



**PACMAS**

Pacific Media Assistance Scheme

# Solomon Islands

STATE OF MEDIA &  
COMMUNICATION  
REPORT  
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International  
Development

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The Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI) Executive discussing ideas on how best to strengthen the Association. Photo by Jean Gabrielle Manguy 2012.

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Any opinions represented in this report are those of the authors and research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The findings are presented in three sections:

1. Country Context
2. State of Media and Communications
  - Media and Communications Platforms
  - Media and Communications Landscape
3. Summary of Findings

## Contents

Solomon Islands Country Context.....	2
Key Insights	
Communication Spaces.....	2
Unintended Consequences of Climate Change Action.....	2
Contracting Media Environment.....	3
State of Media & Communications .....	3
Media & Communications Platforms .....	3
Television .....	3
Radio.....	4
Newspaper & Newsletters.....	4
Online & Mobile Media.....	5
Other Communication Platforms.....	6
Media & Communications Landscape .....	6
Policy & Legislation.....	6
Media Systems.....	7
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Technicians.....	7
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Emergency Broadcast System .....	8
Capacity Building .....	8
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Media Associations.....	9
PACMAS Strategic Activity: TVETS.....	9
Content .....	9
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Climate Change.....	9
PACMAS Strategic Activity: NCDs .....	10
Cross-Cutting Issues: Disability, Gender & Youth .....	11
Summary of Findings .....	12
Policy & Legislation.....	12
Media Systems.....	12
Capacity Building .....	12
Content .....	12

## Solomon Islands Country Context

Solomon Islands is an independent state in the South West Pacific, located about 2000 kilometers north-east of Australia. Honiara, the capital, is located on the largest island Guadalcanal. The population of more than 500,000 is scattered across the mainland and some of the 992 islands. English is the language used in many formal and official settings (for example, in schools and workplaces), but Melanesian/Solomon Islands Pidgin is the main language, with at least 63 additional spoken languages. Solomon Islands is predominantly Melanesian, with small groups of Polynesians, Micronesians, Europeans and people of Chinese descent. The country's recent history of ethnic tensions resulted in a region-wide attempt to return stability to the country. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) began as a military operation at the request of the Solomon Islands government to restore order, and has since become a support system to rebuild the institutions via a rehabilitation program<sup>1</sup>. As a result of ethnic tensions, the country experienced economic difficulties, and as a developing country it continues to face challenges in the economic, health and education sectors. As part of a long term strategy, RAMSI is now in its transition phase (2013-2017) focusing primarily on law and justice, while bilateral aid assistance will continue to address long term development challenges.

## Key Insights

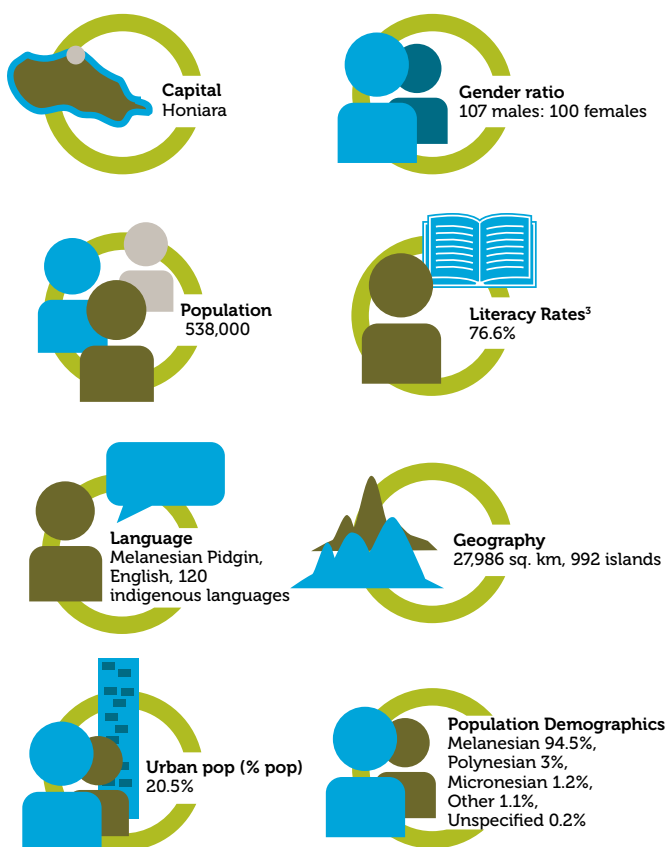
### Youthful Media Industry

A unique feature of the media industry in Solomon Islands is youth employment. Solomon Islands has a population with 70 per cent of people under the age of 29, and the media industry primarily comprises young people. While this is important for youth employment and contributes to a dynamic industry, 50 per cent of media practitioners do not have a higher education qualification<sup>4</sup>. The media industry often attracts people straight out of high school and the lack of formal education among most media practitioners in Solomon Islands is said to impact on the quality of media<sup>5</sup>.

