

EPLD 2014

# Solomon Islands Study Tour Report 19 – 25 October 2014.



This report briefly highlights key learning of team Solomon's study tour of the Solomon Islands. We met a lot of great leaders and visited important industries, institutions and organizations that are doing it tough but exceptionally well in what they are doing. It does not cover the entire scope of this learning journey for the 12 Emerging Pacific Leaders which is peculiar to each individual.

## Introduction

The EPLD 2014 Solomon Islands Study Tour took place from Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and included 12 emerging leaders from 9 countries in the Pacific. They are:

George Koi (Team Leader)	Papua New Guinea
Celcius Talifu (Liaison officer )	Solomon Islands
Akisi Bola Bola	Fiji
Aloha Nafuki	Vanuatu
Jay Williams	Aotearoa New Zealand
Myjolynn Kim	Federated States and Micronesia
Kiri Dicker	Australia
Bruce Levi	Aotearoa New Zealand
Levi Tamou	Australia
Maya Urben	New Caledonia
Nina Hekau	Niue
Mawe Gonapa	Papua New Guinea

During the study tour, participants had the privilege of attending presentations from a diverse group of leaders from a range of areas, including the private, public and community sectors. The study tour covered 5 core themes, these are areas in which good leadership is vital to the future of the Solomon Islands. This report highlights some of the key messages and lessons learned during the study tour.

## Theme 1: Education



The study tour began with a presentation and tour of the American World War II Memorial by Ms Annie Kwai, CEO of the Pride of Our Nation Trust. This presentation revealed the impact that World War II had on the eventual independence of the Solomon Islands, which at the time was colonised by the British. Annie also highlighted the importance of incorporating the unique experiences and roles of Solomon Islanders during the War into the country's national curriculum.

Later in the study tour we learnt that despite spending an impressive 23% of its national budget on Education, the Solomon Islands Government continues to struggle to meet the education needs of its growing population. The abolition of school fees in primary school has meant that the majority of Solomon Islanders receive a basic education, however limited places in secondary school mean that young people are gradually 'pushed out' with only a small number completing the equivalent of grade 12. The quality of the Solomon Island's education system is further compromised by a lack of resources and a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in rural areas.

Providing hope for those unable to access the formal education system are institutions such as the Don Bosco Technical College, who provide agricultural based vocational education to school drop outs, and the San Isidro School for the Deaf, who provide educational opportunities for young Deaf men and women who are unable to attend mainstream schools. These organizations operate under severe financial constraints and are largely funded through the Churches or through personal donations.

## Theme 2: Security and Stability



From the outset of the study tour, the group was reminded of the ethnic 'tensions', which plagued the Solomon Islands between 1999 and 2003. It was during this time when other Pacific Islands Countries united to the aid of the Solomon Islands in the form of the Regional Assistance Missions to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

The devastating impact of these ethnic tensions, which continue to this day, framed our conversations about peace, security and stability.

We had the opportunity to meet with Mr Richard Griffith (Deputy Special Coordinator of RAMSI) who openly discussed the successes and challenges of the mission over the past 11 years. We learnt that RAMSI had been crucial in fulfilling its mandate to restore order to a lawless country, including implementing a firearms amnesty that saw thousands of guns collected and destroyed. A shortcoming is the lack of capacity building machinery of the government. Future challenges for RAMSI include the staged and limited rearmament and continued capacity building of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). A brief and unexpected encounter with Mr Harold Keke, Solomon Island's most notorious warlord and leader of the Istanbu Freedom Movement (IFM), during our visit to the Rove Prison, was a reminder that punishment will not escape those who sought to undermine peace and security in the Solomon Islands.

On the final day of the study tour, the group attended a presentation by the newly formed Political Parties Commission who is responsible for implementing the newly passed *Political Parties Integrity Act 2014*. This Act provides for the registration of political parties intending on contesting elections. The Act also includes the mandate that at least 10% of all party candidates will be women. This legislation is crucial in achieving political stability in the Solomon Islands Parliament, which has long been characterized by a weak political party system consisting of fluid coalitions, which undermine political stability and good governance.

