The Solomon Islands is a small Island state in the Southwest Pacific, made up of approximately 1,000 Islands, many divided from each other by large stretches of ocean. A third of these Islands are inhabited, mostly by people living in small settlements. Many communities live without access to electricity or telecommunications, and few have passable roads.

The majority of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture, with less than a quarter in paid employment. The official language is English, although Pijin English is widely used as the language of communication. The Solomon Islands is highly vulnerable to natural disasters including cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, and drought.

This Spotlight Report provides an analysis of the Solomon Islands' progress to meet the outcomes and implementation targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, as they are represented in national policy and programming.

Policy, Planning and Sustainable Development Goal 4

The Solomon Islands' commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Agenda 2030 is reflected in the Government’s National Development Strategy (NDS) ‘Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders’, launched in 2016. SDG 4 is directly aligned to the NDS under Objective Three: “All Solomon Islanders have access to quality health and education.” The ‘Medium-Term Strategy: Ensure all Solomon Islanders can access quality education and the nation’s manpower needs are sustainably met’ was adopted to achieve Objective 3. The NDS has a performance framework that matches selected targets from SDGs with the NDS Medium-Term Strategy targets and then details performance Indicators. The National Education Plan (NEAP) has an implementation framework that breaks down the strategy into 5-year chunks. The current NEAP is for 2016-2020.

REFERENCES:
Civil Society Engagement in SDG Implementation and Monitoring

Although there was some CSO consultation in the design of the NDS, the Solomon Islands lacks any regular mechanism for government and civil society to share information and monitor development progress. There is currently no CSO platform on the SDGs nationally and links to Pacific-wide SDG networks are limited. This report represents a first for civil society to advocate on SDG 4 rollout and implementation in the Solomon Islands. COESI found the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) open to providing information and felt they were showing a genuine attempt to get to grips with improving aspects of data collection.

Measuring Progress

The MEHRD produces substantial data, but the indicators in the NDS monitoring framework do not evaluate quality or examine equity issues from province to province or rural to urban areas. There remain serious gaps within MEHRD’s Theory of Change 2016–20, which addresses only formal education for children up to year 13 and does not recognise the many children and youth pushed out from the formal system at various transition points. These pushouts are not tracked and few funds are made available by the MEHRD for further literacy and adult education programmes for them. The MEHRD has its own Standardized Tests of Achievement (SISTA), as well as taking part in the Pacific Islands National Literacy Achievement (PILNA)- both of which only measure performance at school, with no reference to literacy in the out-of-school and adult population.

Equity

Whilst the MEHRD is proud to have achieved equal access for girls in basic and secondary education, there is more in the equity domain that should be examined. Girls are performing better than boys (MEHRD’s Early Grade Reading assessment) at both assessment levels (years 4 and 6) and across all strands (PAR 2018). Students attending private schools and students in urban areas are also performing better. As in several countries of the South Pacific, boys’ participation and relative performance continue to decrease. The structure of the education budget is likely to affect equity, with the top 2 per cent of students taking up nearly half the budget. Further, 62 per cent of scholarship recipients are male, the large majority likely to be from urban areas. As for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training or TVET, largely representing Rural Training Centre, enrolment typically caters for push-outs from the formal sector. Funding per student is the lowest of all sectors, at US$ 139 per student. Nevertheless, it is heavily oversubscribed.

### Education Sector spending (Solomon Island Dollars SBD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub sector</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>No. of students enrolled</th>
<th>Funding per student</th>
<th>Percentage of students</th>
<th>Percentage of the education budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>548,643,906</td>
<td>3,977</td>
<td>137,954</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>330,789,415</td>
<td>54,012</td>
<td>6,124</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECCE</td>
<td>52,214,491</td>
<td>16,067</td>
<td>3,249</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>251,423,077</td>
<td>130,140</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>22,119,425</td>
<td>19,835</td>
<td>1,115</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,205,190,314</td>
<td>224,031</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2019 Actual expenditure by sector, Table 33, MEHRD Annual Report 2019
Possibly the biggest issue raised frequently in the media is the relative size of the scholarship programme, which in 2018 absorbed 10 per cent of the entire national budget, inclusive of donor and development expenditure. The Tertiary sector took 46 per cent of education expenditure, with scholarships taking 78 per cent of that (Table 40, MEHRD Annual Report). Funding in primary was just SBD 1,932 per student (around US$ 241), but US$ 17,244 per student in tertiary.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### SDG4 TARGET AREAS NOT PRIORITIZED OR DEMONSTRATING LIMITED PROGRESS:

- 4.2 Participation rate in organised learning, ECCE and secondary
- 4.4: Decent Skills for Work
- 4.5: Gender and Inclusion
- 4.6: Youth and Adult Literacy
- 4.7: Education for Sustainable Development
- 4.a: Learning Environments

#### PROGRESS MADE ON SDG4 IMPLEMENTATION

- Providing access to basic education through fee subsidies (SDG4 Target 4.1 and 4.2)
- Improving the quality of education primarily through curriculum reform and teacher training and development (SDG4 Targets 4.1 and 4.c)
- Achieving and maintaining gender parity through primary and secondary schools
- Reforming Education sector governance as a foundation for improved quality and focus on Tertiary and curriculum reform

The most critical issues that the Solomon Islands must attend to in ensuring 'No One is Left Behind' are: (1) access to education (financial, infrastructure, and teachers), (2) educational pathways and lifelong learning, and (3) inclusive education.

