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Regional Perspectives Research Project – Phase 1 summary report

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Contents

Understanding the Pacific: Insights from Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

The Regional Perspectives Project, led by the University of Adelaide in collaboration with Vanuatu and Solomon Islands partners and Australia's Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG), is about listening to, and learning from, Pacific people on a range of topics that reflect Pacific priorities, including relationships with other countries.

The project aims to help Defence to better understand Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, develop more sustainable and culturally sensitive engagement strategies, and play its part in creating a safer, fairer, more stable and prosperous Pacific Islands region.

To do this, researchers used traditional local storytelling methods to gather data – 'storian' in Vanuatu and 'tok stori' in Solomon Islands. These approaches gathered in-depth and diverse views directly from the people living in these islands. The information collected is crucial for ensuring policies are fair and well-informed, culturally sensitive, and beneficial.

This report presents a summary of the key findings from phase I of the project. Full reports have been prepared for internal analysis by Defence. This report begins with a summary of the project's key findings and then moves on to the two country reports.

The project aims to help Defence to better understand Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, develop more sustainable and culturally sensitive engagement strategies, and play its part in creating a safer, fairer, more stable and prosperous Pacific Islands region.

Acknowledgement

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the many communities across Vanuatu and Solomon Islands for their invaluable contributions to this research. Their trust and willingness to share their experiences and perspectives has been the cornerstone of the Regional Perspectives Project.

Key questions

The research sought to address the following key questions:

- How do people in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands view safety and stability, and how do these views vary within each country and between different communities?

- What are the main concerns of people in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, and how do these concerns change between regions within each country?

- How do people in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu take action to solve their own problems?

- Who are the foreign players involved in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, what methods are they using to influence these countries, and which methods do the locals feel most connected to and why?

- How do the actions of these foreign players affect independence and the ability to handle challenges in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands?

Summary of findings

Solomon Islands

- Solomon Islanders are grappling with the effects of rapid population growth and climate change, which are diminishing the productivity of their land and water resources.

- The nation's leadership is struggling to address youth issues, as rising unemployment pushes some young people towards substance abuse and violence.

- Individuals with disabilities are finding it increasingly difficult to have their rights observed and receive adequate support.

- The switch of diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China has introduced complex new geopolitical concerns, reshaping both local and global perceptions of Solomon Islands.

- Although there are some reservations, Australian aid is generally well-regarded by many in Solomon Islands for its consistent support and recent initiatives.

- Solomon Islands is celebrated for its cultural diversity, with the people united by a desire to be recognised as a peaceful, thriving, and hospitable community.

Vanuatu

- 'Kastom' – the unique customs and traditions of Vanuatu – plays a crucial role in uniting communities and guiding local governance. These traditions vary across the islands but are central to maintaining unity and social order.

- Across Vanuatu there is an ongoing need for better education, healthcare, water, and transportation services.

- Christian beliefs deeply shape community life, influencing economic decisions and approaches to security within a collective framework.

- Programs that send workers abroad and internal migration are reshaping community life. While these movements help build better infrastructure – like cyclone-resistant homes – they can also disrupt family relationships and community cohesion.

- Remote communities face significant challenges in accessing basic services, a situation worsened by natural disasters, such as cyclones, which hit these areas hardest.

- There is a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit among Vanuatu's women, who contribute significantly to their communities through handicrafts and local markets.

- Despite various challenges, the resilience of communities is strong. Traditional leaders and councils are pivotal in maintaining order and addressing local issues.

- The impact of countries like Australia and China varies across different parts of Vanuatu. Some locals value the immediate benefits of foreign aid, while others are wary of its long-term effects and potential inequalities.

- The period of data collection occurred against a backdrop of political instability, with several changes in leadership possibly influencing how people view governance and international relationships.

- The research was carried out by local teams, ensuring findings were directly informed by those who best understand the cultural and social landscapes of Vanuatu.

Photo: Maualaivao Maima Koro. Pango
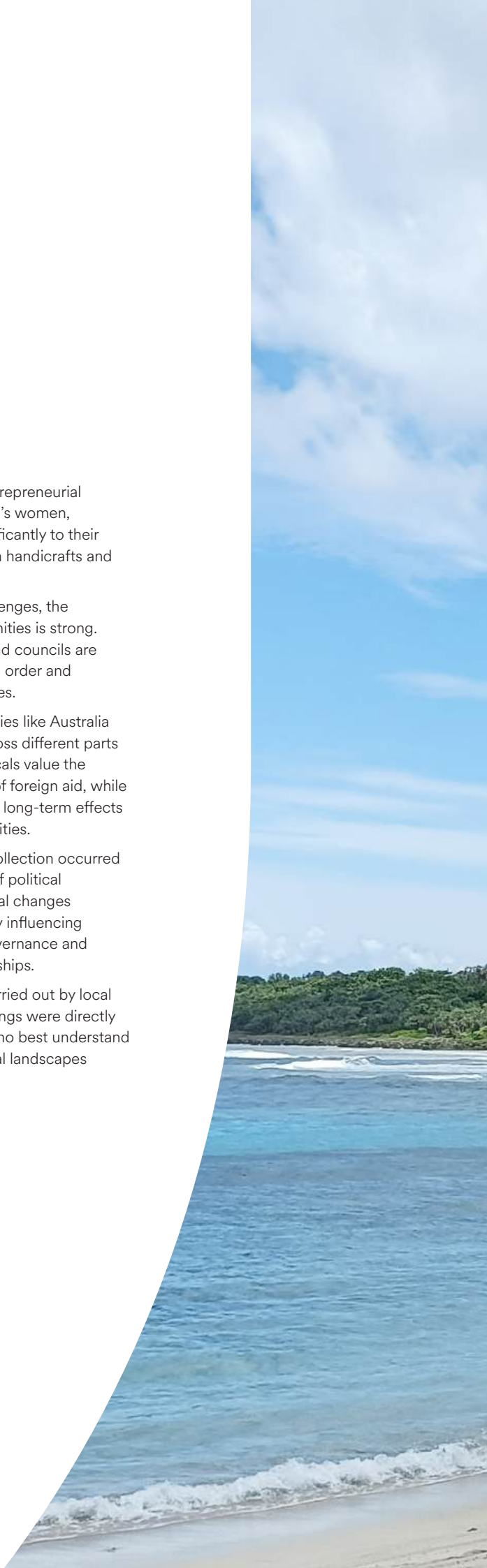
On localisation and local capacity

- Partner countries, including Australia, should prioritise locally driven solutions that build local capacity and recognise local expertise and agendas. Localisation should be guided by an emphasis on partnership, inclusiveness, complementarity, capacity building, stable funding and sustainability.

- The best people to advise Australia and other partners of their needs are those who experience the daily richness, opportunities and challenges of life in their countries.

- Australia and other partners should appreciate the strength and resilience of Pacific communities, along with the challenges that they face. Pacific peoples take pride in their cultural and societal achievements and aspire for a peaceful and prosperous future. Solomon Islands and Vanuatu possess considerable human expertise; efforts to help communities capitalise on it could include improving access to markets and offering employment opportunities. Rather than passively receiving assistance, people want support that advances their own development.

- Australian-supported research should involve genuine partnerships between Australian and Pacific researchers right from the inception of the project. These collaborations need to respect and reflect the knowledge, relationships and trust of all parties, while prioritising and platforming Pacific voices and perspectives.

Recommendations

- Australia and other partners should recognise the diverse sources of authority and leadership in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, which often resonate more with residents than national and local governments. It's important to identify points of entry across these countries to collaborate with a range of actors – from community to national levels, including churches and traditional leaders of both genders – in ways that bolster, rather than undermine, each level, acknowledging their fluidity and local specificity. Advancing decentralisation agendas that improve government accountability and service delivery across all levels should be supported.

- Many Pacific people prefer long-term, constructive development approaches over more immediate, 'flashy' aid. By focussing on equitable development, Australia can foster sustainable improvements that build long-lasting, trustful relationships. Prioritising youth opportunities and well-being would further enhance the effectiveness of long-term assistance.

- Australia and other partners should invest more in building influence through soft-power initiatives, including more effectively targeting and promoting existing work to all sectors of society. Relationships need to be visible in communities, schools, clinics and on church notice boards. Australia should also pursue other cultural, environmental and economic initiatives, including climate action and more streamlined and flexible visa arrangements. Supporting telecommunications, broadcasters and provincial media to improve information flow would be beneficial.

- Addressing major development challenges requires both internal and external collaboration. This collaborative approach – both essential and characteristic of the Pacific way – demands immense investment and concerted effort.

- In Vanuatu, Australia should support the implementation of the Government's Decentralisation Plan through established institutions and mechanisms. The research outlined a clear need for equitable development, which includes enhancing access to quality social services and increasing community involvement in public service decision-making.

- Australia should recognise the enduring impact of 25 years of sporadic violence on many people in Solomon Islands, noting that events like the 2021 riots can reactivate trauma. Continued support for peacebuilding initiatives led by the people of Solomon Islands is crucial to realise the intent of past peace agreements and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Lessons

- Communities have well-established leadership and problem-solving governance structures that have adapted to Christian authority structures and, more recently, national and local governance. As contexts change rapidly, many communities are revisiting these structures to effectively meet current challenges.

- Australia should feel both pride and humility about its track record in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. While Australian assistance is usually welcomed, there are concerns about the unintended consequences of programs such as labour mobility schemes. Historical contexts, including blackbirding and the countries' colonial past, still influence perceptions of the present relationship.

- Many are unaware of Australian assistance, often because it is delivered by third-party contractors or international development actors, and the AusAID brand is no longer used. The goodwill from past activities like RAMSI isn't everlasting and needs to be maintained through consistent, sustained development partnerships. Currently, labour mobility schemes are a strong positive example in Solomon Islands.

How we gathered our data

In the Pacific Islands region traditional data-collection methods, such as surveys and key informant interviews with elites, often miss diverse community voices, leading to an incomplete understanding of local social, political and environmental issues.

This makes it difficult for both Pacific Island countries and their partners to make informed decisions. Past efforts have struggled with logistical issues, lack of infrastructure, and the wide geographical spread of the islands. They also often overlook the unique cultural and social aspects within Pacific Island countries, leading to misunderstandings.

This project took a new approach by deeply engaging with communities in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands using traditional local storytelling methods that respect local cultures which enabled participants to gift their knowledge to our teams of researchers. This has allowed us to get a clearer and fuller picture of local conditions and opinions and to identify differences across Vanuatu and Solomon Islands' provinces. We conducted extensive fieldwork, using open-ended questions to hear from a wide range of people, ensuring our findings genuinely reflected their views on international relations and their daily impacts.

This project also took a new approach by seeking to be mutually beneficial to both the funding government agency and to the Vanuatu and Solomon Islands partners leading the research. Each step, including identifying project aims, research questions, and designing methodologies, was co-designed by the ni-Vanuatu, Solomon Islander, and Australian researchers.

Photo: Maualaivao Maima Koro. Team Vanuatu

Reflecting an emphasis on localisation, the research was led by Linda Kenni and a team from Vanuatu, and Jennifer Wate and a team from Development Services Exchange in Solomon Islands. Reflecting the prioritisation and foregrounding of Pacific voices and perspectives, the data was analysed by the ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Island researchers. This report, and others generated by the project, are written by the ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Islander research partners.

The project is guided by a co-created Data Collection Plan, Communications Plan, and a robust Cultural Protocol to ensure that it is conducted in a way that respects the agency of the ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Islander research partners, research participants, and the broader Vanuatu and Solomon Islands communities.

