

15. Women

Traditionally, despite there being patrilineal and matrilineal societies (where in theory some women control land and inheritance), Solomon Islands remains a male-dominated society in which the status of women is low. Government policy is to ensure the active contribution and meaningful participation of women and men in all spheres, and at all levels of development and decision-making. Unfortunately, this gender equity is slow to develop. Women have not been able to break through the gender barriers to play a full role in national leadership commensurate with their proportion in the population. Paid employment is heavily oriented to males. Surveys indicate that only 28 percent of married women make decisions regarding their own healthcare, and few women have decision-making capacity within families.

Very few women have ever been elected to the National Parliament or Provincial Assemblies, although a number now lead or hold senior positions in government departments or in the private sector. Women's networks, including non-government organisations and church groups, have been working to address these issues. There is a National Council of Women and a Ministry of Women, Youth and Children, but generally women's organisations receive insufficient support from the national government, relying on funding from overseas donors.

Recent governments have legislated to curb domestic violence, and to promote gender equality, to assist women in rural areas with skills training, and ensuring the well-being of women and families. While many of the images in this chapter are of urban women, it needs to be remembered that the majority of women live in rural areas. A more balanced picture, which includes this rural emphasis is gained by looking at women as depicted in all chapters.



15.1. Women's Club, Honiara, 1962. (Solomon Islands Government)



15.2. Girl Guides Troop, Honiara, 2006. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.3. Selling fresh fish at a roadside stall, at the 'Fishery' (Malaitan Fishing Village), Honiara, 2003. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.4. Roadside stall in Honiara, selling cooked fish, 2004. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.5. Doing the washing by hand, Honiara, 2004. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.6. Womens' Fellowship, South Seas Evangelical Church, Fataleka, Malaita, 2006. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.7. Malaitan women leaving the 'Fishery' (Malaitan Fishing Village) in Honiara to take part in a Bridewealth exchange, 2011. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.8. In memory of Roselyn Aona Toatee, from Kobito, Honiara, who died in 2016. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.9–10. Portraits of business and professional women, Honiara, 2005. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.11–12. Portraits of village women, Malaita, 2000s. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.13. School teaching is one of the work roles open to women. This teacher is at Kilusakwalo Primary School. Malaita, 2005. Note the reuse of a rice bag as a school satchel, with a strap added. (Mike McCoy Collection)



15.14. A woman selling jewellery in Central Market, Honiara, 2007. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.15. A woman selling *bilums*, Honiara, 2007. (Clive Moore Collection)



15.16. The Hotbread Kitchen team, Honiara, 2014. (Christopher Chevalier Collection)



15.17. Isabel women, 2006. (Graham Baines Collection)



15.18. Isabel woman, 2006. (Graham Baines Collection)



15.19. For many women in the provinces, particularly those living in inland villages, life is not about earning cash. It is focused on working in the gardens and bringing up a family. This mother was living with her children and husband in Kwaio, Malaita, 2007. (Christopher Chevalier Collection)