Solomon Islands
Case Study in Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion
UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
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UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
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<td>Adventist Development and Relief Agency</td>
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<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australia Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>Curriculum Development Centre</td>
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<td>CHS</td>
<td>Community High School</td>
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<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
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<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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A child smiles during the International Children’s Day, supported by UNICEF.
(Left-right) Junior Fred and Sarisha Pai study a globe during class at St. John Primary School in Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands.
Introduction

Purpose of case study

As part of the United Nations Children’s Fund’s global Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme, the East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) is developing a regional strategy on education for social cohesion and comprehensive school safety. In order to provide context for the strategy, two case studies of conflict-affected countries have been commissioned to explore the relationship between conflict, education and social cohesion; and the role of the education sector in general and UNICEF in particular, in supporting social cohesion. While the countries selected, Thailand and Solomon Islands, have very different conflict contexts, there are similarities, nevertheless, in the role of the education sector in addressing the root causes of conflict and the need to strengthen social cohesion as part of an appropriate response from a policy and programmatic perspective.

This case study addresses: 1) the political, social, ethnic, linguistic and economic factors contributing to the conflict and its aftermath, including the relationship between education and conflict; 2) the policy framework of the Solomon Islands Government and the United Nations system for addressing social cohesion and peacebuilding; 3) the education sector response of the government, UNICEF and non-governmental sectors, and the extent to which education has been integrated into peacebuilding and social cohesion policies and programmes; and 4) conclusions and practical recommendations for UNICEF in education programming that contributes to peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Definition of terms

The term ‘social cohesion’ is used throughout this case study as the term ‘peacebuilding’ has proven to be controversial for a number of countries and contexts. ‘Social cohesion’, as adopted by UNICEF EAPRO, has been defined by The World Bank as “the degree to which vertical (a responsive state to its citizenry) and horizontal (cross-cutting, networked relations among diverse communal groups) social capital intersect. The more social cohesion exists, the more likely a society will be cohesive and thus possess the inclusive mechanisms necessary for mediating/managing conflict” (World Bank, 2000, p. 4). As the term ‘peacebuilding’ has been used in official policy documents, frameworks and programming as well as in current dialogue by Solomon Island’s Government and civil society organizations (CSOs), ‘peacebuilding’, where cited in documentation, will also be used in this case study. The term ‘peacebuilding’ used by UNICEF to frame its education and peacebuilding initiative is defined as a “multi-dimensional range of interventions that aim to solidify peace and prevent the lapse or relapse of conflict. In this way, no one actor alone is responsible for peacebuilding; it is a system wide undertaking. Peacebuilding processes and interventions can take place prior to the outbreak of violence or conflict, during conflict, or long after hostilities have ended.”

Methodology

A desk review of academic and programmatic literature, policy documents and reports was conducted, including documents from Solomon Islands’ Government, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Further research was also conducted through the internet. A number of key stakeholders were interviewed during a site visit to Solomon Islands, including representatives from the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation (MNUPRI), New Zealand High Commission, UNICEF and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Offices, Save the Children and the Solomon Island Christian Association (SICA). A complete list of people interviewed is provided at the end.

Summary of findings and recommendations

The conflict in Solomon Islands is complex, but largely centred around the inequitable distribution of and access to government services including education, especially for youth; a rapidly growing population and youth bulge with a lack of employment opportunities; the abuse and manipulation of traditional structures and systems; ownership of land and land tenure issues; management and ownership of resources; and ineffectual law and justice systems. While education has contributed to conflict through a lack of access, limited resources and a Western curriculum ‘challenging’ traditional ways, the government has made considerable progress in increasing education access at primary and secondary levels. Solomon Islands has also achieved education reform through the implementation of fee-free basic education, mother tongue usage in early childhood education, national curriculum reform, and in the introduction of distance education and flexible learning.

UNICEF Solomon Islands can play an important role in the ongoing education sector reform process and the following recommendations are thus suggested for consideration:

1. Advocate for continued curriculum reform with a focus on social cohesion elements, including integration of diverse cultural and traditional practices;
2. Learn from the current mother tongue initiatives and seek ways to expand these in order to increase language and literacy skills and validate local cultures and traditions;
3. Advocate for positive discipline practices to be part of teacher training programmes;
4. Support the expansion of secondary education and other opportunities for youth;
5. Advocate for non-formal opportunities for youth to access education and technical skills;
6. Strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education at the provincial level;
7. Develop mid and longer-term strategic plans that support the government sector-wide approach and are guided by social cohesion principles; and
8. Aim to achieve a balance between national and community-level interventions that are locally driven and to achieve successful tangible outcomes.
1. Background and context of conflict in Solomon Islands

This section provides an overview of the conflict in Solomon Islands, the post-conflict situation, and the relationship between the conflict and the education sector.

1.1 Overview of the conflict and post-conflict context

For five years beginning in 1998, Solomon Islands experienced a period of social unrest and organized violence known as the ‘Tensions’. It started when a group of militant youths from the island of Guadalcanal attacked settlements in northwestern Guadalcanal inhabited by people predominantly from Malaita, a neighbouring island. The bloodshed resulted in hundreds of deaths as well as the displacement of more than 30,000 people from and within the province of Guadalcanal. It also caused massive destruction of infrastructure and key industries, the breakdown of law and order, and the virtual failure of democratic government.

While the conflict is sometimes portrayed as an ethnic one, the causes are far more complex. An in-depth conflict analysis conducted by the government in collaboration with UNDP in 2004, Peace and Conflict Development Analysis (PCDA), outlined a number of contributing factors, including land; traditional versus non-traditional authority structures; rapid growth; unequal access to government services; unequal development and economic opportunity; inadequate law and justice institutions; youth unemployment and lack of participation; and a lack of educational opportunity (Bush and Le Mesurier, 2004).

Despite the signing of the Honiara Peace Accord in 1999 and the Townsville Peace Agreement in 2000, the underlying issues remained unresolved and the security situation deteriorated. In early June 2000 the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), representing the interests of the Malaitans, took control of the police armoury in Honiara and subsequently the entire capital city. The violence effectively destabilized the country, undermining national institutions and severely disrupting economic activity (McGovern and Choulai, 2005).

In July 2003, in response to a request from Solomon Islands’ Government, the Regional Assistance Mission for Solomon Islands (RAMSI), an Australian Government-led multinational force, was despatched. Despite its success in restoring law and order, riots erupted again in Honiara in 2006 after the election of Snyder Rini as Prime Minister. The violence took place largely in Chinatown with Chinese-owned property targeted, amidst allegations that the election was fixed with the aid of money from Chinese businessmen. The commercial heart of Honiara was reduced to rubble, and Snyder Rini was forced to resign after only eight days in office. RAMSI forces were bolstered, and continue to be present in Solomon Islands, working with authorities to provide a secure environment; to support the law enforcement capabilities of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF); to strengthen Solomon Islands’ justice and correctional systems; and to help combat corruption and malpractice. Starting in mid-2013, RAMSI will implement ‘transitional plans’ based on a smaller presence (RAMSI, 2013). It remains to be seen if the stability now felt in Solomon Islands, and particularly Honiara, will continue during the transitional period and beyond.

The underlying socio-economic and political disparities that provoked the Tensions continue in the current post-conflict situation. The structural drivers of conflict remain: poverty and relative deprivation; outstanding grievances often playing out along ethnic lines; concentration of disaffected youth/ex-combatants in large numbers in Honiara, Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces; division between communities; elite/political capture and manipulation of resources; and political exclusion. This combination of factors constitutes severe and ever-present threats to human security in Solomon Islands (UNDP, 2010). While significant
progress has been made in policy and intervention strategies to address some of the conflict triggers, there is still a huge gap in service delivery between rural and urban populations. Inequitable distribution of government services, inconsistent political leadership, limited private sector development, misuse of public resources and economic growth driven largely by unsustainable logging continue to be pervasive challenges (Haque, 2012). Current levels of basic service delivery, particularly in education, depend largely on aid funding and foreign technical assistance as well as issues of inequitable distribution, access and quality need to be addressed.

At the height of the Tensions, the indigenous population of Guadalcanal claimed that the Malaitans settled in Honiara, occupying their customary land without paying customary compensation. While land disputes are not unusual in Solomon Islands, the intensity and violence associated with these were fuelled by the erosion of customary management practices; demands for new roles for land and resources; and an influx of foreign companies often in collaboration with the government, which has benefited from land and resource exploitation at the expense of the local community (Bush and Le Mesurier, 2004, pp.12–13). The erosion of traditional systems and the introduction of new authority structures have provoked tensions and differences of opinion, not just over land and justice, which were apparent during the Tensions, but also across sectors. In education, the division between traditional and non-traditional systems is central to the debate over the teaching of traditional customs and skills versus the use of standard Western curricula and training approaches. According to some leaders, Western education is not only undermining the teaching of traditional values and attitudes, but also eroding children's respect for their elders. With accessibility issues critical in Solomon Islands, where literacy and education levels are low, people feel estranged from a Western-imposed and centralized bureaucracy (Bush and Le Mesurier, 2004, p.10).

Another critical element contributing to the causes of conflict in Solomon Islands is the marked centralization of government services principally in Honiara, including opportunities for employment, access to information, development and investment. Like many small island states, Solomon Islands faces the challenges of limited access to services, poor communication channels, dependence on foreign aid, and a small population which affects natural economies of scale in terms of nationwide investment in infrastructure (Bush and Le Mesurier, 2004, p.19). This has impacted all sectors, in particular education.

Inadequate access to and the poor quality of education contributed to the growth of an uneducated and idle youth population in Honiara and its subsequent engagement in the political violence. According to the 1999 census, approximately half of those no longer attending formal education had attained at most an upper primary education, with a further 28 per cent having received little or no schooling. Even today, with considerable improvement in school access and retention rates, students with secondary or higher education still remain poorly equipped to compete for scarce jobs. This suggests that the education system and policies are not responding to the required skills sets demanded by the labour market, nor are they developing new avenues for job creation (Maebuta and Spence, 2009). The government has acknowledged that limited resources and disparate education structures are failing to furnish enough young people with the skills needed for socio-economic advancement (MEHRD, 2007).

With economic opportunities virtually collapsing during the Tensions as the government lost control of finances and faced huge debt, further disruption of already stretched government services occurred in both Honiara and rural locations. Government domination of the economy through state businesses and regulations had hindered the development of a strong private sector. Lack of good governance, pervasive corruption, misappropriation of funds and political favouritism had all contributed to a lack of trust in the government and deterioration in the business environment (AusAID, 2004). While the situation has

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2 Interview with Reuben Lilo, Director of Peace and Reconciliation, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation, on 13 March 2013.
improved, inadequacies still persist. It is important for government and other implementing partners to ensure coordination between economic and social development. Programmes in education and other sectors will have limited impact unless accompanied by strategies to support household income (UNICEF, 2005, p.11).