The improved understanding of the perceptions of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands people outlined in this paper is invaluable for policymakers and regional partners, providing essential insights into the real effects of international relations on the lives of people in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Although these insights specifically reflect the communities visited and might not represent wider national opinions, they are crucial for refining current policies and guiding future studies to include more regions.

Understanding Solomon Islanders' perceptions: phase 1 summary report

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This abridged summary presents the key findings from research conducted in the Solomon Islands from August to October 2023, as part of the broader Regional Perspectives Research Project. This initiative is the first phase of a two-part research process, running parallel to a sister project in Vanuatu. The University of Adelaide – in partnership with Development Services Exchange (Solomon Islands) and Peacifica (Australia) – led this project, which was supported by funding from Australia's Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG).

The primary goal of this research is to engage with and understand the stories of Pacific communities, focusing on their perceptions of change, priorities and external relationships, particularly with Australia. Researchers used 'tok stori'– a local, participatory storytelling method – to deeply engage with participants and elicit rich, often overlooked, insights through more than 50 focus group and key informant events in various provinces including Guadalcanal, Isabel, Malaita, Rennell and Bellona, Western and the capital, Honiara.

Through the tok stori sessions, researchers identified several key themes, which are explored in detail in the report. These include: social cohesion; leadership; empowerment; peace and security; disaster response; climate change; food security; water and sanitation (WASH); education; and, international relations.

Designed to inform the Australian Department of Defence and aid broader Australian Government strategies, the report aims to refine how Australia engages with the Pacific Islands. By incorporating local perspectives directly into policymaking, the project seeks to foster a relationship that is respectful, mutually beneficial and culturally sensitive. The extensive fieldwork and collaborative approach with local teams in both the design and analysis phases mark a significant shift towards more inclusive research methodologies.

These efforts are crucial for developing strategies that address current geopolitical dynamics, such as the shift in diplomatic recognition and the impact of climate change, while truly meeting needs and aspirations of Pacific communities.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the communities of the Solomon Islands for their essential contributions to this research. Their willingness to share their stories and engage in trust-building dialogue has been the cornerstone of our project.

Summary points

- Solomon Islanders are facing significant changes and challenges, exacerbated by population growth and climate change, which are impacting land and water productivity.

- Existing leadership and decision-making processes are under strain, especially in addressing youth challenges, with increased unemployment leading some youth to substance abuse and violence.

- People with disabilities are experiencing heightened difficulties in accessing their rights.

- A shift in diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China has brought new geopolitical dynamics and concerns, affecting local and international perceptions.

- Despite some criticisms, Australia is viewed positively by many Solomon Islanders due to its longstanding support and recent aid initiatives.

- The research highlights the diversity of the Solomon Islands and the common aspiration among its people to be seen as peaceful, prosperous and welcoming.

Current information landscape

Traditional data-collection methods in the Pacific Islands often fail to represent the diverse voices within communities. This leads to a fragmented understanding of local socio-political and environmental realities, hampering effective decision-making and policymaking.

Previously, data-collection efforts were hindered by logistical challenges, limited infrastructure, and the widespread geographical distribution of island communities. In addition, data-collection methods did not consider the unique cultural and social dynamics specific to each island, leaving important aspects of these regions poorly understood.

By engaging deeply with communities and applying culturally sensitive methods co-designed by researchers from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Australia, this project captures a more accurate and comprehensive picture of local conditions and perspectives.

The insights gained from a wide range of voices through interviews and focus groups provide a clearer view of the intricate social structures, leadership dynamics and external perceptions that influence these communities.

By improving data quality, the report supports more informed policymaking that is tailored to meet the unique challenges faced by Pacific Island communities, fostering interventions that are truly effective and relevant.

Context of the geo-political landscape at the time of data capture

The research was conducted in 2023, a pivotal year for Solomon Islands marked by significant political and social events. The nation's longest-serving Prime Minister, Manasseh Damukana Sogavare[1], completed his term amid political turmoil, including a failed no-confidence vote and controversial constitutional amendments. These changes extended the term of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DCGA) Parliament, enabling upcoming national elections. Such decisions faced legal challenges and widespread scrutiny, setting the stage for critical national, provincial and city council elections in April 2024.

Amidst this political landscape, Solomon Islands hosted the Pacific Games, attended by 24 countries. This event not only highlighted the country's organisational capabilities but also showcased its rich cultural identity as a peace-loving nation. The Games provided a platform to demonstrate Solomon Islands' commitment to unity, cultural diversity and Christian values, reinforcing its positive image to the Pacific and the wider world.

Data collection for this project occurred between these significant events, capturing a time of cautious optimism about the future, mixed with immediate local concerns about environmental and economic stability.

Key insights

The research encompasses a broad cross-section of Solomon Island perspectives, including individuals from remote villages, towns and various levels of government. Their diverse backgrounds provided rich insights into the social structures and challenges facing their communities.

Solomon Islands communities are built on long-established social structures and processes

In Solomon Islands, community identities are deeply rooted, and pivotal for social cohesion and conflict resolution. These communities rely on traditional authority figures like chiefs and community committees for planning and decision-making. Christianity, integrated with indigenous values, plays a central role in unifying these communities without causing division. This strong local identity often takes precedence over national identity, which isn't necessarily a weakness as it reflects a profound connection to place and people.

Moving on from terminology like 'customary' and 'formal'

The use of terms such as 'customary' and 'formal' often misrepresents the reality of Solomon Islanders, who blend traditional practices with government-imposed systems. 'Custom' remains integral to their identity, suggesting a shift to terms like 'established' and 'emerging' might better reflect their experiences and allow for an understanding of changes over time. These terms could clarify how Solomon Islanders navigate problem-solving and planning through both traditional and governmental channels.

[1] https://forumsec.org/forum-leaders/hon-manasseh-damukana-sogavare

Remoteness is relative

Travel within Solomon Islands varies greatly. While some regions are accessible by flights and boats, others struggle with basic infrastructure, making even short trips challenging and costly. This lack of accessibility hinders economic opportunities and exacerbates inequalities, particularly in remote areas like Renbel with minimal infrastructure.

Information poverty is a pervasive problem

Information flow within communities primarily relies on trusted local networks. However, there's a notable gender gap in information access and literacy, with women generally less engaged in wider community issues due to these barriers. Online information sources are underutilised and often regarded as unreliable, which exacerbates 'information poverty'.

Every province is different

Provincial identities are strong, influencing decision-making at a local level. Celebrations of Provincial Days underscore their significance. However, structural inequities such as inadequate ports or poor roads can disadvantage poorer areas, affecting investment and aid distribution, and fostering resentment towards perceived central favouritism.

The struggle to just get by is the norm

Solomon Islanders routinely face difficulties in securing basic needs and leveraging government support. A pervasive sense of 'information poverty' complicates these challenges, as inconsistent access to various information channels hampers planning and disaster preparedness.

Some young people are being pulled - and maybe driven - away from established social structures

Young people in Solomon Islands often find themselves at a crossroads between traditional and emerging ways of life, expressing their identities through new forms of community and creativity. However, they still largely identify with their traditional communities, despite feeling disconnected from older generations.

In provincial government and community life, people feel disempowered

Local efforts at development often falter due to inadequate oversight and support from higher authorities. This disempowerment is reflected in the struggle to manage community resources and maintain autonomy over local projects and finances.

There is a broad spectrum of views on China and global competition

Opinions on the shift from Taiwan to China vary widely among Solomon Islanders, with many seeing opportunities for new investments alongside concerns about the sustainability of Chinese aid. This geopolitical shift has heightened awareness and interest in international affairs beyond local concerns.

Australia is seen as a friend, but details are vague

While Australia is respected for its historical support, especially during crises, the specifics of its ongoing assistance are less well-known among the populace. Nonetheless, Australia's role is appreciated, though it is viewed as more of an outsider compared to Pacific Island states.

Lower literacy and access to information for women is widely perceived as a problem

Disparities in literacy and information access affect women's ability to participate fully in community life. While the community values education for girls, practical barriers continue to limit their educational achievements.

The legacy of the tensions is very present

The period of historical conflict known as 'The Tensions'[2] continues to influence community fears about stability. Despite these concerns, there is a strong desire among Solomon Islanders to be recognised as a peaceful people committed to a harmonious future.

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[2] https://www.ramsi.org/the-tensions/

Key thematic areas

The themes below stem from collective team insights gathered during our research reflection:

Social cohesion

Social cohesion in Solomon Islands is recognised as a key strength, fostering strong relationships and a sense of belonging that underpin community resilience. This cohesion is supported by traditional governance and justice systems managed by local chiefs and community committees, which are deeply integrated with Christian and indigenous values.

Current context

The region faces challenges that threaten its harmonious social fabric. These include the erosion of cultural knowledge, socio-economic struggles, and shifting power dynamics, which are particularly impactful on the youth. Many young people are turning away from traditional leadership, indicated by increased substance abuse and a lack of engagement, which correlates with a lack of community programs for youth, especially in rural areas.

Key considerations

- Community leadership needs to be strengthened, and youth-engagement programs should be expanded to include sports and vocational training beyond traditional religious activities.
- Initiatives to preserve indigenous knowledge and practices are essential for maintaining community identity and cohesion.
- Addressing the urban-rural economic disparities and enhancing social services are critical to reducing migration pressures and social stratification.
- Targeted programs to address mental health and substance abuse are required to tackle the root causes of youth disengagement and antisocial behaviour.

"We usually come together on Sundays to meet and talk about issues. We have the governance that runs the village on a daily basis and we have the justice that the chiefs deal with conflict issues."

Community leader from Isabel

Leadership

Leadership plays a significant role in Solomon Islands' communities, particularly in fostering peace, harmony and communal cohesion. Leadership in these communities traditionally revolves around voluntary service and stewardship, contributing positively to community development and infrastructure. The research findings emphasise the importance of fair decision-making, the equitable involvement of women, and the preservation of communal values and resources amidst economic activities like logging and mining.

Current context

Leadership in Solomon Islands, especially noted in Isabel Province, is based on a voluntarism model but faces challenges as some leaders become monetarily motivated. The local governance includes the 'tripod' system, combining government, church, and customary leadership to address communal issues. Women and youth are increasingly recognised and involved in leadership roles, which helps to address various community challenges effectively.

Key considerations

- Some community leaders prioritise personal gain over communal welfare, which could undermine traditional leadership values.
- Increasing the involvement of women and youth in leadership roles is crucial for balanced decision-making and community development.
- Communities face threats from economic activities that could exploit natural and cultural resources, necessitating a balanced approach to development.
- Effective use of local governance structures and referral systems, such as the tripod, is vital for addressing communal issues.

- Community leaders, particularly chiefs, should serve as role models and receive capacity-building training to enhance their effectiveness.

"The work I do is on a voluntary basis because I see the importance of helping my people in the communities and am happy doing voluntary work. Being an Isabellian woman from a matrilineal society where I own the land, resources and birth rights too makes me happy to do my job. I have seen changes in my community especially in community developments where people work together and manage to build community infrastructures like rest houses and community halls, young people taking up leadership roles and also having women chiefs in our community. However, in terms of economic developments like logging and mining that involve money men used to suppress our matrilineal rights, this is not a good practice. Men should work together with women in any development aspirations that everyone can benefit out of and also not to destroy our natural resources; but preserve them for future generations as well."

