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Research on women's leadership and political participation in selected constituencies of Solomon Islands

United Nations Development Programme

Synthesis Report





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women are under-represented in politics throughout the world but in Melanesia they are almost completely excluded from national-level political institutions. Solomon Islands currently has only two female Members of Parliament (MPs) out of 50 and in its post-independence history only four female MPs have been elected to national parliament.

Sustineo was engaged by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to undertake research on *Women's leadership and political participation in selected constituencies in Solomon Islands*. The research project is part of the UNDP *Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in Solomon Islands Project (SECSIP)* Phase II.

The purpose of the project was to contribute to increasing women's political representation in Solomon Islands by providing better understanding of the factors that both inhibit and enable women's political representation.

The project employed a mixed-methods approach to research design and conduct. A desk assessment of relevant literature and women's performance in past elections was used to establish the project's analytical framework and identify two constituencies in each of Central, Honiara, Isabel, Malaita and Western Province. Interviews were conducted to reveal the dynamics that influence the competitiveness of candidates in Solomon Islands - 89 interviews were held with 95 participants between 9 March and 13 April 2018. A survey was conducted in the 10 target constituencies to gain insight into the perspectives of voters. A total of 1061 survey responses were obtained from eligible participants between 4 April 2018 and 4 May 2018.

Key findings

The project identified a number of findings relevant to the future programmes, projects and activities for SECSIP Phase II. This section outlines the findings aligned with key thematic areas.

Electoral environment of Solomon Islands

- Prevalence of money politics - vote-buying, gifting and the use of money to manipulate the electoral process -persists, and represents particular obstacles to increasing women's representation.
- While culture is a barrier to women's political representation, the main obstacle is access to adequate financial resources.
- Access to significant financial resources is essential for candidates, with some interviewees suggesting that increased funding available to sitting MPs could contribute to the emergence of the (almost) 'invincible incumbent' in Solomon Islands.
- New barriers to women's participation in politics, such as access to resources, have arisen while the traditional barriers of cultural and societal attitudes towards women's representation are perceived to have reduced.

Perceptions of Women's Leadership

- A good female leader is characterised in the ways they conduct themselves and engaging with people and the community, while a good male leader is characterised as bringing development projects to the community and having financial management capabilities.
- Women candidates are perceived to stand for community-minded motives whereas male candidates are perceived to stand for personal benefit.

- Advocating for women's issues is viewed as one of the main reasons why female candidates stand for election, confirming a widespread perception that women candidates are candidates for only women.
- Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents (74.3%) said they would vote for a female candidate. This parallels past research findings.
- While 74.3% of respondents said they would vote for a female candidate, only 13.2% said they had actually voted for one.

Candidate Characteristics

- The key characteristics common to competitive candidates include: deep connections to the constituency; access to financial resources; family connections; and a track record of helping in their communities.
- These characteristics are necessary, but not sufficient, for a candidate to win. While a candidate would not need all of them to win, the more they do possess the more likely they it is that they would be competitive.
- Behavioural standards for women are stricter than for men. For example, women candidates are penalised for being divorced or 'not having a good family life' in ways that male candidates are not.

Community connections

- Having strong personal links with multiple different communities is the most likeable quality in both female and male candidates and the most important characteristic for a competitive candidate (considered important by 99.1% of respondents).
- Depending on the constituency, it is not essential to be supported by all communities to win an election. In the last two elections the median winning candidate won with just 37% of votes cast. Some candidates won with as few as 15% of votes cast.
- Although most winning candidates were born in the constituency they represent, maintaining ongoing connections to a constituency did not require living in that area at the time of elections. It is common for candidates to be based on Honiara but maintain strong connections to the multiple communities.

Resources

- A candidate having significant financial resources is considered sufficient to potentially overcome other disadvantages, such as those related to profile, reputation and experience.
- Being perceived as a likely winner is an important decision point for voters. The strategies used by candidates to appear likely winners often required significant financial or other investment, which are usually harder for female candidates to obtain than for their male counterparts.
- Beyond individual wealth, the backing of business or well-resourced supporters is critical. However, the perceptions of business related experience, support and other financial and resource related issues emerged as less important.

Family connections

- Family connections are a very important indicator of candidate's competitiveness with competitive male and female candidates being more likely to come from prominent, political and/or chiefly families. The importance of family connections

is especially true for competitive women candidates, to a greater extent than their male counterparts.

- Family connections can trump other characteristics including age, work experience and education. It is easier for men than for women to leverage family connections for political purposes.

Powerful local networks

- The support of powerful local networks - including family, community and church - are essential for a competitive candidate. However, the importance of these networks varies in practice. This is aligned to the political geography of each constituency.

Reputation for helping

- A reputation for helping is important for a competitive candidate, but how this translates politically depends on context and gender.
- Gaining a reputation for helping often means offering financial assistance to communities and individuals within the constituency and requires engagement with communities beyond the standard term of an election campaign.
- While a reputation for helping is important for a candidate to be competitive, it does not necessarily result in winning the seat, particularly for women candidates.

Other characteristics

- A number of individual attributes - level of education, professional qualifications and leadership experience - are important to be a competitive candidate but not sufficient to win. While these attributes are generally important in being perceived as a credible candidate, they can be trumped by other factors.
- The value of community leadership differs between male and female candidates. While women candidates often have substantial leadership experience, primarily within women's groups, this leadership experience is not as politically valued as other leadership roles, such as in the business community, in community decision-making, or church leadership positions. This is a clear barrier to women's electoral success.

Political experience

- While provincial government experience is considered as beneficial, electoral results indicated it was an important criterion for voters in national elections. The low levels of funding available to provincial governments may harm the political trajectories of provincial members, as they may appear ineffective.
- While there is no clear pathway from provincial government to national level success, it may work in the opposite direction with a number of interviewees winning at the provincial level after competitive but unsuccessful campaigns for national government.

Political parties

- Party endorsement does not correlate to electoral success for either male or female candidates in national elections.
- The political party system was characterised as weak, with parties often centred around individual political figures rather than a coherent policy platform. Parties are seen as elitist and Honiara-based institutions, with little relevance to rural communities.

- While there are potential advantages - such as financial and logistical support and mentoring to female candidates - the present impact of party membership on electoral politics in Solomon Islands appears minimal. Voters very rarely vote along party lines.

Campaigning

Laying the ground work early

- Early preparation for a future campaign is critical. The campaign period itself is often less important than what candidates have done in the past. Candidates typically have to campaign strongly but unless they have laid groundwork over preceding years, a strong campaign in the weeks prior to an election will typically not be enough for a candidate to win election.
- Women candidates often found it hard to do 'early preparation' as that meant taking time away from their family responsibilities and potentially resigning or taking leave from their jobs. This is viewed as more of a burden for women than men.
- Announcing a campaign early can also create added pressure, with potential voters approaching aspiring candidates for financial support or favours, putting a financial strain on aspiring candidates.
- The voter registration period is crucial with mobilisation in the voter registration period a common tactic of competitive candidates.

A sound support base

- Establishing a strong support base in the constituency is an essential element of a competitive campaign. The extended family and kinship networks are considered the critical voter base for a candidate.
- While the strength of family ties is significant, there is a risk that vote splitting within the family can harm a candidate. Vote splitting occurs when two candidates from the same family network contest against each other, or when voters split their votes among different candidates in the same family or other network.
- Negotiating with male relatives and in-laws who are also interested in running is necessary for women, but also difficult, as there are cultural expectations that a man's political ambitions supersede those of his female relatives. Where female and male relatives both want to enter politics, it is usually the man who is favoured by the extended family.
- Identifying support from the powerful networks within the particular constituency is also important. Women candidates' networks - through women's groups and youth groups - were often numerically significant yet did not translate to votes.

A sound resource base

- While there is a legal limit of \$50,000 on campaign spending in Solomon Islands which should provide a level basis for candidates to contest the election, interviews highlighted that campaign finance regulations are largely unenforced, with successful and competitive candidates regularly spending over the mandated limit.
- Former candidates reported a wide range of their own estimated costs of running a campaign, up to \$100,000. When asked how much *other* candidates spent on election campaigns, they were perceived to have spent hundreds of thousands and sometimes several millions of dollars.

- Male candidates tended to spend more than female candidates, reflecting that women in general do not have access to the same amount of resourcing.

Being seen as a winner

- Being seen as a winner is an important part of a competitive campaign. A poorly resourced campaign sends a message to voters that a candidate is not credible. It is harder for women to run a well-resourced campaign given that they have less access to money. As few women have won in the past, it is hard for current women candidates to convince voters that they can plausibly win in an election.
- Some women candidates have successfully negotiated these barriers and employed deliberate strategies to present themselves as winners, leading to their election at the national or provincial government levels.

Campaign strategy

- Successful campaign messaging prioritises the local over the national as voters are generally interested in tangibles over ideals, projects over policies and local issues over national issues.
- Knowing the constituency is crucial, as is having a campaign plan that involves targeted campaigning with contextualised messaging. Candidates often emphasised the importance of 'research' as a way of successfully localising their campaign. Understanding local issues and presenting viable and popular solutions are important.
- Successful localised campaigning involves in-depth knowledge of the constituency and the different communities within it. Competitive candidates often strategically chose key members of campaign teams from different communities.
- Candidate profile is less important in a competitive campaign than political geography, including the demographics, culture, context, physical geography, current priorities of the particular constituency, and whether the candidate is perceived to be a likely winner. Certain candidates did well in one election but poorly in another election when circumstances had changed.

Culture and context

- Campaigning can be a potentially hostile space for women, especially for those deemed to be transgressing traditional gender roles and ideas of leadership. In some areas, to stand for election as a woman implies an unacceptable distance from custom. Cultural barriers to women's leadership are not insurmountable obstacles to women's success in politics, but add complications to running an effective campaign.
- Working within cultural traditions is important. Female candidates need to be careful about which campaign messages and techniques to use, particularly in rural and more conservative areas. Employing conscious strategies to negotiate particular cultural barriers can bolster the campaigns of women.

The campaign team

- Building a good campaign team is important as the team often does the bulk of campaigning for the candidate. A large campaign team is also a good indicator that a candidate is competitive, but it is expensive and difficult to manage the team's needs and expectations.
- Choosing the right campaign team is important, especially selecting people who are prominent, influential and have good relationships with the community.

Unsuccessful candidates tended to have much smaller campaign teams - largely as a result of resource constraints.

Perceptions of Political Participation

- Survey results showed that respondents knew that people were not allowed to (94.1% of respondents) and should not be able to (95.4%) pressure another person to vote for a certain candidate. However, of the 80.6% of respondents who voted at the 2014 national election, 16.0% indicated they did not feel they got to vote according to their personal preference.
- The apparent prevalence of vote pressuring was greater when respondents were asked to assess the freedom of different demographic groups within their constituency. When asked how the freedom of other groups to vote, the majority of survey respondents felt that adult men (52.9%), adult women (62.3%), young men (62.5%) and young women (64.9%) could not vote for their personally preferred candidate.

Implications and recommendations

These findings have a number of important implications for efforts to increase women's political representation in Solomon Islands.

- 1. The electoral environment in Solomon Islands is dynamic and changing but no easier for women to get elected than in the past.** Barriers to women's political representation have traditionally been considered as primarily cultural; however, the increasing financial resources required by candidates has seen the main barrier shift to that of access to financial resources.
- 2. Access to financial resources is now the predominant barrier for women candidates rather than culture.** Access to financial resources has become increasingly important for candidates to be perceived as credible and competitive.
- 3. Past electoral results demonstrate that candidate characteristics are a better predictor of competitiveness than the constituency in which female candidates contest.** Female candidates who have key characteristics and qualities can be competitive even in constituencies where it might otherwise be considered difficult for a female to win.
- 4. The perception that women candidates stand predominantly to progress women's issues is likely limiting their voter base.** If women candidates can broaden the scope of issues on which their campaigns are based this is likely to increase their appeal to voters in their constituency, including potential decision makers.
- 5. This project did not conclusively identify demographic factors shaping perceptions of women's leadership, or their voting practice.** Information based programs targeted at certain demographics will potentially miss the key drivers of voting and be unlikely to significantly change voting practice.
- 6. In the short term, measuring increases in women's representation only by an increased number of women in parliament risks overlooking important longer term changes that could be achieved.** While women's presence in national-level politics is important, there are clear opportunities for efforts in this space to be continued, particularly in relation to increasing the number of women who have the characteristics of competitive candidates, combined with efforts to increase the profile of women leaders and normalising women's political representation at provincial levels.

Recommendations

The recommendations outlined below are targeted towards SECSIP Phase II, including the UNDP and SIEC stakeholders.

Targeted actions leading up to the 2019 National General Election

At time of writing, there is less than a year until the 2019 National General Election in Solomon Islands which limits the actions that can be implemented to assist candidates who have not already been positioning to stand for a reasonable period. There are, however, a number of actions which can be taken to support already intending women candidates.