A further contributing factor to the conflict and possible continued unrest is population growth. Such growth, together with the centralization of services in Honiara, has supported an urban drift, principally of young people, into the capital in search of education and employment. On current growth trends, the national population will double in 20 years (Bush and Le Mesurier, 2004, p.21). This migration not only increases pressures on Honiara, but the shift to urban ‘modern’ life erodes traditional values of self-sufficiency and hinders development of rural communities. A youth bulge can be beneficial or harmful depending on how a government responds. If economic opportunities are present, a young workforce can boost productivity and support major economic gains. In their absence, idle and disillusioned youth can increase the risk of conflict, especially when combined with unstable government, a poor-performing economy and low secondary education levels (UNICEF, 2011, p.16). Thus, it is imperative that issues facing youth are addressed equitably and in a sustainable manner, with young people afforded opportunities to engage in governance and political, economic and educational processes (Romer and Renzaho, 2007). This is not just an urban issue; support must be provided to rural populations as well, using a ‘bottom-up’ structure where youth can develop leadership, empowerment and responsibility skills.3

1.2 Education and conflict

In Solomon Islands, issues around limited access to education and the quality and appropriateness of curricula, teacher training and methodology have contributed either directly or indirectly to conflict. While the government has done much over the last decade to address some of these areas, continuing inadequacies in the education system have contributed to large numbers of out-of-school young people who lack the appropriate skills to be productive in the workforce. Such groups, disenfranchised from society and opportunities, contributed significantly to the Tensions and 2006 riots.

The UNESCO Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2011 recommends that governments and donors "prioritise the development of inclusive education systems, with policy on language, curriculum and decentralisation informed by an assessment of the potential impact on long-standing grievances. Schools should be seen first and foremost as places for imparting the most vital of skills: tolerance, mutual respect and the ability to live peacefully with others” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 3). To strengthen the role of education in promoting social cohesion, four broad areas require attention: security and violence protection; education sector reform; curriculum reform and teacher training.

Security and violence protection

Conflict continues to impact the lives of young people in Solomon Islands, with many reporting a sense of community dislocation. Young people have become perpetrators as well as victims of violence. Alcohol and drug-related crime is evident. A high rate of domestic violence remains a risk factor that pushes youth into crime and violence (AusAID, 2011). Within schools, continued use of corporal punishment and other unsupportive interactions between teachers and students is a huge concern.4 Bullying in schools between students and of students by teachers is a major issue, with few or no child protection plans or mechanisms in place in education environments.5 Without behaviour management protocols and methods of supporting safe, non-violent teaching and learning environments,
violence in and out of school has the potential to increase. Research into and pilot work on positive discipline has started with the support of Save the Children and UNICEF.\(^6\)

**Education sector reform**

Sector-wide approaches to programming (SWAps) provide an opportunity for the government and donors to commit resources to a collaborative programme of work, including the development of sectoral policies and strategies, institutional reforms and capacity building. SWAps also represent an opportunity to initiate conflict sensitive planning processes (Smith et al., 2011). The SWAp was first introduced in Solomon Islands in 2004 with the objective of making system and curriculum changes in direct response to the conflict. Despite a weakened government structure and a significant lack of capacity and resources, the MEHRD was able to foster ownership and formulate considerable policy development through this mechanism with internal leadership, the support of a technical advisor, central budget assistance and consistent donor backing. This is a notable achievement; however, actual support to provincial education offices and schools in terms of knowledge, implementation and monitoring of education plans and initiatives is now a priority (Tolley, 2011).

Access to schooling is a critical component of developing more inclusive education processes and promoting social cohesion. The MEHRD has made significant progress in this area, increasing enrolment in primary education from 50–60 per cent of all children ten years ago to more than 90 per cent currently.\(^7\) However, enrolment rates vary considerably between the islands and only about half of those who attend primary school can access secondary school due to limited places. Some 65–80 per cent of students who attend secondary school fail their exams or drop out due to the unaffordability of school fees. The gender gap also widens at higher grades, with more boys than girls continuing in education (AusAID, 2011). While there are now over 200 secondary schools compared to only 27 a decade ago, these were largely built by communities.\(^8\) Certainly, this has improved community access to and increased community involvement in secondary schooling. However, uncontrolled expansion of community high schools (CHS) has brought risks of poor quality and management (MEHRD, 2007, p. 25).

While government spending on education as a whole is considered high in Solomon Islands, a considerable proportion of funding is directed to tertiary education, leaving other levels under-funded and under-resourced. In 2006, 40 per cent of the education budget was allocated to tertiary education, involving 2 per cent of students, with just under a third allocated to primary education, catering to 80 per cent of students (Whalen, 2010). Currently, funding for tertiary education is still much higher than for lower levels, allocated principally to cover university student scholarships overseas.\(^9\) This is significant, given the large number of young people who drop out at the end of primary school or fail to complete secondary school. If the MEHRD is to increase access to quality basic education as stipulated in education action plans, budgets will need to reflect more equitable distribution of resources.\(^10\)

**Curriculum reform**

Curriculum reform needs to address the potential role that education content has played as a causal factor of conflict. Areas to be considered for reform include language policies,

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\(^6\) Interview with Joan Kipwola, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Manager, Save the Children Solomon Islands, on 18 March 2013.

\(^7\) Interview with Franco Rodie, Undersecretary, Tertiary Education, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, on 13 March 2013.

\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) The scholarship system, theoretically merit-based, has been politicized, allowing substantial funding to be used outside of the country for those who may not have earned it, and is therefore not sustainable (interview with New Zealand High Commission on 18 March 2013).

\(^10\) Interview with New Zealand High Commission.
Background and context of conflict in Solomon Islands

history teaching, and pedagogical and structural approaches concerning identity, including ‘Western’ imposed approaches during colonial times versus traditional approaches. Reform also needs to deal with the legacy of the conflict, incorporating reconciliation and peacebuilding practices which are culturally sensitive and promote tolerance, critical thinking and values common to a society (Tawil and Harley, 2004).

