



# Introduction

Solomon Islands was one of five countries included in a study by AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) to assess the effectiveness of current approaches to addressing violence against women and identify promising practices. The report of the study—*Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*—was published in 2008.

The ODE report was released by the Hon Stephen Smith MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Australian Minister for the Status of Women, on 25 November 2008 to coincide with White Ribbon Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The Solomon Islands country supplement to the ODE report was launched in Honiara on 11 March 2009 by the Hon Peter Tom, Solomon Islands' Minister for Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, coinciding with the week-long celebration of International Women's Day, with its theme 'Men and women together to end violence against women'.

The ODE study used a participatory approach focused on women's own experience of violence, and on what does or does not help them in terms of protection and prevention. The research team spoke with more than 120 people in Solomon Islands, including 40 people who were interviewed and another 80 people who participated in focus groups. The research was undertaken using international and local researchers. The local researchers in Solomon Islands were Salote Austin and Caroline Laore. The research was also supported by a local advisory group of prominent individuals.

The ODE report made a series of recommendations for Solomon Islands and the region that are relevant to all organisations and individuals who are committed to preventing and responding to violence against women.

This paper sets out Australia's initial response to the recommendations for action to end violence against women in Solomon Islands. Australian development assistance to Solomon Islands is delivered through a number of mechanisms, on a bilateral, regional and multilateral basis. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is a partnership between the government and people of Solomon Islands and the contributing countries of the Pacific region, including Australia. There are a number of areas where RAMSI is providing support to end violence against women. These are included in this report to demonstrate the scope of effort currently occurring in Solomon Islands to end violence against women.

AusAID recognises that ending violence against women requires action over the long term, and that the activities set out in this report are just the first stage in intensifying our efforts to address violence against women as part of the Australian international development assistance program.



Launch of the ODE report in Honiara.  
Photo: Charles Kadamana, Solomon Star Ltd

# Principles and priorities

The ODE report identified a range of principles and priorities structured around a *framework for action* for addressing violence against women. AusAID will use this framework and a set of key principles to guide its contribution to ending violence against women in Solomon Islands.

## Principles guiding Australia's contribution

The following principles will guide Australia's contribution to ending violence against women. AusAID will:

- > make a long-term commitment to ending violence against women
- > promote gender equality as a central principle of our work
- > work in partnership with key stakeholders and align with partner government priorities
- > adopt an integrated approach.

Further details are set out in the regional report.

## A framework for action

The framework for action sets out three main *strategies* for responding to violence against women:

- > ensuring women have access to justice
- > ensuring women have access to support services
- > preventing violence against women.

The framework for action can be used by all those working to end violence against women.



The box below sets out AusAID’s vision, its aim and the outcomes it will strive to achieve within the framework recommended by the ODE report.

A framework for ending violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor		
<b>Vision:</b> Women in Melanesia and East Timor are able to live free from violence and the fear of violence.		
<b>Aim:</b> To work in partnership—with national governments, civil society, international partners, and men and women—to increase efforts to reduce and respond to violence against women.		
<b>Outcome:</b> Women have access to justice	<b>Outcome:</b> Women have access to support services	<b>Outcome:</b> Violence against women is prevented

The structure of this report reflects the framework for action recommended in the ODE report, with sections on each of the three key strategies—ensuring women’s access to justice, ensuring women’s access to support services, and preventing violence against women—and on efforts to support an integrated approach.

# Women have access to justice

## Goals for all stakeholders in Solomon Islands

To increase women's access to justice.

This will include:

- > passing and implementing laws and policies that discourage violence and impose consequences on offenders
- > providing women with the means to protect themselves and their children from violence
- > providing women with the information necessary to access their rights
- > ensuring women are treated humanely and fairly by justice system personnel.