1. The implementation of training programs to build specific skills with intending women candidates and campaign managers. Improving communication skills and increasing confidence in public speaking were identified as areas where women candidates need to improve. As part of campaign strategy development, this skill building should be complemented by support to identify the most appropriate style of communication and campaign conduct to apply in different contexts to align with the cultural context.

2. The development and delivery of support and potential mentoring programmes to intending candidates for campaign strategy development. Improved skills in campaign strategy would be a useful contribution for both candidates and campaign managers. From this project, potential areas for investigation would include:

- *Assessing potential candidate and campaign competitiveness.* This could involve supporting candidates in identifying their relative competitiveness through information on the constituency. This could range from trends based on past electoral results to the number of votes required to be competitive, and identification of which areas of the constituency voted a certain way in the previous election.
- *Tailoring campaign messaging to the issues that are important and salient in the constituency, or targeted communities.* Women are perceived to stand for parliament to address women's issues, which likely restricts their potential supporter base given voting influences at household and community levels. Clearly campaigning beyond women's issues and aligning the messaging to local needs could broaden women candidate's potential voter base.
- *Working through local systems of governance and community decision-making.* The importance of campaigning through means appropriate to the cultural and community context is clear. This could focus on the best way of identifying and understanding the importance of these issues, such as working through and with community supporters and the campaign team.

3. In provincial briefing sessions, emphasise the core elements to consider when nominating to stand for election and in designing and developing a campaign. This should draw on the insights of previous candidates, who can speak to their experiences and lessons from the process. Due recognition should be given to the personal and financial costs of candidacy.

4. Resource Centres should support the development of candidate campaign strategies, in addition to other types of material support. While material support - such as posters, printing and access to the internet - were identified as being potentially useful, targeted campaign strategy support information could include:

- Information on past election results, ideally broken down by constituency, with support for interpreting this information
- Collation and synthesis of any information on strategies to enhance campaign competitiveness.

In the circumstances of limited resources, Resource Centres should be located in areas which are accessible to the maximum number of candidates standing in the maximum number of constituencies. In the first instance, this is likely to be Honiara and the provincial capitals of Gizo and Auki. In running the Resource Centres for the 2019 election, an emphasis should be placed on learning, specifically through discussing with previous candidates regarding what was useful and what improvements could be made for future elections.

5. Collect experiences from women candidates who stand in the 2019 election through a debrief to identify lessons learned from strategies employed - including training, support programmes, mentoring and resource centres - as well as areas where additional support could be required. Undertaking a debrief soon after the 2019 election with women candidates will provide a useful snapshot of what worked well and areas for improvement. Beyond identifying immediate lessons learned, this will provide important information in shaping support priorities for the next electoral cycle leading up to the 2023 election.

6. Tailor voter awareness programmes to issues relevant to the locations where they are being delivered. At the time of writing, such programmes are being designed for the 2019 National General Election. In relation to political participation, the project identified a disconnect between knowledge and attributes on freedom to vote and the perceived practices. Similarly, while attitudes towards women candidates are generally positive, practice suggests other factors shape what people do. While awareness programmes have an important role to play in informing voters of electoral rules and their electoral rights, there is little evidence that awareness programmes are effective in changing voter behaviour, or in changing which candidates voters will vote for.

7. Emphasise Solomon Islander ownership of the design and delivery of activities, projects or programmes to support women candidates. Further, the contributions of UN, development partners, the Government of Solomon Islands and other involved stakeholder groups should be coordinated coherently in the lead up to the election. There is a broad interest in supporting women candidates at the upcoming election. We note that efforts are already underway to do this.

Strategies and priorities in the medium to long term

A key finding from the project was the importance of long term campaign planning for candidates. There are a number of steps that the UNDP and SIEC can take, through SECSIP Phase II, to support women candidates in the longer term.

1. Employ a people rather than place-based approach to supporting efforts to increase women's political representation. While resources limits might result in programmes, projects or activities focused on specific provinces, an acknowledgement that the particular candidate will shape the result rather than the constituency is important.

2. Contribute to creating an enabling environment for the emergence of women with competitive candidate characteristics, specifically through a focus on women's economic empowerment. Increasing women's economic empowerment will contribute positively to increasing the number of potential competitive candidates for election. Acknowledging this is a broader development issues, SECSIP Phase II could usefully pursue broader collaboration with Solomon Island Government and development partner stakeholders to contribute to achieving this objective.

3. Investigate building greater connections between SECSIP Phase II and women's networks, particularly those with business connections. Contributing to a broader public dialogue and normalising women's leadership in public forums could lead to longer term benefits. More specifically, building on the importance of women's economic empowerment, promote connections and relationships with and across women's development Women in Business.

4. Review campaign financing regulations and enforcement. An emphasis should be placed on assessing means of better enforcing the campaign spending limit. This would contribute to levelling the playing field for all candidates, but particularly for women who are generally more disadvantaged by the necessity of significant financial resources than men.

5. Contribute to a dialogue on the implications that the RCDF has on the electoral environment. In an electoral environment requiring significant financial resources to be competitive, the RDCF was identified as a key advantage that sitting MPs have in election campaigns. A dialogue should be opened with Solomon Island Government stakeholders if it continues to emerge as an issue which is having significant influence on electoral results.

6. Support temporary special measures (TSM) to support women's political representation at the provincial government level. Having more women in provincial parliaments is an important goal in its own right. Furthermore, while there is no clear pathway from provincial to national politics in Solomon Islands, increased women's representation in provincial assemblies may help normalise the idea that women can win elections, which could make people more likely to vote for women in the future. The influence that TSM has on voting patterns in relevant provinces should be monitored by SECSIP Phase II.

7. Encourage competitive women candidates who do not win at the national level to consider contesting provincial-level elections. Women who have been competitive at the national level campaign will likely be better positioned to be at least competitive, if not successful, at the provincial level. The relationship between national and provincial level campaigning should be monitored by SECSIP Phase II.

8. Provide support to provincial candidates, as well as national. As noted above, promoting women's political representation at provincial level is an important objective in itself. Beyond training and support during campaigning, broader contributions could be made supporting women to access the appropriate tools and skills to do the job once elected.



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9. View promoting the support and development of women candidates across the whole electoral cycle. The importance of early ground work for competitive campaigns suggests that support programmes should take the view of providing support throughout an electoral cycle, rather than in the final months. Taking a longer term perspective is important in seeing sustainable progress over time.

10. Assess ‘what success looks like?’ for increasing women’s political representation in Solomon Islands. A simple measure of the number of women in national parliament (or the number of female candidates contesting each election) is not necessarily going to acknowledge the incremental changes and success that can be achieved to address the complex issues that cut across the electoral environment. An assessment of the competitiveness of women candidates, in terms of ranking and proportion of vote share, over time could be pursued. Support of certain candidates by the SECSIP Phase II programmes and activities in the lead up to elections could also be used as a proxy measure for the on-going support and contribution of the program to supporting women’s political leadership. Ultimately, SECSIP Phase II should consider what the realistic measures of success will be to give a reasonable and balanced assessment of what can be achieved in this space.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are under-represented in politics throughout the world but in Melanesia they are almost completely excluded from national-level political institutions. Solomon Islands currently has only two female Members of Parliament (MPs) out of 50 and in its post-independence history only four female MPs have been elected to national parliament. Development partners have invested significant resources into increasing women's political representation but this has had a limited effect to date.

In February 2018, Sustineo was engaged by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to undertake research on *Women's leadership and political participation in selected constituencies in Solomon Islands*. The research project is part of the UNDP *Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in Solomon Islands Project (SECSIP)* Phase II.

This project is directly aligned with Outcome 1 of Gender Equality in the *United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022* which notes that the "UN aims to create a social and institutional environment to welcome and support women's political participation, increases the number of women candidates, and enhances their support networks". It is also aligned with the Strategy's focus on the Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.1 related to the "Number of Pacific Island Countries and Territories in which the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments has increased".

Purpose

The **purpose** of the project is to contribute to increasing women's political representation in Solomon Islands. It **aims** to do this through better understanding the factors that inhibit and enable women's political representation within target constituencies. The project is structured to do this through:

- Assessing the historical voting practices in constituencies as they relate to women candidates
- Characterising the type of voters who are more and less inclined to vote for women candidates and why this is the case
- Identifying the factors that are considered as the most significant in limiting or enabling electoral success.

The project has provided an opportunity to investigate issues of women's leadership and political participation in detail, improve the evidence base on the factors which contribute to candidate success in Solomon Islands and strengthen efforts to support female candidates.

Methodology and limitations

The project employed a mixed-methods approach to research design and conduct. The research findings are based on the integration of a desk assessment, key informant interviews and a survey. Details on these methods are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 – Purpose and detail of methods used in the *Women's leadership and political participation in selected constituencies in Solomon Islands* project

Method	Detail
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Desk assessment	<p>The purpose of the desk assessment was to establish a foundation of knowledge and understanding of women's political representation in Solomon Islands. The assessment included a review of relevant literature (Section 2), re-analysis of previous survey data to assess demographic differences in attitudes towards women's leadership (Annex X), and historical analysis of previous election results related to the performance of women candidates (Annex X).</p>
Interviews	<p>The purpose of the interviews was to better understand the dynamics that influence whether candidates are successful or not in Solomon Islands, including in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors that impact on the success of candidates • Relevance of political party alignment • Challenges that candidates were confronted with during their campaign • What would have been helpful in running a more successful campaign. <p>A total of 89 interviews with 95 participants were completed, including field visits to the 10 target constituencies (see below). Interviews were completed between 9 March and 13 April 2018.</p>
Survey	<p>The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into the perspectives of voters in the selected constituencies. Specifically, this included voter perspectives of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Candidate qualities and characteristics • Campaigning • Political participation • Women's leadership. <p>A total of 1061 surveys were completed in the same 10 constituencies as the interviews. Eligible survey participants were Solomon Islanders who were 18 years old and over, and who were registered in the constituency where the survey was being conducted. The survey was conducted by Solomon Islanders in Solomon Islands Pijin using tablets. Survey based data collection was completed between 4 April 2018 and 4 May 2018.</p>

The desk review established an analytical framework for the project which further revised and validated throughout fieldwork. The framework focused the research design on three levels which influence political representation and participation in Solomon Islands, particularly as it relates to women. These levels included:

- Electoral environment - the structural barriers that influence women's political representation
- Candidates and characteristics - the factors that shape the relative competitiveness of candidates, particularly as they related to gender-based differences

- Constituency and campaigns - the factors that shape the relative success of a campaign for different candidates, particularly as they related to gender-based differences.

Complementing this framework, the research team used a matrix of characteristics shared by many successful candidates (Barbara and Baker, 2016) to guide the issues to investigate during data collection. More detail on the methodology and project limitations are available at (Annex X).

Target provinces and constituencies

The identification of provinces and target constituencies for this research project was based on a balance of: past participation of women candidates; past performance of women candidates; historical aspects of the constituencies and provinces; cultural context of the constituencies and provinces; and whether there appears to be some chance the sitting MP may lose the 2019 election.

Based on these factors 10 constituencies were identified in the five provinces of Central (Nggela and Russells/Savo), Honiara (Central Honiara and East Honiara), Isabel (Gao Bugotu and Maringe Kokota), Malaita (Fataleka and Lau/Mbaelelea) and Western (North Vella Lavella and West New Georgia/Vonavona). Figure 1 maps these constituencies.