### The Potential of Media for NCD Awareness and Outreach

Risk factors for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) - lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, tobacco, betel nut chewing and alcohol use - are the core focus of government and NGO initiatives in Solomon Islands. NCDs were identified as a key priority in the National Health Strategic Plan under the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services has a media section that provides technical and production services to various divisions including the HIV/AIDS, malaria and NCD programs. Although the mainstream media is known for disseminating information about health issues, there is a great deal of anticipation around the pending Solomon Islands Tobacco Control Act. This includes the possibility of using a broader

Table k.1 Basic Country Data<sup>2</sup>



1 See the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) <http://www.ramsi.org/about/what-is-ramsi.html>

2 UN DATA 2013. Solomon Islands. <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Solomon%20Islands> Accessed 30 April 2013

3 UNESCAP 2012. Solomon Islands <http://www.unescap.org/stat/data/syb2012/country-profiles/Solomon-Islands.pdf> Accessed 30 April 2013

4 ABC International Development 2012. SOLMAS Baseline Report.

5 ABC International Development 2012. SOLMAS Baseline Report.

range of media (including community media, such as theatre) to communicate messages and a more concerted effort to coordinate messaging across government, mainstream and community media.

### Effective Communication and Public Emergency Systems

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), an active government unit, liaises with media organisations in the effort to promote awareness. There is a close collaboration with the public broadcaster, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC), which sets up infrastructure and relevant processes to assist the NDMO disseminate information in times of disaster. In addition, there is an effort to address the different types of communication required depending on the needs of communities outside the urban centres. Community media outside the urban centres take the primary responsibility for communicating disaster information, as well as other related issues such as climate change adaptation strategies.

### State of Media and Communications

Solomon Islands has a number of public and private media broadcasters, and print outlets. SIBC is the state broadcaster and plays an important role in providing information to Solomon Islanders, reaching over 90 per cent of the population via radio<sup>6</sup>. SIBC does not have a television station. OneTelevision (One TV), a privately owned station that broadcasts local content, is the first and only TV station in Solomon Islands. John Lamani and Associates owns the country’s largest newspaper, the *Solomon Star*, and the most popular commercial radio station, Paoa FM. A number of civil society and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) produce content including, for example, Vois Blong Mere Solomons, a women’s rights group, and Catholic Communications, which produces regular radio dramas and newsletters.

### Media and Communications Platforms

#### Television

Television is the most limited form of mass media in Solomon Islands in terms of reach. One Television, the country’s single local television station, broadcasts a range of local programming, including news six days a week. Other television providers include the church based Trinity Broadcasting Network that broadcasts in other countries in the region, Solomon Telikom Co. Ltd and a Digital Pay TV, Satsol.

**Table k.2 Media and Communication Platforms: Television**

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/ Funding	Language/ Content	Sector
Television	One TV	Dorothy Wickham	Broadcasts in English and Solomon Islands Pidgin, local news and regional news from other Pacific nations.	Commercial
	Solomon Telikom Co. Ltd.	Solomon Telikom Co. Ltd.	Relay services: two channels broadcasting Australia Network and BBC Worldwide. It runs local advertisements.	Government
	Satsol	Satsol Limited	Digital Pay TV 35 channels of foreign content	Commercial
	Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN)	American owned Christian network	US religious television channel delivered via satellite. It has no local news.	Church

#### Radio

Radio is the medium with the largest reach in Solomon Islands. The vast majority of the people (95 per cent) surveyed in the 2010 Audience Survey commissioned by the Solomon Islands Media Assistance Scheme (SOLMAS) stated that they have access to at least one radio station in their area, with SIBC having the greatest reach<sup>7</sup>. SIBC runs Radio Hapi Isles, Wantok FM (commercial music station) and provincial stations, Radio Hapi Lagun and Radio Temotu. Paoa FM is the leading commercial radio station run by Solomon Star. ZFM 100, another commercial station, is owned by Commercial XJ6 Co Ltd. Gud Nius Redio, a semi-commercial station, broadcasts religious music and content but produces no local news.

<sup>6</sup> Tebutt Research. 2010. Solomon Islands Audience Survey Report.

<sup>7</sup> Tebutt Research. 2010.

Catholic Communications Solomon is a production centre where religious or community development programs are prepared for dissemination by the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation. They also prepare newsletters and magazines. Catholic Communications began a media program for high school children, which was eventually moved to the Don Bosco Technical Centre, a secondary technical school run by the Catholic Church.

**Table k.3 Media and Communication Platforms: Radio**

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/ Funding	Language/ Content	Sector
Radio	Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation	Government	English and Solomon Pijin	Government
	Radio Hapi Isles	Operated by Solomon Island Broadcasting Corporation	English and Solomon Pijin	Government
	Wantok FM	Operated by Solomon Island Broadcasting Corporation	English and Solomon Pijin, commercial music station	Government
	Radio Hapi Lagun (Provincial public broadcaster station)	Operated by Solomon Island Broadcasting Corporation		Government
	ZFM	Commercial XJ6 Co Ltd	English and Solomon Pijin,	Commercial
	Gud Nius FM	Semi-commercial, owned by the Pacific Partners Solomon Islands Association (PPSIA) Footnote details-PPSIA includes Honiara Central Church of the South Seas Evangelical Church, Rhema Family Church and the Church of the Living Word	Solomon Pijin	Church
	Paoa FM	Solomon Star Co. Ltd	English and Solomon Pidgin, leading commercial radio	Commercial
	Gold Ridge FM	Gold Ridge Mining Limited		Community

Figure 1: Staff at Catholic Communications Solomons, editing a radio program. Photo by Joys Eggins, September 2012.

