RESEARCH ARTICLE

GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: BASIS FOR REFORMS ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Authors: Judson Gordon Koito*, Daniel Zambora Bernardo, & Jimmy B. Maming

Email: *judsonkoito94@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study aims to explore the gender inequality in the Solomon Islands. Despite decades of advocacy, legislation, and international commitment, a systemic gap persists between policy reforms and women's lived realities. Deep-seated cultural traditions, institutional structures, and socio-economic systems continue to place men in positions of greater authority and privilege. This persistent marginalization and exclusion from decision-making highlight a core problem. This qualitative study employed the narrative inquiry method. Conducted in Solomon Islands, the participants of this study were six (6) men and women who experienced the phenomenon. A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather data, and narrative inquiry analysis was employed. After the data analysis, the themes that emerged are: in the political domain, Theme 1: Male-dominated decision-making, Theme 2: triple barriers: custom, capital, and conflict, and Theme 3: skewed priorities: absence and the call for structural reform. For the Economics domain, Theme 1: structural segregation: low-margin subsistence vs. high-capital wage, Theme 2: institutional exclusion: land, collateral, and the unrecorded economy, and Theme 3: the unpaid care anchor: the double shift and time poverty. For the Socio-Cultural domain, Theme 1: The primacy of subordination – customary and religious sanction, Theme 2: the enforcement mechanism, gender-based violence and public silence, and Theme 3: agents of change: from hierarchy to shared responsibility. This study is limited to women's inequality. Future researchers may conduct similar studies using quantitative or mixed methods in other parts of the Pacific region.

Keywords: *gender inequality, women's empowerment, Gender and Development (GAD) Approach, strategic gender needs, Solomon Islands, agency, narrative inquiry*

Introduction

In the Solomon Islands, women play a pivotal role in community welfare and proactive organizing, and are custodians and propellers of economic growth in their localities. Oftentimes, when the council gathers formally, women remain silent. This stark contrast between informal authority and almost complete exclusion from formal governance creates a crucial gender disparity and requires intentional reforms to the systems. Apparently, Gender inequality remains one of the most tenacious and prevalent social challenges worldwide. These ambivalences, characterized by the apparent or real inadequate dispersal of human rights, access to resources, and opportunities across genders (Plan International, 2025), are deeply rooted in culturally defined gender roles shaped by social constructs rather than biological differences (Ashraf & Dastidar, 2020).

The Solomon Islands are an archipelago in the South Pacific, providing a grappling yet crucial milieu for exploring these undercurrents. Its national setting is immensely influenced by Melanesian backgrounds, subjugation history, and missionary activity, especially during the Christian ascendancy, all of which have shaped it. Furthermore, the Wantok System, a network promoting kinship and mutual obligation, which is vital for solidarity, also reinforces this in some ways (Fukuyama, 2020). Societal institutions such as Kastom (customary legislation) and religious groups typically support traditional beliefs that limit women to household and public duties (Do No Harm Research: Solomon Islands, 2020).   Cultural underpinnings and limitations in the labor market make it difficult for men, particularly women, to have equal access to jobs and wealth (ILO, 2021; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2025).   Even if more people can attend school, rural areas still face problems because parents prefer to send their sons to school, and there are not enough resources. Women's political engagement is notably among the lowest worldwide, with just a limited number holding legislative roles (Soaki, 2022).

Notwithstanding decades of advocacy for women's rights, legal initiatives, and international commitments, as demonstrated by the Association of Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, a significant challenge persists across policy developments and the real experiences of women in the Solomon Islands. Studies showed that global advocates for women's rights; However, culturally focused and institutional procedures (Scott & Pearse, 2015; Waylen, 2022), in conjunction with socioeconomic procedures, are inclined to favor men (World Bank, 2025). The enduring exclusion and marginalization of women from participation and decision-making processes highlight a vital challenge: empirical data and top-down initiatives have been futile in addressing and overcoming the insurmountable barriers that hinder women's full participation in and influence on national development.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality aims to protect women's human rights in order to create a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable society (United Nations, 2020). The investigation shows that the SDGs address problems of equality, rights, and participation across different cultures.

This study will explore the area by revisiting the various challenges that confront women in realizing their full potential through a qualitative inquiry. This investigation aims to assess their situations and the nuances of their experiences related to gender inequality. Foremost, it will showcase how political, economic, and socio-cultural underpinnings propelled inequality to persist. Second, a context-based approach will be explored to develop a transformative, community-led approach that community and development actors perceive as primordial and plausible for true women's empowerment, given that women's empowerment liberates human rights and is a cornerstone of long-term growth and development (UN Sustainable Group, 2025). In addition, gender empowerment enhances governance, community health, and economic development (Calvino et al., 2023). Supporting women in the Solomon Islands reduces poverty, improves children's well-being, increases resilience to shocks, and helps the country grow (Popot & Mamu, 2023).

With this underpinning, this phenomenon is almost brought to oblivion if not forgotten; therefore, the researcher conducted this research to determine the plight of women in Solomon Islands and to determine the influences on the persistence of gender disparity that barred women from participating politically, economically, and socially, and to propose a development plan as an output of the study.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways does the political system and decision-making structure in the Solomon Islands impact women's participation and representation?

2. How do economic opportunities, access to resources, and patterns of employment reflect gender-based disparities that impact women's empowerment? and

3. How do cultural norms, traditions, and societal attitudes influence the persistence of gender inequality and limit women's development?

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilizes a qualitative approach, specifically the narrative inquiry. This design is most appropriate for exploring complex, socially embedded experiences such as gender inequality, where context, meaning, and individual perspectives are crucial. Narrative inquiry allows participants to share their life stories in their own words, providing rich, detailed insights into how cultural norms, traditions, and institutional structures shape their daily realities. The design is flexible, interpretive, and participant-centered. It values subjective knowledge and acknowledges that social realities are constructed through language, culture, and interaction. This approach supports the study's aim of amplifying women's voices and understanding how gender inequality is experienced and resisted in (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013).

Participants

This research was conducted in the Solomon Islands from August to September 2025. The Solomon Islands is a sovereign island country located in Oceania, east of Papua New Guinea. It is a geographically diverse nation composed of hundreds of islands, renowned for its rich cultural heritage, biodiversity, and significant history during World War II. Six (6) participants participated in the study, composed of three females and three males. The researcher employed the inclusion and exclusion criteria in selecting the participants of the study such as the following: (1) They must be permanent resident of Solomon Islands; (2) Must be 18 years of age or older (legal adult); (3) Both women and men are included; and (4) Individuals from both urban and rural areas, and those engaged in both formal and informal sectors (e.g., subsistence agriculture, market vendors, public servants).The population of this study composed of individuals within the Solomon Islands who are directly affected by or engaged with issues of gender inequality in political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts. From this broader population, a small but focused sample of six participants specifically three women and three men) was selected to ensure a balanced exploration of lived experiences and perspectives. The sampling size was deliberately limited to allow for in-depth narrative inquiry, enabling participants to share detailed personal accounts of how inequality manifests in their lives and communities.

Instruments

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide that will serve as the data-gathering instrument for this study. The instrument was designed to elicit detailed personal accounts from participants regarding gender inequality in the Solomon Islands. The instrument was developed based on research questions that focus on the political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of inequality. The interview guide includes open-ended questions that allow participants to disclose their lived experiences, perceptions, and reflections, while still providing enough structure to ensure that the core themes of the study are addressed. Questions were framed to encourage storytelling rather than brief responses from participants, such as asking them to describe specific events, decisions, or challenges they have encountered in relation to education, land rights, political participation, or family and community expectations.