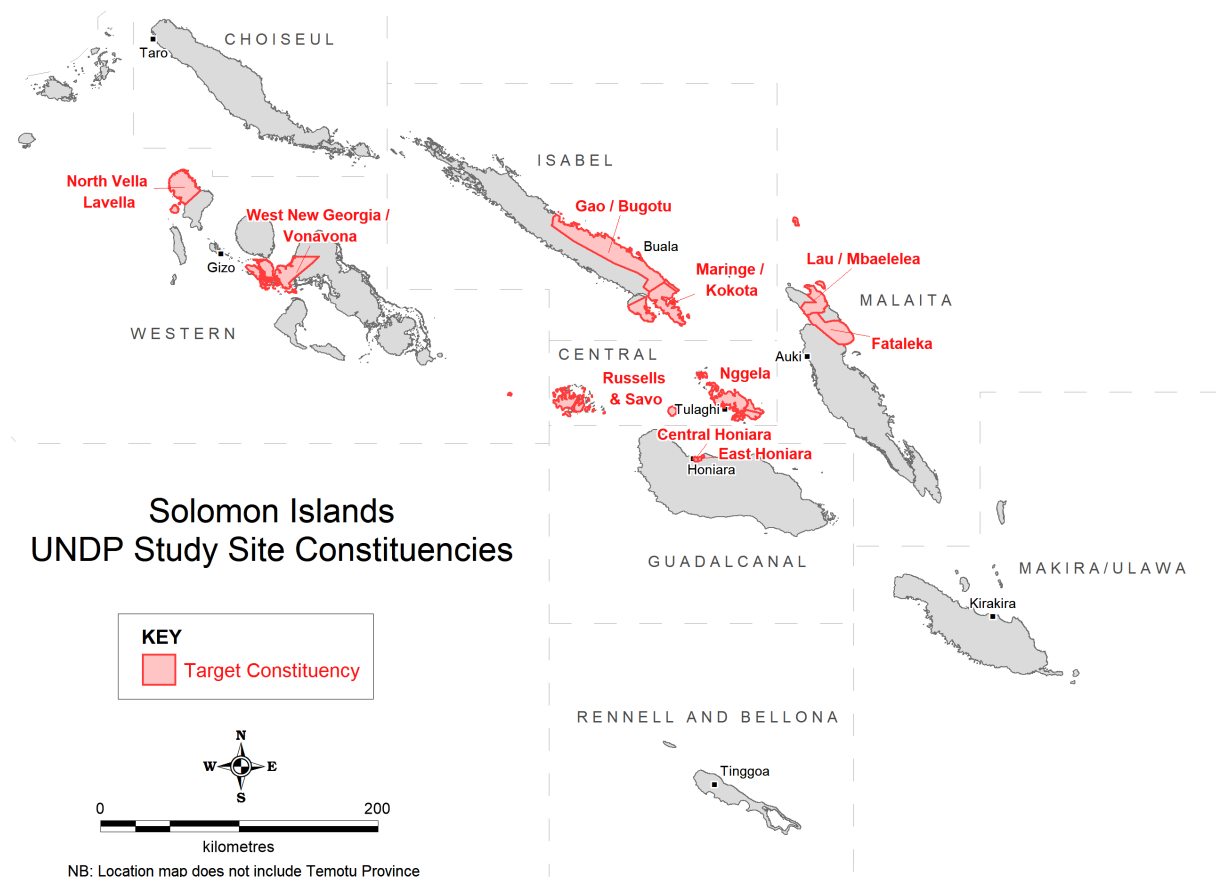


Figure 1 – Distribution of target constituencies for the *Women’s leadership and political participation in selected constituencies in Solomon Islands* project

More details on constituency selection are available at (Annex X).

Report structure

The purpose of the report is to provide the synthesis of data collected throughout the project. The findings draw on the Technical Survey Report and Technical Interview Report as the evidence base.

Section 2 outlines the literature review component of the **Desk Assessment**. Section 3 presents the findings related to the **Electoral Environment of Solomon Islands**. This includes elements that influence how different candidates operate in relation to electoral politics and campaigns. Section 4 explores **Perceptions of Women's Leadership in Solomon Islands**. This includes findings related to the perceived differences between a good male or female leader, different motivations for why men and women stand for election, and perceptions of women's suitability as a MPs.

Section 5 provides an outline of the key **Candidate Qualities and Characteristics** which were identified as important for competitive candidates. This is followed by Section 6 which outlines the key issues identified as important in **Competitive Campaigns**. Section 7 presents findings related to **Political Participation** in Solomon Islands, including perceptions of freedom to participate in elections.

Finally, Section 8 presents the primary **Implications and Recommendations** from the research project.

The Annexes provide further detail on: past survey research on attitudes towards women's leadership (Annex 1); historical analysis of women candidate performance at previous elections (Annex 2); the project methodology, analytical framework and project limitations (Annex 3); and constituency selection (Annex 4).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the literature review of women's leadership and political participation in the Pacific and Solomon Islands. Significant research has been undertaken within the Pacific, specifically Melanesia, on women's political representation and what influences candidate competitiveness. A summary of the key thematic areas is outlined below, noting that many of these are interrelated.

Defining a competitive candidate

In the report, comparisons are made between competitive and non-competitive candidates. For the purposes of this research, we have defined competitive candidates as winning more than 10 per cent of the vote OR placing in the top two candidates in at least one election. While this may seem a generous interpretation of 'competitive', we believe that a vote share of over 10 per cent demonstrates a significant support base in Solomon Islands elections. Most candidates who have stood in Solomon Islands elections since independence have won less than 10 per cent of the vote.

Cultural attitudes towards women's leadership

Cultural and religious traditions that assert male authority and female subservience hinder women's participation in politics in Solomon Islands and the wider Pacific region (Billy 2002; McLeod 2015; Pilapitiya 2014; Roughan & Wini 2015; Soaki 2017; True et al. 2012; Wood 2015), as well as educational and professional opportunities (Liki 2010). Gender stereotypes that situate men as leaders and women within the domestic sphere are strong and pervasive. Church structures reinforce these stereotypes, and women's leadership in religious spaces is often siloed, with few women taking on key leadership roles outside church women's organisations (Whittington, Ospina & Pollard 2006). Where women have public influence - for example, in local peacebuilding activities - it is often framed through the expression of characteristics that fit within and do not transcend traditional gender norms, such as maternal nurturing. These activities are hard to build on as a foundation for political activity (Soaki 2017).

Voter education is often pursued as a strategy to improve the electoral chances of women but its value is disputed. Survey results and past research into women's political participation indicate that Solomon Islanders have consistently shown their support for greater women's representation and willingness to elect 'good' women candidates (Dicker, Billy & Barclay 2016; Haley et al. 2015; McMurray 2012; Roughan & Wini 2015), yet these attitudes fail to correspond to the actual rates of success for women candidates.

Conservative leadership infrastructure - both formal and customary - is a barrier to women's political participation (Soaki 2017) but significant reform is possible (Haley & Zubrinich 2016). Gender roles are entrenched but not immutable; women's interests can be promoted even in conservative and patriarchal societies through the exploitation of 'cracks' in social norms (Roche et al. 2018). Cultural barriers are significant but not the whole story when it comes to women's political under-representation (Dicker, Billy & Barclay 2016; Wood 2014). Where women do enter politics, however, they are often held to different behavioural standards than men and this can affect career longevity and broader perceptions of women's leadership (Haley & Zubrinich 2016; Soaki 2017; Whittington, Ospina & Pollard 2006; Wood 2014).

Socio-economic barriers

Economic resources are a key determinant of election success. Access to resources has become more important as election-related costs have increased over time in Melanesia (Barbara & Baker 2016). Gendered socio-economic differences, therefore, exacerbate political inequality (Soaki 2017).

Having access to financial resources is necessary for a competitive election campaign in Solomon Islands (Wood 2014; 2015), as in other Pacific countries, especially those in which money politics is prevalent (Haley & Zubrinich 2016). Financial resources are important for candidates to be able to demonstrate responsiveness to community needs, usually through the provision of cash or material goods. Voters want a representative who will add personal wealth to the community (Dicker, Billy & Barclay 2016).

Reputation and a high profile within the community can overcome a lack of resources for some women candidates in the Pacific (Spark, Cox & Corbett 2018; see also Meleisea et al. 2015), but this is not always the case. Similarly, women's economic empowerment is an important precondition for effective participation in political systems but it is not sufficient in itself to guarantee success (True et al. 2012).

Lack of support from voters

A female candidate's election loss is often attributed to a lack of support from women voters (Baker 2017). This narrative underestimates the value of networks used by women in pursuing political aims. Often the advancement of individual women in the public sphere - including in political roles - is bolstered by advocacy from church women's groups, local women's groups and NGOs (Chan Tung 2013). Yet an election strategy that focuses on the 'women and youth' vote is often politically naïve, with the support of key local powerbrokers - who are overwhelmingly men - usually crucial to success.

Pursuing the 'women's vote' is not a successful election strategy as the calculation for female voters is complicated, as men's votes are, by community, family and church ties as well as obligations stemming from gifts of cash and material goods and the influence of local powerbrokers (Baker 2017). Voters, both female and male, are inclined to support a candidate that they believe can win (Roughan & Wini 2015). Wealthy backers often will only support a candidate that is credible (Dicker, Billy & Barclay 2016; Wood 2014). This is an issue associated with gendered norms of political leadership and money politics; cultural attitudes towards women's leadership and socio-economic disadvantage can prevent female candidates from being seen as credible and competitive.

Access to local powerbrokers

Support from the electorate is often dependent on gaining the endorsement of local powerbrokers (Wood 2014; 2015). Effective brokers may be community leaders, heads of clans and church leaders, and they are usually men. In the Solomon Islands context, male community elders can be highly influential, especially over the votes of women and young people (Dicker, Billy & Barclay 2016; Soaki 2017).

In the Pacific, gaining the support of influential local leaders is important (Barbara & Baker 2016). Strong male backers are especially important for successful and competitive women candidates (Haley & Zubrinich 2016). Gaining the support of male powerbrokers is often difficult for female candidates, however, due to local norms on leadership and gender relations (Wood 2014).

Structural barriers

The increase in constituency development funding available to members of Parliament, and the changing role of politicians as a result, has tilted the balance against women and fuelled “a transactional political culture at the detriment of women’s political participation” (Dicker, Billy & Barclay 2016). This new political context has created a perception of the role of an MP as predominantly based on service delivery, rather than national policy-making and governance. Successful candidates in contemporary Solomon Islands politics tend to be those who can demonstrate a track record of service delivery to the constituency - but this kind of work in the community is gendered. Service to the community carried out by women is often perceived as apolitical, while that carried out by men is considered political and contingent on electoral success.

More broadly, the prevalence of money politics is a gendered issue in Solomon Islands (Roughan & Wini 2015), as in elsewhere in Melanesia (Baker 2017). Spending over the official campaign finance limits is commonplace and undertaken with impunity (Whittington, Ospina & Pollard 2006; Wood 2014). The first past the post electoral system has been identified as a further gendered barrier (Whittington, Ospina & Pollard 2006), although electoral system reform in neighbouring Papua New Guinea has failed to deliver substantial gains in terms of women’s representation (Baker 2018).

3. ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Women have to run harder, jump higher, just to win the race

Former candidate, Isabel Province

This section presents the findings related to the broader electoral environment of Solomon Islands. Solomon Islands has a single member district plurality electoral system in which a high number of candidates typically contest each constituency (see Wood 2014). Most candidates, both female and male, who have contested elections in post-independence Solomon Islands have won less than 10 per cent of the vote (Wood 2014). The first-past-the-post electoral system was highlighted by some interviewees as an obstacle to women's representation, but as noted above, voting system reform in neighbouring Papua New Guinea has not delivered any substantive gains in terms of women's representation over three general elections (Baker 2018). Rather than factors such as the first-past-the-post electoral system, this section focuses on key elements of the electoral environment that shape how different candidates operate in relation to electoral politics and campaigns.

Prevalence of money politics

The prevalence of money politics - vote-buying, gifting and the use of money to manipulate the electoral process - was highlighted as an obstacle to increased women's representation. Interviews identified a widespread perception that money politics was increasing in Solomon Islands and that this was having a significant effect on election outcomes. The impact of 'Devil's Night' - the night before the election when vote-buying is believed to spike - was seen as a crucial moment when elections could be won or lost. This was noted by many former women candidates as a detriment to their campaign, particularly in swaying the vote of young people and other disadvantaged groups.

While the extent and influence of money politics may vary between constituencies and between elections, it is an aspect of politics that needs to be taken into account in most parts of Solomon Islands. Specifically, the rise of money politics **further tilts the playing field against female candidates**, many of whom are unwilling or unable to participate in such practices.

Potential emergence of the 'invincible incumbent'

A number of interviewees suggested that there has recently been the rise of the (almost) 'invincible incumbent' in Solomon Islands. With it increasingly difficult to win elections without significant financial resources, interviewees suggested that unseating a sitting member was becoming particularly challenging due to their access to the RCDF. The funding paid to national members for RCDF has increased enormously since its introduction in 1992 and, given that the distribution of RCDF at the constituency level is largely at the discretion of the sitting member, it was identified as contributing to the emergence of the (almost) 'invincible incumbent'.

This makes it very hard for new candidates to challenge incumbents. Because they have a lot of money. And they use those projects to be geared towards the next election. It is quite hard to unseat the current member. *(Former MP, Isabel Province)*

If you see what the current RCDF is doing, it's making people ... stronger in terms of holding on to power. *(Women's leader, Western Province)*

Historically, there has been a high turnover of sitting MPs at each election, with approximately half losing their seats at each election. The 2014 national general election was an exception to this with approximately three-quarters of MPs being retained. While it would be pre-emptive to conclude a significant change based on the results of one election, incumbent turnover should continue to be monitored in the 2019 national general election and beyond, with particular reference to recent and future changes in the RDCF.

As there are very few female incumbents, if the ‘invincible incumbent’ does emerge it **presents a gendered barrier to election**. While some interviewees thought prospects for women’s increased participation in national-level decision-making and politics were getting better, most disagreed, arguing that the increasing monetisation of politics skews the playing field even further against women.

If money wasn’t given to MPs through the RCDF everyone would be on a level playing field. ... A lot of money will be spent by MPs, and that is a great obstacle to women candidates. (*Women in politics advocate, Honiara*)

The increased importance of access to significant financial resources shows that even if other barriers to women in politics might be changing in Solomon Islands, the electoral environment is not becoming easier for women to traverse.

