported this. When subsequently asked how they had voted, however, 27% of participants had chosen a women candidate. It should be noted that in this general election there were three women candidates and nine men running in Central Honiara.

UN Women research 2016

More recent data on public perceptions of women as political leaders is available in the UN Women's report, *The influence of gender attitudes and norms on voter preferences in Solomon Islands*. This study analysed data collected through a range of methods including a mock election, a questionnaire and focus group discussions. While smaller in scale than the

⁹⁹ Christine McMurray, 'National elections and women candidates in Solomon Islands: results from the *People's Survey*', Australian National University, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ *People's Survey 2008 Complete Report*, p.83.

¹⁰¹ McMurray, p.11.

¹⁰² Wood (2014), p.8; Dicker et al, p.14.

¹⁰³ Roughan and Wini, 2915.

RAMSI surveys (156 participants), the considered design and analysis of this study provide extremely valuable insights into the barriers to and opportunities for women's parliamentary participation in Solomon Islands.

The research found that the factors nominated as most important by voters in choosing a candidate were close connection to the constituency and a track record of service delivery. The researchers suggest that, generally, it is more difficult for women candidates than for men to meet these criteria. In addition, the authors discuss a 'feedback loop' in which voters, influenced by the historic under-representation of women in political leadership, perceive women candidates as less likely to be successful, thus perpetuating the cycle of under-representation.¹⁰⁴ The researchers stress the need for structural reform, including reassessment of the Rural Constituency Development Fund system.

Academic work produced by the Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University

A strong body of work relating to perceptions of women as political leaders in the Pacific region has been produced in recent years through the Department of Pacific Affairs (formerly the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program) at Australian National University.¹⁰⁵ ANU academics who have written about women and leadership in Solomon Islands and are cited in this review include Kerryn Baker, Julien Barbara, Nicole Haley, Terence Wood and Kerry Zubrinich. This body of research mostly takes a regional approach but includes important work specific to Solomon Islands.

In particular, the 2016 synthesis report, *Improving the Electoral Chances of Pacific Women through an Evidence-Based Approach*, reviews evidence regarding the performance of women candidates in the Pacific region. This report shows that successful

candidates, men and women, tend to have deep roots in their local communities, a track record of service delivery, significant financial resources, experience in leadership and an ability to build coalitions with local powerbrokers. Based on these findings, the authors advocate long-term and tailored support to increase women's chances of electoral success.¹⁰⁶

UNDP research 2019

In 2018 the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in partnership with the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission conducted research on women and leadership under a program known as SECSIP: Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in Solomon Islands (Project II). Funded by the Australian Government, the European Union and UNDP and coordinated by Australian consulting firm Sustineo, this study is titled *Research on women's leadership and political participation in selected constituencies of Solomon Islands*. The purpose of the research was "to contribute to increasing women's political representation in Solomon Islands". It aimed to do this through "better understanding the factors that both inhibit and enable women's political representation" within target communities.¹⁰⁷ The study includes a literature review and statistical analysis of past elections, surveys conducted in ten constituencies and key informant interviews with 95 people.

The study found that the electoral context in Solomon Islands is not becoming easier to navigate for women. Authors suggest that while some barriers to women's representation, including cultural and societal norms relating to leadership, may be waning, new challenges are emerging. In particular, the report notes the rise of money politics: vote buying, 'gifting' and other use of money to manipulate the electoral process. It concurs that the ongoing availability and increasing

¹⁰⁴ Dicker et al, pp.23-25.

¹⁰⁵ See <http://ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au/ssgm-research-communication/all-publications>.

¹⁰⁶ Barbara and Baker, pp.14-18.

¹⁰⁷ Sloan et al, p.7.

value of the Rural Constituency Development Fund may be influencing the longevity of incumbent Members of Parliament, to the detriment of women candidates. The report also suggests that the perception by some voters that women candidates are focused on gender issues may limit their appeal to these community members.¹⁰⁸

Analysis of why so few women have been elected in Solomon Islands

Getting elected in Solomon Islands is inherently difficult, for men as well as women.¹⁰⁹ At the outset, the significantly lower number of women candidates means that statistically women are much less likely to be successful than men. The number of women candidates available to be elected is therefore a primary consideration.

Beyond this, for the range of historical and cultural reasons already noted, power and formalised leadership have become strongly associated with men in Solomon Islands. Analysis includes the influence of ‘traditional’ patriarchal leadership models, the consequences of the colonial administration and the influence of churches. There is also reference in the literature reviewed to *kastom* as an explanation for the view that it is considered appropriate for men to lead decision making at family, community and local government levels.¹¹⁰ The factors identified by Alice Pollard over ten years ago appear to be relevant still:

- there is a generalised and prevailing view that leadership and decision making are the responsibility of men
- churches have significant influence on elections and generally endorse the view that leadership is men’s domain
- parliamentary leadership is competitive and dominated by men – it does not embrace informal sector leadership where women excel

- women lack resources to contest effectively
- political parties are not strong and this disadvantages women
- women are a heterogeneous group and women candidates cannot rely on women to vote for them.¹¹¹

Terence Wood suggests that a further impediment for women in Solomon Islands is the presence of election ‘brokers’. These are individuals who have local standing (for example, strong connections with influential local businesses) and ‘broker’ the evaluation of candidates by the local community prior to elections.¹¹² In Wood’s view, this is a highly patriarchal system and one to which women have limited access.

