

## 16. Economy

The modern Solomon Islands economy still has a narrow base: copra, cocoa, palm oil, logging, fishing, and mining. The colonial economy was founded first on itinerant visits by whalers and marine product traders, then by syphoning off labour to work on plantations in Queensland and Fiji, a processes known as blackbirding. Once the Protectorate began, its economy was based on copra production—the smoke-dried flesh of coconuts—which at independence in 1978 accounted for one-quarter of the export earnings. Copra production is now in decline, although there are moves to find new ways to process coconuts for oil rather than for copra. Cocoa production was also significant, mainly as a village cash crop. Palm oil is harvested at large-scale plantations, mainly on Guadalcanal Plains. Logging has been part of the economy for a century, and since the 1980s whole log exports have sustained the national economy. Excessive exploitation has taken place, with little replanting. Regeneration will be slow. Untouched native hardwood forests do remain, held by communal landowners, but mainly high in the mountains in inaccessible areas.

Fishing is another mainstay, and although there is a local cannery at Noro in the Western Province, much of the fish is exported whole and frozen, to be processed in places like Thailand. As with logging, there is little local ownership in the industry, and whole log exports through Asian companies predominate. A small gold mine operated briefly at Gold Ridge of Guadalcanal, but closed during the ‘Tension’ years in the late 1990s, briefly reopened afterwards. There are areas of prospecting on other islands, which may eventually come to fruition as mines, however, local communities are very aware of the possibility of environmental damage from mining. Two or three mines would ‘float’ the national economy, but, despite exploration, new mines are by no means assured. The nation has great wealth in timber, fish and minerals, although creating an indigenous focus for future development will be a challenge.

Subsistence agriculture and fishing remain important in village economies. There are still high levels of cash poverty across the country, highest in remote rural areas. There is poor infrastructure development (limited road networks, electricity and reticulated water supplies) which has deterred foreign investment. The social strength of the Solomon Islands is that most of the land (85 percent) is owned by local communities, not the state or private enterprise, although this slows economic development.



16.1. Canoes drawn up for the Saturday morning beach market held once a month at the old Hawa`a plantation, south coast of Arosi, Makira, 2006. (Michael W. Scott Collection)

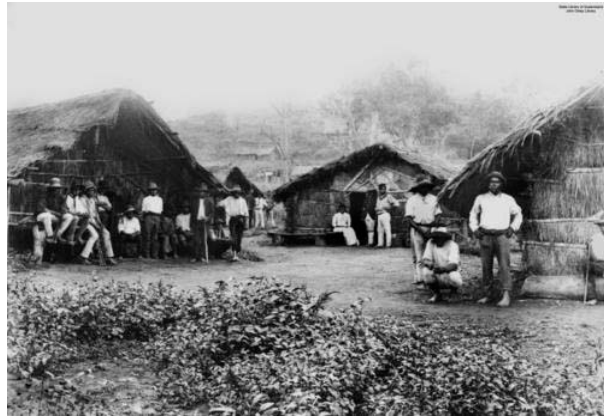
## Plantation Work in Queensland and Fiji, 1870s–1910s



16.2. Men from Guadalcanal and Malaita on Foulden plantation at Mackay, Queensland, in the 1870s. (Clive Moore Collection)



16.3. Australian Solomon Islander Chris Fatnowna in 1988, standing with a model of a recruiting ship made by Jack Marau, who came as a labourer to Queensland, Australia, and spent his life at Mackay. (Clive Moore Collection)



16.4. Islanders loading cut sugar cane at Knockroe plantation in the Isis district, Queensland, 1896.

16.5. Islanders outside their houses on a plantation at Mackay, 1880s. (16.4-5, State Library of Queensland, John Oxley Library)



16.6. Malaitans at Innisfail, with a slit drum and bows and arrows in the early 1900s, all made in Queensland. (Clive Moore Collection)

16.6. This Malaitan canoe in Fiji, presumably manufactured and decorated there, is one of the most remarkable artefacts from the overseas plantations, showing how culture was maintained overseas. The canoe is in Walu River, which is an old local shipping area. The river ran down a valley occupied by Solomon Islanders. (A. M. Brodziack & Co., Max Quanchi Collection)



## Plantation Work in Solomon Islands, onwards from the 1900s



16.7. New recruits on a plantation in the Russell Islands, a major plantation area in Solomon Islands.

16.8. The first task on a new plantation was to cut down the huge rainforest trees.



16.9-10. The trees were cleared and burnt and coconut palms planted in rows.