Key informant from Buala Village

Decentralisation and empowerment

In Solomon Islands, the concept of 'decentralisation and empowerment' encapsulates the desire for greater autonomy at all levels, from provincial governments to local communities. The central theme is the aspiration to self-govern, reflecting a widespread call across the islands for the authority and resources to implement local decisions effectively. However, the decentralisation process has been uneven across various government ministries, and the lack of financial and administrative capacity often hampers effective local governance.

Current context

The drive for decentralisation is marked by a significant push from provincial governments toward statehood, aiming to gain independence from central government oversight. This move is motivated by the desire to have greater control over local resources and decision-

making processes. Local governments face challenges such as outdated regulatory frameworks, limited revenue-generating capabilities, and dependency on national government for funding. These issues are compounded by the stark disparities in capacity between larger and smaller provinces.

Key considerations

- Provincial leaders are advocating for statehood to gain autonomy and better manage local affairs without central government interference.

- There is a critical need for provinces to enhance their capacity to generate revenue and effectively plan and execute budgets.

- Strengthening administrative and financial-management skills at the provincial and local levels is essential for successful decentralisation.

- Addressing inter-provincial disparities is necessary to prevent worsening inequities under less centralised control.

- Updating and enacting relevant local governance legislation can help empower provincial and town councils.

"The community within the town boundary in here, they're really looking at a struggle of survival. Most of the people who are staying here are retiring already from the public service or from the government or from private sector... They will be stay close to where the services are provided; and also they will be close to where they will be able to make money from the market. They go fishing or from the garden. They come here. So even though they've retired, they still see Gizo is a resource centre."

Government official from Gizo

Peace and security

Ongoing peace and security in Solomon Islands are deeply influenced by the enduring impact of historical conflicts known as 'The Tensions'. These past conflicts continue to shape everyday life, causing widespread insecurity among the populace. This insecurity is not only a result of historical violence but also current social issues such as antisocial behaviour among youths and inadequate leadership. The discussion around these issues reveals a national reluctance to fully engage with the past, as evidenced by the delayed discussions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report in Parliament.

Current context

Solomon Islands' struggle with peace and security is underscored by the societal scars left by the Tensions, which still trigger panic and fear among citizens. This backdrop of historical insecurity is exacerbated by current challenges, including youth antisocial behaviour and sporadic violent incidents. Efforts to address these issues include proposed revisions to the national peace policy and revitalising peace committees, yet progress is slow and the path to peaceful resolution remains fraught with difficulties.

Key considerations

- Acknowledging and addressing the long-standing impacts of the Tensions is crucial for national healing.

- Proactively involving young people in positive community roles can mitigate their involvement in antisocial activities.

- Strengthening community policing initiatives could improve security and trust between police and communities.

- Supporting traditional dispute-resolution systems can enhance local governance and peacekeeping.

- Implementing comprehensive policy revisions and supporting legislative changes are essential for addressing both past and current security challenges.

"We have some kind of conflict within the Ministries, to the point that the police officers were involved. And they came in and pointed the gun at me, tell me to go out from this position." - Participant affected during the Tensions

"I was thankful for RAMSI's (The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands) presence that bring back peace despite Temotu is far from, but we were also affected too."

Participant from Temotu Province

Economics and development

In Solomon Islands, economic and development challenges are acute due to bureaucracy, the centralisation of services, geographical obstacles, and poor infrastructure. Rural communities in particular face significant hurdles in accessing markets, leading to economic stagnation. The inefficiencies in transportation, along with misinformation about market opportunities, exacerbate these issues. Environmental degradation and resource scarcity further hinder economic growth and impact food security.

Current context

Economic opportunities in Solomon Islands are limited by a combination of infrastructural deficiencies and geographical isolation. Transportation costs are high, and market access is restricted, particularly in remote areas like Renbel and Western Provinces.

These factors contribute to low cash flow and limited economic activities, with communities often resorting to barter systems or local sharing practices due to the absence of viable markets. The situation is complicated by environmental issues, such as the overharvesting of marine resources and land degradation due to logging and mining, which threaten sustainability and livelihoods.

Key considerations

- It is recommended that roads, bridges, and wharves be enhanced to facilitate better access to markets and reduce transportation costs.

- Developing local markets and buyer networks in rural areas could significantly support agricultural and fishing communities.

- Implementing sustainable practices would help prevent resource depletion and ensure long-term food security.

- It is advisable to boost educational opportunities and create jobs, particularly through local and seasonal employment initiatives, which could address the high unemployment rate.

- Expanding access to essential services such as electricity, water, and healthcare in rural areas would improve living standards.

"We are women living in Kologaru and we spend most of our time working in our gardens for survival and also produce to sell at the Buala market for family income. Earning income in the rural areas is very

hard at the moment because there are no economic activities like copra and cocoa buying centres or even fisheries that people could sell their produces for cash, but only canteens and shops and fuel depot who provides services to the people."

Women of Kologaru, Isabel Province

"Most of the people here, they do things by themselves by struggling, how to get money to build a house... We don't, we don't employ. Here just doing things or having an income from copra or fishing or market, something like that."

Community elder, Western province

Natural and human-made disaster, climate change, food security

The interconnected challenges of natural and human-made disasters, climate change, and food security significantly impact daily life and development in Solomon Islands. The diverse geographical landscape of the archipelago exposes different areas to various climatic hazards such as cyclones, tsunamis and droughts, affecting infrastructure and agriculture. Human-induced disasters, such as logging and mining degrade the environment, compound these issues and affect local economies. The research highlights the importance of local knowledge in addressing these challenges, emphasising that those living these realities daily are best placed to advise on necessary interventions.

Current context

Solomon Islands ranks highly in global disaster risk assessments due to its vulnerability to a wide range of natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. These changes in weather patterns not only disrupt traditional agricultural practices but also increase the occurrence of floods and droughts, affecting food security and economic stability. At the same time, political instability and industrial activities like logging and mining are viewed as human-made disasters, further destabilising communities and degrading natural resources. The ongoing impact of these combined factors necessitates comprehensive and locally informed responses to enhance resilience and drive sustainable development.

Key considerations

- The development of integrated approaches that address both natural and human-induced disasters would mitigate their combined impact on communities.

- Building climate resilience through community-based projects, such as mangrove restoration and proper land management, could protect environments and livelihoods.

- Harnessing local knowledge for disaster preparedness and climate adaptation strategies would ensure that interventions are contextually relevant and effective.

- Enhancing infrastructure to withstand extreme weather conditions is recommended to ensure continuous access to markets and services.

- Implementing sustainable agricultural practices and diversifying crops could help stabilise food supplies and adapt to changing climatic conditions.

"When I implemented an activity I realised another issue has to be addressed. For example, realising climate change impact has destroyed our biodiversity. Mangrove is like a garden for women where the mangrove bean is our protein, just like cabbage. Due to climate change when women went to pick the mangrove beans, they were washed out due to high tides. So that gives us a challenge. So from conservation we integrated our climate change activities and project."

Conservation project worker in Malaita

WASH and education

Solomon Islands faces significant challenges in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and education. Both sectors are crucial for the wellbeing and development of communities but often receive inadequate attention and resources. In many areas, the lack of reliable and safe water sources and appropriate sanitation facilities hinders daily life and health, despite some government support through initiatives like the constituency development fund. Similarly, educational access is constrained by geographical barriers, resource limitations, and socio-economic factors, particularly affecting girls and individuals with disabilities.

Current context

WASH facilities in Solomon Islands are often incomplete or fail to meet the needs of the communities, compounded by difficulties in accessing relevant information due to remote locations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of comprehensive WASH facilities in schools and villages was notably apparent, affecting hygiene practices among children and the broader community.

In terms of education, while there is a high value placed on learning as a pathway to improved living conditions, actual access to education is hampered by physical distance, lack of materials, and financial constraints within communities.

Key considerations

- It is recommended that efforts be intensified to build and maintain adequate WASH facilities in both schools and communities to improve health outcomes and quality of life.

- Expanding educational facilities closer to rural communities could significantly improve access. Additionally, providing more resources and support for dormitory accommodations would help maintain consistent attendance, particularly in secondary education.

- Special attention should be given to enhancing educational access for girls and individuals with disabilities, ensuring that all community members can benefit from educational opportunities.

- Encouraging greater community involvement in schools could improve educational outcomes and foster local stewardship of educational resources.

- Better management and distribution of educational resources, as well as improved financial planning for schools, would address some of the current operational challenges.

"I hope that our life can be better. Change happens when services are accessible."

A young girl, member of the blind and visually impaired community

The University of Adelaide
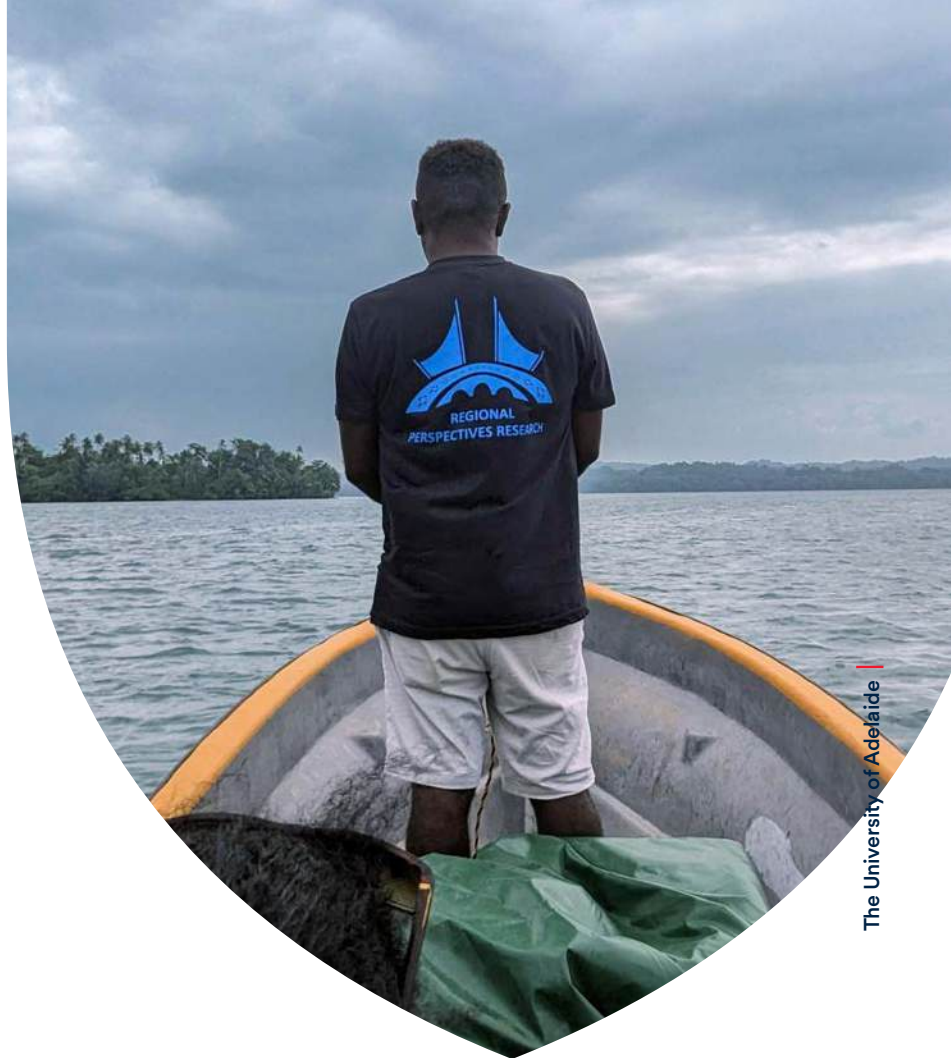
International relations

International relations are increasingly relevant to the daily lives of Solomon Islanders, not just as a matter of high-level diplomacy but also in tangible community impacts through projects and security assistance. Local perceptions of international relationships are coloured by visible infrastructure projects and development aid, primarily from China and Australia. These nations' influences are distinctly marked by their respective contributions to local economies and infrastructure, but there is a significant gap in the public's understanding of donor contributions versus contractor roles.

Current context

Solomon Islands' relationships with international partners like China and Australia directly affect local development and security. Large-scale projects like the Munda Airport and initiatives like the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) are well-recognised, whereas the finer details of funding sources remain less understood. Recent geopolitical shifts, particularly the diplomatic switch from Taiwan to China, have stirred public debate and brought international relations closer to everyday discussions among Solomon Islanders.

Key considerations

- Enhancing public understanding of international projects' funding and implementation roles could clarify perceptions of international aid and investment.

- Fostering balanced international relationships that respect local needs and sovereignty could prevent dependency and protect national interests.

- Directing international cooperation efforts towards projects that have tangible, positive impacts on local communities would increase the perceived value of international relationships.

- Engaging in international relationships with sensitivity to local culture and political contexts is crucial, especially in avoiding the pitfalls of 'debt-trap diplomacy' and ensuring equitable development benefits.

"I see our relationship with other countries slowly works out in helping us financially in forms of projects for people of Solomon Islands. I feel happy and as part of Australia because they recognise the needs of the people in the community. Because those projects really went right down to the communities and were actually seen and felt by the people in the community."

Isabel community member

"My concern is on labour mobility. In blackbirding there were people who have not returned... Now labour have occurred again, what will Australia have to be done for Solomon Island citizens?"

Key informant, Buma, Malaita

"I have heard Solomon Islands have strengthened relationship with other countries. The new switch to China has some disagreements from the public but the switch has also strengthened relationship ties with the United States of America and Australia as well."

Key informant, Isabel

"When Sogavare moved into Chinese, the other partners like Australia and others are now coming back in full force. Stronger, because 'why are you going for China? I'm still here. Why haven't you asked for me?' So will there be a competition between China and our old friends in development and that will speed up the development assistance?"

Key informant, Western

"I was educated there and have some good memories of Australia. Australia as a country can always be trusted in all they do although there are some criticisms here and there."

Key informant, Honiara

Appendix: Team Solomon Islands' methodology

Using grounded theory, qualitative data from semi-structured conversations informed by open questions was analysed to identify significant issues and detailed findings. The report includes many specific examples representing larger trends.

A distinctive feature of this research is its emphasis on collaboration and localisation, from conception to write-up. While many team members had experience with similar research, participation by the full research team in all stages of the Regional Perspectives Research Project's (RPP's) design and implementation far exceeded past efforts.

Project formation

The collaborative approach began almost at Regional Perspectives Research Project's (RPP's) inception. Discussions between Professor Joanne Wallis of the University of Adelaide and David Matthews of the Defence Science and Technology Group identified issues concerning Australia's understanding of the Pacific region and its people. Their overarching objective was to influence Australia's engagement with the region by 'mobilising empathy'. They recognised the research would need to be driven by Pacific people and Pacific ways of working.

In early 2022, Professor Wallis contacted Peacifica to invite its participation in the Solomon Islands component and to discuss potential research partners. Peacifica suggested Development Services Exchange (DSE), the umbrella NGO body in Solomon Islands', and initiated the approach.[3] With experience in community-based research and an established network across Solomon Islands, DSE was an obvious and appropriate partner. Peacifica, with similar research experience and a focus on amplifying Pacific voices, agreed to join the project after considering the appropriateness of accepting funding from an agency of the Department of Defence. Both the research objectives and the Pacific-led approach informed their decision to participate. A similar process was followed to identify the Vanuatu research team.[4]

Peacifica and DSE were separately contracted to the University in June 2022. While there was some negotiation and clarification of deliverables and contract details, the University led the identification and scheduling of milestones. This ensured consistency across Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and conformed to university contract procedures.

The contracting process was the last intentionally 'top down' moment of the research. Despite the necessary roles of donor (DST), manager (the University) and implementers (DSE and Peacifica), the project has sought to break down some of these divides. The work still proceeds according to a timeline dictated in the contract, with payment linked to milestones. The University designed the milestones and associated deliverables to front-load funding, facilitating the participation of Pacific-based researchers.

It has also not hesitated to make adjustments to the milestones in response to external factors.

Collaborative design

The project's 'Pacific-led' approach started in earnest once the contracts were signed. DSE's General Secretary, Jennifer Wate, was named team leader for Solomon Islands, with Peacifica sharing responsibility for deliverables and serving an advisory role.

From June to December 2022, the University hosted several face-to-face meetings in Adelaide involving the two country research teams, Professor Wallis and her growing department of Pacific island scholars, and personnel from DST's social research unit. These meetings fostered a spirit of collaboration and reduced the distance between funders and researchers.

They were also effective in building a shared understanding of the project, leading to modifications to the original questions. What started as a general inquiry into how Pacific people understand 'security' evolved into a broader exploration of their aspirations, how they solve problems, who they turn to for help, how they access information and their attitudes towards other countries. Terms like 'security' and 'resilience' were largely eliminated from the research material.

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[3]DSE and Peacifica previously collaborated in 2019-20 on the Pacific Perspectives on the World research project for the Whitlam Institute. Dr Wallis, then at ANU, was on the advisory group for that project.

[4]The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu research teams collaborated with the university and DST on developing the project, however data collection and analysis in each country has been conducted separately.

During this time, the Solomon Islands team also developed a 'Situational Analysis' document, presenting a Solomon Islander perspective on their country's history and culture, economy, geography, politics, environment and more. The draft document, which also addressed country's violent history of the last two decades, was presented to a project meeting in December 2022 and informed a briefing to stakeholders from the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs. This stakeholder meeting highlighted the power of having those most connected to an issue being the ones to talk about it. The Situational Analysis was finalised in 2023 following that meeting.

The December 2022 project meeting also finalised the research questionnaire after extensive discussion over the preceding months. These discussions were central to building shared ownership and understanding of the research and its intent. Together, the team crafted a set of open-ended questions to allow participants to talk about what was important to them within research scope. Questions included 'What are your hopes for the future?' and 'Where do you get your information from?' The most direct question was 'What comes to mind when you think about Australia?' The questions were translated into Solomon Islands Pijin, leading to further discussions about their meaning and intent.[5]

The research team, under the University's leadership, also developed core guidance documents on Communications and Cultural protocols and contributed to sections of the University's ethics application. The project underwent several ethics review processes: University of Adelaide, DST, and the national processes for Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Preparation for data collection

The research was initially planned to start in April/May, but was delayed due to a question within the Department of Defence on how to communicate its status as funder. This delay caused some inconvenience, as initial socialisation activities with Solomon Islands government representatives were paused. It also put pressure on the research team as the hard deadline of the country's hosting of the 2023 Pacific Games approached. However, the delay did

Figure A- Draft location map. Some locations are not formally shown on a map, so sites are approximate.

enable more thorough preparation of the research team, following an initial training workshop in April.

Research began in August 2023. Socialisation with government and target communities resumed, and the research team received repeated training on the research questions. During this period, plans to involve student researchers from Solomon Islands National University were abandoned due to the delayed start.

Research team

Jennifer Wate – Development Services Exchange (DSE) General Secretary and team leader

Lovelyn Maezama – DSE Staff

James Cox – Peacifica Executive Director

Cathie Konainao – DSE Staff

Inia Barry – Chair DSE

Samantha Lianga – DSE volunteer

Alice Houanihau – Vice Chair DSE

Dairus Korasi – DSE Staff – logistics and support

The researchers divided into smaller teams of two to four people to conduct the research.

Research locations and participants

This research prioritised locations outside Honiara, including Guadalcanal, Isabel, Malaita, Rennell and Bellona (Renbel), and Western provinces. Locations ranged from government offices and communities in provincial capitals to villages and towns with varying proximity to these centres.

While the team aimed to reach all identified locations and personnel, several

factors prevented this. Communuties and leaders around Honiara were distracted by preparations for the Pacific Games and other events, while unpredictable weather required changes to some research locations. In all instances the project was socialised to communities before the team's arrival, but a key lesson learned was that in-person socialisation is more effective than letters.

More than 50 separate focus group and key informant events were conducted, with at least 250 participants.

DSE identified the research locations - some well-known from past and existing relationships, others new with little previous contact with external researchers or development projects. While linear distance from town was not far in most cases, geography and travel costs made some locations functionally remote.

Reaching these locations required significant time, money and effort. Plans often had to be adapted on the fly, and individual interviews were sometimes opportunistic.

The research was conducted through one-on-one interviews in English or Pijin and in tok stori groups (focus groups) in a mix of languages. Venues included church and community halls, outdoor meeting areas, government offices, and DSE's office.

In communities, formal and informal leaders and actors were encouraged to participate, though all participation was voluntary. Participants comprised a cross-section of community and government leaders, elders, committee members, youth leaders and other interested individuals, both men and women. Two tok stori groups with people with disabilities were conducted in Honiara.

Data collection

Data was collected through tok stori (focus group) or local informant (key informant) interviews, with most discussions lasting 1-3 hours. Tok stori data was collected by a dedicated note taker and supplemented with audio recordings. Local informant interviews were one-on-one, recorded and reviewed later. Some photos were taken with participants' permission. All participants gave informed consent and indicated their preference for anonymity or identification.

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[5]See annex for the full questionnaire in both languages.

Research venue in Verahue, Gudalcanal. The tok stori group used the unfinished Catholic church building while key informants were interviewed under the tree at right

Participants were invited to respond to the research questions in English or Pijin,. The teams found that it beneficial to vary the sequence of questions according to context, often asking question 4 (on communication) later in the process. The open-ended nature of the questions encouraged wide-ranging and reflective responses. Local informants were sometimes willing to share quite personal experiences and feelings, particularly relating to their experience of violence and community cohesion.

Data from each event was organised into data collection templates, which captured details, quotes, key issues and coded data points by theme.

Research visits varied from a few hours to overnight, depending on access. Shared meals were an important informal part of the process, providing valuable information and nuance.

Analysis

Data from each research event was transcribed in an Excel spreadsheet. Each data point was coded with an event code (eg 'K6.15' for a key informant interview in Western province (6)), basic demographic data (Male, Female, Youth, Group, Elder, Disability, Unknown), and the question number. Thematic coding was applied to categorise data by themes identified by the research team, guiding the report's structure. Responses can be analysed according to a number of different categorisations, such as location type (provincial capitals, peri-urban or village areas), providing further nuance. This report does not reflect the full range of possibilities for analysis.

Following data collection, the Solomon Islands team held workshops to initiate the analysis process. The first was a documentation workshop to begin adding data to the Excel sheets, The second was a writing workshop where the team brainstormed key issues from the data and started drafting individual report chapters. Due to limited time before the December 2023 project meeting in Adelaide, this brainstorming and writing occurred before documenting the data was completed. The brainstorming was in effect the first iteration of the grounded theory analysis.