The Solomon Islands Government and supporting partners have sought to address some of these components with measures to develop culturally sensitive curricula – initiated before and after the Tensions. In the 1990s the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) began developing materials, entitled ‘Nguzunguzu’, drawing on local traditions and culture. The ‘Nguzunguzu’ curriculum aimed to address low literacy levels and retention rates in primary schools through a locally developed and more culturally appropriate curriculum for Solomon Islands children. The CDC was later involved in revising a course on life skills in the Rural Training Centres (RTC), with many churches and NGOs working with youth programmes utilizing parts of this package. Unfortunately, there was no real coordination and the activities remained ad hoc (Pryor, 2003).

In 2004, in response to the Tensions, and specifically to address the fact that children and youth under the age of 18 were being recruited by armed groups, a peace education module was developed for use in both formal and non-formal education settings. The module: “Come Together, Talk Together, Work Together: Practicing Peace”, brought together the views and inputs of community leaders, educators, young people and NGOs. Published by UNICEF in 2005, it covered topics on understanding peace and conflict; practicing interpersonal and intergroup peace; and good governance and peace. The module was used in the informal education sector, while individual lessons and learning objectives were integrated into the formal social studies course at relevant elementary and secondary levels in the revised formal curriculum.

A curriculum revision process initiated by the MEHRD in 2005 acknowledged that the existing syllabus and learning materials had not generated the kind of student achievement levels expected by parents and employers. The newly revised curriculum, still in process, aims to ensure that the content “prepares students to live fulfilling lives, is of high quality,
promotes high level student achievement, and meets individual and national needs” and that it “recognises existing strengths while relating school learning outcomes and objectives to the educational, social and economic goals of the country” (MEHRD, 2007, pp. 34–35). The revised curriculum is intended to incorporate a diverse range of religious beliefs, cultures, traditions and local customs from all provinces, so it is viewed as part of a system that is not imposed from outside or incorporates content only from a few ethnic groups.11

**Teacher training**

Teacher training, a critical component supporting curriculum reform, is needed to promote teaching methodology that includes participatory and active learning and creates avenues for critical and analytical thinking. While the current methodology in Solomon Islands depends predominantly on rote learning, efforts have been made to incorporate more learner-centred approaches. In-service professional teacher development is still inadequate, and students still spend too much time listening to lectures and too little on hands-on projects using modern materials – something the MEHRD has tried to address through curriculum review. The National Education Action Plan (NEAP) (2010–2013) has a key activity focused on ensuring that school-based professional development programmes are in place to improve teacher effectiveness and teaching methods. The MEHRD recognizes that the country needs critical and strategic thinkers and planners in education to be able to offer the best to schools and the children they serve (Rodie, 2013).

The MEHRD is also cognizant of the need for more teachers, particularly in rural areas and to staff the growing number of secondary schools. There is still an acute shortage of qualified teachers in Solomon Islands, as well as weak school administration and ineffective community engagement. Teacher absenteeism continues to be a challenging issue, particularly in the more remote and rural areas (Save the Children, 2012). The NEAP (2010–2013) incorporates training of more secondary teachers, including the provision of incentives to attract teachers to isolated schools; and in-service training through Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL), workshops and summer schools.

2. Review of education, peacebuilding and social cohesion policy frameworks and planning

This section provides an overview of policies and planning related to peacebuilding and social cohesion, with a particular focus on the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development policy. It also presents the approaches and interventions of the United Nations, NGOs and civil society, and analyzes to what extent policies and frameworks address education and its relation to peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Programming for social cohesion and peacebuilding requires establishing linkages between the causes of conflict and programmatic and structural measures to address those causal factors. Education has the potential to contribute to social transformation processes in post-conflict contexts; however, for the most part, peacebuilding or social cohesion theory has not explicitly been used in education programming in Solomon Islands. Conflict and situational analyses have been conducted in the country, and peacebuilding initiatives have been documented in some national policy documents; but there is little or no evidence of direct linkages between these analyses and education programming. Social cohesion and peacebuilding approaches within United Nations frameworks have attempted to address linkages between education and social cohesion. Coordination of efforts among education stakeholders would be beneficial to education sector reform.

2.1 Government

Several government entities were established as a consequence of the conflict in Solomon Islands, including the Peace Monitoring Council (PMC) in 2000 and its replacement, the National Peace Council (NPC). Both implemented a range of activities in support of reconciliation, national unity and the rule of law, civic education and provision of advice to the government. The PMC and NPC were considered valuable at the time in the indigenous peace and reconciliation process. In 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to investigate the conflict; promote national unity and reconciliation; restore the dignity of victims; examine the root causes of the tension; and promote accountability for human rights abuses. A key component was the initiation of thematic 'hearings' across the country, one being specifically for youth, to reflect on the past and acknowledge it with compassion and respect. The hearings also contributed to giving victims a voice by legitimizing them within the public sphere and showing that youth can demonstrate commitment and leadership through this process. The final TRC report, which has been completed and submitted to the Prime Minister, outlines findings and provides recommendations to the Solomon Islands Government, including measures to prevent the recurrence of conflict and promote long-term reconciliation. The report, once publicly released, could contain important areas of consideration for the education sector.

Several documents based on conflict and situational analyses have been produced, including the government-supported UNDP/PCDA in 2004, as previously mentioned, and a UNICEF (2005) situational analysis of children, women and youth in Solomon Islands, focusing on economic and social diversity, inequality, education and health. While references to such analyses are not explicitly cited in the government policy documents, SIG endorsed the PCDA and its recommendations.

Through the National Economic Recovery, Reform and Development Plan (NERRDP) 2003–2006, the MDPAC outlined the priority issues to be addressed as a result of the Tensions, including basic services and social development. The strategy emphasized the need to improve the quality of life for all people in Solomon Islands, not just some people or groups. The plan stated that education development (in particular affordable access and improved quality) was a “key component of Solomon Islands’ broader economic recovery, social restoration and development strategy and in urgent need of assistance”. The current strategy for 2011–2020 continues these themes, affirming “reconciliation and the associated rehabilitation to support it are fundamental to sustained development, peace and harmony in the Solomon Islands” (SIG, 2011).