Changing barriers to women’s political leadership

Barriers to women’s equal participation were identified as having changed over time; however, the electoral environment overall remains largely unwelcoming to women. A number of enduring barriers to women’s political representation remain but are less prominent than in the past. Cultural barriers remain with interviews identifying the perception that a significant proportion of the population that would not countenance voting for a woman, at least at the national level. For example, 25.4% of survey respondents either stated they would not vote for a female candidate or that they did not know if they would vote for a female candidate.

Limited access to customary decision-making positions and institutions was identified further as a cultural barrier to women given their restricted access to these forums in many parts of Solomon Islands. However, **while culture was ultimately seen as a barrier, ultimately it was perceived as of secondary importance with access to financial resources considered the main obstacle to greater women’s representation.**

Finance is the biggest barrier. Not necessarily culture. (*Aspiring candidate and women’s leader, Honiara*)

People will waive culture and traditions if you have money. (*Female candidate, Malaita, multiple elections*)

While gender roles have shifted over time in Solomon Islands, the local political economy has also shifted, meaning new barriers to women’s participation in politics, such as incumbency and access to resources, have arisen even as the traditional barriers of cultural and societal attitudes towards women’s representation have been perceived to be reduced.

4. PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

This section presents findings on the differences between a good male or female leader, the different perceived motivations for why men and women stand for election, and perceptions of a woman's suitability as a member of parliament.

Characteristics of a good leader

Although there were many similarities, there were some differences in the types of characteristics that were identified as being important to a good female leader compared to a good male leader. Survey respondents were asked to identify the three most important characteristics of a good female and a good male leader. Table 2 shows the difference in the most commonly identified important characteristics regarding gender.

The most common important female leader characteristics were aligned with positive ways of conducting themselves and engaging with people and the community. While those types of characteristics were also present for good male leaders, the most common responses for important male leader characteristics related to bringing development projects to the community and financial management capabilities. Bringing development to the community was still identified as relatively important for women, with financial management less so.

Table 2 – Aggregated top responses to the question 'What do you think are the three most important characteristics of a good female leader?' shown in comparison the question 'What do you think are the three most important characteristics of a good male leader?'

Characteristic	Female leader		Male Leader	
	Ranking	%	Ranking	%
Is fair and treats everyone equally	1	11.6%	3	11.8%
Honest way of doing things	2	10.5%	4	11.7%
Helps keep good relations in the community	3	10.5%	5	9.8%
Brings development projects to the community	4	9.4%	1	12.4%
Accountable and transparent in how they use money	7	8.0%	2	12.3%

Motivations for standing for election

There were differences in the perceived motivations for why either men or women stand for election in Solomon Islands. Survey respondents were asked to identify the three main reasons why men and women stand for election. Table 3 shows the differences in the most commonly identified motivations for men and women standing.

Overall, women candidates were perceived to stand for more community-minded reasons where male candidates were perceived to stand for personal benefit. While helping all people in the constituency was identified as a main reason for both genders (first for women, second for male), male respondents were perceived to be more likely to stand for personal financial gain and to have power. The top three responses for why women

stand were all for helping or advocating for different groups. **Advocating for women issues was seen as one of the main reasons why female candidates stand** (23.8% of respondents), where it was hardly noted as a reason for male candidates (1.8%). This finding confirms there is a widespread perception that women candidates are candidates for women, a perception that can damage the viability of a campaign if male voters do not believe the candidate will represent their interests.

Table 3 – Aggregated top three responses to the question ‘What do you think are the three main reasons that a female candidate stands for election?’ compared to the question ‘What do you think are the three main reasons that a male candidate stands for election’

Reason	Female Candidates		Male Candidates	
	Ranking	%	Ranking	%
To help all the people in their constituency	1	25.7%	2	18.6%
To advocate and address women’s issues in parliament	2	23.6%	11	1.8%
To help all the people in Solomon Islands	3	15.5%	5	11.0%
For personal financial gain	8	4.0%	1	21.0%
To have power	4	6.2%	3	16.2%

Different motivations for why male and female candidates stand for election were also emphasised through the interviews. Women tended to emphasise the need for more women in politics, while men emphasised their own leadership qualities and other skills as the basis for their interest in politics. A number of former candidates reflected that they did not stand to win the election, but rather to have a presence and emphasise an agenda. Men were more likely to note they had been encouraged to run by voters or leaders within the constituency, including chiefs.

Interviewees also observed that national-level politics in Solomon Islands had changed negatively over time due to the increase in RCDF. Specifically, they contended the increased discretionary findings for sitting members have altered the perceptions and actions of members of Parliament, and also who might choose to stand.

I wish I was in parliament but not today's parliament. It has changed over time, people go in there for other reasons. (*Female candidate, Honiara, 2006 election*)

RCDF is so lucrative and draws the wrong crowd with the wrong motives. (*Male candidate, Malaita, 2014 election*)

This reiterates the broader influence that access to resources is having on the electoral environment in Solomon Islands.

Public support for women candidates

The findings from this project suggest that **attitudes towards women’s leadership and potential as political representatives have not improved over time.** In this project, nearly three-quarters of survey respondents (74.3%) said they would vote for a female candidate. While previous studies have asked different questions related to perceptions of women’s leadership, they have reported generally positive responses to women’s

leadership. The findings from this study are broadly in line with past questions about women in leadership from previous studies (Table 4).

Table 4 – Comparisons of perceptions of women’s leadership identified in different surveys

Survey	Question	% of Yes	% of Other*
Women’s leadership (Current)	Would you vote for a female candidate?	74%	26%
Peacebuilding (2017)	Do you think that women can be leaders in their community?	91%	9%
Voter Awareness (2015)	Do you think women are as skilled at being politicians as men?	81%	19%
People’s Survey (2013)	Do women make good leaders?	91%	9%

*Including ‘No’ and ‘Do not know’

Over time, there does not appear to have been pronounced positive changes in relation to attitudes towards women’s leadership at different levels. This is despite the significant efforts that have been made by the Government of Solomon Islands and development partners.

The survey results showed that while there are generally positive attitudes towards women candidates at an abstract level, a clear gap persists between those who said they would vote for a women candidate at a national level and those who have. Figure 2 shows the stark differences, with only 13.2% of respondents indicating they had previously voted for a woman candidate and 86.0% indicating they had not.

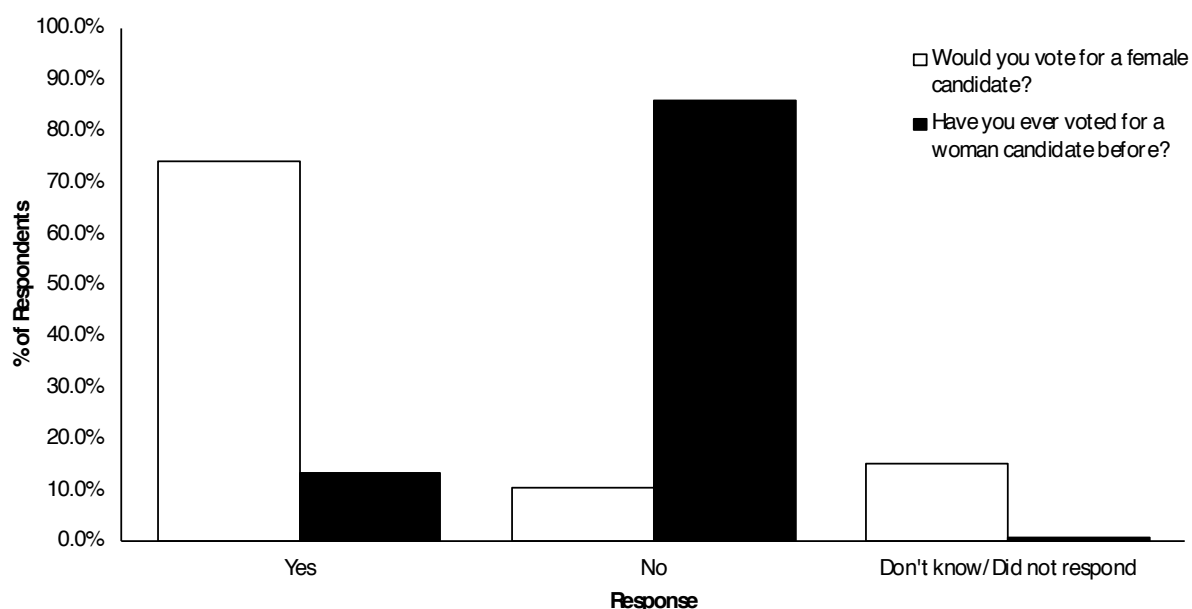


Figure 2 – Comparison of responses to the questions “Would you vote for a female candidate?” and “Have you ever voted for a woman candidate before?” for all surveys.

Of the 86.0% of survey respondents who said they had never voted for a female candidate, the majority (53.1%) said this was because there was no female candidate in their constituency, with the second most common response being that the respondent had not voted before (17.0%).



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

One of the overarching objectives of the project was to characterise the type of voters who are more or less inclined to vote for women candidates and further investigate why this is the case. **Overall, the findings of this research project are inconclusive in relation to a specific type of voter who is more or less inclined to vote for a female candidate.** That is to say, within this project there were no significant differences based on respondent characteristics - such as age or gender - related to attitudes towards women's leader. This parallels the findings from the *Desk Assessment*.

However, the project has highlighted a number of findings which are important to consider and which contribute to the broader purpose of this assignment to contribute to increasing women's political representation in Solomon Islands, as outlined above and described further in subsequent sections.

5. CANDIDATE CHARACTERISTICS

This section reports on findings related to characteristics that are perceived to be important or desirable for a competitive candidate. Informed by the matrix of characteristics of successful candidates developed by Barbara and Baker (2016), the findings are based on the integration of both interview and survey data.

The following discussion covers the broad thematic areas of connection to community, resourcing, family connection, support of local networks, individual attributes and political parties. These issues emerge in inter-related ways and their relative importance varied depending on the circumstances within a constituency, at a particular time. It is important to acknowledge this complexity and the requirement for a nuanced understanding of how these characteristics emerge throughout Solomon Islands, in interpreting the following results.

Connections to communities

Having strong personal links with multiple different communities was identified as an essential attribute of a competitive candidate. When asked to identify the three most likeable qualities in a female candidate and male candidate, the **most commonly identified qualities for candidates of both genders was strong personal links to their community.** When asked specifically about the importance of a candidate **having strong personal links with multiple different communities** for them to win in the constituency, 99.1% of respondents indicated they considered it important. This was the highest level of importance recorded across 17 possible candidate characteristics and qualities.

Interview data further emphasised the importance of having close connections with the constituency as decisive in a candidate being competitive. However, there are nuances that should be understood in how such connections are targeted and maintained.

Depending on the nature of the particular constituencies, interviewees reflected that it was not essential to be supported by all communities. Within particular constituencies, there will be communities which have greater or lesser influence on the election through population differences, and an emphasis was placed on being strategic with those communities that potential candidates fostered relationships with.

Maintaining a connection to a community also did not necessarily mean living in that area or constituency. While a candidate 'living in the constituency at the time of the election' was identified as important by 94.1% of survey respondents, triangulation of this finding with other data sources suggests that it is not a key determinant of voter's decisions. Specifically, **it was not uncommon for successful candidates to be based on Honiara but to be able to maintain strong relationships and connections to the multiple communities that they require for a competitive campaign.**

It was clear that there is not a single one-size-fits-all approach to retaining a connection to communities, with a broad range of strategies being noted. These included:

- Providing financial support to students from that constituency
- Maintaining close relations with key community groups
- Having representatives of the potential candidate in those communities.

As discussed in Section 6, a candidate's campaign team also plays a critical role in engaging with communities, sometimes in lieu of the actual candidate. Women candidates who have been successful at the provincial and national levels tend to use the same types of strategies as successful male candidates in terms of building and fostering connections to communities.

Well-resourced

The resources available to candidates were identified as being critical to their level of competitiveness. As outlined in the *Electoral Environment of Solomon Islands*, access to resources is the core factor which shapes electoral success. Having sufficient access to financial support was identified as important, particularly in being able to overcome the sitting members' advantage of access to the RDCF.

Having significant financial resources was considered sufficient to overcome many other potential disadvantages for a candidate, such as those related to profile, reputation and experience. Financial resources were identified as one of, if not the most, important factor dividing competitive and non-competitive candidates. It is especially important in demonstrating to voters that a candidate has the potential to win.

You really have to plan and have the resources. Especially prior to the election, you need to show you can win as people want to vote for a winning candidate. (*Female candidate, Honiara, 2014 election*)

A large majority of interviewees noted that people will vote for candidates they believe are likely to win. To prove they are likely winners, candidates may employ strategies including: travelling with a lot of supporters; distributing campaign merchandise; using a projector and other expensive equipment; and gifting (cash, donations, and food) to potential supporters.

If they see that a potential candidate will win, they want to vote for someone who will win and look after them. They don't want to vote for a losing candidate. (*Female candidate, Honiara, 2014 election*)

The strategies used by candidates to appear to be likely winners often require significant financial or other resources, which are usually harder for female candidates to obtain than for their male counterparts. That women candidates generally have less access to resources than men put them at a distinct disadvantage in terms of their perceived likelihood of succeeding. This is also likely exacerbated by a perception they are less likely to succeed than their male counterparts, due to gendered attitudes towards leadership and the historical under-representation of women in Solomon Islands politics.