Brainstorming key issues while the data collection was still fresh in the team's minds – but before documentation was complete – made a virtue of the predominantly Solomon Islander composition of the research team. From the earliest opportunity it is Solomon Islander people processing and communicating Solomon Islander experiences. The brainstorm enabled the team to appreciate the distinction between the data that it had gathered and the knowledge that had been acquired through the process. It is this knowledge that first shaped the key research themes, which were refined through close examination of the information that subsequently emerged when the data was analysed. As with the December 2022 meeting when the Situational Analysis was first presented, the December 2023 meeting – at which the team presented its working draft of this report – offered another opportunity to test these themes.

The research demonstrates a grounded theory approach. The initial ideas from the research team's brainstorm were refined through analysis and discussion both before and after the December meeting. The findings will be validated in 2024 as part of the second phase of the research.

Focus group in Kolgaru, Isabel

Learning from the research process

The research team has found this project challenging but highly rewarding. While focus groups and interviews are routine for DSE, team members were more involved in the project's design than usual. Rather than having the data taken away and written up by others, they retained responsibility for analysing and reporting on it.

The localisation approach allowed local staff to gain insights from a study involving researchers from design phase through to gathering and analysing the data. The transfer of knowledge and skills built the confidence of local researchers to share insights about effective practices in Solomon Islands, considering diverse locations, cultures and traditions.

Research ethics and protocols, mandated by Solomon Islands' research applications, required the team to reflect and gather everyone's views, upholding respect at all levels of engagement. Over the research period, trust and confidence grew among team members. Working with different groups of respondents also allowed the team to revisit and tailor the questions for the varying participants.

Collaborating with DSE has been rewarding and enlightening for Peacifica, aligning with their values around centering Pacific voices and facilitating Pacific expertise. Learning from team members about Solomon Islander ways of living was also enlightening and influenced the data analysis.

While overwhelmingly a positive experience, the project also highlighted challenges that can arise when working to make the research as collaborative as possible. This is not so much in the collaboration around designing the project as around other roles. There is a tension between the principles of collaboration and the realities of project management that warrants further consideration. Everyone wants to be part of the research process and has contributed to the design, but are there other ways to look at who has a say in the management of the project? What roles need to be maintained by certain parties, and which can be shared? What steps need to be taken at the outset to clarify when to collaborate and when to have defined roles? Could some components, like developing protocols, have been

RRP Stori bridge
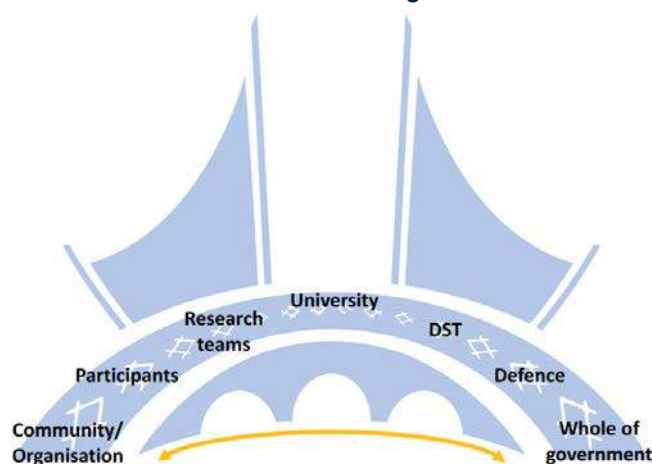
co-created from the ground up rather than following a draft-and-comment process if more time had been available?

A key lesson from this project is the potential of collaborative work to bring people and ideas into closer contact, bridging the gap between stakeholders without excluding anyone. In a traditional research project, an agency might contract a researcher who gathers information from people, analyses it and reports back to the agency. The agency might learn about the people's interests but is no closer to knowing them as people.

This research explores ways to bridge this gap between the subjects and those asking the questions. The 'stori bridge' pictured illustrates the different stakeholders and the full distance from

one end to the other. The project is reducing this distance by building a closer relationship between the research teams, the University and DST, and by creating opportunities for researchers to speak directly to Defence and even to other arms of government. DSE is also in direct contact with the Australian High Commission in Honiara. Moreover, this research carries the voice of rural people to the researchers and stakeholders.

In its next stages, the project has an opportunity to close the gap in the other direction too. Participants universally expressed strong wishes for feedback on this first phase of the research. It would be exciting and appropriate for representatives of the University and DST to participate in this process.

Extra-curricular data gathering at Munda wharf, Western

Understanding Vanuatu communities' perceptions: phase 1 summary report

Linda Kenni,
Kiery Manassah,
Ketty Napwatt,
Christina Thyna,
Maualaivao Maima Koro

This abridged summary presents key findings from research conducted in Vanuatu between September and November 2023, exploring local perceptions of security and stability as well as the impact of international diplomacy. Part of the broader Regional Perspectives Research Project, these insights aim to refine Australia's strategy in the Pacific, fostering a safer, more equitable, and prosperous region.

The findings are designed to inform the Australian Department of Defence and support the Australian Government's efforts to enhance engagement with the Pacific, especially following the 2018 'Pacific Step-Up' initiative. By incorporating diverse local perspectives, the report strives to better align Australia's contributions with the authentic needs and aspirations of Pacific communities.

The project is led by the University of Adelaide in partnership with teams from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and is supported by Australia's Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG). It aims to gather insights on how Pacific Islanders view security and stability, which is crucial for shaping Australia's engagement in the region.

The report adopts a collaborative approach developed with Pacific partners, highlighting local perspectives while minimising internal and external bias. It adheres to our jointly created Cultural Protocol, Data Collection, and Communication Plans, ensuring respect for local contexts and promoting transparency.

Using 'storian', a local storytelling method, as its primary data collection technique, the research captures and conveys Pacific stories about community changes, priorities and interactions with external actors, particularly Australia. These insights can guide Australian policymakers toward more informed, culturally sensitive and mutually beneficial strategies.

Acknowledgement
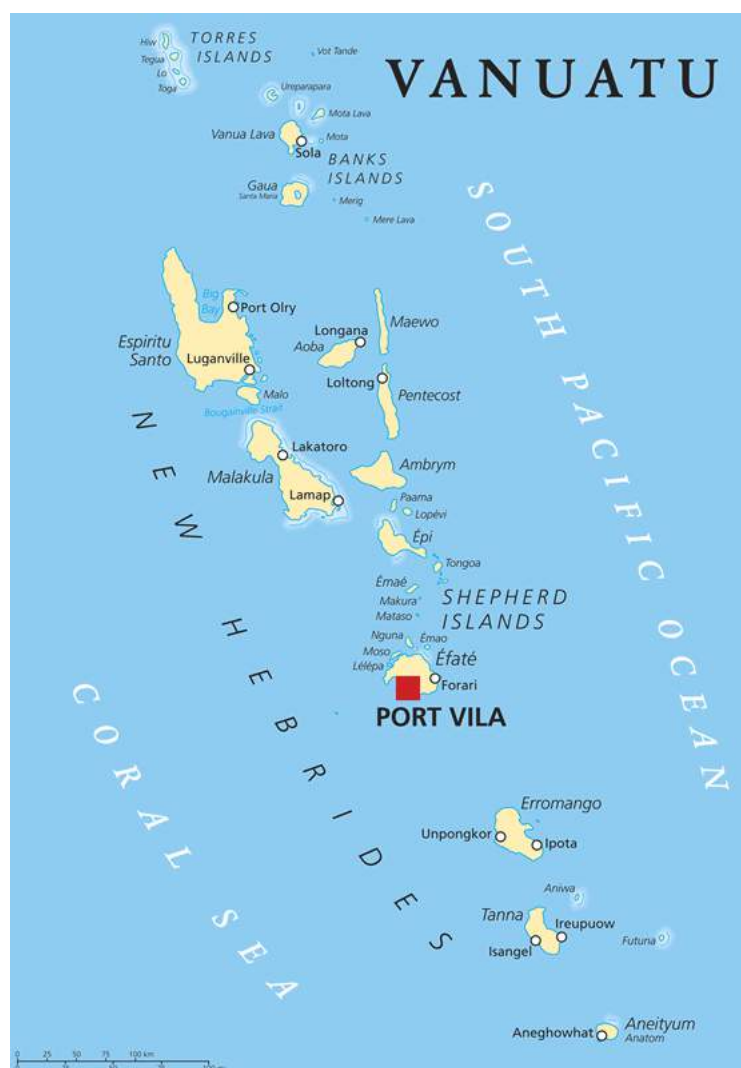
Summary points

- The findings highlight the significant role of 'Kastom' – local customs and traditions – in sustaining communities including governance across Vanuatu. These customs vary widely between communities and are essential in maintaining social cohesion.

- Persistent challenges in essential services such as education, health, water and transport are faced by communities across Vanuatu. Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of achieving improvements in these areas to advance development.

- Christian values deeply influence community life, guiding economic and security pursuits within a communal and collective societal framework.

- Both external labour mobility schemes and internal migration significantly impact community dynamics, altering traditional social and economic structures. Benefits include infrastructure improvements, such as the reconstruction of cyclone-damaged structures and building cyclone-proof concrete homes. However, these changes can also strain family ties and fragment communities.

- There is a critical need for improved service delivery in remote communities, highlighted by infrastructure challenges and limited government capacity. This is exacerbated by natural disasters like cyclones, which have a disproportionate impact on less-mobile populations.

- The entrepreneurial spirit, particularly among women, is strong, with many engaging in economic activities such as handicrafts and local markets to support their communities.

- Despite challenges, there is a strong sense of resilience and community effort. Local governance through traditional leaders and councils plays a crucial role in maintaining order and addressing community issues effectively.

- The presence of international actors like Australia and China is felt differently across communities. While some appreciate the immediate relief provided by foreign aid, others are critical of the long-term impacts and the perceived inequities in international relations.

- The data collection period overlapped with political instability, including multiple changes in prime ministership, which could influence the research outcomes by affecting participant perspectives on governance and international relations. Political instability is most felt in the capital Port Vila

- Data analysis was unique as it was conducted locally by Vanuatu team members, ensuring that insights were informed by direct interactions and cultural understanding.

Current information landscape

This report presents an unprecedented exploration into the perspectives of the people of Vanuatu, particularly their understanding of international engagements and their impacts on everyday life. Our research methodology was deliberately co-designed to directly engage with diverse community members through open-ended questions to prevent biases and genuinely capture local sentiments.

The insights included here stem from extensive fieldwork in various provinces, although logistical constraints prevented visits to Malampa and Penama. It is essential to recognise that the perspectives documented are specific to the visited communities and while they are possibly indicative, they do not necessarily represent broader national views.

Given Vanuatu's communal society, where relational values and kastom – a term from the local Bislama dialect encompassing a wide array of cultural norms and practices – significantly influence daily life[6], appreciating these local dynamics is crucial. These cultural contexts provide the framework through which the people of Vanuatu – referred to for the purposes of this report as Ni-Vanuatu – perceive their challenges, hopes and priorities.

This report offers a depth and breadth of insight previously unavailable. It provides policymakers and partners with invaluable information on the real effects of international relations on the daily lives of Ni-Vanuatu people, reaching beyond urban and commercial narratives. This foundational work paves the way for enriched future dialogues and engagements, particularly looking forward to the anticipated second phase of the study, which aims to include the regions not yet explored.

Local context at the time of data capture

Data collection for this study, conducted from September to November 2023, coincided with a period of intense political activity in Vanuatu, largely concentrated in the capital, Port Vila. During this time, the nation experienced significant governmental instability, marked by three motions of no confidence that led to the appointment of three different Prime Ministers in just a few months. The political scene reached a critical point when the Head of State intervened to avert a second dissolution of Parliament within 15 months, an unprecedented scenario in Vanuatu's history. This intervention aimed to establish a Government of National Unity, reminiscent of the pre-independence era in 1980, designed to foster cooperation across political divides.