The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development

The MEHRD started the Education Sector Investment and Reform Programme (ESIRP), Phase 1, in 2004 within the framework of the NERRDP in conjunction with its principle development partners, the European Union and NZAID. The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2004–2006 was developed as an implementation plan for the ESIRP. The ESP aimed to provide equitable access to quality basic education for all children in Solomon Islands as well as access to community, technical, vocational and tertiary education to meet individual, regional and national needs for a knowledgeable, skilled and competent workforce (MEHRD, 2007).

The ESP has since embarked on its second phase, guided by the Education Strategic Framework (ESF) 2007–2015 and the NEAPs of 2007–2009 and 2010–2013. These plans express the desire “that all Solomon Islanders will develop as individuals and possess knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to earn a living and to live in harmony with others and their environment. We envisage a united and progressive society in which all can live in peace and harmony with fair and equitable opportunities for a better life. We envision an education and training system responsive to its clients and efficiently managed by its stakeholders and clients. We wish to deliver quality education for everyone in the Solomon Islands” (MEHRD, 2009, p. 10). In line with an equity-driven peacebuilding approach, the first strategic goal of the NEAP is to achieve equitable access to education for all people in Solomon Islands regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, location or disability.

These policy documents have allowed the MEHRD to identify some of the gaps in education service delivery and quality, and to concretize these through policy reforms such as free basic education; increasing access to secondary, vocational and tertiary education; distance learning; vernacular language; and national curriculum guidelines. While these reforms are essential, ensuring positive impacts continues to be a challenge. The Fee Free Basic Education Policy implemented in 2009 addressed parents’ inability to afford school fees, and increased access to basic education in Grades 1 to 9; however, education is still not totally free, and school officials can still ask parents for contributions. Fees charged for senior secondary school and beyond pose further financial challenges for many. Despite an increasing number of secondary schools, cost considerations and limited enrolment capacity mean that many children are excluded from secondary education and beyond. The 2010 Policy Statement and Guidelines for Tertiary Education aims to provide access to high-quality tertiary education and to close the gap for marginalized groups. While considerable progress has been made to increase overall access and the gender balance has improved in early childhood and primary education, the majority of students in senior secondary are male (United Nations, 2012).

To address the concerns of what many consider a Western-driven curriculum and methodology, the use of vernacular languages has been on the education agenda in Solomon Islands since the 1990s. Local languages were incorporated into the ‘Nguzunguzu’ curriculum as previously mentioned. In 2008, the MERHD issued a directive in the National Early Childhood Policy Statement to use vernacular tongues in early childhood education, with the aim of incorporating and reflecting local cultures, customs and traditional practices in Solomon Islands (Glasgow et al., 2011).
By the end of 2015, one of the MEHRD’s key outputs is to ensure registered early childhood centres are meeting the minimum standards for teaching, learning and development in line with the vernacular language policy. Furthermore, one of the key activities under ‘quality’ is to ensure that a curriculum framework for vernacular languages is developed, including minimum standards for children at the end of Grade 3, with tools in place to assess student achievement in literacy and numeracy through the use of vernacular language as a medium of instruction (SIG, 2013).

Following the curriculum review in 2005, the MEHRD issued a Policy Statement and Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of the Solomon Islands National Curriculum (2011) in recognition that the overall syllabus was still not up to standard. As part of the process, peace topics have been integrated into social studies texts, potentially paving the way for a fully developed peace curriculum in the future (Maebuta, 2012, p. 97). Social studies in junior secondary (Grades 7 to 9) address conflict, the causes of social unrest and how it may be solved, offering examples from other countries as well as exploring in detail past conflict at home. In explaining reconciliation processes the course asks students to think critically about preventing conflict and achieving national unity. The Grade 8 curriculum in particular examines the period of the Tensions and its aftermath, addressing the causes and efforts to restore and maintain peace. It provides information on the peace agreements, traditional methods of reconciliation, the National Peace Council, the Truth and Reconciliation process, and RAMSI.

Solomon Islands has not only acknowledged the issues of the past, but chosen to reform its curriculum and incorporate the conflict into the teaching of history, including ways to prevent a resurgence of violence. However, it is vital that teachers actually teach the lessons on peacebuilding and conflict resolution and do not allow other demands to take precedence. As many of the initiatives around access, quality and peacebuilding and social cohesion are relatively new – for example curriculum reform, vernacular language in ECE, distance education and flexible learning, and a very recent initiative to link skills with

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13 Interview with Patrick Daudau on 14 March 2013.
14 The Distance and Flexible Learning strategy aims to provide distance education and flexible learning opportunities that are more accessible to all and meet the needs of different groups of learners (MEHRD, 2010).
economic development through the National Training Unit of the MEHRD,\textsuperscript{15} – it will take time for these to have real impact on students’ and teachers’ learning outcomes. What is important is that these initiatives are grounded in policy. The next step is to ensure they are fully implemented at the school level.

**Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA)**

The MWYCFA has developed several policy and planning documents that explicitly address education, peacebuilding and social cohesion. The Annual Work Plan, 2013, focuses on several outcomes related directly to youth, peacebuilding, education and development, including: Outcome 1: Improved and equitable access to education, training and employment opportunities for young women and men (youth and career pathways); and Outcome 4: Increased number of young people participating in activities that promote peacebuilding and conflict prevention (youth and peacebuilding).