### **Theme 3: Strengthening Communities**

The thematic area of strengthening communities was focused on the issue of ending violence against women. The Solomon Islands has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world, with research showing that 64% of women will experience physical or sexual violence from their partners during their lifetime. The study tour group was grateful for the opportunity to examine this issue from a number of perspectives.

On the first day of the study tour, the group received a briefing from the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs on the history and progress of the new *Family Protection Act 2014*. This stand-alone domestic violence legislation will provide for an improved response by the law and justice system, including increased penalties for perpetrators of violence. The Ministry is now challenged with ensuring the effective implementation of the new Act to achieve justice for women.

The group also had the opportunity to visit the country's only domestic violence crisis service, the Christian Care Centre. The Centre, operated by the sisters of the Anglican Church of Melanesia, has the capacity to provide crisis accommodation and trauma counseling to approximately 20 women who are escaping domestic violence and their children. The visit to the Christian Care Centre will be a lasting memory for many members of the study group, who were shocked by the shortage of services available to survivors of violence in the Solomon Islands.

A presentation by a Justice of the Solomon Islands High Court, Honorable Justice Stephen Pallaras, provided an important legal perspective on the issue of violence against women and highlighted some of the challenges in effectively prosecuting perpetrators of violence. Justice Pallaras said that under his term, he has seen sentences for perpetrators of sexual

crimes increase from a mere 2 to 3 years to as high as 10 years, with fewer successful appeals. Justice Pallaras told the group that the key to ending violence against women was achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The group also heard from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) who are supporting gender equality in the Solomon Islands through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiatives, which will provide \$32 million in development assistance over the next 10 years to initiatives that promote women in leadership, ending violence against women and women's economic empowerment. All this are initiatives to address domestic violence in communities. It has to be a holistic approach from all sectors of society to address domestic violence.

#### **Theme 4: Industry and Infrastructure**



During our study tour we learnt that sustainable economic growth driven by the private sector was crucial in achieving human and economic development outcomes in the Solomon Islands. The group had the opportunity to visit the facilities of a number of the Solomon Islands' leading businesses, including:

- The SolTuna tuna cannery in the Western Province, which employs 1700 people (mostly women) to process the country's national icon.
- The Guadalcanal Plantation Palm Oil Ltd, which is exporting world class sustainably grown palm oil across the world.
- Solomon Breweries Ltd, which produces the Solomon Islands only local beer (Solbrew)
- National Fisheries Developments Ltd, who employs around 800 fishermen to provide yellow fin and skipjack tuna to the SolTuna cannery.

## **Theme 5: Regional Cooperation**

As part of the study tour, the group had the opportunity to visit the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), an initiative of the Pacific Islands Forum, whose mission is to ensure the sustainable use of shared offshore fisheries through regional cooperation between PIFs member countries. The group learnt that the Pacific region provides 60% of the world's tuna catch, which is exported regionally and internationally to Asian and European markets. While most species are being managed sustainably, regional cooperation is essential to avoid depleted stocks. This is demonstrated by the fact that through effective monitoring and surveillance, the Agency has virtually eliminated the presence of unauthorized fishing vessels in Pacific waters. The challenge now is ensuring that FFA as a regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) ensures that its members implement the agreed conservation and management measures (CMMs) issued. Implementation of these CMMs by all members consistently will compel players (distant water fishing nations) to abide by the same rules when operating in the region.

RAMSI was also offered as a best practice example of regional cooperation in the Pacific. Since its inception, the Mission has been supported by all 14 member states of the Pacific Islands Forum, who deployed personnel and resources to the Solomon Islands.

## **Theme 6: Leadership and Good Governance**

Leadership and good governance was a cross cutting theme relevant to all of the institutions and initiatives that the group visited during the study tour.