16.7-12. The plantation manager's home was substantial, surrounded by sheds and barracks for the labourers.  
(16.11-12, Joseph Meek, Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd., in Clive Moore Collection)





16.13. Maru coconut plantation, east of Hagaura village, north coast of Arosi, Makira, 1993. (Michael W. Scott Collection)



16.14. A copra dryer, the style of primitive drying chamber used for a century to dry the kernels of the nuts to produce copra, Malaita, 2004. (Clive Moore Collection)



16.15. Copra bags waiting for shipment on the wharf at Honiara, 2008. (Clive Moore Collection)





16.16. Longline fishing to supply the Tri Marine cannery at Noro, 2010s. (Joe Hamby and Tri Marine Collection)



16.17. Solomon Taiyo cannery at Tulagi, 1970s. (Clive Moore Collection)



16.18. The modern Tri Marine cannery at Noro, 2010s. (Joe Hamby and Tri Marine Collection)





16.19. The purseiner fishing boat *Discovery 105*, in Western Province, 2010s. (Joe Hamby and Tri Marine Collection)



16.20. A purseiner fishing vessel at the wharf in Honiara, 2010. (Christopher Chevalier Collection)





16.20. Harvested timber in a 'log pond' on Guadalcanal, waiting for shipment, 2011. (Clive Moore Collection)



16.21. Sino 'log pond', north coast of Arosi, Makira, 2006. (Krista L. Ovist Collection)

16.22. Whole logs are stored at the beach and floated out to ships, Makira, 2006. (Michael W. Scott Collection)





16.23. Logging ship, *Bang Quan*, at anchor off Sino 'log pond', north coast of Arosi, Makira, 2006. (Michael W. Scott Collection)



16.24. A logging pond being loaded onto *Fu Wang* off Waiae Bay, Makira, 2010. (Christopher Chevalier Collection)





16.25. Gold Ridge mine, Guadalcanal, 2016. (Stefan Armbruster Collection)



16.26. Tulagi market, 2007. Because most villages have no refrigeration, local markets operate regularly and are an important source of fresh produce and cash earnings for the people. (Clive Moore Collection)





16.27. Goods from bulk stores in Honiara being packed to send to the provinces. (Christopher Chevalier Collection)



16.28. Far too much of the food consumed in Solomon Islands, particularly in urban areas, can be classified as ‘junk food’—noodles, biscuits and soft drinks. (Christopher Chevalier Collection)



16.29. Women, in particular, sell items at road side stalls to supplement family incomes. This women had her stall near Honiara's Henderson airport in 2004. She is selling her own produce, such as betel nut, pepper stick (to chew with the nuts), cakes, donuts, sweets and single cigarettes. (Clive Moore Collection)





16.30. Seaweed farming at Rarumana on New Georgia, 2004. This was a European Union (EU)-funded project. (Mike McCoy Collection)



16.31. Seaweed farming at Rarumana on New Georgia, 2004. (Mike McCoy Collection)





16.32. Fishing platforms at Bulahaha, Malaita, 1906. The Anglican's *Southern Cross* is in the background. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection,)



16.33. A modern fishing platform on edge of fringing reef, Tawania'u, north coast of Arosi, 1993. (Michael W Scott Collection)





16.34–41. Shellfish are a key element of diet in coastal villages. Here, at Kia village, Isabel, in 2016, women make string bags, harvest shellfish among mangroves, and cook. Empty shells add to land reclamation in this coastal village. (Evelyn Tetehu Collection)





16.42–43. Pigs are central to the village economy. The first pigs reached the Solomon Islands 3,000 years ago on board long distance voyaging canoes from the north. Once used mainly in exchange or as sacrifices in religious ceremonies (like these pigs raised at 'Ai'eda Village, east Kwaio, Malaita, 1996), they are still most often consumed on special occasions. (David Akin Collection)



16.44. Pigs are wealth assets but people do not just treat them as livestock. They are valued and villagers develop close relationship with their animals. This Kwaio man from 'Ai'eda, east Malaita is picking lice off his pigs in 1996, a daily activity which they clearly enjoyed. (David Akin Collection)



16.45. One problem is the relationship between keeping pigs and having gardens. Pigs destroy gardens if they are not fenced. On the coast, people often keep pigs penned up on the water's edge. This one is on Babanga Island in the New Georgia Group, 2007. Its drinking vessel is a huge clam shell. (Clive Moore Collection)





16.46–47. These taro cultivation scenes are from `Ai`eda Vilage, east Kwaio, Malaita, in the 1980s and 1990s. The main source of subsistence for the majority of Solomon Islanders is root crops from their gardens, which are mainly sweet potato, taro, yams and cassava. Gardening involves clearing regrowth rainforest which has been left fallow for some years. Even with the use of metal tools, this still involves burning to make the clearing. Until the 1930s, taro was a major crop, but a disease known as taro blight affected the gardens and many farmers changed over to sweet potato, like cassava, a recently introduced crop. (David Akin Collection)





16.48. Yams are another staple crop in Solomon Islands. The tuber is underground and the vines are trained to climb on stakes. These photos are from a yam garden at Gounaile, `Ai`eda Village, east Kwaio, Malaita, 1996. (David Akin Collection)



16.49. This sweet potato garden is above Tawatana, north Arosi, Makira, 2006. (Michael W. Scott Collection)