The MWYCFA, in collaboration with youth, also developed the National Youth Policy 2010–2015, with one of its key pillars focusing on ‘youth and peacebuilding’. The ministry is currently looking at developing a National Youth Employment Strategy for Solomon Islands, under which it would partner with the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation, Honiara Youth Council and the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP). One component of the initiative will be the engagement of a “youth body and selected youth to be attached and work in various government ministries to gain insights and practical experience that will help them in their search for formal employment within the government and the private sector” (Solomon Star, 2013). While not mentioned, it will be important for the MEHRD to engage in this process.

### 2.2 United Nations system

Despite the conflict analyses undertaken and the government’s focus on the sector-wide approach, little evidence of these appears in United Nations documentation and recommendations on peacebuilding in Solomon Islands. Several tools and guiding principles have also been developed on conflict sensitive education and integrating conflict reduction processes into education planning. These could provide structured guidance to existing and new initiatives for donors and development partners to engage in.

The UNDP PCDA general recommendations to donors and development partners included that they:

- consider the conflict and social impacts of their work in developing their country strategies given that the underlying causes of the conflict have not been fully addressed;
- carry out peace and conflict development analysis at the project level – especially in areas touching on core conflict themes, including access to government services and economic opportunity; and
- integrate peacebuilding goals within current governance support efforts (Bush and Le Mesurier, 2004).

While no final recommendations were made regarding the education sector, the PCDA stated that in terms of policy and programming implementation, developing ownership and capacity in Solomon Islands, including for education, will require a balance between the immediate needs of service delivery (a product focus), and a longer-term horizon for Solomon Islanders to address their issues (a process focus). The report also suggested that, to ensure more effective communication to counter perceptions feeding into conflict cycles, support of gender-sensitive, community-based peace education could be of benefit (Bush and Le Mesurier, 2004: pp. 38, 43).

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Shirley McGill and Debbie Sade on 18 March 2013.
Similarly, while there were no explicit education recommendations in UNICEF Solomon Islands: A Situation Analysis of Children, Women and Youth (2005), the report emphasized that:

- Interventions to improve education (and health) services and legislation to protect children and women will have only limited impact unless they are accompanied by strategies to improve household income;
- There is a need for a sustained commitment from both government and donors to transform education to make it affordable and better adapted to community needs; and
- Non-formal education for youth is particularly important to meet the needs of urban and rural young people who have been ‘pushed out’ of the education system or who cannot afford secondary education.

UNICEF, UNDP and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are currently implementing the ‘Human Security Initiative for Tensions Reduction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation in the Solomon Islands’. Initially proposed for 2011–2013, the start date was pushed back to 2012–2014 due to funding delays. The main outcome of the project is to provide former combatants with training and socio-economic rehabilitation packages by promoting sustainable measures for survival and dignity. UNICEF’s involvement is through the water, sanitation and hygiene sector and although some activities under UNDP/ILO address peacebuilding, an overall social cohesion or peacebuilding framework is not evident. Given the delay in starting the project and the lack of identified former combatants, the extent to which its aims will be achieved remains uncertain.

As mentioned earlier, UNICEF has been specifically engaged in peacebuilding and social cohesion programmes in the development of the peace education module: “Come Together, Talk Together, Work Together.” This was based on a situation analysis on the potential for peace education in Solomon Islands (Pryor, 2003). In 2009 and 2010, UNICEF supported the MEHRD in the development of a policy to include and promote the use of vernacular languages aimed at increasing access to and literacy rates in basic education. UNICEF continues to be engaged in early childhood care and education programmes, including support to the MEHRD in the development of early childhood and basic education policies and through the implementation of a child-friendly schools approach. UNICEF is also currently supporting Save the Children in positive discipline approaches. There are further opportunities for UNICEF to engage with the MEHRD, including support to the SWAp, and in programmes supporting social cohesion. These are discussed further in the recommendations section.

2.3 Non-governmental sector and civil society

A number of organizations are involved in education programming that addresses social cohesion and peacebuilding. Major initiatives are described below.

**Save the Children Solomon Islands**

Save the Children implements a programme on Children and Youth in Conflict with the Law. The programme utilizes a community and traditional justice approach involving the training of traditional leaders to apply mediation, justice and dialogue processes with victims and perpetrators of crimes. The programme is both urban and rural based, designed to integrate young people who have committed crimes back into communities using restorative justice methodology. It is currently being implemented in Isabel, Malaita, Makira, Western Province and Honiara, with the goal to achieve sustainable outcomes for the youth involved.17

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16 In terms of engaging with the MEHRD, while there appears to be an inclination to support the SWAp, actual practice indicates that many development partners, including UNICEF and UNESCO, are far from aligning with country systems (Coxon and Tolley, 2011).

17 Interview with Joan Kipwola, Save the Children Solomon Islands, on 18 March 2013.
Save the Children is also working on positive discipline programmes funded by UNICEF and will pilot training for current and new teachers at the recently established Solomon Islands National University (SINU). The goals of this project are to strengthen classroom discipline, promote positive classroom management, and counteract continued corporal punishment in schools. Save the Children will continue to advocate for SINU/SICHE to have the training incorporated into the curriculum for new teachers.

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)

As part of AusAID’s NGO Partnership Agreement, ADRA is involved in a five-year Youth Engagement and Livelihood Project (2009–2014). During its initial phase, the programme worked directly with youth, community members, and civil society organizations to identify the greatest needs in their communities and how they could better address them. The project provides opportunities for livelihoods training and improving access to commercial markets. People learn skills such as financial literacy, personal financial management, and how to run a small business. The project also educates young people and others in their community on the consequences of destructive behaviours and aims to promote greater acceptance of, and appreciation for, youth participation within their communities (ADRA, 2009).