## Newspapers and Newsletters

Newspapers are available predominantly in Honiara, and most of the reporting is from around that area. The *Solomon Star*, published six days per week, is the most established and widely read paper. The *Island Sun* and the *National Express* publish five times and three times a week, respectively, and both have a lower print run than the *Solomon Star*. There is also a Sunday paper, the *Sunday Isles*, and two monthly papers.

**Table k.4 Media and Communication Platforms: Newspapers and Newsletters**

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/ Funding	Language/ Content	Sector
Newspaper	Solomon Star	John Lamani and Associates	English	Commercial
	The National Express	The National Express Ltd owned by Ishwar Narain and Richard Lal	English	Commercial
	Island Sun	Mathias Loji, Priestly Habru and Richard Toke'	English	Commercial
	Sunday Isles	Lynda Wate	English	Commercial
	<i>AgrikalsaNius</i>	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Monthly	Commercial
	<i>Voice Katolika</i>	Catholic Church	English and Pijin Quarterly newsletter	Church

## Online and Mobile Media

Mobile phone penetration in 2011 was relatively high at 49.8 subscriptions per 100 people. Internet user rates however are low at 6 per 100 people<sup>8</sup>. Facebook has gained moderate popularity, with women being the majority users. The Solomon Star runs a news website which is updated daily, and SIBC has an online subscription news service. The use of online service is limited due to the high costs involved.

**Table k.5 Media and Communication Platforms: Online and Mobile Media**

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/ Funding	Language/ Content	Sector
Online	Solomon Star	John Lamani and Associates	Solomonstarnews.com English	Commercial
	Solomon Times Online		http://www.solomontimes.com/	Commercial
	Pacific Youth Voice Magazine	Commonwealth Youth Program (funding)	English http://issuu.com/pacificyouthvoices	Development
	SIBC news website	Government owned and SIBC operated	http://sibconline.com.sb/main.asp	Government

## Other Communication Platforms

Communal gatherings offer communication spaces where information is shared, with churches playing a central role. Information that comes from leaders or church elders in community gatherings is considered trustworthy. People still rely on sending letters, and passing messages through travelling relatives. Other traditional communication modes endure, including the slit gong, or church bells.

**Table k.6 Media and Communication Platforms: Other Communication Platforms**

Platform	Organisation	NA	Language/ Content	Sector
Other	Market spaces	Information exchange,	Solomon Pijin, English	Community
	Religious Institutions (Churches)	gatherings and ceremonies	Solomon Pijin, English	Community
	Villages	Information exchange, storytelling	Solomon Pijin, English, local languages	Community

## Media and Communications Landscape

This section of the report focuses on the Solomon Islands' media and communication sector across four key areas: policy and legislation, media systems, capacity building, and content. It provides an overview of the state of media across these four areas and aligns them with Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) program components, as defined by the six PACMAS strategic areas: Technicians, Pacific Emergency Broadcast Systems, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVETs), Media Associations, Climate Change and NCDs. Media Systems includes a focus on Technicians and Pacific Emergency Broadcast Systems (PEBS); Capacity Building includes TVETs and Media Associations; and Content looks at climate change and NCDs. It provides an overview of media and communication across these areas and aligns them with PACMAS program components.

## Policy and Legislation

Media legislation includes the Broadcasting Act 1976, the Television (Amendment) Act 1996, the Telecommunications Act 2009, and the draft Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation Bill 2003. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are guaranteed through the Solomon Islands Constitution (Article 12).

Political tensions are evident in the media industry. This might be the result of legal defamation cases in the past that resulted in large payments made by media houses to individuals including the former Prime Minister, Dr Derek Sekua<sup>9</sup>. Some research participants felt that the press can play a more critical role if the government is held accountable. The Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI) has been developing a Code of Ethics for journalists and media practitioners.

<sup>8</sup> UN ESCAP. 2012. Solomon Islands. Geneva: United Nations <http://www.unescap.org/stat/data/syb2012/country-profiles/Solomon-Islands.pdf>, Accessed 13 May 2013

<sup>9</sup> Pacific Media Watch. 2010. Solomon Islands: Island Sun ordered to pay damages <http://www.pmc.aut.ac.nz/pacific-media-watch/2010-11-23/solomon-islands-island-sun-ordered-pay-damages>

Telecoms are governed under the Telecommunications Act 1972, and the Ministry of Post and Communications is the regulatory authority. Solomon Telekom Company Limited had an exclusive licence as a sole provider, although in 2009 a settlement was made to terminate this monopoly. In 2009 a new Telecommunications Act was introduced which established an independent regulator and allowed competition. The Telecommunications Commission Solomon Islands (TCS) is the regulating body that is responsible for the economic and technical regulation of telecommunications, including the allocation of radio spectrum<sup>10</sup>. SIBC is one of nine State-Owned Enterprises (SOE), and through its governing board is required to complete obligations under the SOE Act, reporting to the Minister for Finance and the Prime Minister.