## Situational analysis

Current legislation in Solomon Islands is limited in its ability to prevent and respond to violence against women. In particular, the Penal Code covers only some forms of domestic violence: there is no specific offence for domestic violence, and marital rape is not a criminal offence. Maximum penalties for physical assault are low. Protection orders are available only to people who are married; they must be obtained from a court and they can be difficult to enforce. There can be long waiting times to have cases heard in court, as priority is being given to trials associated with the civil conflict of 1998 to 2003 (referred to as 'the tensions'). Accessing courts and police can be difficult in provincial areas.

The ODE report found low levels of knowledge in the community on laws relating to violence against women. This is consistent with findings of RAMSI's annual 'People's Survey' over a number of years that women are less likely to report crime than are men and they have lower levels of confidence in police and the justice system generally.

Solomon Islands is one of six countries that will be participating in the project Changing Laws, Protecting Women. The project is being carried out by the Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team<sup>1</sup> with funding under the 2008 grants round of the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to End Violence against Women (the Global Trust Fund). Through this project, the Regional Rights Resource Team will work with the Solomon Islands Government to advance legislation to combat gender violence.

<sup>1</sup> The Regional Rights Resource Team is a Fiji-based human rights organisation. It works with state and non-state organisations in the region to build capacity on human rights and gender equality.

## Solomon Islands Government priorities and actions to support women's access to justice

The Solomon Islands Law Reform Commission is currently conducting a review of the Penal Code. As part of this review, the commission has prioritised reform of the morality offences under the Penal Code including its provisions relating to domestic violence and sexual assault. In November 2008, the commission released an issues paper, *Review of Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code*, and commenced a public consultation process that includes a call for written submissions and consultation meetings in the provinces. The commission will make recommendations for reform to the Penal Code to the Solomon Islands Minister for Justice.

The Police Commissioner has approved a domestic violence policy for the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). In support of the policy, the RSIPF has established the position of Family Violence Coordinator (FVC) in each of the nine provinces in Solomon Islands. The FVCs will provide information to the RSIPF's Domestic Violence Unit (a policy unit based in Honiara) about what is happening in the provinces. The role of the FVCs is to educate other police members, disseminate information on family violence, investigate cases of family violence and manage cases through the court system. The collection of information on domestic violence cases by the Domestic Violence Unit from the FVCs and from health clinics in Honiara will allow FVCs and the police to better target problem areas. In early 2009, the FVCs attended training in Honiara, which included gender sensitisation as well as training in identifying and responding to domestic violence.

The RSIPF has introduced a new family violence report format in 2009 to enable more accurate recording of data on domestic violence incidents. Collation of statistics from those family violence forms will enable the targeting of recidivist offenders. The RSIPF has also increased its efforts to seek meaningful bail conditions against family violence offenders.

## Australian support for women's access to justice

### Law and Justice Program

RAMSI is a partnership between the government and people of Solomon Islands and the contributing countries of the Pacific region, including Australia. It is a long-term activity aimed at helping to create the conditions necessary for a return to peace, stability and a growing economy. The RAMSI Law and Justice Program, primarily funded by AusAID, focuses on support to the Solomon Islands justice and corrections sectors. The Law and Justice Program supports a variety of activities that contribute to increasing women's access to justice, as set out below. The redesign of the program commencing in July 2009 will place a priority on strengthening measures to improve access to justice for women, drawing on the experiences of other law and justice programs in the Pacific region.

A RAMSI-funded Principal Legal Officer Adviser to the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs and the National Judiciary has developed new Civil Court Procedure Rules, which came into effect on 1 March 2008. The new rules have assisted the National Judiciary to streamline the litigation procedures of the High Court and magistrates' courts. These aim to make the courts more efficient, accessible, and less costly.

Through the RAMSI Law and Justice Program, Australia provides funding support to the Law Reform Commission. Through RAMSI adviser support, the commission is taking into account gender concerns as part of its review of the Penal Code in Honiara and the provinces.