They don't want their ballot to be wasted. Voters see women candidates as less likely to win than men. (*Women's leader, Western Province*)

However, it was clear that where resources were accessible for women candidates, they could run a campaign that successfully depicted them as a likely winner (Box 1). **While enhancing women's access to resources could provide a means to help level the playing field, the amount of resources required is significant and would likely require significant personal resources or the support of well-resourced local backers.**

Box 1. Vignette of Jane Tozaka

Jane Tozaka contested at provincial level in Western Province for the first time in 2014 and won. Her husband, Milner Tozaka, has been the MP for North Vella Lavella since 2006. Jane's campaign drew on her past work with women's groups for which she was well known in the area. She also used the resources available for her campaign strategically to present an image as a likely successful candidate:

When I arrived in villages, you can tell that voters saw and said 'this woman is going to win'. That was a strategy/plan that I came up with. Because I'm standing up against all the big men and village of the ward ... I had to be unique, so in spite of these big men, they see those 10 canoes coming through the passage to campaign, they will see that I'm going to win so [they will think] 'I'll vote for her'.

Jane's experience shows that political connections and past community work are important, but equally important is being perceived as a competitive candidate with a good chance of winning.

Family connections

Family connections emerged as another very important indicator of candidate competitiveness in elections. Competitive male and female candidates were more likely to come from prominent, political and/or chiefly families. The importance of family connections is especially true for competitive women candidates, to a greater extent to their male counterparts. This can be seen in looking at the profiles of the women who have been elected to Solomon Islands Parliament since 2012. Two, Lanelle Tanangada in Gizo/Kolombangara and Vika Lusibaea in North Malaita, won their seats in by-elections after they were vacated by their husbands. A third, Freda Tuki Soriacomua, comes from a well-known chiefly family in her constituency of Temotu Vatud.

Family connections are particularly salient and can trump other characteristics including age, work experience and education. This aligns with the findings of past research which has shown that women MPs in the Pacific often come from well-known families with strong local networks (Baker et al. 2013; Barbara & Baker 2016). Several younger aspiring women candidates interviewed for this research, however, noted that it is easier for men than for women to leverage family connections for political purposes.

Powerful local networks

The support of powerful local networks - including family, community and church - were essential for a competitive candidate, but there is significant nuance in the way these different networks operate in practice. These networks were identified as important both by survey respondents and in interviews. Table 5 shows the relative importance of three attributes related to support or engagement with community and church networks.

Table 5 – Comparison of selected candidate characteristic questions related to support of local networks.

Rank	Attribute	% of respondents who identified it as important
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3	Support from powerful community leaders	96.6%
5	Support from church leaders	94.8%
7	Being part of one of the big church groups in their constituency	92.8%

Family support was identified as important for competitive candidates. One reason for this is that support of extended family provides candidates with a strong support base. Another is that having the support of family increases a candidate's chances of being perceived as credible and a likely winner. While the family network was not the only network utilised by competitive candidates, it is an important foundation for a competitive campaign. As noted above, there can be gendered obstacles for women candidates in securing family support, particularly if they have politically ambitious male relatives.

Community networks, and particularly the support of powerful community leaders, were commonly identified as important. However, **it was clear that the relative importance and influence of this community network needs to be understood in context**, as noted above. The relative importance of chiefly networks, for example, varies widely between constituencies. In interviews, Temotu Vatud was frequently highlighted as a constituency in which chiefs exercise a lot of political power, while in Isabel the political influence of chiefs was perceived to be waning. While gaining the support of community leaders was important everywhere, which leaders were politically influential was highly context-dependent. These powerful community leaders were overwhelmingly men. Developing strong relationships with such leaders was seen as more difficult for aspiring female candidates than their male counterparts.

While church support was considered very important, its relative importance and influence also differed by location. Again, **it was clear the influence of church networks in shaping a candidate's competitiveness need to be assessed on a provincial and constituency level**. The importance of endorsement by a church leader to electoral success varies from denomination to denomination, and from constituency to constituency. For instance, the power of the CFC in West New Georgia as a voting bloc, and the importance of securing the endorsement of CFC leadership, was heavily emphasised. In other constituencies, however, church leadership endorsement was not a significant consideration. Similarly, while membership of a particular church group was seen as important in some areas - including West New Georgia and in Nggela where the majority of the population is Anglican - in others, the particular denomination a candidate belonged to was much less important.

Consideration also needs to be given to the political saliency of different community and church networks. Women's community and church-based organisations were well-respected, but not considered powerful political forces. Thus, the endorsement and support of such groups carries less weight in elections than other important groups within constituencies. This is a significant obstacle for women candidates, many of whom relied heavily on women's networks in their campaigns.

Reputation for helping

A reputation for helping was identified as important for a competitive candidate but how this translates politically depends on context and candidate gender. Gaining a reputation for helping in the community often means offering financial assistance to communities and individuals within the constituency. This requires a long-term approach to building a reputation in the community, beyond the standard term of an election campaign.

People vote for you if you have helped them in the past. (*Current member of Parliament, Central Province*)

To challenge the sitting member, you have to assist the constituency financially. Creating a reputation. It's part of our culture. If you just give someone a lift in your vehicle, or you visit in hospital, they will remember that good deed. (*Female aspiring candidate and women's leader, Honiara*)

A reputation for helping is important for a candidate to be competitive but it does not necessarily result in winning the seat, particularly for women candidates.

You see Alice Pollard, she has been so successful with her micro-finance set up, she has a women's group. She has done so much but she didn't get through. (*Campaign manager, Malaita, multiple elections*)

A strong local reputation can also be gained through a caring profession, such as teaching or nursing, or in civil society can translate into political capital. **Teaching, especially experience as school principals, has historically been a common background for male politicians because they have a community leadership profile and networks.**

There are cases where people you haven't heard of, especially men, they could be teachers or nurses in the rural areas. Mainly it's because they do favours for the community, and the community recognises that and vote for them next time. I don't think this will be the case for women. ... I think for a woman you haven't heard of to get into politics, it won't happen. Women cannot [sic] get in, from out of nowhere. (*Young women's leader, Honiara*)

It is unclear whether a woman without significant financial resources could gain entry to national politics through a strong local reputation as a teacher or in another caring profession. It is important to note too that research has shown MPs in the current era are more likely to have private sector backgrounds than come from the public service or caring professions (Corbett & Wood 2013).

Having a good reputation was identified as important for all candidates to be competitive, but behavioural standards for women are stricter than for men. For example, women candidates penalised for being divorced or 'not having a good family life' in ways that men are not.

I am a single mother and people would ask all about that. They don't ask about men's personal lives, even if they have O1s and O2s [multiple romantic partners] that everyone knows about. (*Female aspiring candidate, Honiara*)

Women are held to a higher standard, or higher level of scrutiny. Men's bad behaviour is excused. (*Female candidate, Malaita, multiple elections*)

Reputational issues are not, however, insurmountable. Afu Billy lost by the narrowest of margins in East Malaita in 2001 despite being divorced and living in a de facto relationship with a new partner from another province (Billy 2002). Although this was an issue for many voters in the constituency, she came from a high-profile family; her father was a famous South Seas Evangelical Church pastor who had died the previous year. Her family connections and other attributes were enough to overcome the disadvantage of being divorced and make her a competitive candidate. **This suggests that while a good reputation is important, it can be superseded with resources, key attributes and/or family connections.**

Individual attributes

A number of individual attributes - being well educated, professional qualifications and leadership experience - were identified as being important in being a competitive candidate but not sufficient to win. Survey respondents identified 'having an

understanding of how government systems and institutions work' (97.4%) and 'being well educated' (96.4%) of high importance in relation to important candidate qualities. Leadership at a community level was also identified as important, with examples of it being perceived as critical in deciding the outcome of the elections

These findings, combined with broader evidence that politicians in the Pacific, and Solomon Islands in particular, tend to have high levels of education and professional experience (Barbara & Baker 2016; Corbett & Wood 2013), suggest that these are critical factors in determining competitiveness. However, in the context of Solomon Islands, it appears that **while these attributes are generally important in being perceived as a credible candidate, they can be trumped by other factors**. Specifically, their relative importance in shaping whether an election is won or not by a particular candidate can vary depending on the context surrounding a particular election (see Box 2).

Box 2. Vignette of Dr Culwick Togamana

The experience of Dr Culwick Togamana as a candidate and then sitting member highlights the relative importance of different attributes between elections. When Dr Togamana stood for Maringe/Kokota in 2010, he presented a range of desirable characteristics, such as being highly educated, with a doctorate in environmental science, and having professional experience as an academic at the University of the South Pacific. In 2010 he came second, however, almost 400 votes behind the winner.

Following his loss, he spent four years building connections and local support in the constituency. In 2014, he stood for election and won. While interviewees from the constituency repeatedly highlighted his level of education as a reason he won, the case of Dr Togamana shows that education and work experience, while influential, will often have to be supplemented by leadership experience and relationship building at the constituency level.

The experience of Dr Togamana shows that different traits can have different relative value across elections. While he was perceived to have lost the election in 2010 due to a lack of community leadership, despite his other credentials, in 2014 project interviewees perceived that the success of Dr Togamana was a result of his education and qualification rather than connection to community.

Interview data showed no major differences in the educational and professional backgrounds of competitive and non-competitive candidates - that is to say, many highly-educated candidates with professional experience polled poorly, while others were successful or very competitive. In contrast to previous studies, a candidate's profession did not seem to be an important factor in explaining electoral performance. Similarly, age was not a determining factor with several male interviewees noting they had run successfully at the provincial or national level while young (aged in their twenties). While various interviewees thought that candidates with high levels of education were more attractive to voters, education did not seem to be critical in explaining differences between non-competitive and competitive candidates.

Rather, the success of a campaign is often shaped by the context of the constituency, at that point in time, with the relative value of different candidate characteristics likely to change depending on which other candidates are competing; the popularity of the incumbent; and local priorities at that point in time.

The value of community leadership differs between male and female candidates. Most of the women candidates interviewed in this research had substantial leadership experience, primarily with women's groups, however as noted above this did not appear to translate to substantial political value. Some of these women's groups, such as the

Mother's Union in Isabel, were acknowledged by both female and male interviewees as very powerful but were seldomly regarded as influential in a political sense. **A clear barrier to women's electoral success is that this leadership experience does not appear to be as politically valued as other leadership roles, such as in the business community, in community decision-making, or church leadership positions.**

Political experience and political parties

Previous political experience and alignment with political parties did not emerge as prominent factors in increasing the competitiveness of candidates. This was true of previous political experience, as well as alignment with political parties.

A large number of interviewees suggested provincial government was a potential 'training ground' for national-level politics, with provincial elections also being easier to contest in terms of cost and logistics. A common piece of advice for possible women candidates was to start at the provincial level.

Provincial elections are easier to campaign and win if you don't have money.
(*Campaign manager, Malaita, multiple elections*)

It is easier for a woman to win at provincial level where it is easier to see her and know what she does. (*Female provincial member*)

Similarly, a relatively high proportion of survey respondents (89.2%) identified candidates 'having previous experience at the provincial government or in a local council' as being important for national elections, suggesting it could be a pathway to national politics. **However, evidence from the experiences of candidates interviewed suggest there is no clear pathway from provincial to national level.** For example, within the scope of this project, 16 members of provincial assemblies were interviewed of which 13 had contested national elections. Only two had successfully transitioned from provincial to national government. In both cases, neither won their national seat on first attempt.

Past election results have shown that **experience in provincial government is not an important criterion for voters in national elections.** The low levels of funding available to provincial governments may harm the future political aspirations of provincial members as they may be viewed as ineffective. A number of former provincial and national candidates argued that this was a deliberate strategy by national MPs to underfund provincial governments and refuse to work collaboratively with provincial members, to prevent them becoming competitive threats to national members.

It is important to emphasise that increasing women's representation is important at both provincial and national levels. While there is no clear pathway from provincial government experience to national level success, it may work in the opposite direction. Four interviewees had run competitive campaigns for national government, and although unsuccessful, subsequently were elected at provincial level.

National election paved the way for provincial election. It gave me the confidence to talk with people. ... after the national election, I didn't find the provincial one hard. (*Male former national candidate and current provincial member, Isabel*)

Encouraging competitive women candidates who do not win at the national level to consider contesting provincial-level elections may pay off with greater representation at the lower level. A recurring theme in interviews, however, was the challenges of effective representation at the provincial level given the current political and economic climate, with resources concentrated at the national level. Strategies to increase women's representation at the provincial level need to take this political reality into account, with material and moral support for female provincial members post-election as an essential component.