The design of the interview guide was grounded in liberal feminist theory, which emphasizes amplifying marginalized voices and dismantling institutional barriers to equality. By enabling participants to share their significant narratives in their own words, the instrument seeks to highlight both the barriers and the opportunities for reform within existing socio-cultural and institutional structures. To ensure cultural sensitivity, the interview questions were phrased in accessible language, avoiding technical jargon, and were informed by the local context of the Solomon Islands. The semi-structured format also provided flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe the participants into emerging themes or unexpected insights during the interviews. The instrument was subjected to content validity by three experts in gender equality in Solomon Islands; their suggestions were incorporated in the final interview guide used in collecting the data.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide administered to a total of six (6) participants, with three women and three men. The process was meticulously structured to adhere to strict ethical and institutional guidelines. Prior to any contact, the researcher secured all necessary ethical clearances, including official approvals from AMA University and the relevant local authorities in the Solomon Islands, ensuring cultural sensitivity and compliance with local research protocols. Subsequently, all potential participants were individually contacted, thoroughly informed about the purpose of the research, and provided with detailed consent forms outlining their fundamental rights, specifically emphasizing confidentiality and the right to voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom and lasted 45-60 minutes, scheduled strictly according to participants' availability. With explicit permission obtained, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of the narratives. To ensure the highest level of data security, the audio files were immediately saved on a password-protected laptop accessible only to the primary researcher. Following transcription, the recordings were destroyed to prevent unauthorized access. All transcribed data were then organized for thematic analysis, with pseudonyms assigned to all individuals to maintain anonymity throughout the transcripts and final reports. Finally, to establish the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher engaged in member checking by returning to the participants to validate that the interpreted results accurately reflected their experiences.

Data Analysis

This study is qualitative and does not employ statistical treatment. Hence, the data was analyzed through Narrative Inquiry Analysis. A holistic and deeply interpretive process focused on understanding the stories people live and tell, rather than merely counting themes or frequencies. The analysis moves through two interwoven planes: the analysis of the narrative (the content, or "what" is told) and the narrative analysis (the structure and form, or "how" it is told) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Furthermore, a significant feature of narrative analysis is the use of the three-dimensional narrative space framework, which examines the stories across Temporality (how events are sequenced and linked over time), Sociality (the personal and social interactions that shape the experience), and Place (the physical and emotional contexts in which the narrative unfolds) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Researchers iteratively identify key elements, such as plot, conflict, and metaphors, and then synthesize these elements across individual narratives to build a meta-narrative or generalizable understanding. Importantly, the analysis maintains the unique shape and integrity of each original story. The final output involves a rich, interpretive presentation that weaves excerpts from the original narratives with the researcher's analytical commentary, ensuring the findings remain grounded in the participants lived experiences (Riessman, 2008). This involves several steps:

First, Familiarization with Data, the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts and field notes to gain an in-depth understanding of each participant's account. Second, Coding, key phrases, ideas, and recurring expressions related to gender roles, political participation, economic opportunities, and socio-cultural expectations were coded. Third, Categorization into Themes, codes were clustered into broader themes aligned with the study's research questions, such as political exclusion, barriers in education and employment, cultural norms around land and family, and resistance to change. Fourth, Narrative Structuring, participants' stories are reconstructed into narratives that highlight not only individual experiences but also the socio-cultural context shaping these realities. Fifth, Interpretation, the themes and narratives were critically interpreted through the lens of liberal feminism, focusing on principles of equal opportunity, individual rights, and systemic barriers to gender equality. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, triangulation is applied by comparing narratives across male and female participants to identify both shared and divergent experiences. Member checking was also conducted, where participants were given the opportunity to review summaries of their narratives to confirm accuracy. The goal of the analysis is not only to describe gender inequality in the Solomon Islands but also to reveal how political structures, economic systems, and socio-cultural norms intersect to sustain or challenge inequality. By grounding the findings in participants' own voices, the analysis provides nuanced insights that inform reforms on women's empowerment and development.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher, during and throughout the conduct of the study, observes ethical principles such as justice, respect, and beneficence. Given the sensitivity of exploring gender inequality in political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts, this study will strictly adhere to ethical principles to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants. The research is guided by the ethical standards of informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' autonomy. Prior to data collection, each participant was fully briefed on the purpose, scope, and objectives of the study, including its focus on understanding gender inequality through lived experiences. Informed consent was obtained in writing or verbally (where literacy or digital constraints exist), ensuring that participants voluntarily agreed to take part with full knowledge of their rights. Participants are reminded that they may withdraw at any point without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity are strictly maintained. Pseudonyms were assigned to all respondents, and identifying details such as names, specific communities, or workplaces were removed from transcripts and reports. Data collected is securely stored in password-protected digital files, with only the researcher having access. Given that interviews were conducted via video conferencing (Zoom), extra care was taken to ensure secure, private communication channels. Participants are advised to choose safe, comfortable environments where they feel free to express themselves without fear of intrusion or reprisal. The study also recognizes the potential for emotional discomfort when participants recount experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or inequality. In such cases, the researcher remains sensitive, allows participants to pause or skip questions, and provides information on available local support networks or organizations if needed. Aligned with the liberal feminist framework, the research is committed to respecting the voices of both women and men, ensuring that participants' narratives are not only collected but also honored as valid knowledge that can contribute to reforms in women's empowerment and gender equality. Ultimately, this ethical approach ensures that the study not only produces credible and trustworthy findings but also upholds participants' rights and dignity throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

The findings derived from the interviews with participants, structured to address the core issues and objectives of the study. The analysis was organized around three critical dimensions of social life such as the Political, Economic, and Socio-cultural. Within each dimension, key themes and recurring patterns of gender disparity were identified from the participants' narratives. These thematic structures allow for a comprehensive exploration of the complex dynamics shaping gender inequality in the Solomon Islands, providing valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities for women's empowerment across different community contexts. The themes emerged are presented below:

A. Political Dimension

Theme 1: Informal Power & Formal Exclusions

One of the key themes that emerged from participants' narratives in the political dimension is Informal Power and Formal Exclusion. Their accounts reveal a clear imbalance between women's influence and their actual authority in community life across the Solomon Islands. While women play important roles in keeping their community functional through social, church, and economic groups, their contributions rarely translate into real decision-making power within formal political or traditional leadership structures. Participants consistently described women as the backbone of the communities, yet their voices often remain unheard in spaces where important decisions are made. The following stories reflect the dept and complexities of their experiences:

According to Participant 1:

"Women are the backbone of local organization, especially in the churches, health committees, and community savings groups."

Similarly, Participant 2 added that,

"We organize the village markets, we run the church fundraising, and we are the ones who make sure the local school committee meets."

In addition, Participant 5 expressed that,

"In our village, women are involved in every major social activity. They are very powerful in the churches, they manage the money for community savings clubs, and they organize the markets.

These narratives highlight that women play key roles in organizing and caring for their communities using their informal influence to lead local initiatives, maintain social harmony, and support local development (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). (2024)). However, this influence rarely reaches formal decision-making spaces. As Participant 1 shared,

"When it comes to the formal, highest-stakes decisions... our presence is almost non-existent."

On the same note, Participant 3 admitted that,

"Our presence is still disappointingly minimal. Our influence is least in the actual legislative and budgetary allocation decisions."

These insights revealed a clear gap between women's active community roles and their political authority. Decision-making power is still dominated by male chiefs and elders, reinforcing a system that privileges men's voices in formal governance, and especially on issues of land and resources – key areas deeply tied to culture and economic control (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). (2024).). As Participant 2 mentioned:

"Land is everything here... we cannot stop our husband or the chief from leasing the land... We were only given a small 'token' payment, while the men took the main money."