### 1. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The Government has drawn back from investing more in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), declaring a moratorium on the establishment of further ECCE schools, and performing poorly in disbursing grants to existing schools – paying out to only 67 per cent of ECCE schools 2019 (MEHRD annual report, 2019). Now it seems that they are putting the responsibility of ECCE back into the hands of families and communities.

One of the chief barriers to access to education in the Solomon Islands is poverty. This is compounded by the issue of insufficient government grants. As the majority (77%) of the population live in rural and remote areas of the archipelago leading largely subsistence-based lifestyles, the ability of families to meet the demands of school fees (and other schooling costs) for their children to attend school is limited. While there is generally a high net enrolment at the primary level (91.8% NER), the low enrolment rate at secondary is alarming (37.4% NER for junior secondary), indicating high dropout rates between levels. As government grants are insufficient, school councils set additional parents' contribution fees, and non-payers are often excluded, conflicting with the aim of providing education for all children.

Government grants are not structured to meet the costs of supporting children with disabilities to attend a school or learn adequately if they do. Neither does the government fund special schools. Children classified by the school census as living with a disability make up only 1.3 per cent of the student body, meaning most children with disabilities do not attend school.

**Recommendations:**

a. To ensure that basic education is free and of good quality and that all children are able to access and benefit from it, schools’ demands for parents’ contributions to basic education must be outlawed. The level and management of financial support (grants) provided to schools need to be reviewed and increased.

b. Additional school grants (per student) must be provided to schools, which include children with disabilities in classroom learning, to provide for special needs teachers and assistants.

### 2. EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Little attention is paid to post-secondary pathways. Rural Training Centres (RTCs) owned and run by Church authorities, offer the only alternative pathway in rural areas and for skills for sustainable livelihoods education. However, they are heavily oversubscribed and only partially funded. Community learning centres (CLCs), where adult and out-of-school youth’s literacy needs could be addressed, are not supported.

**Recommendations:**

A nation-wide literacy assessment of youth and adults is conducted to determine the need for literacy and educational programmes.

a. Quality Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) programmes for youth and adults are developed, including bridging programmes to access PSET providers.

b. Adult female literacy is particularly low, so the government must fund literacy programmes to address this issue.

c. Assistance to RTCs must be expanded in scale and scope, and additional skills development programmes are provided. Community learning centres must be recognised and supported as well.

d. Learning modalities and curricula should be adjusted to ensure education supports sustainable livelihoods in the community and equips the population with skill sets demanded in the local economy.

### 3. INCLUSION

The Solomon Islands Government has failed to take disability seriously. It is one of the 10 or so countries that have not ratified the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The MEHRD does not collect data on the special learning needs of children with disabilities and it is therefore unknown how
much children with disabilities who are currently enrolled and participating in schools are actually learning or achieving compared to their peers. Specific teaching materials and aids have not been developed or distributed to schools. The Government and its donors are not currently directing any budgetary support to address or mainstream inclusivity. As common in many countries, civil society has been left to pick up the pieces in this space.

**Recommendations:**

a. The new Education Act should legislate for compulsory education, meaning that the educational needs of girls, learners with disabilities, learners in remote areas, and the poor have to be considered.

b. Gender parity should be monitored continuously to ensure equity at all levels in the education system.

c. The new Education Act should legislate for compulsory education, meaning that the educational needs of those with disabilities have to be considered.

d. The National Disability Inclusive Education Policy needs to be approved by the Cabinet. This could be a possible requirement for the ratification of the CRPD.

e. People with disabilities must be involved in the framing of any disability policies.

f. A specific budget must be allocated to the training of Teacher Aides that will support children with disabilities, and to make classrooms and WASH facilities in schools more inclusive.

g. A fair proportion of scholarships should be made available for students with disabilities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

Whilst the Solomon Islands escaped the first wave of COVID-19 by closing its borders quickly, many are worried about a second wave and its implications on the possible education strategies.

Due to a lack of infrastructure and equipment, an online homeschooling approach would not reach the vast majority of students. COESI (2020) has carried out a survey on the potential for homeschooling and it was strongly recommended that the government urgently draw up plans for homeschooling that does not rely on technology, TV, or radio to continue education services, rather printed versions supported by teachers.

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### Percentage of schools with technology for digital learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Technology for Digital Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNESCO.