

14. Village Life

Approaching 150,000 Solomon Islanders live in urban areas, with the remaining 500,000 living in rural villages. Solomon Islanders in villages grow, or catch, most of the food they need. Most cooking is done in a traditional manner, using pre-heated stones with a leaf cover as insulation, or simply over an open fire, though modern pots and pans are used. Home-grown foods include sweet potato, cassava, yam, and taro, though rice has become very popular with those who can afford to buy it. As population density increases, more villagers come to discover that land for food production is no longer readily available. Crop rotation cycles must be shortened, at the cost of lower crop yields.

Although modern houses are now being built, traditional building materials, known as ‘bush materials’, are still used in most house construction, sometimes with a mix of modern building materials. ‘Bush materials’ include bamboo walling, split palm flooring, sago palm leaf thatch, and vine ties. Cooking is usually done in a separate building close to the main house. Even in remote areas, radio has been used for decades to receive news, and solar panels are now widely used to provide limited lighting, and to power some devices, such as mobile phones linked to local communication towers. Limited introduction of piped water supplies has occurred.

Village life has absorbed modern elements, but communities are still organised, and structured, on the basis of relationships, of blood and of association. Village governance is not formally part of government. Church and tradition are important elements. And villages are not only rural. Honiara also contains designated urban villages, and many of the settlements in Honiara are called villages. Through these links, rural life and kin-based communities have transferred to the city.



14.1. Nataghera Village, Santa Ana, 1985. (Mike McCoy Collection)



14.2. A school teacher from Busu Primary School crossing Kwaimanafu River, Malaita, on his way to his family food garden after work, 2009. (Mike McCoy Collection)



14.3. Malaita bush village, central Kwara`ae, 2007. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.4. This Malaitan bush hamlet in the Kwaio area was photographed in 2004. It is in the style of early villages. (David Akin Collection)



14.5. Inside a traditional men's house in the Fataleka area, Malaita, 2007. The fire place is in the centre, and little has changed in the style of construction, although modern items are scattered about the walls and benches. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.6. Many villages moved down to the coast and houses began to be built on short stumps, rather than directly on the ground, while maintaining use of local materials. This photograph is from Mono Island, Treasury Islands, in the 1950s. (Lynne McDonald Collection)



14.7. Village at Buma, west Malaita, 2005. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.8. Children at the Gilbertese (iKiribati) village on Babanga Island, New Georgia Group, 2007. (Clive Moore Collection)

In the 1950s and 1960s, the British government organised re-settlement for a few thousand people from the Phoenix Group in the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati), where poor soils and low rainfall had caused famines. The first Gilbertese settlements were created at White River at Honiara, Wagina Island at the southeastern end of Choiseul, at Titiana on Gizo, and at Kamaliae in the Shortland Islands. They recreated their original lifestyles, building *maneaba* (large meeting houses) and maintaining distinct cultural ways, which were particularly obvious in singing and dancing. Coming from atolls, they were unaccustomed to forested land and found it difficult to adapt their maritime skills to Solomons-style agriculture. This was aggravated by the poor quality of the land they had been allocated.



14.9. The *maneaba* next to the Church in the Gilbertese (iKiribati) village on Babanga Island, New Georgia Group, 2007. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.10. House in the Gilbertese (iKiribati) village on Babanga Island, 2007. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.11. House in the Gilbertese (iKiribati) village on Babanga Island, 2007. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.12. This is an urban village or settlement at the back of Honiara, 2002. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.13. Village life can be modern, like this series of family homes in Lake Tengano, Rennell Island, 2002. (Clive Moore Collection)



14.14. Not all villages are beyond urban areas. The 'Fishery' (Malaitan Fishing Village) on the foreshore at Kukum in Honiara was begun in the 1950s as a home for Malaitan families from the lagoons. It has progressed from temporary to permanent settlement, with houses crowded close together, people living in clans just as they would have lived on the artificial islands in the lagoons. This photograph was taken in 2012. (Clive Moore Collection)