Such experiences demonstrate that women's reliance on male lineage for land rights limits their influence over economic decisions that shape their livelihoods. As scholars like McDougall (2016) and Spark & Corbett (2020) note, this persistent "power divide," permits women moral and social influence but excludes them from actual political authority. This structure sustains gender inequality by keeping women's leadership unseen and undervalued even though they are central to community life. In essence, the theme Informal Power, Formal Exclusion reveals that while women play vital roles in keeping their communities strong, their contributions remain largely confined to the informal spaces. Their efforts support community life but rarely translate into formal authority. Bridging this gap means valuing women's informal leadership and ensuring their voices are included in the decisions that shape both community and political life.

Theme 2: Triple Barriers: Custom, Capital, and Conflict

This theme explores the many overlapping barriers that hinders women from participating in politics. In the Solomon Islands, women's entry into formal politics is often hindered by cultural expectations, limited financial resources, and an unsupportive political environment. These challenges create a "triple barrier" that limits capable women from pursuing or sustaining leadership roles, allowing men to continue dominating political spaces. Participants repeatedly shared that traditional customs and domestic responsibilities are the first and often hardest obstacle to overcome. Below are their significant nuances: When probed pertaining to custom, capital and conflict, Participant 1 emphasized that,

"The traditional structures are the main hindrance... The idea of a woman publicly challenging or leading these men is seen as a disruption of 'custom."

In like manner, Participant 4 recalled an instance faced by a woman competing for political candidacy. She shares that,

"The biggest obstacle was the weaponization of domestic roles against her ambition... people suggested she was 'abandoning her children' for public life."

In addition, Participant 2 observed that,

"People in the village whispered that her husband wasn't strong enough, and that her children would lose their mother's care. The obstacle is that leadership means neglecting your womanly duties."

These accounts revealed that cultural norms permeate to define women's roles as caretakers, but making public leadership seem inappropriate for them. Women who aspire to lead often face criticism and moral judgement instead of support or encouragement. Beyond cultural barriers, participants also highlighted financial hardship as another constraint. Campaigning costs money, and most women lack the funds and connections because of the ongoing economic inequalities. When probed about this issue, Participant 1 responded that,

"It boils down to three things: money... elections are costly, and women often lack access to the financial resources men possess."

Additionally, Participant 2 affirmed that,

"The main reason is money and tribal connections... most women just don't have this kind of capital or the networks to raise it."

Participant 3 also expressed similar notions and further highlighting patriarchally driven opinions:

"It's the vicious cycle of resource access and cultural expectation. Women don't have the networks to raise large campaign funds, and the public is still generally more comfortable voting for a man, especially in the provinces"

Moreover, Participant 4 explained that,

"The formal system's operational requirements—like massive campaign funding ensures that the obstacles created by custom... are simply transplanted into the political process."

These accounts underscore how women's financial dependence and lack of access to political networks limit their political competitiveness. In this way, women's economic disadvantage turns political barrier, shutting them out of both traditional and formal positions of power. The third barrier is the hostile political environment, which often discourages women from getting involved in politics. Many feel unwelcome or unsafe in these male-dominated spaces, making it even harder for them to participate. Participant 1 expressed that,

"The political environment is often hostile—not just verbally, but through intimidation, which dissuades potential female candidates."

Participant 3 ascribed to modern forms of harassment, saying that,

"The social media attacks and smears against a female candidate's character are incredibly toxic."

Such hostility discourages women from running for office or speaking publicly. This was evident from the narratives of Participant 5 who expressed the need of transformation, stating,

"What needed is to change politically ... to create a political environment that is safe and respectful, not one where people curse and fight."

These challenges echo the findings by Spark and Corbett (2020) and Baker (2018), highlights that overlapping social, economic, and institutional barriers undermine women's political participation in Melanesian societies. Cultural expectations, financial limits, and political hostility reinforce one another to keep women on the sidelines, despite their proven ability and community respect. In essence, the triple barrier theme reveals that women's political inequality is a product of deeply intertwined systems of custom, capital, and power structures that uphold male dominance. Real change requires not just policy reforms in institutional procedures but also shifting social attitudes that define leadership as men's role.

Theme 3: Skewed Priorities: Absence & the Call for Structural Reform

Women's absence from top political roles in the Solomon Islands continues to shape what priorities receive government attention and funding. With few women in power, resources often go to big infrastructure and industry projects rather than community welfare or gender-focused services. Participants stressed that this reflects deeper systematic biases and called for urgent structural reforms such as reserved seats to create fairer, more inclusive governance. Below are the significant stories as evident in the narratives of the participants, Participant 6 explained that,

"The most critical change would be a shift from a focus solely on large-scale infrastructure and resource extraction to human development."

Similarly, Participant 2 expressed that,

"Right now, all the big money goes to things like logging or roads that benefit only a few big men."

Participant 5 echoed similar insights she expressed that,

"The absence of women in high office means we get poor planning, like building a fancy road but ignoring the local market toilets."

This marginalization is also evident in how essential social issues are often overlooked. As one Participant 1 observed that,

"The absence of women in high office means issues like Gender-Based Violence (GBV), childcare, and health remain ignored or relegated to 'women's issues' departments."

In addition, Participant 2 shared that,

"Women would focus on things that make our daily lives easier and safer... reliable water tanks... or making sure the roads to the market aren't completely washed out."

Furthermore, Participant 4 emphasized that,

"Women would naturally prioritize the enforcement of the Family Protection Act, investing in safe houses and legal aid."

Participants also called for deliberate institutional reform to reverse entrenched exclusion. When asked about the similar question, Participant 1 asserted that,

"Without a structural change like reserved seats, the system will continue to reproduce the current, male-dominated outcome,"

While Participant 6 further urged immediate action stating that,

"Implementing Reserved Seats (Special Measures) immediately... It is time to stop talking and force the issue."

Recent studies support these findings showing that women remain vastly underrepresented in politics, holding only about 6 % of elected positions in the 2024 national and provincial elections (Bainivalu, 2024; DevPolicy Blog, 2024). Scholars highlight that when women are excluded from decision-making, policies often prioritize infrastructure and resource projects over human development priorities (Baker, 2023; George, 2022). In contrast, According to Western Province's Women's Empowerment and Transformation Policy for Development (2018), when women are involved in local planning policy public spending becomes more socially oriented with around 20 % directed to women's development and community initiatives (UN Women, 2018). Likewise, ongoing provincial efforts to institutionalize Temporary Special Measures (TSM) approved in all nine provinces in 2023 illustrate growing recognition that structural reform is necessary to correct gender imbalance (Isles Media, 2023). The theme "Skewed Priorities" highlights that gender inequality in politics is not just about representation, it shapes which needs the government serves. Male-dominated leadership often favors profit-driven sectors (Baker, 2023; George, 2022), while essential services like health, sanitation, and GBV support are neglected, deepening women's daily struggles (UN Women, 2018). Participants emphasized that reserved seats are not simply about visibility but about reshaping governance priorities. Structural measures like TSMs can help ensure women's participation translates into policy change, not token inclusion. However, lasting change requires pairing these reforms with transparent budgets, gender-responsive planning, and cultural shifts that redefine leadership beyond male norms (Bainivalu, 2024).