## Media Systems

Media systems take into consideration technical skills, support and infrastructure. It also explores emergency broadcast systems and experience from past disasters and crises in Solomon Islands.

### PACMAS Strategic Activity: Technicians

Research participants reported limited formal training for media and communications technicians, especially for engineering and transmission work. Technicians across media organisations have a range of qualifications from higher degrees to short course certificates, and many have on-the-job training. Training is often in-house or through corporate sponsorship for specialised skills, for both print and electronic media. Some technical training and capacity building are available through scholarships from donors. Most of the certified training is undertaken off shore (e.g. PNG, Fiji or New Zealand). As a research participant described, *'I got on-the-job training and [...] during my work that's when I got opportunities to go to workshops and small trainings from those overseas coming over to do a short training with sales and on-air presenting production'* (SOLOMON09). Technical maintenance is often outsourced. Technical support and advice is shared across organisations; however, it is outsourced overseas if there is no in-country expertise.

Most interviewees noted that there were no specific technician associations or affiliations, other than the media associations that their companies are members of. The Solomon Islands Media Assistance Scheme (SOLMAS) was noted as a support and advice network for media organisations and individuals; *'Before SOLMAS came in, we already established that network but when SOLMAS came, it made it much easier to get technical advice and people from these two organisations to come in and work with our technicians on our transmitter side especially'* (SOLOMON10).

While technical skills can be accessed via commercial organisations, other skills such as computer installation, software setup, transmissions, or printing press operations, are less common. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training, especially for education in rural settings, is available. As one research participant describes, *'I do a lot of training work and capacity building in educational technology and e-inclusion... To give an example of why this is needed, you might have internet access in a province, from the new mobile networks, but very few people are using it effectively'* (SOLOMON02).

Information and support about technical equipment is often sought through social circles and networks. Sharing technical resources is made difficult by the fact that each organisation uses different brands of equipment. The costs and logistics involved in sourcing and purchasing equipment, and keeping abreast with the latest technology, are perceived as challenging. Accessing information about the latest technologies is easier than acquiring and maintaining it, due to lack of funding and skills. Two organisations noted plans to upgrade their facilities, one of which noted an improvement in the internet services provided by Telikom by the introduction of 3G broadband. While the broadband is said to be slow at times, research participants reported it has become more reliable.

### PACMAS Strategic Activity: Emergency Broadcast System

*We do try as much as possible to remain on air during times of natural disasters. During cyclones the National Disaster Management Office and the disaster stakeholders, the police, they use Solomon Island Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) to talk to the people out there, tell them what to do and before any disasters, how to prepare for a disaster. We sort of see ourselves as the main information channel to the people out there. Because of the scattered nature of the islands, radio plays a very important role in linking the people to information.* (SOLOMON10)

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<sup>10</sup> Telecommunications Commission of the Solomon Islands website. <http://www.tcsi.org.sb>, Accessed 13 May 2013





Figure 1: The backup receiver tower at the National Disaster Management Authority office. Photo by Joys Eggins, October 2012

Existing documents for broadcasting emergency information include the National Disaster Risk Management Plan 2010 for Disaster Management Arrangements and Disaster and Climate Change Risk Reduction<sup>11</sup>, Solomon Islands National Progress Report on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (2009-2011)<sup>12</sup>, and the National Adaption Programs of Action<sup>13</sup>.

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and its stakeholders are currently working on a plan providing an overview of responsibilities in the event of a disaster. The plan also includes risk reduction considerations. The Provincial Government Act does not align with the National Disaster Centre Act in terms of assigning Disaster Risk Management (DRM) responsibilities to the local government and identification of roles at the provincial level (NDMO, 2011)<sup>14</sup>.

The NDMO runs tsunami response drills, but all information is pre-approved before general release. The public broadcaster airs information sourced from stakeholders such as the NDMO and police. The NDMO connects with Telekom for technical assistance in times of disaster, however some organisations do not have processes in place for technical assistance during disasters. The NDMO is also exploring mobile telecommunication with Telekom.

Broadcasters are considered Critical Infrastructure Agencies. In the event of an emergency, SIBC hands control over to the NDMO. The public broadcaster has a second receiver tower located at the NDMO, on a hilltop site, as a back-up. According to one media organisation, the evacuation policy is a '*work in progress*' (SOLOMON14)

11 National Disaster Council. 2010. National Disaster Risk Management Plan, 2010. Honiara: National Disaster Council of the Solomon Islands Government. <http://www.pacificdisaster.net/pdnadmin/data/documents/7972.html>, Accessed January 10, 2013

12 National Disaster Management Office, Ministry of Home Affairs. 2011. National progress report on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (2009-2011). PreventionWeb. [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/18359\\_slb\\_NationalHFProgress\\_2009-11.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/18359_slb_NationalHFProgress_2009-11.pdf), Accessed 8 November, 2012