The social and political climate during data collection is vital to understanding the responses gathered. Ongoing political instability might have shaped community perspectives on governance and external relations, particularly regarding their views on international engagement and local governance practices.

The environmental context was also challenging as the nation was recovering from the impacts of tropical cyclones Kevin and Judy, exacerbating the long-standing issues related to climate change and affecting the everyday lives of the Ni-Vanuatu.

These conditions provide essential context for the data collected, highlighting not only the resilience of the communities amidst political upheaval and environmental challenges, but also potentially influencing the perceptions and priorities expressed by the study participants.

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[6]https://researchrepository.rmit.edu.au/esploro/outputs/doctoral/Worlds-in-Collision-an-inquiry-into/9921864297901341

Photo: Linda Kenni

Historical context

From 1906 to 1980, Vanuatu, then known as New Hebrides, was uniquely governed by both France and the United Kingdom under a joint administration called a Condominium, often jokingly referred to as "Pandemonium". This arrangement created duplicate systems for health, education, policing, and legal services, including three distinct government systems and courts. This fragmented governance model presented significant challenges in the uniform delivery of services across the islands.

Upon gaining independence in 1980, Vanuatu embarked on a path toward establishing a cohesive, democratic state, seeking prosperity alongside other Pacific nations. Despite challenges such as COVID-19 and frequent cyclonic disruptions, Vanuatu has made notable international strides. In 2020, it graduated from being classified as a 'least developed' to a 'developing' country'[7], and has become a leading voice in the global fight against climate change and regional opposition to seabed mining in the Pacific[8].

Vanuatu's active participation in the Pacific Islands Forum and its role as a founding member and host of the Melanesia Spearhead Group[9] underscore its respected status in the region. The country's archipelago comprises 83 main islands, spanning more than 12,199 sq.km of land area[10], with Port Vila on Efate Island serving as the political and economic hub.

Understanding this historical and geopolitical backdrop is crucial for contextualising the data captured in this research, as it reflects the ongoing evolution of Vanuatu's social, economic, and political landscapes, which continue to influence the perceptions and realities of its citizens.
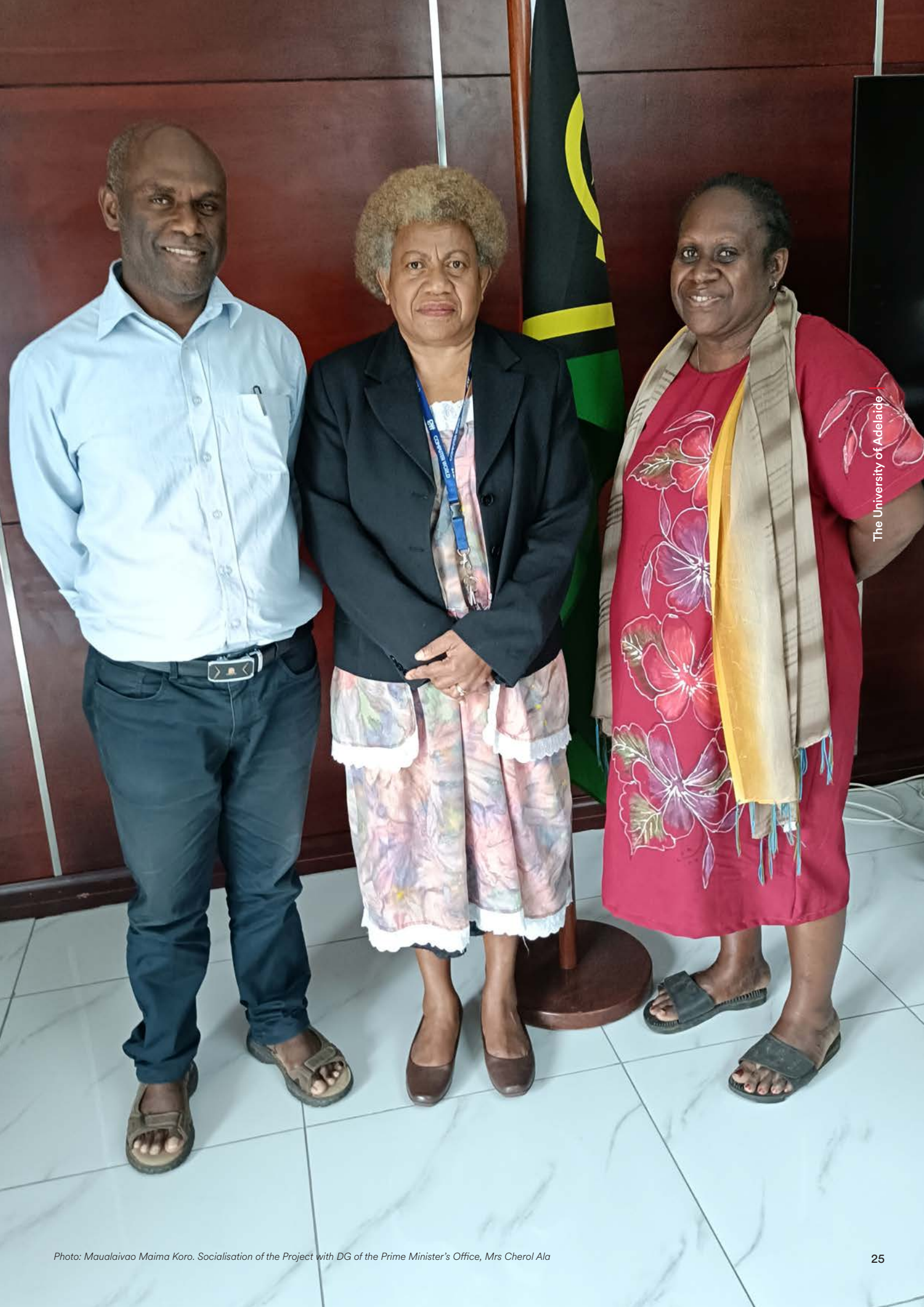
[7]https://unctad.org/news/vanuatu-graduates-least-developed-country-status

[8]https://docc.gov.vu/

[9]https://msgsec.info/

[10]https://www.gov.vu/index.php/about/about-vanuatu

Photo: Maualaivao Maima Koro. Erakor

Photo: Maualaivao Maima Koro. Socialisation of the Project with DG of the Prime Minister's Office, Mrs Cherol Ala

Key thematic areas

The following outlines the key thematic areas identified through detailed individual and collaborative analysis. Critically, these areas are interconnected – each influencing and complementing the others:

Mobility

In this report, 'mobility' encompasses both externally funded labour-mobility schemes and internal migration, notably in Australia, New Zealand, and Vanuatu. These programs have profound impacts on communities, eliciting both advantageous and adverse effects. About half of the surveyed individuals shared their experiences with labour-mobility schemes, including New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme and Australia's Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, which includes the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS). While a minority reported favourable feedback, they primarily highlighted improvements in living standards and economic opportunities.

Current context

The labour-mobility schemes have led to notable improvements in community infrastructure and economic conditions. For instance, workers have pooled resources to rebuild essential structures like churches, devastated by natural disasters. Economic uplift is also evident as returnees invest in housing and start new businesses, visibly transforming their villages. However, these schemes also pose significant social challenges. Family and educational dynamics often shift, with many children growing up under the care of grandparents or relatives, which can affect their social and moral development. Additionally, the schemes often split families, leading to increased marital strife and fragmented communities. Consequently, some young people devalue education, opting instead to join the scheme to seek financial independence.

Key considerations

- Labour-mobility schemes could address the social disruptions they cause, particularly concerning the impact on family structures and community cohesion.
- While economic benefits are clear, they should be balanced with the social costs, particularly the effects on children's upbringing and community integrity. The programme needs to be depoliticised as it has, and will continue to be, a serious security concern if not properly mediated.
- Efforts are needed to enhance educational outreach to ensure younger generations value formal education and are not solely reliant on seasonal work for income.
- Policies must also focus on those left behind, such as the less literate, elderly, and women, ensuring they receive adequate support during community crises.
- Improved data-collection methods are needed to help in planning and implementing interventions more effectively, particularly in disaster recovery.
- The implications of internal migration for urban areas should be addressed, especially the pressures on land use and social services due to increased population density.

"For a major government project targeting COVID-19 recovery we have to work with females now heading their households in backyard gardening ventures, recruitment of participants has been a challenge. In Santo three out of five participants recruited have left for seasonal work in Australia and NZ. While seasonal work has its monetary value, it destabilises the community labour force. One cannot find good builders anymore. If you are lucky, you will get one, but they can be expensive and may not provide the same quality of job. Increasing labour costs for low-quality jobs. There are not enough people in the communities anymore to either develop the land or do community work such as repairing or build houses after cyclones. A community in Erromango has had to recall their RSE workers travelling from Port Vila to return to the island and repair damaged houses before leaving for seasonal work. Not only that, the RSE is also causing brain drains where communities are losing key people like teachers and nurses. Given that the RSE is attracting many, including the educated few, when there is a disaster, ground assessments are a challenge because there is no one to conduct proper assessments on behalf of the communities."

Community member, Port Vila

Photo: DB Talap. North Tanna roads

Photo: Linda Kenni. Focus group Tanna

Essential services

Participants from various communities highlighted significant challenges in accessing essential services like education, water, health and transportation. The predominant concern centres around government service delivery, hindered by capacity limitations and logistical issues. These deficiencies are felt across the population, including those with special needs, and are exacerbated by infrastructural weaknesses and geographic isolation.

Current context

Challenges in service delivery are most acute in remote areas like Torba and Tafea provinces, where residents face sporadic NGO assistance and unreliable transportation, crucial for basic supplies and access to markets. The situation is dire in Futuna, where residents struggle with limited agricultural land due to its geological make up and delayed shipping, severely affecting food supply and economic stability. Efforts by local communities often supplement these gaps, with initiatives led by chiefs and church leaders due to mistrust in elected officials. Meanwhile, some communities like Mangaliliu and Pango have seen improvements in infrastructure over the decades, with better roads and electricity access, illustrating some success in government outreach and local initiatives.

Key considerations

- Enhancing the capability of local services would meet community needs more effectively, especially in remote areas.

- Investing in critical infrastructure improvements, particularly in transportation and utilities, would facilitate better service delivery.

- Accelerating Governmental decentralisation is advised to improve service accessibility, ensuring local councils are adequately resourced and empowered.

- Strengthening trust and collaboration between communities and elected officials would enhance the effectiveness of local governance.

- A focus on long-term, sustainable solutions would address service gaps, such as reliable water sources and energy options like solar power.

- Robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating service delivery are recommended to ensure transparency and accountability.

- Community resilience would be increased by supporting adaptive measures and preparedness for natural disasters, reflecting the harsh realities of climate impact.

"Since the establishment of the Area Council Office, we have reduced the cost of travelling to Tanna for birth registration and other main services. We are working with any partner/stakeholder on the ground to ensure no duplication of activities of development on the ground. [A]s the Area Administrator, we are the ears and eyes of the government in the area...We know our population, their priority needs and their challenges. We even know the risk of each community. We assist any agency (Government or NGO) who visit this island to provide assistance to our people."

Public Official, Aneityum

Kastom

Vanuatu boasts a rich, varied and evolving culture known as kastom. It profoundly influences daily life, embodying the core of how Ni-Vanuatu people experience their world. The concept of kastom is integral to community life, offering a framework for governance and social interaction that is deeply respected across the islands.