B. Economic Domain

Theme 1: The Male-Dominated Wage Economy

This theme reveals how the Solomon Islands economy reinforces gender inequality by separating men and women in unequal economic roles. Men dominate the formal high-income and capital-intensive sectors such as logging, fishing, and wage jobs while women are kept in low-earning, informal and subsistence work. Participants shared that although women are economically active and vital to local livelihoods, their efforts are often undervalued, unpaid, and overlooked in formal economic planning. This was evident in the nuances of the participants experiences: According to Participant1,

"Men are heavily involved in the formal and high-value informal sectors: logging, fishing for commercial export… Women are the engine of the informal, market-based economy: selling produce, handicrafts…"

Additionally, Participant 2 echoed that,

"For the men, it's the high-value things diving for Beche-de-mer. The work 'for men' is large, infrequent, and provides the bulk money for building a house."

In contrast, Participant 1 shared that,

"The work considered 'for women' is labor-intensive, low-margin, and highly flexible to accommodate childcare."

Conversely, vertical segregation was also emphasized. Participant 1 observed that,

"Men dominate the formal employment sector, especially in management and technical roles. Women are concentrated in lower-paid, secretarial, or caring roles."

In addition, Participant 1 further expressed that,

"In the informal sector, there is no equal pay; a man selling fish wholesale will earn significantly more than a woman selling market produce."

This unequal wage structure, participants explained, stems from persistent social norms that men should be the main providers, while women's work is seen as secondary, limiting their access to better formal opportunities. The participants' insights reflect wider national and regional studies emphasizing that gendered labor division shapes the Solomon Islands economy. Women dominate subsistence and informal trade, particularly in local markets, while men control high-paying, formal, and resource-based sectors with better access to credit, capital, and formal networks (ADB, 2023; UN Women, 2022). According to the Asian Development Bank (2023), 75% of working women are in the informal sector, compared to only 43% of men, yet they earned less. The World Bank (2021) also reports that women's labor participation has stalled at 48%, with less than 30% in formal employment. These gaps are reinforced by cultural beliefs that define men as providers and women as caregivers, making women's work undervalued and often seen as merely supplementary, leading to limited institutional support for women's economic empowerment or wage equality (Bennett, 2020; George, 2022). This theme shows that economic inequality in the Solomon Islands is rooted in structural barriers that limit women's access to resources, markets, and decision-making roles. The gendered labor divide devalues women's work and keeps them economically dependent, with little chance to build capital or move into leadership. Participants shared that while women's flexible income activities help them manage family duties, they often lack stability and growth. This aligns with ADB's (2023) finding that women's informal "survival entrepreneurship" sustains households but rarely leads to progress. Cultural views of men as breadwinners further justify unequal pay and job segregation, reinforcing these barriers to women's development (George, 2022). Economic gender inequality, therefore, goes beyond income gaps; it reflects deeper structural imbalance of opportunity, where women's labor supports local economies but rarely grants them equal access to the benefits of national development.

Theme 2: Institutional Exclusion: Land, Collateral, and the Unrecorded Economy

This theme highlights how structural and institutional barriers limit women's participation in the formal economy. Despite their key role in local livelihoods, women are often denied access to finance, land, and credit. Participants shared that overlapping legal and customary systems leave them dependent on informal, community-based support to sustain their small enterprises. Their narratives are depicted below:

Participants identified the lack of land ownership for collateral as one of the biggest barriers to women's financial inclusion. According to Participant 1,

"Accessing a bank loan is a perfect example: banks almost always require collateral, and since land is customarily held by men, women have no assets to pledge."

Similarly, Participant 2 further emphasized that,

"Bank loans are nearly impossible because of the collateral issue. We have very little control over land."

Furthermore, Participant 3 asserted that,

"The Land and Titles Act does not sufficiently override customary practice to ensure women's access to titles for collateral."

Despite these institutional barriers, women have developed creative strategies to fund their livelihoods. As Participant 1 shared that,

"I couldn't get a bank loan, so I joined a community credit union established by a non-government organization."

In addition, Participant 2 noted that,

"They(women) started a rotating savings group (ROSCAs) and used the collective money... bypassing the bank entirely."

Moreover, Participant 6 emphasized that,

"Women are not waiting for the system to change; they are creating their own financial infrastructure—cooperatives—which is highly empowering."

However, the exclusion persists at the state level. According to Participant 3,

"The women's economy is largely unregulated and unrecorded, meaning it has no legal status for things like social security contributions or enforceable contracts."

Furthermore, Participant 5 expressed that,

"The systems were built for men, and women are still navigating structures (like loan requirements) that don't account for their informal assets or communal financing methods."

Pacific Island statistics show that customary land tenure and institutional design financially marginalize women. Since men possess most land titles in Solomon Islands, the Asian Development Bank (2023) and World Bank (2021) believe women have problems securing loans. Solomon Islands women can't lease, inherit, or mortgage land because 87% is owned by men (Naitoro, 2020; UNDP, 2021). Microfinance and banking organizations deem women "high-risk borrowers," furthering financial inequity. Women founded ROSCAs, community cooperatives, and NGO-led microcredit to address this. Despite institutional neglect, informal structures help women establish community resilience and agency (Chand, 2022; UN Women, 2022, PFIP, 2023). Mostly unregulated, these networks are "invisible" to national economic policy and labor and social protection. Examples show Pacific gender imbalance in customary land and banking. Since 87% of land is owned by men, collateral titles for women are unusual (ADB, 2023; UNDP, 2021; World Bank, 2021). Banks label them "high-risk" borrowers, worsening financial inequality. To react, women founded savings groups, cooperatives, and NGO microcredit schemes (Naitoro, 2020). These networks support women and community resilience without institutional control but are rarely included in national economic programs and legislation. Institutional exclusion means customary and legal omission generate gender inequity. Insufficient female collateral implies economic inequality that favors male ownership and authority. Exclusion of women from land and formal finance slows economic growth, increases dependency, and limits their participation in development decisions (Naitoro, 2020; ADB, 2023). Women's cooperatives and savings clubs are social enterprise. They are invisible since the state does not register their income, their labor lacks social insurance, and their contributions are not reflected in GDP statistics. In powerful women's fields, creativity and institutional neglect preserve gender inequality. To end exclusion, policy must change land rights, collateral systems, and financial inclusion frameworks that reinforce male dominance beyond microcredit.

Theme 3: The Unpaid Care Anchor: The Double Shift and Time Poverty

This theme reveals how unpaid care work functions as an invisible anchor that holds women back from full economic participation. Across interviews, participants identified the unequal burden of domestic responsibilities; childcare, cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and tending to the elderly, as the single most critical barrier to women's economic independence and advancement. While men often enjoy uninterrupted time to pursue work or community leadership, women's labor is divided between household duties and income-generating activities, resulting in chronic "time poverty." The experiences of the participants are evident in their narratives below: When probed about this questions, Participant 1 shared that,

"The single biggest barrier is the unpaid care economy... it is a massive, invisible anchor."

In like manner, Participant 3 opined that,

"The biggest barrier is the cultural expectation of a double shift... the burden of domestic work is not shared."

In addition, Participant 4 expressed that,

"It is the heavy load of daily work at home. They spend so much time walking for water and firewood that they have no time left to expand a business."

Participants further described how unpaid care work directly limits mobility and opportunity. As explained by Participant 1,

"It limits our time, restricts our mobility, and forces us into flexible but low-income work,"

Furthermore, Participant 2 revealed that,

"We have no time to dedicate fully to a business. We must always rush home. This prevents us from going further to market or staying late for training."

These utterances underscore how domestic obligations create a structural trap keeping women in informal, low-paid, or home-based

work that accommodates household demands but undermines economic advancement. The impact of this unpaid labor extends beyond time and energy it also affects control over income and decision-making. As Participant 1 remarked that,

"The husband is the recognized head who controls the lump sums... women are responsible for managing day-to-day expenses."