13 NAPA. 2008 NAPA Report: Solomon Islands. NAPA Project Office: PreventionWeb [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574\\_solomonislands.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574_solomonislands.pdf), Accessed 13 May 2013

14 National Disaster Management Office, Ministry of Home Affairs. 2011. National progress report on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (2009-2011). PreventionWeb. [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/18359\\_slb\\_NationalHFProgress\\_2009-11.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/18359_slb_NationalHFProgress_2009-11.pdf), Accessed 8 November, 2012

and they hope to work in consultation with the NDMO to create a Standard Operation Procedure. They have technical staff on the NDMO committee. Respondents from various organisations noted the lack of internal evacuation policies: *'At the moment we are still working on it [evacuation procedures]. There are two colleagues who are...with this NDMO group and they are still working on what we do...the SOP... Standard Operation Procedure. But we basically inform our staff every now and then, if anything happens just run towards the hill behind our compound'* (SOLOMON14).

Reporters often react to natural and man-made disasters as they happen, but media organisations are becoming increasingly proactive about creating awareness of pre-and post-disaster responses. One organisation indicated that it covered pre-disaster stories and confirmed that the NDMO has been active in working with them on this process. In 2007, Western Province lost its public broadcasting radio station during the tsunami, but there are reportedly plans to set up an FM station in the province. Technicians sent to the site a week after the disaster were able to establish an FM station within a week. It is still operational and has become strategic in disseminating information.

Other organisations have a range of procedures in case of disasters. The People First Network (PFNet) community radio email group was well informed by the High Frequency radio email system during the 2007 tsunami. The Commonwealth Youth Program (CYP), an advocacy for young people organisation, supports capacity building of youth-led disaster management groups when the need arises in specific areas. If they cannot respond directly, they bring in their partners to assist with the request.

The Hyogo Progress Report states that there is currently insufficient knowledge and awareness of disaster response roles and responsibilities in local governments and some communities. In addition, not enough resources are allocated to implement the National Plan at the provincial and community level. One research participant supported this observation by commenting on the importance of working in the provinces to strengthen rural and community media, in addition to centrally based organisations; while media such as radio are common, atoll dwellers may not access radios, news or other information about early warnings or drills.

People use and often rely on traditional early warning information and local knowledge of hazards and preparedness based on past experience (running to the hills, observing animal behaviour, changes in flora and fauna, and so on). Authorities disseminate warnings through a range of channels, including using church bells or conch shells to alert communities.

## Capacity Building

*We have trained unskilled, uneducated people how to do digital editing and then they have produced their own radio programs according to the themes that have been identified. So it's possible for you to build those capacities if they have those radio stations there and they got the ownership. So it is truly empowerment radio then (SOLOMON02).*

Media organisations have different levels of capacity building, depending on the nature of the organisation and management (i.e. community or commercial radio station). The *Solomon Star* newspaper has a greater capacity to fund training for its staff, while Gud Nius FM operates purely based on volunteers' time and donations, leaving them unable to afford training.

The Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI), Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) and SOLMAS have been invaluable in capacity building for all media organisations. SOLMAS's short-term up-skilling in specialised areas such as investigative reporting has been valued by the industry. It was noted though that MASI has not been running training for a number of years.

Media organisations' response to capacity building varies, however most research participants expressed the need and preference for training to be provided by regional and international media associations, aid-supported media assistance schemes, and institutions abroad. Workshops have been noted as most useful in terms of up-skilling journalists, as it helps them to understand the industry, improve basic journalism skills of writing, presentation and programming. The University of South Pacific (USP) communications courses offer media organisations and journalists opportunities for up-skilling. Divine Word University in PNG has also attracted Solomon Islands journalism students in the past.

Research participants noted that a number of issues impact on capacity building in Solomon Islands including funding, selection criteria (e.g. nepotism) and underutilisation of technically capable people and resources. Research participants from organisations working on social issues in communities, expressed the need for more communication and media training for their staff. Workshops delivered by journalists are considered of high value. The Don Bosco Technical Centre, run by the Catholic Church, offers short courses on media/communications, which have become popular with NGOs. The SIBC also trains interns who do short term work experience with the broadcaster, often training them in both technical and journalism skills. The Commonwealth of Learning, an intergovernmental organisation focusing on distance education and open learning education, has helped communities to use communication for development methods.

### PACMAS Strategic Activity: TVETS

Three institutions are recognised as offering media/journalism programs. The former Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), now Solomon Islands National University (SINU), is the largest. The second is the Don Bosco Technical Centre (funded by the Catholic Church) located near the Henderson Airport. Initially a weekend program for high school children, it has now become an additional option for journalism training in Solomon Islands. The third is the University of South Pacific (USP) Open Campus. In addition, there are Rural Training Centres (RTCs) that operate from outer lying islands and work to build leadership capacity within communities.

SINU is the most recognised tertiary education institution in Solomon Islands, offering a media/journalism program. It is also the only institution that offers a TVET certificate in journalism. The certificate program, established in 2010 was the result of collaboration between SOLMAS and SINU. The programs, developed from the British curricula when SINU was a technical college, are currently under review to ensure a number of issues are addressed, including specialisation in trade fields. SINU recruits Grade Nine or Grade Ten school leavers and has opened up enrolment to community high schools, bringing in Form Six leavers, and Form Three leavers who have had three years' work experience.