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Through the RAMSI Law and Justice Program, Australia seeks to build capacity of the Public Solicitor's Office, which provides legal aid to Solomon Islanders in need, both in the civil and criminal courts. RAMSI advisers provide training and mentoring to local lawyers and support the office's free legal clinics. A formal referral system ensures that clients of the Family Support Centre who require legal aid are able to access assistance from the Public Solicitor's Office.<sup>2</sup>

The RAMSI Law and Justice Program also provides support to build the capacity of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) to meet the demands of the criminal justice system, in particular to ensure criminal charges progressed through the court system are both timely and fair. The program is also assisting the development and implementation of a prosecution policy, which will assist the ODPP, police and lawyers in applying criminal law, as well as increase the ODPP's transparency and accountability to the community.

The RAMSI Law and Justice Program is currently providing financial support (\$32,000 over two years from 2008-09) to the Women in Law Association of Solomon Islands for both administrative support and funding to participate in training and advocacy for women's legal rights. This frees up volunteers' time to focus on making policy submissions, such as the Country Legislative Indicators for the Solomon Islands country report on progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Solomon Islands is a signatory, and providing a network of support for female legal practitioners. The Women in Law Association is continuing to build stronger ties with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Fiji and with the Law Reform Commission in order to provide input, including a written submission, to the commission on the Penal Code review of domestic violence legislation.

## Policing

The Participating Police Force (PPF) is part of the support provided to Solomon Islands through RAMSI. It is composed of police from 14 countries, including Australia. The PPF works in partnership with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force across Solomon Islands, and has posts in all provinces.

The implementation of programs to prevent violence against women and children is a key performance measure for PPF provincial operations and is considered by the PPF to be one of the more successful areas of capacity development of the RSIPF.

The PPF Provincial Advisers work with RSIPF Provincial Police Commanders to manage the work of Family Violence Coordinators and to assist in interaction with community groups, including those working in the area of family violence and victim support. PPF Provincial Advisers will continue their efforts to develop the capacity of FVCs in accordance with their position descriptions, along with providing resources (such as family violence information material) and assistance with managing public events.

The PPF also has an adviser working with the RSIPF Community Policing Section to develop family violence policies and assist with coordination of provincial FVCs.

The PPF has undertaken work to embed community perception surveys into the evidence base for policing decision making. The representative surveys include questions relating to fear of violence, for example.

The PPF plans to continue seeking to establish closer ties with women's groups at a local and national level to further advance strategies for reducing violence against women. This will be done in conjunction with local crime prevention committees.

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<sup>2</sup> The Family Support Centre is a non-government organisation based in Honiara that provides counselling and supports women to access the legal system.

To increase women's access to support services.

This will include providing assistance to:

- > increase women's access to psychological, medical and legal support
- > increase women's access to safe havens
- > increase support to organisations that provide support services to women.

In Solomon Islands, the main support services for women who have experienced violence are the Family Support Centre and the Christian Care Centre. The Family Support Centre provides counselling and supports women to access the legal system. The Christian Care Centre provides shelter and counselling to women who have experienced violence. These services are both based in Honiara. In rural areas, women are largely dependent on informal support from family members, friends, chiefs or church ministers or pastors.

The health sector in Solomon Islands does not currently have formal systems in place to respond to violence against women. There is a need for protocols and training for health service providers to support them to better identify and respond to violence against women. The Family Support Centre has held some initial discussions with relevant stakeholders on establishing a referral protocol with the health sector in Honiara. These referrals are currently operating at an informal level.

It is anticipated that the Solomon Islands Government will develop a comprehensive response to address violence against women, including access to support services, based on the findings of the Family Health and Safety Study (see below).

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services, with the support of the World Health Organization, will conduct training and sensitisation for all medical personnel on dealing with domestic violence cases, which may include training on counselling women who have been subjected to violence.



## Australian support for women's access to support services

### Support services

Oxfam, with AusAID funding, will support the Family Support Centre to improve its counselling and referral services in Honiara and expand its reach to Western Province (see below).

AusAID will work with the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs and the Solomon Islands Support Committee to explore how support could be better provided to informal providers of shelter to victims of violence. This is an issue that has been identified by the Family and Health Safety Study. As an early response to the findings of the study, AusAID is funding training by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre for these providers on minimum standards and procedures for referrals to services (\$50,000 in 2009-10).

