Solomon Islands: Senior Secondary Education Improvement Project

Project Name: Senior Secondary Education Improvement Project
Project Number: 55050-002
Country / Economy: Solomon Islands
Project Status: Proposed
Project Type / Modality of Assistance: Grant
Source of Funding / Amount:
- **Grant: Senior Secondary Education Improvement Project**
  - Asian Development Fund: US$ 35.00 million
  - Ireland Trust Fund for Building Climate Change and Disaster Resilience in Small Island Developing States: US$ 700,000.00
- **Loan: Senior Secondary Education Improvement Project**
  - Concessional ordinary capital resources lending: US$ 10.00 million

Operational Priorities:
- OP1: Addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities
- OP2: Accelerating progress in gender equality
- OP3: Tackling climate change, building climate and disaster resilience, and enhancing environmental sustainability
- OP6: Strengthening governance and institutional capacity

Sector / Subsector:
- Education / Secondary
- Public sector management / Public administration

Gender:
- Gender equity theme

Description:
The Government of Solomon Islands has requested assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to strengthen senior secondary education to build climate and disaster resilience. It will achieve this by reforming the curriculum in years 10-12 by making it more practical and equipping students with the necessary foundational skills for continuous learning and future employment, focusing on skills and jobs that foster resilience. The project will update and construct new climate-resilient facilities at 10 schools and strengthen management. It will also address barriers and challenges girls face piloting innovative gender-transformative activities and implementing a leadership and management program for aspiring female educators.
High climate and disaster risk. Solomon Islands is highly vulnerable to disasters and climate change, ranking second highest globally for disaster risk in 2021. Positioned along the Pacific cyclone belt and Ring of Fire, the country is susceptible to various extreme weather and climate hazards (cyclones, riverine floods, king tides, and droughts, as well as landslides, storm surges, landslides, earthquakes, and tsunamis). The country's islands comprise towering volcanic mountains and tiny low-lying atolls. About 60% of the population resides within 1 kilometer from the coast, and is exposed to sea level rise. Between 1970-2021, the country experienced 29 major disasters, primarily extreme weather and climate-related hazards. These have affected rural population, particularly women, by increasing their social vulnerabilities and dependence on subsistence agriculture. Recurrent disasters have caused the loss of housing, disrupted livelihoods, and worsened living conditions, pushing vulnerable communities into poverty and eroding their social resilience. Informal settlements are growing due to rapid urbanization, straining local resources and services. Climate change is expected to accelerate migration displacement and by 2050, 3%-5% of the population. ADB recognizes Solomon Islands as a small island developing state in a fragile and conflict-affected situation. It has experienced episodes of civil unrest and conflicts. Although significant progress has been made in restoring stability, inclusive growth, and uneven development remain critical challenges addition to the country's vulnerability to climate change. The population has inadequate workforce skills to support vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and infrastructure, due to limited education. There is a need to improve quality and relevance across the education system. For senior secondary education, the curriculum needs revision to incorporate climate change content (such as ecosystems-based adaptation, social vulnerability, climate economics, disaster preparedness, and resilient agriscience concepts) and build foundational skills (such as scientific literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and data literacy). This can support workforce diversification into more climate-resilient and adaptive areas of employment, such as regenerative farming and agroecology, ecotourism, renewable energy, and green construction.

Gender inequality, social exclusion, and the role of education. Gender inequality also poses a significant issue, limiting women's employment and income generation. Women's decision-making is constrained and varies based on age, education, and employment status example. women with post-secondary education are more likely to have a say in decision-making than those with limited education. While women and ethnic minorities have full political rights by law, discrimination hampers their political opportunities. Socio-taboo exist around discussing domestic violence, rape, and child abuse. Gender-based violence and sexual exploitation are prevalent issues. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of women aged 15-49 years have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Around 77% of women and 57% of men believe that a husband is justified in hitting or beating a wife under certain circumstances (footnote 16). However, the acceptance of such violence decreases with higher levels of education (footnote 17). Approximately 91% of girls are married before age 18, and 21% of women are married before age 15 (footnote 18). Cultural expectations dictate that girls fulfill household responsibilities in addition to their schoolwork, with girls spending 75% more time on household chores than boys. About 16% of men and 17% of women live with some form of disability, often with reduced opportunities for education and employment. Low participation in education and learning system comprises child labor and high unemployment. The education system lacks qualified and diversified training opportunities, and tertiary education institutions. The completion of secondary school is a challenge for most young people. In 2019, only 12% of girls and 14% of boys who started primary school finished year 12. Most students end their schooling at year 9, with only 32% of students enrolling in senior secondary years. Students face various barriers, such as favor and socioeconomic conditions, including limited school spaces, poor infrastructure, and more girls drop out than boys. Harmful gender norms, bullying, and gender-based violence are contributing factors. Roughly 44% of the girls who leave school do so because they are pregnant, and their decision is influenced by school regulations, societal norms, and social stigma (footnote 17). Students have limited understanding of sexual and reproductive health and inadequate access to contraceptives. In some families, women and girls education is prioritized based on the perception that in the future they will provide care for elderly parents. At the same time, girls are expected to marry and care for their husband's family (footnote 17). These challenges contribute to the low completion rates in secondary education and low participation rates in tertiary education. Students with disabilities face social stigma and negative attitudes, making them less likely to attend school (footnote 17). Consequently, youth unemployment is at 35%. Secondary education completion rates are further affected by disasters, including droughts, floods, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, and earthquakes, which have led to school closures and learning disruptions caused by damage, water shortages, and the repurposing of schools as community evacuation centers.