Live and Learn

The Live and Learn programme under way in Solomon Islands and other small island states with a high prevalence of violence focuses on children and peacebuilding through strengthening children’s participation in the development of peaceful and inclusive societies. It aims to enhance the profile of children in peacebuilding, to facilitate peace networks of children through the education system and to provide opportunities to concretize visions of peaceful societies into reality (Live and Learn, 2013).

Local civil society

During the Tensions, local church organizations assisted displaced and injured people with accommodation and care, and at the same time called for a cessation of hostilities. Churches continue to play an important role in society, especially at village level, where there are frequent discussions around justice, fairness, being good custodians and the rights of children and women. Between 2010 and 2013 Caritas, along with local church partners, focused on a peacebuilding project where more than 5,000 students were introduced to community formation themes of gender, leadership, peacebuilding and the environment (Caritas, 2013). Some church organizations have also adopted peace education and training, utilizing conflict resolution skills and allowing space for people to talk about their experiences.

Women’s groups continue to be instrumental in supporting participation, negotiations and activities involving social cohesion elements. They were an important part of the peace process during the Tensions, particularly with the establishment of Vois Bilong Meri (The Women’s Voice). VBM has consistently advocated for and modelled changes in social norms by communicating stories of successful women and promoting peace issues (Maebuta and Spence, 2009). Other civil society organization activities have included community outreach involving gender issues, efforts to facilitate better coordination of security provision and creating platforms for citizens to express their security concerns. Their engagement with government, however, has been largely unstructured and informal, with no platform for engagement on policy development. The church and CSO networks have consistently provided support to village life and could be supported in building their capacity, with inadequate funding and resources posing challenges to their continued peace work (Maebuta and Spence, 2009, p. 24).

18 Formerly Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE).
19 Interview with James Funa, General Secretary, Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), on 14 March 2013.
The Community Peace and Restoration Fund (CPRF) was established through AusAID in partnership with communities in 2000. The CPRF, which has supported over 800 small-scale, community-based projects in all provinces, is designed to assist reintegration, resettlement and rehabilitation of those affected by the conflict. Its projects span education, health and agriculture and include women and youth. Activities have included building new classrooms and health clinics, road maintenance and training workshops, e.g. on youth health, law and justice and income-generation initiatives. Involving CPRF facilitators and technical support teams, these projects have brought people together with a common purpose and encouraged the restoration of peace, community harmony and well-being (Sullivan and Hegarty, 2005).

These projects have contributed to building peace at local levels by utilizing community strengths and resilience, and cementing trust and confidence among youth that was eroded by conflict. The projects’ activities have enabled young people to learn aspects of leadership in preparation for future roles. The CRPF plays a crucial role in advancing the peace process and providing a catalyst for economic and social development at the village level throughout all provinces in Solomon Islands (AusAID, 2013).

A regional programme that is currently being supported through the New Zealand Government in the Pacific is the Olafou Youth Programme. It focuses on youth participation in structured groups with an emphasis on practical areas of work in communities. Youth are involved in the design and implementation of small-scale projects throughout Solomon Islands.

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20 The Australian Government through AusAID is the largest bilateral donor in education in Solomon Islands and supports programmes with and through SIG, NGOs and communities.

21 New Zealand is a lead donor in the education sector supporting SIG, NGOs and civil society. NZAID was instrumental in establishing the education SWAp in Solomon Islands.
3. Conclusions and recommendations

This section ties together the major findings of the case study and provides guidance to the education sector, with recommendations in particular for UNICEF as it develops its medium and longer-term strategies for addressing education goals in Solomon Islands. Most of the recommendations focus on the continuation of existing good-practice reforms and programmes run by the government and other education stakeholders.

3.1 Conclusions

A summary of conclusions about the conflict follows, with particular focus on the education sector.

- **Underlying causes of conflict.** Labelling the conflict as an ‘ethnic conflict’ is too simplistic. The underlying causes of the conflict in Solomon Islands included the inequitable distribution of and access to government services, namely education, especially for youth; a rapidly growing population and youth bulge with a lack of employment opportunities; the abuse and manipulation of traditional structures and systems; issues over ownership of land and resources; and ineffectual law and justice systems. These challenges to social cohesion and peacebuilding in Solomon Islands still persist.

- **Education and conflict.** Before the Tensions, a largely Western curriculum predominated and contributed to the divide between traditional and non-traditional systems and structures. This, together with limited access to relevant, quality education across all levels and in particular for secondary school-aged children and youth, contributed to a largely uneducated and unskilled youth population. While many people migrated to Honiara for education and other services, the challenge is both an urban and rural one. Many young people have the motivation and willingness to engage positively in society, but with limited education and skills, a lack of opportunities for meaningful activity and employment and few positive role models, they are often stymied.

- **Government reform and education sector policy.** There have been significant gains in education provision over the last decade, including an increase in primary school enrolment from 60 per cent to 90 per cent of children, and an expansion from 27 to over 200 secondary schools. However, while government policies, frameworks and strategic plans have been developed to promote social cohesion interventions, these have not been coordinated or linked explicitly to ministries and departments. While the reforms are largely conflict sensitive according to the current discourse on education and social cohesion, there does not appear to be a strong analytical framework serving as a basis for these reforms. The education sector has embraced a sector-wide approach, but support and ‘buy-in’ is not seen as a priority for some donors and organizations. Policy and planning remains largely at the centralized national level, with provincial and school-level implementation limited.