Current context

Kastom's role in providing security and upholding social order was evident across all research sites. Traditional governance, particularly through the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, is recognised not just as

a cultural institution but as a formal system of governance. This system plays a crucial role in dispute resolution and community cohesion, as evidenced during significant events such as the peaceful demands from Tafea chiefs to the French Prime Minister in 2023. They sought acknowledgement of the Keamu Declaration, which recognised Vanuatu's customary ownership of the Hunter and Mathew islands, central to a longstanding maritime border dispute with France. Kastom encourages unity and familial bonds among diverse language and church groups, which is essential for maintaining peace and security within communities.

Key considerations

- More could be done to ensure the ongoing recognition and respect for kastom to maintain cultural integrity as Vanuatu evolves.

- Embedding traditional governance structures like the Council of Chiefs system within the broader governmental framework would better leverage their local authority and knowledge.

- Unity could be fostered through kastom, promoting a sense of security and belonging across |diverse community groups.

- Traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution should be appropriately utilised to address community issues effectively and maintain social order.

- Encouraging education about kastom across generations would prevent cultural dilution and ensure its principles are upheld.

- It is recommended that kastom practices be monitored and adapted through collaborative processes to remain relevant and supportive of modern community needs while respecting traditional values.

"Other countries if they come, they must know about the situation of our community. They must know about our difficulties and our challenges. If they come, they must know about how we live."

Torba community member

Christianity

Christianity is a fundamental aspect of Vanuatu's societal framework, deeply embedded within the nation's culture and values. The country's motto, "In God we stand", and the Constitution's preamble, which highlights Christian principles, underscore this integration. The influence of Christianity extends beyond spiritual guidance, playing a crucial role in the cultural and moral development of the communities across the nation.

Current context

The historical impact of Christianity began with early missionary efforts in the 1850s, which were pivotal in transformative social changes, such as the cessation of cannibalism and witchcraft. Today, churches in Vanuatu are central to community life, acting not just as places of worship but also as local governance hubs. The story of missionaries from the London Society in 1945, and the subsequent reconciliation

Nupraintata AC - R. Tasi

in 2011, illustrates the enduring legacy of these early influences. The annual Gospel Day Celebration on 1 May symbolises this historical and ongoing connection, incorporating government acknowledgment and participation in these religious celebrations.

Key considerations

- Maintaining the integration of Christian values with local customs (kastom) would support the cohesiveness and moral grounding of communities.
- Celebrating the historical contributions of Christianity through events like Gospel Day can reinforce community identity and values.
- Encouraging religious education that respects and incorporates Christian values into the broader cultural context of Vanuatu is recommended.
- Strengthening church infrastructure would ensure it can serve the dual roles in governance and worship, particularly in disaster-prone areas.
- When leveraging churches for community governance, it's important to ensure that this system remains inclusive and representative of all community members.
- Supporting and promoting community-driven initiatives organised by church groups fosters a sense of agency and development within local frameworks.

"Our hopes are that there are opportunities to build harmonious communities and to do that we would need to work with churches and individual households. The church is an important institution that can mould behaviours of its members. We value a peaceful community and without building the structures now, the future will be at risk. Church and Chiefs know their people very well and they can easily resolve an issue at their levels."

Teouma community member

Photo: Maualaivao Maima Koro. Team Vanuatu

Resilience spirit

The people of Vanuatu exhibit a profound resilience that is not only crucial for navigating the nation's frequent natural disasters but also for overcoming various development challenges. This resilience is vividly demonstrated through inspiring stories of communal strength and entrepreneurial spirit, particularly among women who are central to economic and cultural sustainability across the communities.

Current context

Numerous examples from different communities highlight the resilient spirit prevalent across Vanuatu. In Efate, a former assistant chief's efforts in backyard gardening and hosting cultural feasts demonstrate perseverance despite natural adversities. In Torba, Sanma, and Tafea, residents have embraced agriculture and formed networks to boost economic and social resilience. The entrepreneurial endeavours of women, from handicraft markets in Aneityum to savings and loan schemes in Malo, illustrate a shift towards self-reliance and community-led development. These activities not only bolster economic independence but also fortify community bonds and cultural heritage.

Key considerations

- Strengthening community initiatives that promote economic independence and cultural preservation is recommended.
- Amplifying support for women's economic activities would better recognise their role in community resilience and development.

- Enhancing local infrastructure to withstand natural disasters will support the communities' self-sufficiency efforts.
- Encouraging diverse economic pursuits that respect and integrate traditional practices and modern opportunities is recommended.
- Improved access to reliable information through community networks, radio, and digital platforms – tailoring to the varied needs and preferences across generations – is needed.
- Fostering robust mechanisms for disaster preparedness and response, leveraging local knowledge and leadership, is recommended.
- Community governance structures, such as councils and churches, could be utilised to disseminate important information and coordinate efforts in resilience building.

"Information in the community is shared through church announcements, through Fb [Facebook] and sms phone messages and they are very reliable sources to use. Community people are interest in a lot of different kinds of information, and as echoed by the Area Administrator they live away from many islands and ship visits them once in 5 to 6 months and flights into the island is once a week. These people will need as many information as they can for different things."

Futuna FDG participant

External relations

Community awareness of international involvement in Vanuatu highlights complex and mixed perceptions. Participants recognise the presence of various international NGOs and partner countries, often blurring the distinction between these entities and their specific programs. Notably, Australia is appreciated for its prompt disaster response, whereas relationships with other countries, like New Zealand and China, are seen through the lens of cultural ties and infrastructural investments.

Current context

Community narratives often include interactions with missionaries, tourists, and international aid programs, reflecting a broad spectrum of external engagement. Australia's role as a first responder to natural disasters is well-regarded, particularly among women benefiting from socio-economic programs like Vanwood and ActionAid. Discussions about establishing a sister-island relationship with New Zealand indicate a desire for closer cultural and developmental ties. However, there is frustration with the bureaucratic aspects of international relations, such as visa processes, and a critical view of the quality of Chinese products and their impact on local businesses.

Key considerations

- Community understanding of the roles and distinctions between different international actors and their initiatives needs improvement.

- Cultural and economic ties with countries like Australia and New Zealand could be explored and strengthened in a more balanced way to preserve social harmony while recognising shared histories and potential mutual benefits.

- International aid benefits from being responsive, respectful and tailored to the actual needs of the communities, and not one-size-fits-all.

- It is recommended that visible and direct involvement of international partners at the community level is encouraged to enhance their presence and impact beyond capital cities.

- More accessible visa processes would facilitate easier movement for Vanuatu's citizens, especially those from grassroots levels.

- It is advised that concerns about the quality of products and services provided by international businesses, particularly Chinese firms, and their competition with local enterprises are addressed.

- Focussing international aid on practical and usable solutions, such as providing seaworthy search and rescue boats, rather than symbolic gestures, would better meet local needs.

"There is a plan to have a sister-island relationship with New Zealand and that it is something that is being discussed with their big men in Port Vila. This was something that came up due to the fact that they have some similarities in cultures and that they may have originated from Polynesia or New Zealand. This is still in discussion and the big men in Futuna gladly welcome the idea because they see this relationship as a tie, they can benefit from seeing they are a tiny island that is still struggling to develop to a stage where they can become like other islands like Tanna. The NGOs and other government departments come in during disaster response work which is now a common thing even though not all our needs are being met on time, but they are still appreciated. I believe that Vanuatu is friends to all and enemies to none. I am aware that China is here in Vanuatu building roads in some islands such as Pentecost and Tanna."

Public official, Tanna

Photo: Linda Kenni

Appendix: Project methodology

This study is a collaboration between the University of Adelaide (the University), the Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) and Ni-Vanuatu researchers.

The methodology was collaboratively designed over a period of eight months through virtual conversations, a mixed delivery workshop (online and in-person), and two face-to-face workshops in Adelaide. Our approach was guided by the project's Cultural Protocol[11] and Communications Plan.[12]

Socialisation

To adhere to ethical values such as transparency, respect, and 'do no harm', we aimed to seek common goals and build trust through socialisation. This involved taking time and space to build trust and reflect broadly on collaboration. Our approach was grounded in transparency, respect (acknowledging the participants' ownership of their knowledge and ways of knowing), use of culturally appropriate tools and protocols, and – above all – the principal of 'do no harm'. Socialisation was key to adopting these principles and legitimising the project in Vanuatu, following due protocols and demonstrating respect and transparency.

The project was socialised both informally and formally with the High Commissioner of Vanuatu, HE Samson Fare, who verbally relayed his support. Team Vanuatu also held socialisation meetings with politicians, senior government officials, Area Administrators, community representatives and chiefs. It must

be noted that the political situation in Vanuatu impacted socialisation efforts. Without careful socialisation, project implementation could have been challenging.

Pacific methodological approaches and tools such as consensus building[13], the Samoan consultative principle of soālaupule[14], similar to the concept of nini pari-ien (to tell/say/plan together) in the Nafe dialect of Tanna, or nolwasan (cooperation, collaboration) in the Netvar dialect of Lenakel, and the Vanuatu storytelling tool 'storian'[15] were key features of our methodology. These tools were essential for achieving consensus and navigating team dynamics, including data collection.

We emphasised building relationships through consensus and understanding. By investing in building trust and respectful engagement, we hoped to duplicate these values during fieldwork. Regular virtual meetings and three workshops in Adelaide in July (semi-virtual) and September and December 2022 (face-to-face) tested the design, our collaborative assumptions, and the rules of engagement. The workshops

also provided important opportunities to develop the research objectives and ensure our research project was new and does not duplicate previous efforts. These formal activities, complemented by ongoing dialogue led by the University team, helped cement the 'spirit of trust' crucial for the successful implementation of this phase of the project. We wanted the study to be a true 'co-creation', genuine and clear of biases, fears, or our own skepticism.

Each member of the research team (DSTG, UoA, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and the Australian researchers) had the opportunity to develop their own research objectives. Through a collaborative process of elimination (objectives we collectively decided were outside of the scope of the project) and inclusion (objectives aligned to the project), 15 individual objectives were refined to three broad objectives over a period of about three months. This co-creation with Pacific partners was unique, and invaluable to the overall goal of building trustful relationships and managing expectations sensitively.

Acknowledging the diversity of our collaboration, as well as Melanesian research approaches, we also used the Samoan consultative mechanism soālaupule. Soa means 'two or more people,' lau means 'you or yours,' and pule means 'authority or power'[16] . The principle empowers people to contribute to decision-making, acknowledging their authority to engage in the decision-making process. The ideas and outcomes are collectively shared and owned. Team Vanuatu also provided valuable insights for determining research sites and selecting participants, and led data collection, analysis and report writing. This collaboration marked the first time our researchers were engaged as valued research experts.

Out of respect for the participants and the Vanuatu context, the team used a local method of communication known as storian to seek knowledge.[17] Storian – a widely used relational mode of communication through storytelling – made participants comfortable in sharing their knowledge. Communities gifted their stories in their own environments; for example, in their homes, under the cover of trees, in their offices, and some in their gardens.

Due to its colonial history, Vanuatu has three official languages – English, French and Bislama. All languages are constitutionally endorsed.[18] Bislama was the language used for data collection as it is used universally.[19]

With multiple stakeholders involved, three ethical approvals were required and obtained from the University of Adelaide, the Government of Vanuatu and DSTG data collection commenced. The research ethics were complemented by a Cultural Protocol and Communications Plan, including a public website hosted by the University of Adelaide, which enhanced the 'spirit of trust' with stakeholders.[20]

Socialisation efforts by Team Vanuatu and these mechanisms were vital in securing support from customary and political leaders, including government officials.