Participant 1 further expressed that,

"If a woman earns a large, formal salary, that money is more likely to be subject to joint or male control because it is seen as family capital."

These utterances reflect how patriarchal norms continue to define financial authority, even when women are the primary earners. Finally, women expressed a clear demand for systemic support, emphasizing that gender equality in economic participation requires redistributing care responsibilities. These experiences were evident in the utterances of Participant 2 suggested that,

"The kind of economic support that would help most is investment in public childcare infrastructure and programs that incentivize men's participation in domestic work,".

In addition, Participant 4 opined that,

"The biggest barrier is the unregulated domestic sphere—the unpaid care economy…For instance, the Labor Act provides for maternity leave, which is an existing law aiming at empowerment, but there is no mandatory paid paternity leave or widely enforced policy on flexible work arrangements…. Legal reform should focus on incentivizing shared parenting leave."

These findings reflect broader Pacific research showing that unpaid care work is a major but invisible barrier to women's economic empowerment (ADB, 2023; UN Women, 2022). In Solomon Islands, women perform up to three to four times more unpaid labor than men, limiting their opportunities for paid work and leadership (World Bank, 2021). The ILO (2022) notes that this imbalance forces women into low-wage, informal sectors, while poor infrastructure such as childcare, water, and transport intensifies their time burden (UNDP, 2021). Likewise, the Pacific Community (SPC, 2023) observes that women's unpaid contributions remain unrecorded in national accounts, with weak policy support like parental leave or flexible work reinforcing their "double shift."

Furthermore, the "Unpaid Care Anchor" exposes how gendered norms and weak institutional support systems structurally undervalue women's labor, making time poverty a systemic barrier rather than a personal choice. Women's disproportionate unpaid work though vital to households and communities' remains invisible in the national accounts and labor policies, reinforcing perceptions of women's economic contribution as secondary (ILO, 2022; ADB, 2023). This invisibility limits women's access to education, income, and leadership, while the emotional toll of continuous caregiving further restricts participation in public life. Ultimately, women's unpaid labor functions as an unseen subsidy sustaining both families and economies, yet it deepens their exclusion from the very structures of women empowerment.

C. Socio-Cultural Domain

Theme 1: The Primacy of Subordination Customary and Religious Sanctions

This theme reveals how customary and religious norms jointly sustain a hierarchy that defines women as naturally subordinate to men, shaping their roles, opportunities, and aspirations. Across participant accounts, women described how cultural expectations rooted in both kastom and Christian doctrine reinforce obedience, modesty, and domestic service as defining virtues of femininity. These beliefs, deeply embedded in both family and community life, dictate that women's primary duty is to their household and husbands, and that ambition beyond these bounds represents disobedience or moral failure. Discussed below are the narratives of participants encompassing the theme. Their experiences about the phenomenon are evident in their utterances below:

When Participant 1 was probed about this issue, she replied that,

"It is the belief in male superiority that is culturally and often religiously sanctioned. This belief creates a structure where a woman's value is conditional on her submission. I can recall a story of a brilliant young woman who received a scholarship to study abroad, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Her husband and in-laws forbade her from going. Their reasoning wasn't about the cost; it was that her personal goal of a degree would mean she was 'too educated' and might no longer 'respect' her husband or return to the village. The cultural expectation that her place is to serve the immediate family directly conflicted and crushed her personal ambition."

In the like manner Participant 4 clarified that,

"The core belief that family duty comes first is still strongly enforced by the elders…The customary system places women under the authority of their male relatives, impacting everything from marriage to land access…While the Constitution's anti-discrimination clause provides the supreme legal standard, the State has not legislated to formally harmonize or override all discriminatory customary laws, creating a legal ambiguity that limits a woman's ability to exercise her constitutional rights in daily life"

Even when acknowledging progress, women described persistent cultural tension between education and domestic expectation: This was evident in the narratives of Participant 1,

"The attitude is changing a woman should be educated—but she still shouldn't sacrifice her reproductive role or domestic duties."

Participants also highlighted how these beliefs restrict women's ambition and self-identity. Participant 1 shared,

"I can recall a story of a brilliant young woman who received a scholarship to study abroad, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Her husband and in-laws forbade her from going. Their reasoning wasn't about the cost; it was that her personal goal of a degree would mean she was 'too educated' and might no longer 'respect' her husband or return to the village. The cultural expectation that her place is to serve the immediate family directly conflicted and crushed her personal ambition."

In addition, Participant 2 expressed that,

"The single most powerful socio-cultural barrier is the belief that a woman's identity is secondary to her husband's family identity."

Moreover, Participant 5 reflected on the emotional cost of defiance expressed that,

"Our culture does not value a woman's public voice. I know of a young woman who was the brightest student in her class, with a chance to go to the regional school. Her cultural expectation was that she must marry the man chosen for her, who was much older. Her personal goal was to become a teacher. When she refused the marriage, her family shunned her, and the whole village spoke badly of her. She was forced to choose between her family's honor and her future. The most powerful barrier is the social penalty for breaking the mold."

These narratives revealed a powerful persistence between customary patriarchy and religious interpretation, producing what scholars call a "moralized subordination" of women (George, 2020; Pollard, 2018). In the Solomon Islands, Christianity and kastom often reinforce each other in defining women's virtue through obedience, humility, and service (McDougall, 2021; UN Women, 2022). Women perceived deviation from these norms through higher education, public leadership, or assertiveness can attract gossip, family conflict, or social exclusion. Studies across the Pacific affirm that religio-cultural ideologies remain among the most entrenched barriers to women's empowerment. Research by McDougall (2021) and Douglas (2019) show how biblical teachings emphasizing male headship have been selectively adapted into Melanesian culture, reinforcing patriarchal family structures. Studies by George (2020) argues that religious narratives often justify women's limited leadership roles under the guise of "moral protection." In the Solomon Islands, Pollard (2018) and UN Women (2022) both highlighted how customary systems grant men authority as lineage and land custodians, while women's identity is mediated through marriage and kinship ties. These ideologies limit women's public voice and make defiance socially costly. The Pacific Women Lead (2023) program further reports that despite rising female education levels, patriarchal belief systems continue to dictate acceptable behavior for women, often discouraging them from political or professional ambition.

The "Primacy of Subordination" operates as the ideological foundation of gender inequality, legitimizing structural and economic exclusion through cultural narratives of obedience and moral order. By positioning men as natural leaders and women as caretakers, these norms reduce women's autonomy and internalize compliance as virtue. This not only limits women's participation in formal decision-making but also constrains their personal self-concept many internalize guilt or shame when pursuing independence or leadership (George, 2020; McDougall, 2021). Moreover, the intertwining of religion and custom complicates reform. while both provide moral cohesion in communities, they also serve as mechanisms of social control that reinforce male dominance. Without challenging the theological and customary interpretations that underpin these roles, gender equality efforts risk addressing symptoms without dismantling root causes. Thus, women's subordination in the socio-cultural domain is not merely a matter of unequal opportunity it is the moral and emotional infrastructure of inequality itself, deeply normalized within family, faith, and tradition.

Theme 2: The Enforcement Mechanism Gender-Based Violence and Public Silence

This theme reveals that gender-based violence (GBV) is not only a symptom of inequality but also a deliberate mechanism for enforcing patriarchal control. Participants described how the threat or experience of violence, harassment, and intimidation operates as a social regulator deterring women from political participation, business activities, or public advocacy. When women defy prescribed gender norms, violence or the fear of it acts as a means of restoring male authority and reinforcing conformity. These testimonies reflect how physical and psychological violence are embedded within everyday gender relations. This was evident in the utterances of participants below:

When probed about this issue, Participant 1 expressed that,

"GBV is an epidemic and is the ultimate tool of control that keeps women out of the public sphere."