SINU offers a two-year media certificate program, including two classroom semesters and two practical semesters. The Trade and Commerce Ministry mandates placements but this has become increasingly problematic as many are unable to secure them. The TVET programs are delivered in close consultation with the National Apprenticeship Board, where students sit for tests. The Course Advisory Committee is comprised of media professionals and also builds on curricula from Samoa and Vanuatu.

SINU has found a gender imbalance in enrolments in the journalism course, with a greater number of male students enrolling. Currently SINU has only two staff members, one full time and one part time. The industry recruits from SINU's media programs, for both industry training and long-term employment. The industry is also hoping to make some improvements, for example, by ensuring students use correct English.

Students pay tuition fees but the government provides a subsidy to selected students (a government/parent fees ratio at 75/25), and it offers scholarships for students going overseas. Annual government grants and tuition fees are the two major funding sources for SINU.



Figure 2: Key media leaders of the Pacific attended Climate Change training coordinated by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in Honiara. Photo by SPREP.

### PACMAS Strategic Activity: Media Associations

The Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI) was established in 1982. Since then it has contributed to the networking and sharing of information among media workers and organisations. As one participant describes, *'MASI always stands up for the interest of media organisations locally whether people see us as part of the government but we, as much as possible, we'd like to see ourselves as separate from the government, so*

*if the government gives an ultimatum or anything that we think is not in the interest of local media, MASI always comes out and stands for the interest of the local media'* (SOLOMON10). Since its inception, MASI has facilitated media training, and has drafted a Code of Ethics for journalists, and a constitution for the association. Media practitioners who took part in this research noted that MASI could take a more active role in training. Due to resources and funding limitations, MASI finds it challenging to keep the association running.

## Content

*Previously there was minimal coordination of activities identifying stakeholders, partners and various sites dealing with climate change. The national policy framework is still being filtered down to provincial government level. The policy was recently developed and challenges still remain, but there is a movement toward preparedness from the government's perspective (SOLOMON06).*

Media content focuses on communication platforms and programs, and ways to address issues related to climate change and NCDs, which are two core areas for PACMAS.

### **PACMAS Strategic Activity: Climate Change**

The effects of climate change in Solomon Islands include rising sea levels, increase in frequency and intensity of cyclones, coral bleaching, coastal erosion, changing patterns of pests and diseases, salt-water intrusion, change in weather patterns (agriculture), storm surges and flooding, increased temperatures (affecting taro production on lowlands, increasing risk of fire) and drought. Vulnerability to climate change is often determined by location, and atoll dwellers are particularly affected. Further, women have a central role in agriculture, and are therefore also affected by climate change<sup>15</sup>. The cost of addressing these climate change issues is expected to be high, relative to gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>16</sup>.

The policy frameworks for Solomon Islands in terms of climate change include the Solomon Island National Climate Change Policy: 2012-2017<sup>17</sup>, the Solomon Islands National Adaptation Programmes of Action<sup>18</sup>, and the National Climate Change Policy. Major partners include the Ministry of Environment (implementing body) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) and the United Nations Development Programme – Adaptation Learning Mechanism (UNDP ALM). Communication of climate change awareness and adaptation to the general public remains a challenge. The Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change Project (PACC) in Solomon Islands has created guidelines that cover media, target audience and content<sup>19</sup>. Each organisation working on climate change issues, and the Ministry of Environment, has its own communication strategy.

There's a push to raise awareness across different sections of society. For instance, some schools include essay competitions on climate change, and speech competitions. According to a PACC representative, research around awareness levels reveals gaps in climate change understanding between national and provincial schools. There is little knowledge of what climate change issues are, and how they affect people. Our research participants indicated their awareness by noting that climate change is presently a priority of national concern. Media reporting has increased but participants believe that further training is needed for journalists to better understand climate change issues.

Climate change communication training is offered by some organisations, and there are programs on environmental studies offered by educational institutions. For instance, SPREP has offered training on how to use the media to disseminate information. While the Climate Change Division under the Ministry of Environment does not provide training, it does facilitate partnerships.

There are mixed reports about the effectiveness of training on improving climate change understanding. One interviewee indicated that its coverage of the issue is good, giving an example of a local journalist who won an

15 NAPA. 2008 NAPA Report: Solomon Islands. NAPA Project Office: PreventionWeb [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574\\_solomonislands.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574_solomonislands.pdf), Accessed 13 May 2013

16 NAPA. 2008 NAPA Report: Solomon Islands. NAPA Project Office: PreventionWeb [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574\\_solomonislands.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574_solomonislands.pdf), Accessed 13 May 2013

17 Solomon Islands Government. 2012. Solomon Islands National Climate Change Policy, 2012-2017. Ministry of the Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology. [http://www.pacificdisaster.net/pdnadmin/data/original/SLB\\_MECDM\\_2012\\_CCPolicy\\_Finaldrft.pdf](http://www.pacificdisaster.net/pdnadmin/data/original/SLB_MECDM_2012_CCPolicy_Finaldrft.pdf)

18 NAPA. 2008 NAPA Report: Solomon Islands. NAPA Project Office: PreventionWeb [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574\\_solomonislands.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8574_solomonislands.pdf), Accessed 13 May 2013

19 PACC website: <http://www.sprep.org/pacc-home>, Accessed 24 June 2013.



Figure 3: Billboard along a busy intersection in Honiara town, photo by Joys Eggins, September 2012

Asian Development Bank (ADB) award for reporting on climate change (SOLOMON05); however, other research participants indicated that media professionals should be communicating more frequently with climate change personnel, in order to understand the issues better and report them with accuracy.