The power of leadership and good governance to reform private sector institutions was aptly demonstrated in a presentation from the Solomon Islands Electricity Authority (SIEA). In a period of just a few years and with the support of the Asian Development Bank, SIEA was able to transform itself from an organization operating at a significant financial loss with insufficient capital to purchase essential equipment to a thriving State Owned Enterprise.

The importance of leadership and good governance in achieving political stability was highlighted in a presentation by the newly formed *Political Parties Commission*. The group learnt that the Solomon Island's has weak political party system characterized by a large number of informal parties and/or independent candidates with no clear priorities, who form fluid coalitions to further their own personal interests rather than those of their constituents. This results in frequent 'no confidence' votes and changes in leadership, which undermines good governance and decision-making.

## **Theme 7: Sustainable Economic Growth**

The study tour group attended a presentation by the CEO of the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau, who is promoting the tourism industry as a means of achieving sustainable economic growth in the Solomon Islands. Tourism presents a more sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative than other industries, such as mining and logging.

The group also received presentations by two key private sector advocacy groups:

- The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), who provides networking and support services to its 150 + members, and;

- The Solomon Islands Women in Business Association, which assists over 400 female business owners to overcome the additional challenges faced by women in business.

These groups highlighted the importance of creating an enabling environment for investment and entrepreneurship, which required the Solomon Islands Government to address issues such as tax reform, access to finance, deregulation and political instability.

## **Theme 8: Environment**

The study tour group had the opportunity to meet with staff and volunteers at the *Solo Enviro Beautification* initiative, whose sole mission is to beautify the nation's capital Honiara through tree planting and urban improvement initiatives. The organization enlists the help of hundreds of young volunteers, who in exchange for their labour, receive training in horticulture and business skills.

## **Conclusion**

The study tour was an important opportunity for members of the Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue to witness firsthand the initiatives that are taking place in the Solomon Islands to achieve economic and human development outcomes and the leadership required to ensure their success. The resilience of the Solomon Islands people amidst daily challenges of access to education, employment, security and health is greatly appreciated by the tour group.

For many of us, the experience was life changing and a number of members of the EPLD Study Tour group have made personal commitments to return to the Solomon Islands and contribute in a personal and professional capacity.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the following people who made our study tour possible:

### EPLD Solomon Islands Study Tour Organizing Committee

Hon. Ms Jane Tozaka	Chairwoman
Mr Robert Goh	Vice Chairman and PLF board member
Ms Alison Riley	Secretary
Ms Yolande Yates	member
Mr Fred Conning	member
Ms Julie Haro	member
Ms Besty Kuma	member
Ms Atenasi Ata-Wasuka	member
Mr Royderitz Tati	member

### Host Organisations

- Pride of Our Nation Trust
- Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
- Don Bosco Technical College
- Solomon Islands Electricity Authority (SIEA)
- Soltuna

- Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)
- Political Parties Commission
- Rapid Employment Program (World Bank)
- Justice Pallaris
- Tina River Hydro Project
- Honiara Rotary Club
- Solo Enviro Beautification
- Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Solomon Islands Women in Business Association
- Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
- Christian Care Centre
- San Isidro School for the Deaf
- Bishop Patterson Theological College
- Guadalcanal Plantation Palm Oil Ltd (GPPOL)
- Correctional Services Solomon Islands
- Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- RAMSI
- Australian High Commission
- British High Commission
- Solomon Breweries Limited
- National Fisheries Developments
- Mr and Mrs Chotto
- Solomon Islands Parliament

And we thank all those who provided in kind and supported one way or the other, including our faithful bus driver, to make the third EPLD Study Tour of the Solomon Islands a success.

Last but not the least, we are grateful of Pacific Leadership Foundation. This is a great initiative. An opportunity of a life time, bringing young leaders of the Pacific together to have a real sense of the Pacific and navigate its way forward. Let us all do everything possible to keep this great dialogue growing for generations to come.