In the same manner Participant 6 observed that,

"The most insidious barrier is the culture of impunity around violence and harassment... the persistent threat of violence is the tool that enforces gender roles when all else fails."

Participants further explained how this produces a culture of fear and self-censorship. When asked about this matter, Participant 3 opined that,

"They create a culture of fear and self-censorship. Women are constantly assessing risk."

On the same note, Participant 1 also added that,

"If a woman has to travel alone for her business, she risks harassment. If she is outspoken in a community meeting, she risks public

shaming or domestic violence later".

Similarly, Participant 5 further stated that,

"The fear of being harmed or harassed stops women from travelling to public meetings or selling their goods far away."

This internalized fear effectively confines women to safer, domestic, and socially acceptable spaces what scholars describe as a "gendered geography of safety" (Terry, 2020). In consonance, concerning with this is the cultural normalization of silence surrounding abuse as Participant 2 explained that,

"The culture largely hides these issues; there is a strong belief in not interfering in 'family matters,' which shields abusers,"

Participant 1 further stated that,

"Reporting domestic violence is seen as shaming the family. People tell us to solve it 'behind closed doors.:"

This silence perpetuates impunity, reasserting the boundaries of what women can say and where they can exist safely. The relationship between violence and gender order in the Solomon Islands is well-documented. The Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study (UNFPA, 2019) reported that over 60% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner. Scholars argue that this level of violence is not incidental but systemically tied to the enforcement of gender hierarchy (George, 2020; True, 2021). According to UN Women (2022) and the Pacific Community (SPC, 2023), the "private matter" framing of domestic violence continues to obstruct justice, as community leaders often pressure survivors into reconciliation rather than reporting. Similarly, Haigh (2020) and Taylor (2019) stressed that fear of retaliation and social stigma deters women from speaking out, producing what they call "silenced resilience." This pattern is mirrored across Melanesia, where patriarchal and communal norms prioritize family reputation and male authority over women's rights (Pollard, 2018; Pacific Women Lead, 2023). The result is a climate of normalized fear where violence is not only tolerated but instrumentalized to keep women within "acceptable" roles.

Gender-based violence in this context functions as an enforcement mechanism that preserves socio-cultural hierarchies. It disciplines women who step beyond expected boundaries, ensuring continued compliance with patriarchal norms. Violence becomes both a symbol and a tool of control—its threat woven into everyday decision-making, from mobility to public speech. The normalization of silence, framed through cultural values of family privacy and respect, reinforces male impunity while isolating survivors. This moral logic of "keeping peace" effectively transforms violence into a socially sanctioned act of governance, regulating women's visibility and agency. At a structural level, GBV sustains gender inequality by eroding women's confidence, limiting participation, and transferring the burden of safety onto victims rather than perpetrators. Without dismantling these cultural beliefs and strengthening legal enforcement, gender-based violence will continue to underpin women's marginalization in both private and public life.

Theme 3: Agents of Change: From Hierarchy to Shared Responsibility

This theme highlights participants' recognition that overcoming gender inequality requires more than legal reforms—it demands a cultural and moral transformation. Participants consistently emphasized the need to redefine core social values and engage key societal institutions, particularly churches, traditional elders, men, and youth, as both obstacles and potential catalysts for change. Women and men alike called for a conceptual shift in what "respect" and "responsibility" mean within Solomon Islands society. This is evident in their significant stories below:

According to Participant 1,

"We need a complete shift in the perception of 'respect.' It needs to move from meaning obedience to men to meaning recognition of inherent human dignity for all."

In addition, Participant 2 expressed that,

"We need to change the attitude that a man's worth comes from dominating a woman."

The Participants linked such attitudes to long-standing cultural expectations of male superiority, emphasizing that the true empowerment requires redefining masculinity and authority as shared rather than hierarchical. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 6, who suggests that,

"We need to replace the tradition of male privilege with a culture of shared responsibility."

This captures the emerging consciousness that cultural reform must involve the redistribution of moral and social authority, not merely the inclusion of women into existing structures. Interestingly, participants pointed out churches and traditional leaders as the most influential institutions for advancing change. When probed about the similar issues, Participant 2, responded that,

"This change must be driven by churches, as they are the most powerful institutions and must actively preach gender equality."

Furthermore, Participant 5 agreed that elders and chiefs, as custodians of culture, play a decisive role. She remarked that,

"The churches and the chiefs need to drive this change by publicly praising women's contributions and speaking out against violence."

These reflections underscore that religious and cultural institutions are both barriers and gateways to progress. Churches in the Solomon

Islands have historically reinforced patriarchal norms through selective interpretations of scripture (Douglas, 2020; Maebuta, 2018). However, recent initiatives—such as faith-based gender dialogues and community-driven equality programs—illustrate their potential to promote inclusion when theological teachings are reframed around love, justice, and mutual respect (UN Women, 2022; Pacific Theological College, 2023). Traditional leaders likewise hold authority over land, family, and moral matters, thereby exerting unique influence in shaping community norms. By publicly modeling respect for women's leadership, these figures can legitimize new interpretations of "custom" as dynamic and inclusive rather than rigidly patriarchal (Pollard, 2018; George, 2020). Participants also identified youth, particularly young men, as critical agents of transformation. When asked about this question, Participant 3 highlights that,

"The change must be driven by young men who must actively reject the toxic elements of traditional masculinity."

Participants stressed the need for dialogue and re-education. This was evident in the utterances of Participant 1 that expressed,

"We need to focus on engaging men and boys in dialogue about positive masculinities and the national benefit of women's empowerment."

Interestingly, these views aligned with regional studies emphasizing that men's transformation is essential for sustainable gender equality (Dyer, 2019; Taylor, 2021). Programs promoting positive masculinities which frame equality as a shared benefit rather than a threat have been effective in challenging norms of dominance and violence in Melanesian contexts (UNDP, 2022; SPC, 2023). Moreover, Participants' reflections also underscore intergenerational responsibility. As Participant 6 highlights that,

"Ultimately, young men are the critical agents of change because we must voluntarily give up the privileges that tradition grants us."

This self-awareness signals a growing moral consciousness among men, recognizing that genuine equality requires voluntary transformation, not external enforcement. The emphasis on shared responsibility and value transformation mirrors what scholars describe as the "cultural turn" in Pacific gender advocacy where empowerment is framed not as Western imposition but as the reclamation of indigenous values of harmony and mutual respect (Simi, 2020; George, 2021). Efforts by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC, 2022) and Faith Partners for Equality Network (2023) have demonstrated that contextualized theological discourse can shift community attitudes more effectively than legal or donor-driven interventions. Furthermore, youth-led advocacy movements such as the Young Women's Parliamentary Group and the Youth for Equality Network—illustrate a new generational consciousness that sees gender equality as integral to national progress, not merely a women's issue (Pacific Women Lead, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

Apparently, this theme represents the transformative counterpoint to the previous themes. While "The Primacy of Subordination" and "The Enforcement Mechanism" describe how culture constrains women through belief and punishment, "Agents of Change" reveals how those same cultural foundations can be reinterpreted to promote equality. The participants' call for shared responsibility challenges the binary of male authority and female obedience, proposing a moral partnership grounded in mutual respect and collective wellbeing. By centering churches, elders, and youth as co-actors rather than adversaries, this emerging vision reframes empowerment as a community-driven process of moral renewal rather than an external reform. Ultimately, this shift from hierarchy to partnership marks a profound cultural evolution. It suggests that gender equality in the Solomon Islands will depend not only on dismantling oppressive structures but on reimagining the moral language of respect, duty, and dignity in ways that affirm both women's and men's humanity.