One of the major challenges of reporting climate change is logistics, especially transport. The outer islands are difficult to reach with infrequent ferry services. Some media organisations rely on the public to supply pictures and information. Furthermore, recognising the disconnect between islanders and mainlanders in terms of transportation, electricity and communication (media and telephone) has been an important part of the process as communication will continue to be tailored to suit the situation.

The Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) is currently the largest undertaking by Pacific Island countries in regards to climate change<sup>20</sup>. It networks with non-governmental and church-based organisations in low-lying places. Some of its activities include focusing on water security and agriculture, protected areas and renewable energy sources. The PACC project includes Solomon Islands with a focus on food production and food security.

### PACMAS Strategic Activity: Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

*We do community training - we go out and do training, training on NCDs and other communicable diseases, because malaria, tuberculosis and leprosy are other big problems here. These are communicable diseases...when we talk about lifestyle diseases like diabetes and all that - it is just in the last ten years that the trend had gone really high, and it's going to continue to go up. (SOLOMON03)*

20 PACC (2009-2013) is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Australian Government (AusAID), with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as its implementing agency and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) as implementing partner.

Poor nutrition, lack of physical exercise, smoking and chewing betel nut are some of the health related issues in the country<sup>21</sup>. Solomon Islands completed the World Health Organization's (WHO) STEP survey on NCD risk factors, which indicates that over 30 per cent of the population smoke tobacco daily and more than 60 per cent chew betel nut. Furthermore, 34.6 per cent of youth between the ages of 13 to 15 smoke, and are increasingly vulnerable to NCDs. More urban-based dwellers experience lifestyle-related diseases compared to rural-based, specifically among the Polynesian population. One research participant mentioned a '*decline in the productive population*' (SOLOMON08) as he observed cases of people being terminated from employment due to continued illness with NCDs.

There have been a range of NCD initiatives in Solomon Islands. A Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) strategic health communication workshop was held in 2009<sup>22</sup>. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were developed by the government to address NCD risk factors<sup>23</sup>. The SPC and WHO managed the 2-1-22 program that also supported the attendance of a Solomon Islands NCD officer at the Oceania food training course<sup>24</sup>. The Health Promoting Schools framework was reviewed and piloted in schools. A 2-1-22 small grant backed the Go Local Kastom garden project and the Makira Ulawa indigenous food compilation project<sup>25</sup>. In 2009, SPC provided funding to support the development and implementation of a Solomon Islands National NCD Plan. Technical assistance was provided through a visiting SPC adviser to develop a large country grant and send an NCD coordinator to Noumea to finalise the agreement.<sup>26</sup>

NCDs are specifically noted as a key priority in the National Health Strategic Plan under the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The Health Department coordinates the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Committee, which set standards for all IECs to ensure materials are standardised and culturally appropriate. Health programs are planned with other sectors including NGOs and rural health workers, but health messages are primarily sent through mainstream media. Profiling of communities is used as a way of developing action plans based on identifying needs. Schools are also involved, and healthy canteens and a compulsory fruit day have been implemented to encourage children to use their pocket money for healthy eating.

Interviewees described the challenge of NCD awareness communication as one of coordination between the government and NGO sectors. The Health Department has NGO representatives on its IEC Committee, as well as the Production Committee within their Media Unit. Key NGOs such as Save the Children, World Vision and Red Cross provide information, results and offer technical advice to the unit. Oxfam also works with a local organisation to produce health programs.

One of the NCD awareness activities includes researching both audiences and staff in outer provinces to identify gaps in information in the Health Department, in order to inform awareness strategies. Currently, all accessible media platforms are being used to create awareness. A research participant who works in the public health sector specifically pointed to a lack of media liaison in terms of reporting on NCDs, and called for greater coordination, with the NCDs Division maintaining a central role in verifying information for journalists. Other research participants expressed a similar need for coordination between media and public officials working in the health industry, in order to better provide knowledge and awareness of NCDs to the media. While some media personnel note the three highest incidences of NCDs to be diabetes, cancer and heart diseases, others were not sure of specific details, or even what NCDs were. The Health Communication Unit provides training for journalists, however it is indicated that a more effective relationship with the mainstream media is a costly exercise for them. The unit invites specialists such as doctors to participate in the training as key disseminators of technical information. The unit's media staff also attend SOLMAS and PACMAS training. One of the constraints that the unit has is the lack of capacity in regards to research, including monitoring and evaluation: '*The portfolio for research is put under the national health training and research institute and what I have found is that they are coordinating research proposals from outside, from our students who are doing courses at the Fiji School of Medicine, UPNG or students from other universities who are trying to do research here*' (SOLOMON03).