Poor quality of senior secondary education. Senior secondary education faces three critical challenges: low learning quality, limited access and inadequate learning environment. The curricula taught in years 10-12 have not been updated for more than 30 years, and focuses on academic subjects required for university, neglecting practical applications for students not pursuing higher education. The content does not adequately address gender stereotypes, and education on gender equality is limited. Poor teaching quality leads to weak learning outcomes. The National Adaptation Programmes of Action emphasize the need to develop new curricula and train teachers to integrate climate change and disaster risk reduction. Quality of secondary school infrastructure. Insufficient school places in years 10-12 constrain the country's future skilled workforce. Due to inadequate infrastructure in all nine provinces and the capital Honiara, only 52% of public secondary schools offer education up to year 12. Many secondary schools lack running water and sanitation facilities. The absence of working bathrooms and showers often forces girls and boys to travel long distances or use a river or beach. During menstruation, girls sometimes miss classes, causing them to fall behind in their studies (footnote 17). Where schools lack infrastructure, many classrooms and dormitories face overcrowding, prompting students attending school due to inaccessible facilities and transport issues (only 54% of people with disabilities complete primary school, and only 2% complete secondary school). School infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to climate events and disasters (footnote 23). Investing in resilient assets (such as enhanced drainage, storm protection, flood protection, ventilation, and cooling) and strengthening school infrastructure and reduce class disruption due to natural hazard events such as droughts and storms. Weak school-based curriculum and evaluation reform require attention, implementing the climate-resilient economy requires teachers, management and school leadership improvements. Many principals have outdated leadership and management styles, insufficient understanding of future climate change impacts, and inadequate capacity to create long-term school development and maintenance plans. Weak school-based rules do not prevent bullying and harassment of teachers and students (girls and boys), including sexual harassment. Although teachers may be aware of these incidents, they often lack the skills to manage such behavior. Misconduct can negatively impact academic performance, contributing to dropout rates of girls and boys (footnote 17). There are gender disparities in teaching and management staff, with twice as many men teaching years 10-12. Teachers require support in adopting new teaching methods and implementing the curriculum effectively. Many leaders lack the knowledge and skills to promote gender-inclusive learning outcomes.

Strategic context. The National Development Strategy 2016-2035 recognizes the importance of sustainable and inclusive economic growth in addressing risks from climate change and disasters, high poverty rates, gender inequality, and ethnic tensions (footnote 11). A resilient economy hinges on having a skilled workforce, yet employers report difficulty finding individuals with the right soft and technical skills to fill job vacancies. In 2020, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) developed a framework for senior secondary education aiming to make learning more practical and better prepare students for future employment and further education. The framework emphasizes the need for collaboration between private sector employers, secondary schools, and tertiary education providers. This collaboration is vital for promoting climate-resilient jobs in targeted sectors. MEHRD also requested support to update and implement the Gender Equality in Education Policy, which emphasizes the need to (i) integrate gender-responsive curricula; (ii) develop opportunities for gender-sensitive education; and (iii) develop curriculum related to family life and safety, gender equality, and living in a non-violent society. The project's enhancements to senior secondary education will help create an environment that supports the transition toward a more gender-inclusive, climate-resilient economic base. The project is aligned with ADB's Pacific Approach 2021-2025 to support a resilient Pacific, and will contribute to ADB's Strategy 2030 operational priorities.
Summary of Environmental and Social Aspects

Environmental Aspects

Involuntary Resettlement

Indigenous Peoples

Stakeholder Communication, Participation, and Consultation

During Project Design

During Project Implementation

Business Opportunities

Consulting Services

The consulting services planned for the project have an estimated value of $26.74 million and will follow the quality and cost-based selection method with technical: financial proportions of 80:20 and consultant qualifications selection where the assignment is not complex and the reason for not evaluating multiple proposals are justified.

Procurement

The project procurement risk is assessed as moderate. The strategic procurement planning report identified a lack of capacity and experience in MEHRD to undertake procurement in accordance with ADB's Procurement Policy (2017, as amended from time to time). The inherent risks related to the procurement capacity of MEHRD are seen as substantial, but the nature of procurement is non-complex, the multiple packages are distributed across the project duration, and MEHRD has experience in donor-funded procurement. The project design addresses risks by engaging procurement capacity and providing direct ADB support to early-stage consultant recruitment activities.

Responsible ADB Officer

Bryson, Cindy M.D.

Responsible ADB Department

Sectors Group

Responsible ADB Division

Human and Social Development Sector Office (SG-HSD)

Executing Agencies

Ministry of Finance and Treasury

Timetable

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<td>Fact Finding</td>
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Request for Information

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