- **Development partners, NGOs and civil society programming.** Planning and implementation of peacebuilding and social cohesion initiatives is largely organization-driven and not necessarily inclusive of government. Many initiatives are short term or, due to delays in funding, are not as targeted or appropriate as they could be. A variety of donor-supported projects have been implemented but are not coordinated with other actors or targeted equitably across provinces. Donors, UNICEF, international NGOs and CSOs have been involved in peacebuilding and social cohesion programmes, but there is little evidence of longer-term strategic approaches that foster collaboration among the agencies. The potential to support real social cohesion interventions that empower people and create opportunities to heal past conflicts and open doors for economic and social reform are present, but a concerted effort by the government, partners and communities is needed to work across sectors in a coordinated and transparent way to achieve these goals.
3.2 Recommendations for UNICEF’s role in education, peacebuilding and social cohesion

UNICEF has an important role to play in Solomon Islands, by working extensively with the government and communities. Specific to the education sector and promoting social cohesion, the following recommendations are made:

**Recommendation 1: Continue support for curriculum reform**

UNICEF should continue to advocate for the curriculum reform process with Solomon Islands’ Government and major donors such as AusAID and NZAID. There has been significant reform of the social studies curriculum to incorporate social cohesion topics that promote understanding of the causes of conflict, conflict resolution and peacebuilding skills that utilize traditional concepts. UNICEF should continue to support this process, including the integration of each province’s local culture, history and traditions into the curriculum across all levels of education.

**Recommendation 2: Continue to support mother tongue education**

UNICEF should continue to support mother tongue initiatives in Malaita and Makira, analyse what has been successful and why, and work with the MEHRD at national and provincial level to expand this to other provinces and communities. It is recommended that UNICEF further support the development and distribution of new materials.

**Recommendation 3: Continue to support positive discipline training**

UNICEF should continue to fund, support and advocate for the positive discipline initiative in teacher training to promote violence-free environments in all schools. It is recommended that UNICEF strengthen coordination with and support to Save the Children in advocating for SINU to incorporate positive discipline training into the curriculum for new teachers and to support wider implementation of the training programme to improve school environments and model positive communication and non-violent strategies. UNICEF Child Protection and Education sections should collaborate on existing initiatives that focus on bullying in schools and corporal punishment and seek to strengthen overall UNICEF engagement in this area.

**Recommendation 4: Support increased access to secondary education and opportunities for youth**

UNICEF should continue to work with donors and the MEHRD to expand access to quality secondary education, drawing on the ministry’s priorities in this area and promoting quality, relevant education that embraces social cohesion approaches and non-violent teacher-student and student-student relationships.

**Recommendation 5: Invest in the non-formal education sector**

UNICEF, together with other donors, should continue to fund, support and advocate for education and technical skills development initiatives specifically for youth. These should be linked with economic opportunities towards promoting social cohesion and sustainable livelihoods.22

**Recommendation 6: Support capacity building of the MEHRD**

This should not be confined to the national level. Provincial offices lack resources and support to undertake national directives, new policies and strategic plans. The type and

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22 Support for youth development is much needed in Solomon Islands, but must be provided sensitively in ways that encourage participation without the risk of discrimination or stigmatization (UNICEF, 2005).
scope of capacity building must be needs-based, focused, targeted and measurable against expected outcomes that have been agreed upon with education officers and counterparts. Where possible, given available funds and technical expertise, UNICEF should seek to support and advocate for strengthened capacity at provincial and local levels, either directly or through partners.

**Recommendation 7: Advocate for coordination, integration and complementarity**

These processes need to be transparent and focused on establishing longer-term development and support of social cohesion initiatives between and within government departments, donors, UNICEF, NGOs, CSOs and other implementing partners. This is vital to avoid duplication of activities, ensure all provinces are included, and peoples’ needs are met. It is also essential in Solomon Islands, where government officials are overburdened by a multitude of projects and lack of human resources and skills to successfully manage such initiatives. UNICEF in particular, has strong links with the MEHRD and the MWYCFA and can be a connecting and coordinating agent between the sectors, bringing closer linkages and communication between the education and child protection and welfare sectors. Similarly, UNICEF can draw on NGOs such as Save the Children to strengthen collaborative efforts that support the MEHRD in promoting social cohesion initiatives through education and training.

**Recommendation 8: Support a balance between national and community-level intervention**

UNICEF needs to continue its support to the MEHRD at the national and institutional levels. At the same time, it is essential that communities see tangible projects and concrete results at the local level. Communities seek greater control of their own development and are requesting support for this process, which can enhance women and youth participation and allow communities to prioritize their concerns and access opportunities to address these. The active but under-utilized ‘middle-level layer’ of CSOs, including churches and NGOs already on the ground, provides an avenue to work with and networks (Hassall and Associates, 2004). Supporting initiatives in rural areas will show real results in the provinces and promote alternatives for viable and sustainable projects outside of Honiara.

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23 Interview with Franco Rodi on 13 March 2013.

24 In Solomon Islands, collaborating with a church group in project implementation does not imply that a donor is promoting or aligning with a particular religious denomination (UNICEF, 2005).
References


List of people interviewed

Stella Delaiverata, Programme Analyst, Crisis Prevention and Recovery Portfolio, UNDP
Franco Rodie, Undersecretary, Tertiary Education, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
Kang Yun Jong, Chief of Office, UNICEF Solomon Islands Country Office
Anika Kingmele, Child Protection Officer, UNICEF Solomon Islands Country Office
Lennis Rukale, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation
Peter Mae, Undersecretary, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation
Graham Felejula, Monitoring and Evaluation, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation
Philip Valusa, Deputy Director, Reconciliation for Guadalcanal, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation
Betty Fakani, Administration and Finance, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation
Reuben Lilo, Director of Peace and Reconciliation, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation
Kemuel Laeta, Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation
Patrick Daudau, Director Curriculum Development Division, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
John Aonima, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
James Funa, General Secretary, Solomon Islands Christian Association
Shirley McGill, New Zealand High Commission, Honiara
Debbie Sade, Development Programme Coordinator, New Zealand High Commission, Honiara
Joan Kipwola, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Manager, Save the Children Solomon Islands
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