Party endorsement does not correlate strongly to electoral success for either male or female candidates. At the 2014 election, independents did better than party-endorsed candidates with 33 out of 50 elected MPs running as independents (Haley et al. 2015), although in previous elections party endorsed candidates have performed better. The sole successful female candidate in 2014 was endorsed by the People's Alliance Party. While 78.4% of survey respondents identified candidates 'belonging to a political party' as important, past election results and interviews suggest that these are of lesser importance than other factors identified above. It is important to note that parties tend to endorse and support candidates that are seen as likely to win, so the success of party-endorsed candidates is more likely to be a function of individual candidate attributes than support for the party.

Many interviewees suggested that aspiring women candidates should be encouraged to join political parties. The 2014 Political Party Integrity Act provides some provision to encourage political parties to endorse women, with a minimum requirement of 10% women's representation on party lists and a grant of SBD \$10,000 available to parties that endorse a successful woman candidate. While only three out of the 12 registered parties met this requirement in the 2014 election, **it is important to note that women are already more inclined to seek party endorsement than men.** At the 2014 national general election, 18 out of 26 female candidates (69%) were party-endorsed, compared to 185 out of 421 male candidates (44%).

The weakness of the political party system in Solomon Islands, for women candidates as well as men, was repeatedly highlighted in interviews. Parties are often centred around individual political figures as vehicles for their ambitions to gain executive office, rather than a coherent policy platform. As such, they are seen as elitist and Honiara-based institutions, with little relevance to rural communities. While 17 candidates aligned with political parties won in seats across the country in 2014, this was not attributed to the parties themselves but rather to the individual candidates.

It's an elite's game, the party game. Not for village people. (*Female candidate, Guadalcanal, multiple elections*)

People don't feel like they are a part of parties. Party politics is for Honiara only. (*Male candidate, Malaita, multiple elections*)

Interviewees who lived in Honiara also shared the view that parties were largely irrelevant in the political system.

While political parties in Solomon Islands cannot afford to offer substantial financial support, **some parties can offer forms of financial and/or logistical support and mentoring.** Furthermore, as noted above, parties tend to support candidates that they believe are likely to win. Therefore, parties can play a role in certain locations by signalling that a woman is a competitive candidate.

I think it makes a difference. If people from the party come and stand with you, come and help to talk. They can speak on your behalf. But you have to choose a good party. Some parties don't work. (*Female provincial candidate, Western Province*)

Political parties do provide a policy platform that candidates can draw upon in campaigning, although as noted above local issues are more important to voters than national issues. Within the current political parties system, **while there are potential advantages the present impact of party membership on electoral politics in Solomon Islands appears minimal.**

Business support

The backing of business or well-resourced supporters were identified as critical in interviews. Aligned with the importance of having significant financial resources, business support was a key means through which candidates gained the resources they needed to run a competitive campaign. **However, the perceptions of business related experience, support and other financial and resource related issues emerged as less important for survey respondents.** Compared to many of the candidate characteristics which identified by over 95% of respondents, relatively low levels of importance were attached to ‘support from business (71.8%) and candidates ‘having been a successful business person’ themselves (60.6%). Similarly, in survey respondents associated relatively low levels of importance of ‘spending a lot of money on their campaign’ (51.4%) and ‘giving away food, money or gifts to their voters’ (50.9%), even though interview respondents identified these as critical for running a competitive campaign,

That the importance of business and resources exist as background issues for survey respondents, and are not perceived by voters as critical, is not unexpected. While the display of strength is a key part of campaign strategies, candidates are unlikely to specifically identify their sources of financial support or the agendas that they necessarily represent.

6. CAMPAIGNING

This section reports on findings related to what contributes to running a competitive campaign. The findings presented include those related to: perceptions of campaigns based on candidate gender, campaign preparation, supporters, resources and factors related to campaign strategy. As discussed above, the characteristics of a candidate have a bearing on the competitiveness of a candidate's campaign and, as such, there will be clear parallels and interconnections between certain themes discussed in this section and the previous one.

Candidate gender and perceptions of campaigns

Survey respondents were asked to assess whether men or women were more effective in running an election campaign. **The majority of survey respondents considered that men and women were equally effective at running campaigns** (57.0% of respondents) with just over one-quarter (25.4%) of respondents considering that men were more effective than women. Only 11.6% said men were not more effective than women. Respondents in Honiara (37.1%), Western (31.2%) and Central (28.6%) were more likely to feel that men were more effective than women at running campaigns, while those in Malaita (78.1%) and Isabel (72.7%) more likely to feel men and women are equally effective at running campaigns.

Of the those who said that men were more effective at running campaigns than women (25.4% of all survey respondents), the most common reason why was that: 'men have more vocal supporters who go through the communities' (55.4% of respondents who said men were more effective), followed by 'it is easier for men to get the support of community leaders' (35.7%), 'men have more money to spend to their campaign on food, and gifts and buying votes' (33.5%), and 'people think men are more likely to win' (31.6%).

Survey respondents were also asked what they considered a women candidate would need to do to win in their constituency. The most common responses were that women needed: 'support of other women' (48.4% of respondents), 'to be able to convince voters they can win' (36.0%) and 'better communication skills' (34.4%). These perceptions provide a useful basis to discuss, in more detail, the factors identified as being important in running competitive campaigns.

Laying the ground work early

Former candidates emphasised the importance of early preparation in laying the groundwork for a future campaign. The campaign period itself is often much less important than what candidates have done in the past.

People say - you have to stay with the community for four years or eight years - invest time in it. (*Campaign manager, Isabel, 2014 election*)

If you contest you need to do regular visits to the community... You must do background work for many years. You should do this for four years, not wait for the last minute. In the village, you must do regular visits, must let people see you. People must know who you are. (*Women's leader, Honiara*)

For candidates, 'early preparation' often means taking time away from their family responsibilities, and potentially resigning or taking leave from their jobs. Female interviewees believed that this was a gendered barrier, noting that women found it harder than men to prioritise their political ambitions over their family and financial obligations.

I decided to run four years before, but I was busy with my job and my family. (*Female candidate, Honiara, 2006 election*)

I can definitely win. I won't say I don't want to do it. But I'm a public servant. And under general orders I'd have to resign. Which is unfair ... I'd have to risk my work.
(*Women's leader, Western Province*)

Announcing a campaign early can also create added pressure, with potential voters approaching aspiring candidates for financial support or favours, putting a financial strain on aspiring candidates. Those who do not wish to engage in behaviour that might be seen as 'vote-buying' are placed in an ethical bind, and often at a significant disadvantage.

When you announce you are a candidate, people will start asking for support from you, they start asking for small things and then they ask for bigger things. (*Male candidate, Isabel, multiple elections*)

Female and male unsuccessful former candidates reported that lack of preparation time before the election hindered their campaigns. An early start can be an important advantage and votes can be secured well before the official campaign period.

One year before, I could start really preparing. When I arrived in communities people would say "you are here but we are already married". I said get a divorce!
(*Female candidate, Honiara, 2006 election*)

I told people about four months before the election that I would contest. People said, oh that's nice, but you didn't mention it earlier. We've already been paid by the candidate to vote for them. (*Male candidate, Isabel, 2006 election*)

The voter registration period was identified as crucial. Engaging a campaign team to get supporters registered in the constituency enlarges the potential support base of a candidate. Mobilisation in the voter registration period was identified as a common tactic of successful candidates.

A sound support base

Establishing a strong support base in the constituency was identified as an essential element of a competitive campaign. Specifically, **the extended family and kinship networks were considered the critical voter base for a candidate.** Used strategically and effectively, the extended family can secure an election, depending on the size of the network, the number of votes needed to win and the number of contestants.

The more extended family you have support of, the more they can influence the other voters, and the more who will vote for you. So your support will spread.
(*Campaign manager, Isabel Province, 2014*)

While the strengths of family ties is significant, **there is the potential risk that vote splitting within the family can harm a candidate.** Vote splitting occurs when two candidates from the same family (or other) network contest against each other, or when voters split their votes among different candidates in the same family (or other) network. Political parties and actors may also encourage and fund 'dummy candidates' specifically to split the votes.

Negotiating with male relatives and in-laws who are also interested in running is necessary for women, but also difficult, as there are cultural expectations that a man's political ambitions supersede those of his female relatives. Where female and male relatives both want to enter politics, it is usually the man who is favoured by extended family.

Presenting an impression of a united family group is particularly important to avoid vote-splitting. Even with community support, if a candidate's family is divided, their campaign will usually be seen as less viable.

If you don't have the support of your family, how do you expect others to support you? (*Women's leader, Honiara*)

People in the community look at your relationship in the family before they could allow you to become a leader. (*Aspiring candidate and women's leader, Honiara*)

Getting the support of family members was difficult for many of the female former candidates interviewed. One major issue was that families felt 'protective', given the low success rates of women candidates. Another was managing the competing political ambitions of brothers and other close male relatives.

Beyond the family network, **identifying support from the powerful networks within the particular constituency is also important.** Within each constituency, there will be variation expected in terms of what networks are the most politically salient and valuable. **For women candidates, it was observed that their networks - through women's groups and youth groups - were often significant but did not translate to political capital, thus putting them at a relative disadvantage.**

A sound resource base

The importance of access to resources has been a reoccurring theme of this project. **Having significant financial resources for a campaign was considered sufficient for a candidate to overcome many other potential disadvantages, such as those related to profile, reputation and experience.**

There is a legal limit of \$50,000 on campaign spending in Solomon Islands and this could be seen as providing a level basis for candidates to contest the election. However, interviews identified **campaign finance regulations are often loosely enforced, with successful and competitive candidates regularly spending over the mandated limit.** Former candidates reported a wide range of their own estimated costs of running a campaign, up to \$100,000. When asked how much *other* candidates spent on election campaigns, interviewees suggested that to run a viable campaign, candidates often needed to spend hundreds of thousands and sometimes several millions of dollars.

They set the cap at \$50,000 and everyone was spending more than that, but no one took anyone to court. For an individual, you're talking about \$250,000 minimum to run a successful campaign. (*Campaign manager, Malaita, multiple elections*)

Overspending is the political reality of campaigning in modern elections and campaign finance regulations and enforcement appear not to have kept up with this reality.

Resourcing their campaign is the critical challenge for most female candidates. For both male and female candidates, the majority of their campaign funding comes primarily through personal resources, with fundraising, assistance from relatives and occasional party support making up the remainder of their budget. The biggest expenses are usually transport, paying for fares home for voters, feeding supporters and gifts/cash payments to voters.

I didn't think that I would win, and I saw the challenge as the big money. (*Female candidate, Honiara, 2014*)

I had a high profile, name recognition. But it's meaningless. It doesn't decide it. People say "does it feed me?" (*Female candidate, Honiara, 2006*)

Male candidates tended to spend more than female candidates, reflecting that women in general do not have access to the same amount of resourcing. For a number of unsuccessful candidates, the amount of money they spent on their campaigns was their biggest regret.

I exhausted all my savings ... I used up all my resources. It's very expensive. (*Male candidate, Western Province, 2010 election*)

Some other studies on women's under-representation in Solomon Islands politics have recommended the establishment of a fundraising organisation to assist women with the costs of campaigning, as well as providing mentoring and other support, similar to EMILY's List in the United States and Australia but adapted to Solomon Islands' cultural context (see Dicker, Billy & Barclay 2016). While such an organisation might be effective, it would need to be locally driven and led.

Being seen as a winner

While the importance of being seen as a winner is outlined in the section above, it is **important to emphasise it as part of a competitive campaign**. As voters may prefer to vote for candidates who they feel are likely to win, candidates must present themselves as competitive and do so through the strategic use of wealth, support and largesse. A poorly resourced campaign sends a message to voters that a candidate is not credible. **For women, it is hard to run a well-resourced campaign given that women tend to have less access to money.** This is in addition to gendered attitudes towards leadership and the historical under-representation of women in politics.

For women who have successfully negotiated this barrier, interviews suggested that it means campaigning like successful men do.

Freda (Tuki Soriacomua) is a strong-willed woman, she had wealth. She campaigned as a man. (*Female aspiring candidate and women's leader, Honiara*)

If women want to win they have to be like men. (*Campaign manager, various female candidates*)

The 2014 electoral success of Jane Tozaka at the provincial level in Western Province (see Box 1) highlights that women candidates can employ deliberate and successful ways to present themselves as a winner, if adequately resourced and with the family and community connections.

Beyond conspicuous displays of wealth, support and largesse, this includes being well known locally through taking a long-term approach to their campaign and by prioritising local issues in the campaign messaging rather than focusing on national issues.

Campaign strategy

There were a number of issues that emerged in relation to the strategy employed as part of competitive campaigns. A core element was that **successful campaign messaging prioritises the local over the national**. Knowing the constituency was crucial, as was building a campaign plan that involved targeted campaigning with contextualised messaging.

In national elections, voters are generally interested in **tangibles over ideals, projects over policies, and local issues over national issues**. Successful and competitive campaigns were contextualised, with the issues and messaging changing depending on the area. For instance, religious messages and appeals may resonate with voters in some communities but not others.

Successful localised campaigning involves in-depth knowledge of the constituency and the different communities within it. Competitive candidates often strategically chose key members of campaign teams from different communities. Understanding local issues and presenting viable and popular solutions were important.