[11]https://www.adelaide.edu.au/stretton/ua/media/679/regional-perspectives-project-cultural-protocol-for-website-10-march-2023_0.pdf

[12]https://www.adelaide.edu.au/stretton/ua/media/676/regional-perspectives-project-communication-plan-for-website-10-march-2023.pdf

[13]Tago, T., K. (2022). The Talatalaga Research Methodology: A Qualitative Research Approach, Australia National University, Department of Pacific Affairs, In brief 2022/14, DOI: 10.25911/5N1B-P566.

[14]Tuafuti P (2010) Additive bilingual education: Unlocking the culture of silence. Mai Review 1:1-14.

[15]It is a common Melanesian mode of conversation commonly known in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea as tok stori. Sanga K. and Reynolds M. (2021) 'Bringing research back home: exploring Indigenous Melanesian tok stori as ontology', AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples 17(4):532-542. doi:10.1177/11771801211058342 https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.12838157.v1

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[18]https://parliament.gov.vu/images/pdf/constitution.pdf

[19]https://vnso.gov.vu/index.php/en/7-home

[20]https://www.adelaide.edu.au/stretton/our-research/security-in-the-pacific-islands

1. Socialisation

4. Findings

Methodology

2. Data Collection

3. Analysis

Photo: Linda Kenni

Collection

To achieve the research objectives, seven key questions were tailored specifically for storian with focus groups and key informant interviews (Annexe 1). The storian method, characterised by semi-structured and flexible questions, invited participants to 'gift'[21] their stories and realities in their own way and on their own terms.[22]

Following our research ethics and acknowledging diversity of views in Vanuatu, the research team ensured participants included people from remote provincial areas, urban, peri-urban, and rural communities. Accordingly, data was collected from across Vanuatu: the northern provinces of Torba and Sanma, Tafea in the south, and six locations in Efate (Freshwater, Erakor, Eton, Mangaliliu, Pango, and Teouma). These communities were chosen for their diversity and high population numbers.

Participants were mainly selected based on the team's areas of expertise and networks. For example, Kiery Manassah led the interface and selection of participants from the public sector given his expertise of the sector.

Engagement with provincial and area council communities was led by the Linda Kenni and Ketty Napwatt, while Christina Thyna facilitated the liaison and selection of participants in the urban and peri-urban areas.

After a delay in the project, fieldwork started in September 2023. Linda Kenni commenced her fieldwork in the southern communities of the Tafea province in the islands of Tanna, Futuna, Aneityum, and Erromango, then visited the island of Malo in the Sanma province in the north. Ketty Napwatt resides in Torba, and as such collected information from remote communities there. Data collection in the island of Efate in the Shefa province was conducted individually and as a team:

- Mangaliliu, Eton (Linda Kenni, Kiery Manassah, Christina Thyna and Linda Kenni (Mangaliliu, Eton)
- Erakor (Linda Kenni)
- Pango, Teouma, Freshwater, Seaside (Christina Thyna)
- Public Sector (Kiery Manassah, Christina Thyna, Maima Koro)

Interisland travel was challenging due to unreliable boat and plane schedules. Fieldwork during the cyclone period also affected interisland transport. This was an issue identified by the team but could not be avoided. A planned visit to Sanma by Maima Koro in November 2023 was cancelled because of cyclone risks.

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[21]Upolu Lumā Vaai - the idea of knowledge ownership is the fact that knowledge cannot be 'collected' (as in data collection) but rather a 'given' only to be gifted when the community trust the one who is doing the research.

[22]Vaioleti, Timote (2006) 'Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research', Waikato Journal of Education 12: 21-34.

Table 1: Data collection map

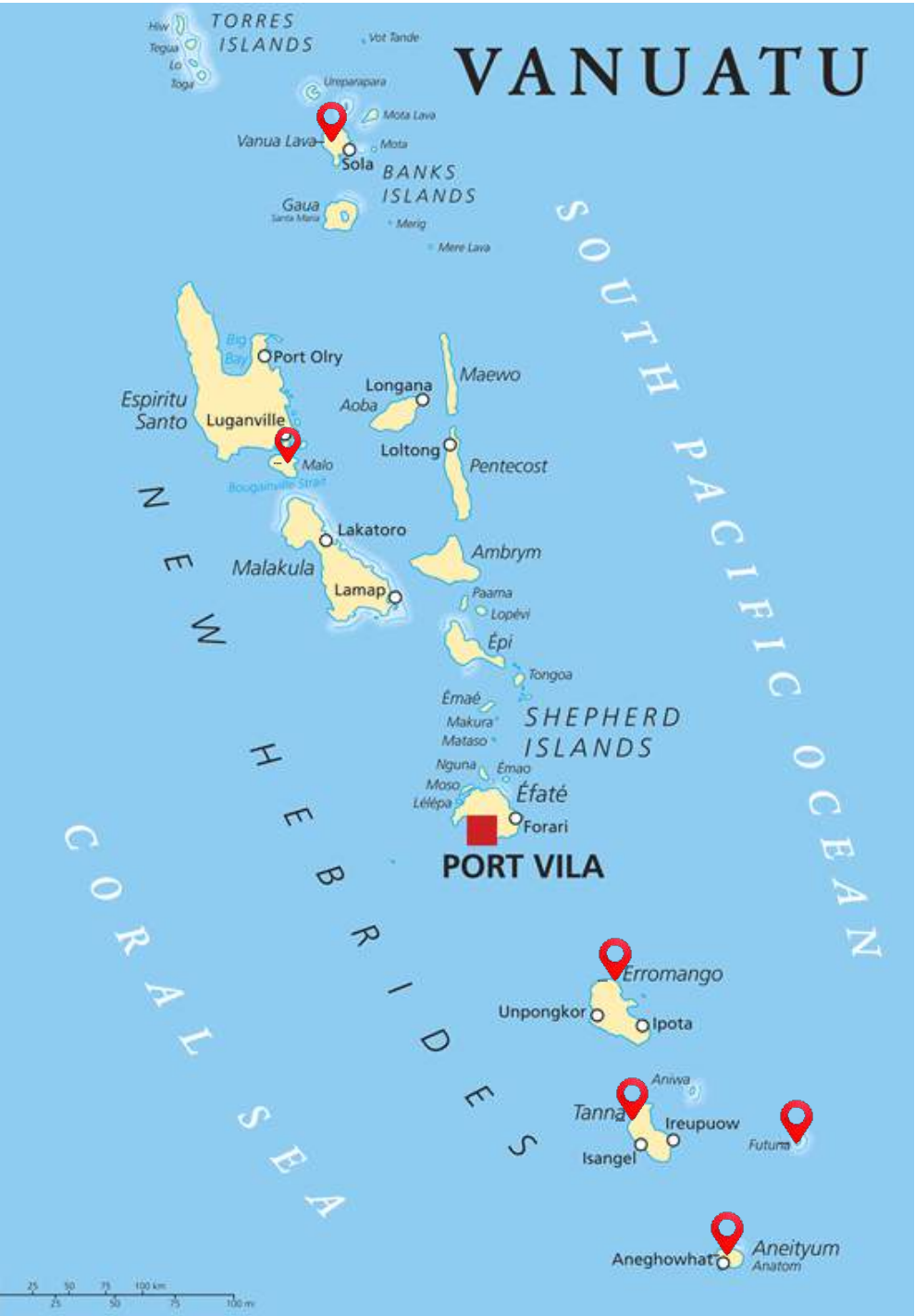The marked points on this map represent data collection locations.

Table 2: Research Data

TAFEA Province	Groups	Person	Gender			Totals
			M	F	Unknown	
Tanna		2	1	1		2
	1				45	
Aneityum		5	4	1		5
Futuna		2	1	1		2
	2			5	6	11
Erromango	1			7		7
Subtotal	**4**	**9**	**6**	**15**	**51**	**72**
SHEFA Province						
Erakor		1		1		1
Eton		1	1			1
	2		45	13		58
Mangaliliu		7	3	4		7
	1		1	8		9
Freshwater		5	3	2		5
	1		5			5
Teouma		10	7	3		10
	2		8	1		9
Pango		5	3	2		5
USP Law Students	1				9	9
Seaside		1	1			1
Public Sector	2		6	3		9
		2	2			2
Subtotal	**9**	**32**	**85**	**37**	**9**	**131**
SANMA Province						
Malo		1	1			1
	2	10	10		25	35
Subtotal	**2**	**11**	**11**		**25**	**36**
TORBA Province						
Vanua Lava		6	5	1		6
	3		5		30	35
Subtotal	**3**	**6**	**10**	**1**	**30**	**41**
Overall Total	**18**	**58**	**112**	**53**	**115**	**280**

Photo: Ketty Napwatt

Analysis

Participants from across Vanuatu 'gifted' their stories to the research team. Of the 280 participants, 19% were recorded as women. However, this percentage does not account for the number of women in mixed focussed groups, as gender could not be disaggregated.

A total of 18 focus groups and 58 **storians** with individuals were completed. These included people from remote communities in north and south of Vanuatu, as well as urban, peri-urban and rural communities in the Shefa province. Participants included customary leaders, landowners, church elders and representatives, women leaders and women's groups, area council representatives, youths, public sector officials, retailers, small business owners, and one participant from the disability sector.

Most **storians** were conducted by individual team members, especially outside Efate. As such, making sense of the data was a two-step process: (i) individual analysis by each member; and (ii) collaborative analysis through a workshop in Port Vila. Individual analysis was important because team members understood the full context of the **storians**, having heard them firsthand and observing the community. As one team member highlighted, "For me, doing the analysis was important because it gives that extra flavor to understanding the people through me, and then sharing to outsiders what I heard from the people and what I think it means for them". In being reflexive and acknowledging each member's positionality, the collaborative workshop allowed the team to test their analyses and identify key themes. One team member reflected that "it was a really good exercise because it made me make sense of what I collected and begin to understand the frustrations they have or feel the warmth they have when they talk about something good. Also doing the analysis made me really picture what people were going through and I was able to work out in most cases or in responses why they were saying that. Not only that, doing the analysis helped me come to understand what many of these communities are going through".

The collaboration also gave local researchers the unique opportunity to use their expertise in analysing the data, a departure from previous studies where external parties outside of Vanuatu with little contextual knowledge analysed the data.

As well as the individual and collective workshop, text analysis was undertaken using QuestionsPro software, complementing a spreadsheet the team used to record data. It must be noted that the workshop was severely disrupted when a member had a serious accident on the first day. Being reflexive, the text analysis was a useful tool in scrutinising the individual and collective themes identified by the team. Text analyses reflected the key thematical findings.

It is important to note that the findings of this report are descriptive, not interpretive. This aligns with the spirit of this project which was to amplify Pacific people's perspectives. Therefore, this report foregrounds participants' voices and perspectives. Whilst Bislama was used in the data collection, the language in this report accurately reflects the words used by the participants, avoiding policy speak. It is crucial to report these perspectives authentically to respect the voices of the participants.

Photo to right: Linda Kenni

Kaurna acknowledgement
We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kaurna people, the original custodians of the Adelaide Plains and the land on which the University of Adelaide's campuses at North Terrace, Waite, and Roseworthy are built. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the Kaurna people to country and we respect and value their past, present and ongoing connection to the land and cultural beliefs. The University continues to develop respectful and reciprocal relationships with all Indigenous peoples in Australia, and with other Indigenous peoples throughout the world.