More recently, Kerry Baker has further analysed the influence of the ‘informal institutions’ of kinship, clientelism and historical notions of leadership on women’s representation in Solomon Islands. Baker suggests that family relations can be both advantageous and disadvantageous to women candidates. She agrees that money politics, including the strategic use of the Rural Constituency Development Fund by incumbents, is a key determinant of elections. Baker concurs that conceptualisations of leadership in Solomon Islands have been influenced by colonial practices and church hierarchies, both of which have privileged men in terms of leadership. These informal institutions – understood as “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels” – have a significant influence on women’s electoral success, particularly in a context where political parties are not highly organised and influential.¹¹³

Finally, election analysis globally suggests that voters are more likely to choose someone they believe is

¹⁰⁸ Sloan et al, p.12.

¹⁰⁹ Wood 2014, p.3.

¹¹⁰ See Roughan and Wini, p.20; Baker (2018b), p.437.

¹¹¹ Pollard, pp.216-218.

¹¹² Wood (2014), pp.10-11.

¹¹³ Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, ‘Informal institutions and comparative politics: a research agenda,’

more likely to win. The implication of this finding is that, until there is a public perception that women candidates are likely to win, women are much less likely to be elected.¹¹⁴ Several studies in Solomon Islands have identified that being seen as competitive is a critical factor for candidates.¹¹⁵

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The literature reviewed is informed by a deep concern about the persistence of women's under-representation in political leadership in Solomon Islands. The following suggestions for further research are based on findings from the review.

Action research to improve community understanding of the electoral system and the value of women's participation

Researchers suggest that general knowledge of government and the electoral system may be limited in many parts of Solomon Islands. There is a view that there is an "urgent need" to increase understanding of the parliamentary system and the role and responsibilities of parliamentarians within the general population. This is seen as a necessary precursor for more women being elected to parliament.¹¹⁶

Surveys have documented community perceptions of women as political leaders. Further investigation into the relationship between people's stated values and their voting decisions at elections would be extremely useful. The experiences of women voters in particular is of interest.

The introduction of a gender quota has gained traction in several provinces in Solomon Islands. Until recently, there has been limited formal research into community views on quotas. Research conducted by WRAM and IWDA since this review was first prepared provides valuable insights into public perceptions of women as political leaders and views on temporary special measures.¹¹⁷ Further work drawing on the findings of this research and implications for women candidates is a high priority.

Action research to increase community awareness of gender stereotypes and norms

Although increasing numbers of women are working in the civil service and in other public roles, this review confirms that there are still strong "cultural proscriptions" against women in public leadership.¹¹⁸ In addition to increasing community understanding of political processes generally, analysts agree that increased gender awareness in the general community is a prerequisite for increased representation by women.¹¹⁹ The research reviewed suggests that gender norm change is key to increasing women's political leadership. Civil society and media organisations must engage women and men in challenging gender stereotypes and in promoting and giving visibility to successful women leaders.¹²⁰

Further analysis of women's participation in provincial and local politics

Scales and Teakeni argued over a decade ago that women's participation at the national level in Solomon Islands will only increase when women have a greater and more formalised role in decision-

Perspectives on Politics 2(4), 2004, pp.725–740, p.727 and Baker (2018b), p.429.

¹¹⁴ Dicker et al, p.23.

¹¹⁵ Dicker et al, p.7; Sloan et al, p.33.

¹¹⁶ See Pollard, pp.219-222 and Soaki, p.107.

¹¹⁷ WRAM and IWDA, *Public perceptions of women as political leaders: views on women's leadership and*

temporary special measures in Solomon Islands, 2019, WRAM and IWDA. See iwda.org.au.

¹¹⁸ Wood (2014), p.8.

¹¹⁹ Scales and Teakeni, pp.78-80.

¹²⁰ Asian Development Bank, p.66.

making at local levels.¹²¹ Researchers suggest that documentation and analysis of women’s activity at local and provincial levels is urgently needed. The Asian Development Bank specifically recommends that such research incorporate a review of sub-national government legislation “to ensure that it conforms to the government’s commitments and policies for gender equity.”¹²²

Documentation of the experiences of successful and near-successful women political leaders

The recommendation here is to undertake research on the social, cultural and political factors that influence individual women’s considerations in relation to becoming a political leader and their experiences of leadership if elected. At the time of writing, WRAM is participating in the *Women’s Leadership Pathways* research project being conducted by women’s rights organisations in five countries in partnership with IWDA.¹²³ It is expected that this research will increase understanding of the factors influencing why and in what circumstances women in Solomon Islands take up political, as well as social and economic, leadership roles.

¹²¹ Scales and Teakeni, pp.77-80.

¹²² Asian Development Bank, p.64.

¹²³ The *Women’s Leadership Pathways* research is documenting individual women’s experiences of economic, social and political leadership with WAVE partners in five countries in Asia and the Pacific region,

including Solomon Islands. The research is overseen by consulting firm Le Groupe-conseil baastel Itée on behalf of IWDA and is due to be completed in 2020.

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