Candidates often emphasised ‘research’ as a way of successfully localising their campaign. Research sometimes meant determining which constituency the candidate had connections that were most likely to yield success; for others, it meant conducting social mapping prior to the campaign to determine which parts of the constituency to target.

Overall, in explaining the difference in performance between competitive and non-competitive candidates, **candidate profile seemed less important than issues related to political geography, including the demographics, culture, context, physical geography and current priorities of the particular constituency.** Sometimes the difference between competitiveness and non-competitiveness was not about an individual candidate’s characteristics but rather timing and context. Certain candidates did well in one election but poorly in a subsequent (or previous) election when circumstances had changed, such as an in-law or relative also running as a candidate.

Ability to capitalise on family and clan networks re-emerged as an influential factor. Conversely, the inability to negotiate within family and clan networks generally resulted in splitting of the vote between multiple candidates and weakening candidate competitiveness. Similarly, the demographics of each constituency are also a key determinant. Candidates who came from a minority language group within the constituency were usually far less competitive than those from a majority group, regardless of other characteristics. The same may also apply for members of minority religious denominations in some contexts. **These findings again emphasise the importance of building family connections and community support as part of a competitive campaign strategy.**

Culture and context

Campaigning was noted as being a potentially hostile space for women, especially for those deemed to be transgressing against traditional gender roles and ideas of leadership. In some areas, to stand for election as a woman implies an unacceptable distance from custom and can prompt a hostile response from some individuals and groups within the constituency. Cultural barriers to women’s leadership were presented not as insurmountable obstacles to women’s success in politics, but as added complications to running an effective campaign.

Working within cultural traditions is important. Female candidates need to be careful about which campaign messages and techniques to use, particularly in rural and more conservative areas. Female candidates may defer to male family and campaign team members, including chiefs, to answer hostile questions or deliver particular messages to audiences. Such strategies to negotiate cultural barriers can bolster the campaigns of women.

Here in Melanesian culture, women don’t speak in front of crowds. They’ll say ‘what kind of women stand up and talk like this’. ... Going with the cultural traditions is an entry point. Culture can be a barrier, but you can go with it.
(*Women’s representation advocate, Honiara*)

For example, Freda Tuki Soriacomua’s successful 2014 campaign was strengthened greatly by her negotiations for the support of key chiefs in her constituency of Temotu Vatud.

Importance of the campaign team

Building a good campaign team was identified as important as the team often does the bulk of campaigning for the candidate. A large campaign team is also a good indicator that a candidate is competitive but it is expensive to run and difficult to manage the needs and expectations of a large team.



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Choosing the right campaign team was identified as being of critical value. In a successful campaign, the candidate may do relatively little, especially if they were an incumbent with a comfortable majority. Name recognition, reputation and the past record of 'helping' and service delivery of the candidate are all important, but the team may do the bulk of campaigning. Interviewees highlighted the need to **select people who are prominent, influential, and have good relationships with the communities they are campaigning in.** This sometimes involved picking and choosing campaign members depending on the community. Unsuccessful candidates tend to have much smaller campaign teams, which was largely a result of resourcing constraints.

I did not have enough money, so I didn't have a team to go with me, so I went around with 2 men. To get attention of people in the village, you go with a big number to get big attention. If you travel alone, then no. So when I arrived, no one noticed me. *(Male candidate, Western Province, multiple elections)*

7. PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The overarching vision of SIEC is “To strengthen democracy in Solomon Islands through the delivery of free and fair elections in which every voter is able to record his or her informed vote” (SIEC, 2017). A core part of this is the ability for Solomon Islander to vote according to their own preference, free from undue pressure or coercion to vote for certain candidates.

This section reports on findings related to the groups identified as providing valued advice, comparisons to knowledge, attitudes and practices related to voting pressure, and the groups identified as those who pressure certain demographics.

Valued advice

Survey respondents were asked to identify those whose advice they valued most when deciding for whom to vote. This was asked prior to, and in isolation of, those questions related to voting pressure, as discussed below. Beyond identifying the primary importance of their own opinion in deciding who they vote for (51.8% of respondents), the group most commonly identified as providing valued advice was parents (13.1%). There was a strong age dependency in relation to this response, with 80.6% of those who indicated parents were the most valued source of advice aged between 18-25 years of age.

The third most commonly identified source of valued advice was husband or wife (10.1%). There were prominent differences by respondent gender, with 16.3% of female respondents indicating they valued the advice of their spouse the most, compared to only 3.8% of male respondents. Other relatively common sources of advice were community leaders (7.1%) and church leaders (6.0%).

These findings suggest that the family decision-making dynamic is important to consider, particularly the way that it is shaped on both gender and age-related lines.

Voting pressure

While there are high levels of awareness that pressuring someone to vote a certain way is not allowed, and a prevailing attitude that it should not be allowed, survey data suggests that pressuring people to vote a certain way occurs in practice.

Survey results showed that respondents knew that people were not allowed to (94.1% of respondents) and should not be able to (95.4%) pressure another person to vote for a certain candidate. While more people in Honiara and Western felt that it was allowed (8.5% and 10.7%, respectively) and should be allowed (3.8% and 5.9%) compared to the other provinces (less than 1.8% for is allowed; between 0.9% and 1.6% for should be allowed), overall there were strong responses that pressuring is not and should not be allowed.

While these findings reflect an understanding that pressuring people to vote is not allowed, other results showed that the practice of being pressured to vote is likely to be far more prevalent.

When reflecting on their experience of voting in the 2014 national election (80.6% of all respondents), 16.0% of respondents indicated they did not feel they got to vote according to their personal preference. The majority (83.9%) felt they were free to vote for their preference, with no differences by respondent gender. **This shows a gap between respondent’s knowledge and attitudes, and their own experience (Figure 3).**

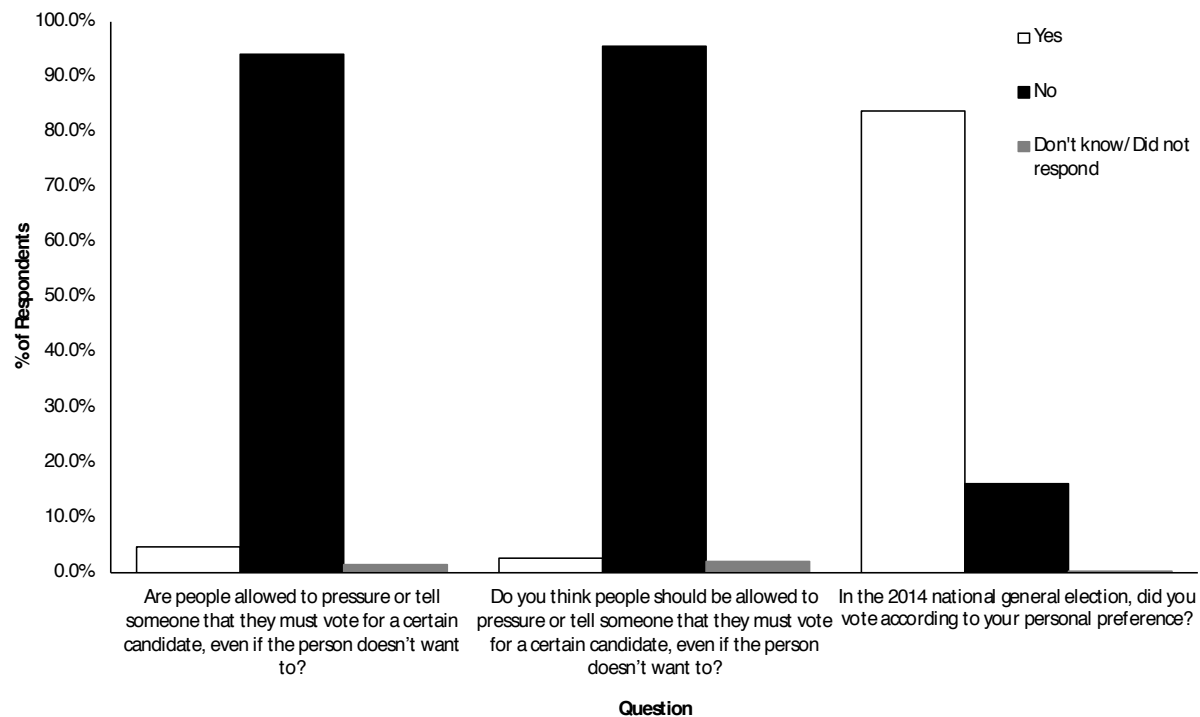


Figure 3 – Comparison of responses to questions addressing the knowledge, attitude and practices towards outside pressure influencing personal voting decisions from all survey responses

However, the potential prevalence of vote pressuring was revealed to be greater when respondents were asked to assess the freedom of different demographic groups within their constituency. As respondents will typically underreport responses to questions about their own personal experience where it involves something that is not allowed - even if they are a victim - it is more likely that questions asked of the experiences of others will be a more accurate reflection of what is happening in practice.

When asked about the experience of others, the majority of respondents felt that people did not get to vote according to their own personal preference. As Figure 4 shows, this was true of adult women, adult men, young women and young men.

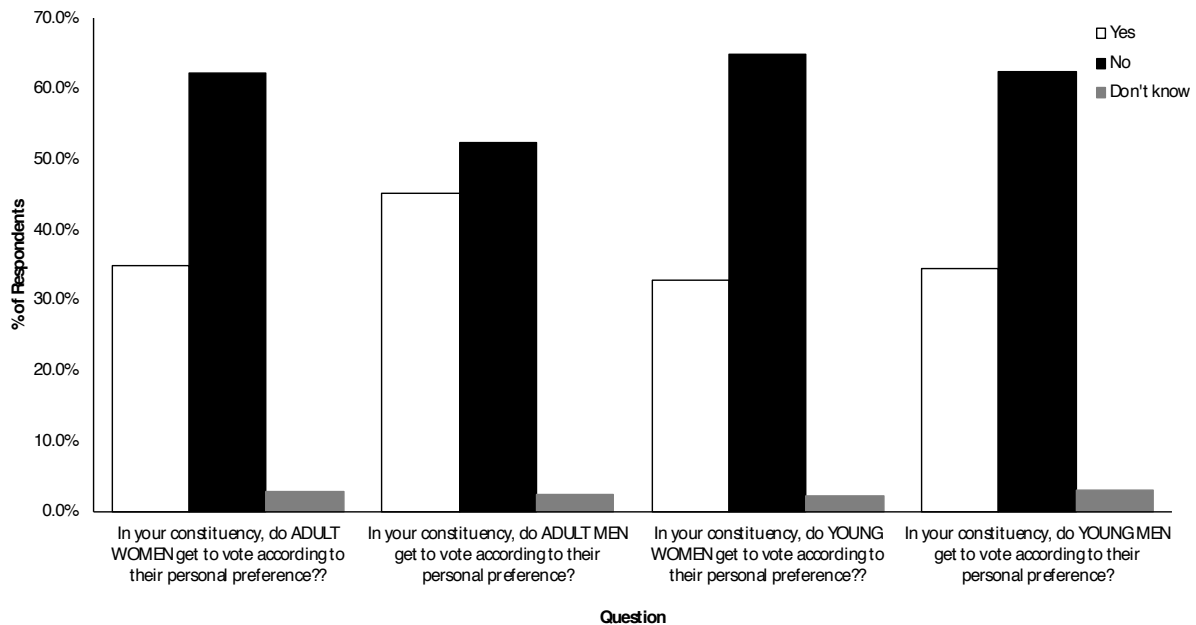


Figure 4 – Responses by all survey respondents regarding the level of perceived freedom to vote for personal preference between various demographics

While survey respondents tended to feel that more adult men were able to vote according to their personal preference (45.1%) than other groups, the majority (52.4%) still felt they were not able to. These findings were broadly consistent across different demographics.

Pressure groups

Survey data provide some insight into the groups that might pressure different demographics of voters into not voting for their personal preference. Of those survey respondents who did not vote according to their personal preference (16.0% of respondents who had voted), the most common reason why they could not vote for their own preference was because their husband or wife told them how to vote (24.1% of respondents who did not vote according to their preference). This changed based on respondent gender, with 40.5% of female respondents who did not vote for their preference saying their spouse had told them how to vote, compared to only 1.7% of male respondents. While these figures are based on only a small subset of the overall sample, they match the gender-based disparity of the *Valued advice* section above and re-affirm other research that there are gender influence power structures in decision making at a household level.

The second most common reason why individuals indicated they could not vote for their own preference was because of community leaders telling them how to vote (23.4% of respondents who did not vote according to their preference). Male respondents (32.8%) were more likely to indicate the influence of community leaders compared to females (13.9%). The third most common reason was that their parents told them how to vote (23.4% of respondents who did not vote according to their preference). Of the 23.4% of respondents who said their parents had told them how to vote, 44.7% of these were aged between 18-25 years old. This also aligns with the findings in *Influencing groups* section related to the importance of parents in shaping how young people vote.

While these findings cannot be generalised, it does suggest that different demographics have different groups that pressure and influence the way that they vote.