21 Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Medical Services. 2010. Solomon Islands NCDs Risk Factors: STEP Report. World Health Organisation Office: Suva, Fiji: [http://www.who.int/chp/steps/2006\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_STEPS\\_Report.pdf](http://www.who.int/chp/steps/2006_Solomon_Islands_STEPS_Report.pdf), Accessed October 30, 2012


22 Administrator. 2009. Pacific countries and territories take up the battle against NCDs. Sunday, 14 June 2009. [http://www.spc.int/hpl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=19&Itemid=48](http://www.spc.int/hpl/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=19&Itemid=48), Accessed 30 October, 2012.

23 Administrator. 2009. Pacific countries and territories take up the battle against NCDs. Sunday, 14 June 2009.

24 The 2-1-22 program is a collaboration between the WHO and the SPC and supports small projects for countries in the Pacific. 2-1-22 stands for two organizations, one team, serving 22 countries and territories

25 Administrator. 2009. Pacific countries and territories take up the battle against NCDs. Sunday, 14 June 2009.

26 Administrator. 2009. Pacific countries and territories take up the battle against NCDs. Sunday, 14 June 2009.



According to a survey designed to inform the National Health Strategic Plan, communities report they have access to few or no health education materials or programs provided by health staff and there has not been consistent work in rural communities. There is awareness that NGOs have a stronger presence in communities rather than the government. International organisations are also using various approaches for training, but they tend to take a communication for behaviour change approach.

### **Cross-Cutting Issues: Disability, Gender and Youth**

The cross-cutting issues explore how disability, gender and youth engage with and are represented within the media and communication environment of Solomon Islands. Disability was mentioned by those in the health sector as having an impact on the economy. As one participant indicates, *'I think economically it has impacted on the families as well, as people are dying earlier than expected, which is resulted in the potential workforce that should be contributing to the economy; there have been a lot of amputations done too to diabetic patients'* (SOLOMON03).

There is awareness about gender balance for staff capacity building within the public broadcaster. In terms of news rounds, gender is taken into consideration by ensuring some roles are given to women, while men are given priority when there is high risk involved in reporting issues. The Solomon Islands National University has noted a lower number of females opting to study journalism compared to males.

In schools, youths (and children) are a significant target group for health messages in response to the increase in NCDs. There is concern about their welfare and the Tobacco Bill highlights that age restrictions should be imposed on cigarette vending and buying. The Don Bosco Technical Centre (DBTC) also has a focus, in its extracurricular media training, on 'push outs' or out-of-school youths. The DBTC offers basic communication skills training enabling them to participate in the media industry. The training includes real outputs such as stories running in the local newspapers. The Commonwealth Youth Program is a youth-focused organisation that emphasises developing youth leadership skills, including media training. It also provides training for young people in disaster management. It has an online magazine called Pacific Youth Voices. As noted in the Key Insights section, the media industry employs a high percentage of young people (50 per cent) under the age of 29.

## Summary of Findings

The Solomon Islands media sector is dominated by radio and print. The relative absence of online and mobile media use is notable compared to other Pacific Island countries. The findings across the four areas of policy and legislation, media systems, capacity building and content are summarised below:

### Policy and Legislation

- Media legislation includes the Broadcasting Act 1976, the Television (Amendment) Act 1996, the Telecommunications Act 2009 and the draft Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation Bill 2003.
- Freedom of speech, and freedom of the press are guaranteed through the Solomon Islands Constitution (Article 12).
- The Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI) has been developing a code of conduct for journalists and media practitioners.
- Telecoms are governed under the Telecommunications Act 1972, under which the Ministry of Post and Communications is the regulatory authority.

### Media Systems

- There is limited training for media and communications technicians, especially for engineering and transmission work.
- The Solomon Islands Media Assistance Scheme (SOLMAS) was noted as a support and advice network for media organisations and individuals.
- Media technical staff sit on the National Disaster Emergency Authority Committee and broadcasters are Critical Infrastructure Agencies in disasters.
- The Hyogo Progress Report states that there is currently insufficient knowledge and awareness in regard to disaster response roles and responsibilities. Not enough resources are allocated to implement the National Plan at the provincial and community level.

### Capacity Building

- The Solomon Islands National University has a two year certificate program in media/journalism studies (for entry-level only)
- Don Bosco Technical Centre offers weekend high school programs, or tailor made courses to media workers from organisations.
- Professional training has largely been done through the Solomon Islands Media Assistance Scheme (SOLMAS), or on-the-job.

### Content

- The Pacific Adaption to Climate Change Project on Solomon Islands is creating its own communication guidelines covering medium, target audience and content.
- Some journalists have received training on climate change reporting.
- NCDs are specifically noted in the National Health Strategic Plan and the Health Department has a fully equipped Media Unit that produces health materials. According to the Unit, the HIV/AIDS Division is the most proactive compared to others.









## Research Partners





Further information:  
<http://www.pacmas.org/>  
<http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/>