AusAID is providing funding to UNIFEM's Pacific Facility Fund in Support of Organisations and Actions to End Violence Against Women to support capacity building for staff from civil society organisations, including from Solomon Islands. This funding (\$200,000 in 2008-09) will enable staff to participate in training and exchanges in 2009 and 2010. This will include participation in formal training programs conducted by key regional agencies such as the Regional Rights Resource Team and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. Training will cover practical skills such as counselling, data collection and administration. It will also increase service providers' knowledge of international human rights law and theoretical issues associated with violence against women. This support will assist in improving the quality of services provided to women who have been subjected to violence.

Oxfam, with AusAID funding, will support the Family Support Centre to improve its counselling and referral services in Honiara and expand its reach to Western Province.

### Health sector

The aim of Australian support to the health sector in Solomon Islands is to assist in strengthening management and improving provision of essential health services. AusAID support for the health sector is provided through a sector-wide approach with the Solomon Islands Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Health will explore the possibility of conducting a gender analysis of the Solomon Islands health sector with support from development partners including AusAID and the World Health Organization. WHO has expertise in this field and has offered to work with the Ministry of Health and AusAID to develop possible terms of reference for consideration by the Ministry Executive.

A completed gender analysis incorporating the newly established sex-disaggregated data sets for the health sector would assist the ministry to develop a more accurate baseline of women's health issues in Solomon Islands. The analysis would be an important component to inform future activity in the health sector and ensure gender issues are addressed. This information would also provide important data for consideration during the development of the next health strategic plan, due to commence in late 2009.

# Violence against women is prevented

## Goals for all stakeholders in Solomon Islands

To prevent violence against women.

This will include assisting in:

- > raising awareness through coordinated efforts at all levels
- > changing community attitudes about violence
- > increasing women's status in society.

## Situational analysis

There is a need to strengthen women's participation in economic, social and political life in Solomon Islands. This will help in improving the status of women in society, which will in turn assist in changing community attitudes to violence against women and enabling women to respond to situations of violence.

Madame Doris Sikua, wife of the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, leads the White Ribbon Day march in support of ending violence against women in Honiara in November 2008. Photo: Solomon Islands White Ribbon Day Committee 2008



Civil society—in particular, women’s organisations and faith-based organisations—is active in Solomon Islands in raising awareness of, and contributing to prevention of, violence against women. A number of groups—such as Vois Blo Mere Solomons; Solomon Islands Christian Association, Federation of Women; Save the Children; and Caritas trauma support workers—play a role across Solomon Islands, in both Honiara and the provinces, in working to prevent violence against women and to change community attitudes towards violence against women. There is potential to further strengthen the work of civil society in rural areas to prevent violence against women.

White Ribbon Day in 2008 brought together a broad range of stakeholders in Solomon Islands to raise awareness and encourage individuals to take action to end violence against women. Events were held in each province, including a march in Honiara, to encourage men and women to work together to end violence against women.

## **Solomon Islands Government priorities and actions to prevent violence against women**

The Solomon Islands Government has established a Prime Ministerial Taskforce to Look into Special Actions for Women (the Gender Taskforce) focusing on gender-based violence as one of four central strategies to improve gender equality. The other issues to be considered by the taskforce are women in leadership, economic empowerment of women and gender equity.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children’s Affairs chairs the Solomon Islands Support Committee, a reference group on gender-based violence. The committee coordinated public awareness raising for White Ribbon Day and 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. At the White Ribbon Day 2008 national leaders’ dinner, the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands and six of his ministers signed the UNIFEM pledge form to ‘stop violence against women’.

The Ministry of Women, Youth and Children’s Affairs is using the Family Health and Safety Study (see below) to raise awareness of the high rates of violence against women in Solomon Islands and the costs of this violence for women, their families and the community. This will include wide dissemination of the research findings, including briefings in the provinces.