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8. KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research project has revealed a number of findings that are important to consider in the context of efforts to increase women's political representation in Solomon Islands. The following section identifies a number of the key messages from the project and recommendations for short-term activities leading up to the 2019 national general election and over the medium- and long-term.

Key messages

1. The electoral environment in Solomon Islands is dynamic and changing, but no easier for women to get elected than in the past. Barriers to women's political representation have traditionally been considered as primarily cultural; however, the increasing money available within Solomon Islands political and electoral environments has seen the main barrier shift to that of access to financial resources. While cultural barriers have shifted, they remain in place to exclude women from the national parliament and present systemic challenges for increasing women's representation in the short-term.

2. Access to financial resources are now the predominant barrier for women candidates rather than culture. Access to financial resources have become increasingly important for candidates in terms of being perceived as a credible and competitive candidate, as well as being required to fund a competitive campaign. While cultural barriers remain and mean that a proportion of the population would not consider voting for a woman candidate, the relative disadvantage women face by not having access to sufficient finances is the most significant barrier. Although this is a significant challenge, there is the potential to reframe access to resources as an opportunity to level the playing field for women over the longer term.

3. Past electoral results demonstrate that candidate characteristics are a better predictor of competitiveness than the constituency in which female candidates contest. A consistent finding of the project was that certain characteristics were common among competitive male and female candidates, including deep connections to the constituency, access to financial resources, family connections and track records of helping in their communities. While the perceptions of women's leadership and performance of female candidates varied across different provinces and constituencies, female candidates who have key characteristics and qualities could be competitive even in constituencies where it might otherwise be considered difficult for them to win because of their gender.

4. The perception that women candidates stand predominately to progress women's issues is likely limiting their voter base. Survey respondents simultaneously identified that advocating for women's issues as a key reason why women stand for election, while also noting that a main reason why women are unsuccessful is not having the support of other women. Other findings suggest that women's voting preferences are often influenced by the men in the household or family. Taken together, it is likely that standing for election to progress women's issues (or being perceived to), does not align with the priorities of those who shape voting choices in certain households or communities. There is the opportunity of women candidates to broaden the scope of issues which campaigns are based on and likely increase the appeal to a great number of those in the constituency, including potential decision makers.

5. This project did not conclusively identify demographic factors that shaped people's perceptions of women's leadership, or their voting practice. Seeking to establish a demographic profile of voters who are more or less likely to support women candidates risk missing the nuances of localised decision making processes and differences between and within provinces of Solomon Islands. Purely information based programs targeted at certain

demographics will miss the key drivers of voting and be unlikely to have significant impact in changing voting practice.

6. In the short term, aligning the perceived success of increasing women's representation in Solomon Island with the number of women in parliament risks overlooking the slower, longer term and important changes that could be achieved. While acknowledging the short-term imperative to increase women's political representation in Solomon Islands, expectations of success should remain realistic with an emphasis placed on creating the conditions for long-term and sustainable change. There have been significant efforts through the programmes, projects and activities of development partners and the Government of Solomon Islands to change perceptions of women in leadership and increase women's political representation. There are clear opportunities for this to be continued, particularly in relation to increasing the number of women who have the characteristics of competitive candidates, combined with efforts to increase the profile of women leaders and normalising women's political representation at provincial levels.

Recommendations

The recommendations outlined below are targeted towards SECSIP Phase II, including the UNDP and SIEC stakeholders. Given the multiple players involved in the electoral environment of Solomon Islands, many of these recommendations will require engagement and contributions from other stakeholder groups. In different contexts, this will include Solomon Island Government ministries, civil society organisations, political parties, the media, community and church groups.

Targeted actions leading up to the 2019 National General Election

To be competitive, an intending candidate needs to build a profile and connections to the constituency long before the actual election. At time of writing, there is less than a year until the 2019 National General Election in Solomon Islands which limits the actions that can be implemented to assist candidates who have not already been positioning to stand for a reasonable period. There are, however, a number of actions which can be taken to support already intending women candidates.

1. The implementation of training programs to build specific skills with intending women candidates and campaign managers. Improving communication skills and increasing confidence in public speaking were identified as areas where women candidates need to improve. As part of campaign strategy support (see Recommendation 2), this skill building should be complemented by support to identify the most appropriate style of communication and campaign conduct to apply in different contexts to align with the cultural context.

2. The development and delivery of support and potential mentoring programmes to intending candidates for campaign strategy development. Improved skills in campaign strategy would be a useful contribution for both candidates and campaign managers. From this project, potential areas for investigation would include:

- *Assessing potential candidate and campaign competitiveness.* This could involve supporting candidates in identifying their relative competitiveness through information on the constituency. This could range from trends based on past electoral results to the number of votes required to be competitive, and identification of which areas of the constituency voted a certain way in the previous election.
- *Tailor campaign messaging to the issues that are important and salient in the constituency, or targeted communities.* Women are perceived to stand for parliament to address women's issues, which likely restricts their potential

supporter base given voting influences at household and community levels. Clearly campaigning beyond women's issues and aligning the messaging to local needs could broaden women candidate's potential voter base.

- *Working through local systems of governance and community decision-making.* The importance of campaigning through means appropriate to the cultural and community context is clear. This could focus on the best way of identifying and understanding the importance of these issues, such as working through and with community supporters and the campaign team.

Acknowledging the importance of long term planning, while training and such support programmes provided to women candidates will be initially focused on the 2019 election, they can usefully also be framed as preparatory steps towards the 2023 election.

3. In provincial briefing sessions with female candidates, emphasise the core elements to consider when nominating to stand for election and in designing and developing a campaign. This should draw on the insights of previous candidates, who can speak to their experiences and lessons from the process. Due recognition should be given to the personal and financial costs of candidacy.

4. Resource Centres should support the development of candidate campaign strategies, in addition to other types of material support. While material support - such as posters, printing and access to the internet - were identified as being potentially useful, targeted campaign strategy support information could include:

- Information on past election results, ideally broken down by constituency, with support for interpreting this information
- Collation and synthesis of any information on strategies to enhance campaign competitiveness.

In the circumstances of limited resources, Resource Centres should be located in areas which are accessible to the maximum number of candidates standing in the maximum number of constituencies. In this first instance, this is likely to be Honiara and the provincial capitals of Gizo and Auki. In running the Resource Centres for the 2019 election, an emphasis should be placed on learning, specifically through discussing with candidates who use the resources what was useful and what improvements could be made for future elections.

5. Collect experiences from women candidates who stand in the 2019 election through a debrief to identify lessons learned from strategies employed - including training, support programmes, mentoring and resource centres - as well as areas where additional support could be required. Undertaking a debrief soon after the 2019 election with competing women candidates will provide a useful snapshot of what worked well and areas for improvement. Beyond identifying immediate lessons learned, this will provide important information in shaping support priorities for the next electoral cycle leading up to the 2023 election.

6. Tailor voter awareness programmes to issues relevant to the locations they are being delivered. At the time of writing, such programmes are being designed for the 2019 National General Election. In relation to political participation, the project identified a disconnect between knowledge and attributes on freedom to vote and the perceived practice. Similarly, attributes towards women candidates is generally positive, practice suggests other factors shape what people do. While awareness programmes have an important role to play in informing voters of electoral rules and their electoral rights, there is little evidence that awareness programmes are effective in changing voter behaviour, or in changing which candidates voters will vote for. Awareness programmes should be designed and messages targeted to be sensitive to this reality.

7. Emphasise Solomon Islander ownership of the design and delivery of activities, projects or programmes to support women candidates. Further, the contributions of UN, development partners, the Government of Solomon Islands and other involved stakeholder groups should be coordinated coherently in the lead up to the election. There is a broad interest in the support of women candidates at the upcoming election from a range of stakeholders. The programmes, projects and activities being undertaken towards this end should be coordinated, where possible. We note that efforts are already underway to do this between UN programmes.

Strategies and priorities in the medium- to long- term

A key finding from the project was the importance of long-term campaign planning for candidates. There are a number of steps that the UNDP and SIEC can take, through SECSIP Phase II, to support women candidates in the longer term.

1. Employ a people rather than place-based approach to supporting efforts to increase women's political representation. As the project demonstrated, women who have the key characteristics and attributes of a competitive candidate, and are positioned to run a strong campaign in their constituency, are likely to be competitive even in constituencies which might be less accommodating of women's political leadership. While resource limits might result in programmes, projects or activities focused on specific provinces, an acknowledgement that the particular candidate will shape the result rather than the constituency is important.

2. Contribute to creating an enabling environment for the emergence of women with competitive candidate characteristics, specifically through a focus on women's economic empowerment. A lack of access to financial resources was identified as a structural barrier to women's political representation, particularly given that money-politics is prevalent in the electoral environment of Solomon Islands. Increasing women's economic empowerment will contribute positively to increasing the number of potential competitive candidates for election. Acknowledging this is a broader development issues, SECSIP Phase II could usefully pursue broader collaboration with Solomon Island Government and development partner stakeholders to contribute to achieving this objective. The collaboration between SECSIP Phase II and UN Peacebuilding Fund Project on women's leadership issues is a step in the right direction.

3. Investigate building greater connections between SECSIP Phase II and women's networks, particularly those with business connections. Contributing to a broader public dialogue and normalising women's leadership in public forums could lead to longer term benefits. More specifically, this could include building on the importance of women's economic empowerment and promoting connections and relationships with and across Women in Business.

4. Review campaign financing regulations and enforcement. The costs of running campaigns were commonly identified as being greater than the official upper limit of SID50,000. While reviewing the appropriateness of that figure could be considered, an emphasis should be placed on assessing means of better enforcing the campaign spending. This would contribute to levelling the playing field for all candidates, but particularly for women who are generally more disadvantaged in accessing significant financial resources than men. In this process, acknowledgement should be given to the influence of the RCDF and whether this would present an increasingly insurmountable advantage to the incumbent.

5. Contribute to a dialogue on the implications that the RCDF has on the electoral environment. In an electoral environment requiring significant financial resources to be competitive, the RCDF was identified as a key advantage that sitting MPs have in election campaigns with interviewees suggesting it was contributing to the emergence of an (almost) 'invincible incumbent'. Noting the lower than usual MP turnover at the 2014

national general election, future MP turnover should be monitored and assessed in line with the potential influence of any future increases in the RCDF. A dialogue should be opened with Solomon Island Government stakeholders if it continues to emerge as an issue which is having significant influence on electoral results.

6. Support temporary special measures (TSM) to enhance women's political representation at the provincial government level. While in the short term there is no immediately available pathway to national parliament, having more women in provincial parliaments may help normalise the idea that women can win elections. In the medium term, this could contribute to people being more likely to vote for women at elections broadly. The influence that TSM has on voting patterns in relevant provinces should be monitored by SECSIP Phase II.

7. Encourage competitive women candidates who do not win at the national level to consider contesting provincial-level elections. While there is no clear pathway from political representation from the provincial to national level, project findings highlighted there might be a trend in the other direction. Women who have been competitive at the national level campaign will likely be better positioned to be at least competitive, if not successful, at the provincial level. Again, the relationship between national and provincial level campaigning should be monitored by SECSIP Phase II.

8. Provide support to provincial candidates, as well as national. Promoting women's political representation at a provincial level is an important objective in itself and, as alluded to above, to contribute to normalising the women as political leaders. Beyond training and support during campaigning, broader contributions could be made supporting women have the appropriate tools and skills to do the job once elected.

9. View promoting support and development women candidates across electoral cycles. The importance of early ground work for competitive campaigns suggests that support programmes should take the view of providing support throughout and electoral cycle, rather than in the final months. As part of this longer term support of women candidates, acknowledgement should be given to the fact that some women who are supported in the programme might decide not to stand. If a potential competitive candidate stands too early, when not sufficiently prepared or in an electoral environment not conducive to them being competitive, this could result in personal and financial costs that precluded them from being competitive in the future. Taking a longer term perspective is important in seeing sustainable progress over time.

10. Assess 'what success looks like?' for increasing women's political representation in Solomon Islands. At a regional level, SECSIP Phase II's work contributes to *United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022* focus on the Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.1 ("Number of Pacific Island Countries and Territories in which the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments has increased"). While the timeframe for this extends out to 2030, stakeholders with an interest in women's political representation in Solomon Islands want to see results prior to this. A simple measure of the number of women in national parliament is not necessarily going to acknowledge the incremental changes and success that can be achieved to addressing the complex issues that cut across the electoral environment.

While the number of women standing for election could be seen a proxy for women's engagement political, we do not recommend it is used as primary measure as it could have the perverse incentive of getting people to stand in situations not conducive to success. Rather, an assessment of the competitiveness of women candidates, in terms of ranking and proportion of vote share, over time could be pursued. Support by certain candidates the SECSIP Phase II programmes and activities in the lead up to elections could also be used as a proxy measure for the on-going support and contribution of the program to supporting women's political leadership. Ultimately, SECSIP Phase II should consider what



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the realistic measures of success will be to give a reasonable and balanced assessment of what can be achieved in this space.