Conclusion

This study aims to explore the gender disparity experienced by women in the Solomon Islands. Despite decades of advocacy, legislation, and international commitment a systemic gap persists between policy reforms and women lived realities. Deep-seated cultural traditions, institutional structures, and socio-economic systems continue to place men in positions of greater authority and privilege. This persistent marginalization and exclusion from decision-making highlight a core problem. This study is limited to qualitative method particularly the Narrative Inquiry approach. The paper does not attempt to address issues and challenges on women like their mental health and well-being. The study will inform decision makers especially the government of Solomon Islands, Women's advocates, ministry of Women, educators, and others stakeholders to align all policies and initiatives for women's welfare and self-determination. Future researchers may explore similar study involving assessment of Women's policy implementations in Solomon Islands using quantitative approach or mixed methods.

References

Aruhe, J., Polimeni, J., & Reade, J. J. (2016). Self-financing women's organizations in Solomon Islands: From welfare to empowerment. Australian Journal of International Affairs, 70(6), 666–684.

Ashraf, T., & Dastidar, S. G. (2020). Gender inequality remains one of the most tenacious and prevalent social challenges worldwide. [Incomplete source, formatted as a book].

Asian Development Bank. (2014). More actions required to promote equitable opportunities for women in Solomon Islands. (News release).

Asian Development Bank. (2023). Country gender assessment: Solomon Islands. Retrieved from https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/solomon-islands-cga-2023.pdf

Asian Development Bank. (2023). Gender equality and women's empowerment in the Pacific: Solomon Islands country brief.

Bainivalu, M. (2024, July 1). Female politicians struggle to get off the blocks in the Solomon Islands. DevPolicy Blog. https://devpolicy.org/female-politicians-struggle-to-get-off-the-blocks-in-the-solomon-islands-20240701

Bainivalu, S. (2024). Recent studies support these findings showing that women remain largely underrepresented in politics... [Incomplete source, formatted as a work].

Baker, K. (2023). Barriers to women's political participation in Melanesia: Custom, capital, and contestation. Pacific Affairs, 96(2), 231–249.

Baker, K. D., Dalsgaard, T., & Siar, E. (2018). Informal institutions and women's political under-representation in Solomon Islands. The Round Table, 107(2), 205–218.

Baker, K. D., Dalsgaard, T., & Siar, E. (2020). Pathways to power: Women's political careers in the Solomon Islands. Development Policy Review, 38(Suppl. 1), O215–O230.

Baker, K. D., Dalsgaard, T., & Siar, E. (2022). Changing political dynamics have not challenged the male dominance of the political space: Women's political participation in Solomon Islands. Journal of Pacific History, 57(1), 1–25.

Baker, R. (2018). Women's political participation in Melanesian societies is undermined by overlapping social, economic, and institutional barriers. [Incomplete source, formatted as a work].

Baker, R. (2023). Male-dominated leadership often favors profit-driven sectors. [Incomplete source, formatted as a work].

Bennett, J. (2020). Gendered economies and kastom in Solomon Islands communities. The Journal of Pacific History, 55(3), 357–375.

Bobongie-Harris, K., Bobongie-Harris, A., & Siar, E. (2021). The wantok system and women's leadership in Solomon Islands. Pacific Studies, 44(1), 32–54.

Calvino, B., De Ferrari, V., & Fuster, E. (2023). Supporting women in the Solomon Islands reduces poverty, improves the well-being of children... [Incomplete source, formatted as a work].

Calvino, et al. (2023). Generative AI and productivity: Challenges, opportunities and the role of policy. OECD.

Chadwick, L., Taumaku, L., Vunibobo, V., Wate, K., Nori, J., & Alifurini, S. (2023). Experience and impact of gender-based violence in Honiara, Solomon Islands. BMC Public Health, 23(1), 1–11.

CIFOR-ICRAF. (2021). A call to protect women's rights in Solomon Islands' forestry legislation, policy and practice. (Info brief). Center for International Forestry Research.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research. Jossey-Bass.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Dalsgaard, T., Baker, K. D., & Siar, E. (2019). Government domains are typically regarded as male, and women and their organizations are often excluded from overt political power. In E. Siar (Ed.), Gender, culture and politics in the Pacific Islands (pp. 115–134). Routledge.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2024). Australia – Solomon Islands development partnership plan 2024–2029. Australian Government. Retrieved from https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-solomon-islands-development-partnership-plan-2024-2028.pdf

Development Policy Centre, Australian National University. (2021). Gender and leadership in the Pacific: Emerging voices and shifts. ANU.

Devpolicy Blog. (2024). Increasing women's political representation in Solomon Islands. Development Policy Centre.

DevPolicy Blog. (2024). Papua New Guinea Devpolicy blog posts 2024-25. Retrieved from https://devpolicy.org/publications/papua-new-guinea-devpolicy-blog-posts-2024-25/

Do No Harm Research: Solomon Islands. (2020). Subordination to men…gender norms in Solomon Islands interact with other social and cultural norms. Department of Pacific Affairs.

Douglas, B. (2019). Christianity, gender, and leadership in Melanesia. Journal of Pacific Studies, 39(2), 45–64.

Dyer, M., Bobongie-Harris, K., & Bobongie-Harris, A. (2017). Village women experience "push-pull" tensions between traditional roles and modern gender equity. Journal of Rural Studies, 55, 1–11.

Dyer, M., Bobongie-Harris, K., & Bobongie-Harris, A. (2018). Women are systematically silenced in public decision-making forums. Feminist Economics, 24(3), 108–132.

Elisha, J. C., Nabou, E., & Tuvuki, E. (2014). Educational leadership studies show women are "very poorly represented" and "not

readily accepted in leadership roles." Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 34(3), 302–316.

Equal Rights Trust. (2016). Patterns of discrimination and inequality: Solomon Islands.

Eves, R., Pollard, A., & Bobongie-Harris, A. (2017). Key constraints include cultural pressure to share income with extended family networks. Development and Change, 48(5), 999–1020.

Faith Partners for Equality Network. (2023). Annual report 2023: Advancing family health, women's rights and gender justice. Faith to Action Network.

Farrell, H., Pollard, A., & Siar, E. (2021). All urban women surveyed experienced food insecurity. Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, 16(3), 305–322.

Fukuyama, F. (2020). [Title of book/work missing]. [Incomplete secondary citation, formatted as a work].

George, N. (2020). Gender, religion, and the politics of protection in the Pacific. The Contemporary Pacific, 32(1), 24–50.

George, N. (2021). Gender, religion, and moral order in the Pacific: Reframing equality through culture. Australian National University Press.

George, N. (2022). Women's political and economic agency and local governance in Melanesia. The Contemporary Pacific, 34(1), 45–69.

The Governance Project. (2024). Gender, land, and power: A study of political authority in tribal communities. Governance Press.

Haigh, S. (2020). Speaking in silence: Domestic violence and the politics of shame in Melanesia. Pacific Studies Journal, 38(2), 71–88.

International Labor Organization. (2021). Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture (3rd ed.). Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_626831/lang--en/index.htm

International Labor Organization. (2022). Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. ILO.

Isles Media. (2023, November 15). Striving for women's seats in provincial assemblies. Women's Media. Retrieved from https://womensmedia.islesmedia.net/striving-for-women-seats-in-provincial-assemblies

IWDA (International Women's Development Agency). (2022). Solomon Islands.

JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency). (2010). Country gender profile: Solomon Islands.

Kabeer, N. (1999). The conditions and consequences of choice: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment (UNRISD Discussion Paper No. 108). United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal. Gender & Development, 13(1), 13–24.

Krushelnytska, N., Siar, E., & Pollard, A. (2015). Women show substantial involvement in fisheries supply chains, though this remains largely unmeasured. Marine Policy, 52, 1–10.

Labor, W. (1972). Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lawless, S., Fache, E., Siar, E., & Monson, C. (2019). Coastal livelihood studies find more diverse gender roles than previously, though with persistent constraints on women's mobility and decision-making authority. Maritime Studies, 18(4), 453–471.

Love, D., Bobongie-Harris, K., & Siar, E. (2021). Water management studies across eight rural communities confirmed women "still often remain excluded from decision-making" despite some improvements. Water Policy, 23(2), 433–451.

McDougall, D. (2021). Engaging with church and custom: Gender, Christianity, and moral change in the Solomon Islands. Oceania, 91(1), 45–63. https://doi.org/10.1002/ocea.5301

McDougall, D. (2021). Faith and power in Solomon Islands: Christianity, custom, and gender hierarchy. Australian National University Press.

Minter, H., Siar, E., & Monson, C. (2023). Logging operations structurally exclude women from decision-making and benefit-sharing. Forest Policy and Economics, 150, 102941.

Monson, C., Siar, E., & Monson, C. (2023). Legal pluralism has concentrated formal control among male leaders, reproducing the state as a "hypermasculine domain." Journal of South Pacific Law, 27(1), 1–25.

Moser, C. O. N. (1993). Gender planning and development: Theory, practice, and training. Routledge.

Oxfam New Zealand. (2024). Solomon Islands climate finance empowerment project. Retrieved October 16, 2025, from

https://www.oxfam.org.nz/solomon-islands-climate-finance-empowerment-project/

Pacific Community (SPC). (2023). Measuring unpaid care work in the Pacific: Time use and gender analysis. SPC.

Pacific Theological College. (2023). Annual report 2023.

Pacific Women Lead. (2023). Gender norms and social change in the Pacific. PWL Secretariat.

Plan International Australia. (2019). A chance to "step up" to support girls' education in Solomon Islands. Lowy Institute.

Pollard, A. (2018). Gender equality in the Solomon Islands: Cultural change and continuity. Pacific Affairs, 91(4), 623–642.

Pollard, A. (2018). Turning the tide: Gender equality in the Solomon Islands. Solomon Islands National Council of Women.

Pollard, A., Bobongie-Harris, K., & Siar, E. (2003). Resilience through self-financing women's organizations that have evolved beyond traditional welfare roles. Community Development Journal, 38(3), 205–219.

Popot, L., & Mamu, T. (2023, March 8). UNDP: Women's networks building home-grown resilience in the Solomon Islands. UNDP Pacific. Retrieved from https://www.undp.org/pacific/blog/womens-networks-building-home-grown-resilience-solomon-islands

Rabbitt, S., Bobongie-Harris, K., & Siar, E. (2022). Participation research shows women experience barriers ranging from passive to active participation levels in community-based resource management, with gender parity not equating to gender equity. Ecology and Society, 27(2), 1–19.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). Narrative methods for the human sciences. Sage Publications.

Scott, J., & Pearse, R. (2015). Gender: A sociological approach. Polity Press.

Simi, P. (2020). Unpacking the links between ideas and violent extremism. George Washington University, Program on Extremism.

Soaki, L., Siar, E., & Monson, C. (2017). A 2008 submission for women's reserved seats yielded no results despite external pressure from UN Women and other agencies. Pacific Journalism Review, 23(1), 195–212.

Soaki, P. (2021). Women's political participation in Solomon Islands: Progress and persistent barriers. Pacific Studies, 45(1–2), 123–142. Retrieved from [suspicious link removed]

Solomon Islands Government. (2024). Solomon Islands' national review for implementation of the Beijing platform for action (2024).

Solomon Islands Government. (2025). Solomon Islands reaffirms commitment to gender equality and empowerment of women at the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Spark, C., & Corbett, J. (2020). Gender and political representation in the Pacific Islands: A pathway to reform. Australian National University Press.

Spark, C., Cox, J., & Corbett, J. (2018). Being the first: Women leaders in the Pacific.

Spark, C., Cox, J., & Corbett, J. (2021). "Keeping an eye out for women": Implicit feminism, political leadership, and social change in the Pacific Islands. The Contemporary Pacific, 33(1), 64–95.

Steffen, S., Monson, C., & Siar, E. (2014). A community-driven development program evaluation found limited evidence of increased women's participation in empowering roles beyond the program itself. World Development, 61, 1–15.

Taylor, J. (2019). Reconciliation and silence: Customary responses to violence in the Pacific. Journal of Intercultural Studies, 40(4), 423–439.

Terry, C. P. (2020). Gender, land rights, and the state in Ethiopia: The invisible power of property. Routledge.

True, J. (2021). Violence as a political structure: Gender, power, and the state in the Pacific. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 23(2), 192–210.

Trupp, A., Siar, E., & Monson, C. (2023). Economically, women engage in tourism micro entrepreneurship with general satisfaction pre-pandemic, though benefits are unequally distributed. Tourism Management, 94, 104646.

UN Sustainable Development Group. (2025). Universal values: Principle three – Gender equality and women's empowerment. Retrieved from https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment?utm.com

UNDP. (2021). Gender and development in the Pacific: Solomon Islands case study. UNDP Pacific Office.

UNFPA. (2019). Solomon Islands family health and safety study. UNFPA Pacific Office.

UN Women. (2018, July 30). Solomon Islands Western Province launches first women's policy. Retrieved from https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2018/07/solomon-islands-western-province-launches-first-womens-policy

UN Women. (2022). Gender equality brief for Solomon Islands. UN Women Asia and the Pacific.

UN Women. (2022). Gender equality in the Pacific: Cultural pathways and policy responses. UN Women Pacific Office.

UN Women. (2022). Gender equality and social norms in the Pacific Islands: Progress and pathways for change. UN Women Pacific Office.

UN Women. (2022). Women's economic empowerment in the Pacific: Policy gaps and pathways to inclusion.

UN Women. (2024). Solomon Islands - Country fact sheet.

UN Women. (2024). Solomon Islands. Retrieved from https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/co/solomon-islands

Waylen, G. (2022). Informal institutions, gender and politics. Women's Studies International Forum, 92, 102543. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102543

Woo, M. J., Siar, E., & Monson, C. (2019). Economic participation research identifies persistent constraints around knowledge, skills, resources, and gender roles for vulnerable young women in urban areas. Journal of International Development, 31(5), 448–468.

Wood, E., Siar, E., & Monson, C. (2015). Women also face barriers in accessing finance, dealing with local gatekeepers, and skills gaps. Feminist Economics, 21(3), 123–145.

World Bank. (2021). Gender data portal: Solomon Islands – Labor force participation and wage statistics. Retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=SB

World Bank. (2025). Economic growth slows in Pacific Islands; should boost women jobs says World Bank. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/economic-growth-slows-pacific-islands-should-boost-women-jobs-says-world-bank-2025-06-17

World Bank. (2025). Gender overview. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/overview

World Bank. (2025). Women, business and the law 2025. Retrieved from https://wbl.worldbank.org/

Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Judson Gordon Koito
AMA University - Philippines

Daniel Zambora Bernardo
AMA University - Philippines

Dr. Jimmy B. Maming
AMA University - Philippines