## **Australian support for preventing violence against women**

### **Working with civil society**

#### **Support for civil society**

In March 2009, Australia announced its support to Oxfam (under a Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement) to work with two groups—Family Support Centre and Western Province Council of Women—to reduce gender-based violence in Honiara and Western Province (\$3 million over five years commencing in 2008-09). The work of Oxfam with these groups will have a strong focus on sustained engagement with existing cultural norms, in an effort to shift attitudes and beliefs in the community (and particularly among men) concerning violence against women. The program is consistent with the findings and recommendations of the ODE report, which emphasised extending the reach of services into rural areas and strengthening service providers to create an environment of awareness and support.

## Working with men and boys

AusAID partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Centre in supporting a Pacific and East Timorese delegation to attend the ‘Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys to Achieve Gender Equality’, held in March 2009. The delegation included representatives from Solomon Islands.

AusAID will provide funding in 2009-10 to the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre for the development of a handbook on working with men as advocates for the elimination of violence against women in the Pacific. The handbook will provide guidelines on best practices for working with men to advocate for gender equality and the elimination of violence, including outlining a training program for men who will become gender equality advocates.

## Working with faith-based organisations

AusAID is a Principal Partner to the International Women’s Development Agency initiative ‘Asia Pacific Breakthrough: The Women, Faith and Development Summit to End Global Poverty’. The summit will be held in December 2009. It will bring together faith-based, women’s and development organisations from across Asia and the Pacific to discuss opportunities to work together to advance gender equality, including to end violence against women.

AusAID currently funds the Church of Melanesia’s Inclusive Communities Program, which aims to rehabilitate prisoners through literacy and personal development training. The training syllabus includes gender-based violence, with topics such as ‘What is domestic violence?’, ‘Cycles of abuse’, ‘Why do men abuse their partners?’, ‘How do women cope in abusive situations?’ and ‘What can you do to help someone in an abusive situation?’.

## Supporting women as peacemakers

AusAID partners with femLINKpacific to support the Regional Women’s Community Media Network on Women, Peace and Security (\$235,000 in 2008-09). The network raises awareness and supports the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325<sup>3</sup> on women, peace and security through regional media initiatives including publications, a website and radio campaigns. The network also supports the institutional strengthening and improves the media skills of a regional network of partner organisations in Fiji, Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

AusAID supports the International Women’s Development Agency ‘Peace Talks’ initiative (\$85,000 in 2008-09), which aims to raise awareness on implementing Resolution 1325 by training civil society organisations from Solomon Islands, Tonga, Bougainville and Fiji. The International Women’s Development Agency supports training for a core group of regional women’s organisations to engage with regional policymakers during the annual Forum Regional Security Committee meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum. In addition, it manages a regional secretariat that shares women’s perspectives and experiences of conflict and peacebuilding; facilitates collaboration among stakeholders in implementing Resolution 1325; and supports women’s participation in regional forums on peace and security.

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3 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000. It is the key international framework that addresses the links between the protection of women from violence and the promotion of women’s participation and leadership in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. UN Security Council Resolution 1820 was adopted in 2008. It addresses the issue of sexual violence in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations.

AusAID provided funding to support a joint research project by UNIFEM Pacific and the UNDP Pacific Centre on sexual and gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The research will make recommendations on how the implementation of Resolutions 1325 and 1820 can be supported by various actors to reduce the high levels of sexual and gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, as well as other Pacific Island states. The findings of this research are expected to be released in 2009.

## **Recognising and promoting the rights of women with disability**

AusAID, through the Pacific Public Sector Linkages Program, is supporting the Australian Human Rights Commission to partner with the Pacific Disability Forum to progress disability issues in the Pacific by delivering training in nine countries in the Pacific. The training courses are scheduled to be held between August 2009 and July 2010. In Solomon Islands, the training will bring together members of People with Disabilities Solomon Islands and government representatives to build their capacity and knowledge of disability rights in order to progress disability issues, including the rights of women with disability.

AusAID, through the International Seminar Support Scheme, supported the attendance of a woman with disability from Solomon Islands at the Pacific Regional Forum on Women with Disabilities and the Pacific Regional Disability Conference in Vanuatu on 20–23 April 2009. One of the key components at these conferences was discussion of the sensitive issue of violence against women with disability.

## **Gender equality and empowering women**

The ODE report noted that efforts to reduce violence against women are intrinsically linked to women's political, social and economic empowerment. The report recommended that Australia ensure all its interventions focus on promoting greater equality between men and women.

Gender equality is a guiding principle of Australia's international development assistance. The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that the needs, priorities and interests of women, as well as men, are considered in all development activities and at every stage of the development process.

### **Women's leadership and decision making**

Through the RAMSI Machinery of Government Program, Australia is supporting a women in government strategy, in partnership with the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs. The Strategy for Advancing the Position of Women in Government aims to increase the number of women in government, in administrative as well as representative capacities, and to increase opportunities for women to realise leadership potential.

The Machinery of Government Program is also working with the Ministry of Public Service to increase the percentage of women at all levels in the public service as well as with the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission to reduce the barriers to the election of women to public office.

Implementation of the strategy also involves partnering with various members of the national women's machinery—including the Solomon Islands Christian Association, Federation of Women; the National Council of Women; and Vois Blo Mere Solomons—to improve the capacity of organisations that have the potential to foster women's aspirations to public office and to increase women's leadership and decision-making roles.



Implementation of the strategy commenced in November 2007. Activities under way in the first 18 months include:

- > piloting of a national Women's Mentor Program
- > support for the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs to implement government policy on affirmative action for women's representation in parliament
- > development of a curriculum vitae database and training to support women's nomination to government boards and commissions, resulting in increased numbers of female board appointments
- > conduct of strategic planning and leadership workshops for 170 women in emerging provincial women's organisations, with some workshops co-funded by members of parliament
- > establishment of networks to improve relationships and communication within the national women's machinery
- > collation of life stories of senior public service women in Solomon Islands, to be published in 2009.

The strategy has worked on identifying barriers to public service women's productivity and on developing strategies to ameliorate gender-based cultural disadvantages. This work has resulted in:

- > training for public service women in identified skill gaps—for example, report writing, oral presentation, and information and communications technology (ICT) skills
- > appointment of the first female ICT technical support officer
- > the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission actively encouraging applications from women for polling official positions, with a 33 per cent participation rate achieved in one constituency by-election
- > the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission incorporating a gender field in voter registration forms to support sex-disaggregated data collection and in turn enable future election planning and conduct to maximise women's participation in the electoral process.

Australia is providing \$6.2 million over five years from 2007-08 for the Gender Equality in Political Governance Program, in partnership with UNIFEM. The program focuses on supporting women standing for elections in the Pacific and including gender issues in governance programs in the Pacific. It will undertake research and develop information, resources and learning materials to promote women's leadership. In Solomon Islands, the program will also train women at a local level on their rights and responsibilities and increase their capacity to be active citizens and leaders.

### **Women's economic empowerment**

AusAID, in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank, is undertaking a series of Gender and Investment Climate Reform Assessments, including in Solomon Islands. These assessments will result in a 'gender toolkit', to be released later in 2009, that will show policymakers and business organisations how to ensure that both men and women benefit from improvements in the business-enabling environment within a country.

# An integrated approach

## Goals for all stakeholders in Solomon Islands

To deliver a coordinated and comprehensive response to violence against women, including among government and non-government actors, at the national and local levels.

This will include:

- > developing and implementing plans of action for preventing violence against women at national, provincial, municipal and community levels
- > supporting interagency taskforces on violence against women (for example, within the context of the reporting on progress required by Solomon Islands as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women)
- > conducting national coordinated campaigns and awareness-raising activities
- > collaborating on training and capacity building of local stakeholders across all sectors.

## Situational analysis

In recent years, multisectoral coordination in responding to violence against women in Solomon Islands has been weak, in part due to 'the tensions'. However, there are signs that coordination and engagement among key stakeholders is improving. The release of preliminary findings of the research 'Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A Study on Violence against Women and Children' has generated strong interest across government and civil society in taking action to end violence against women. This survey is being carried out by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in partnership with the Government of Solomon Islands, with funding from AusAID and the United Nations Population Fund.

As the ODE report noted, the re-establishment of the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs has provided a focal point within government for improving the status of women and addressing violence against women.

There is strong interest and willingness among relevant Solomon Islands government ministries in contributing to ending violence against women. For example, the Solomon Islands Government has signed on to UNIFEM's 'Say NO to Violence against Women' campaign. The Prime Minister, a number of ministers, and the permanent secretaries of the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs all signed on to the campaign at the White Ribbon Day national leaders' dinner held in November 2008. A mechanism is needed to draw these ministries together to ensure a coordinated response to ending violence against women.



At the White Ribbon Day 2008 national leaders' dinner, the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands and a number of his ministers signed the UNIFEM pledge form to 'stop violence against women'.  
Photo: Solomon Islands White Ribbon Committee 2008

## Solomon Islands Government priorities and actions to ensure an integrated approach

The Government of Solomon Islands ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2002. By becoming a party to the convention, the government affirmed its commitment to ensuring that men and women enjoy equality of rights and opportunity, including the right to live free from violence.

Combined with the ODE report and high-profile campaigns by government and non-government stakeholders, the Family Health and Safety Study has generated political momentum from within Solomon Islands to do more to address this challenge.

This culminated in a decision by the Solomon Islands Government in April 2009 to establish a Gender Taskforce. As noted above, the taskforce will look at options for improving gender equality in Solomon Islands in the areas of violence against women, women in leadership, economic empowerment of women, and gender equity.

The Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs has established good connections with civil society, donors and women's organisations in Honiara through its gender-based violence reference group, known as the Solomon Islands Support Committee. The reference group is chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Women, Youth and Children's Affairs.

The ministry is proposing to develop an overarching gender policy and a more detailed gender-based violence policy and action plan.

With the support of New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency, NZAID, the ministry is leading a structural review of the national women's machinery in Solomon Islands. The review may also lead to increased coordination between government and civil society in the promotion of gender equality.

The work of the Gender Taskforce and the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs will need to be closely coordinated.

## Australian support for an integrated approach

### Research and analysis

Through both RAMSI and the Bilateral Development Assistance Program, Australia has contributed to major research projects concerning violence against women. They are the Family Health and Safety Study (see above) and a recent UNIFEM study, 'Drafting of CEDAW Legislative Indicators', conducted in Solomon Islands in October 2008. Each has developed recommendations covering various sectors to stop violence against women in Solomon Islands.

The Family Health and Safety Study has collected national data on the prevalence and types of violence against women and children. This information will provide a strong evidence base to inform future activities in Solomon Islands to respond to violence against women. Australia has provided financial support for the survey and has been an active member of the advisory group that has supported the conduct of the survey.

AusAID is also providing funding to support the dissemination of the research findings (\$100,000 in 2009-10). This funding will be used to conduct workshops in the nine provinces and Honiara on the findings and recommendations of both the ODE report and the Family Health and Safety Study on gender-based violence in Solomon Islands.

## Policy development

In line with the recommendations of the Family Health and Safety Study, AusAID's Community Sector Program will provide funding to the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs to support the development of a national gender policy, and assist the ministry with accessing relevant technical assistance.

Linked to this broader gender policy, AusAID will also support the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs to develop a National Policy and Plan of Action on Gender-based Violence under the guidance of the Prime Minister's Office (funding of \$50,000 in 2009-10). This policy will involve key ministries such as the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Ministry of Police, and the Ministry of Education. It will draw on the findings and recommendations of both the ODE report and the Family Health and Safety Study.

## Participation in coordination committees

AusAID has a representative on the Solomon Islands Support Committee. The committee is active in organising events to advocate for gender equality, women's rights, and the implementation of the findings of the Family Health and Safety Study. This has included the successful events organised for White Ribbon Day in November 2008 to raise awareness and encourage individuals to take action to end violence against women.