

Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
for
Solomon Islands

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Joint NGO Submission

by

Foundation for Marist Solidarity International (FMSI)

Franciscans International (FI) (General Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC)

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Introduction

1. This stakeholder's report is a joint submission from Franciscans International (FI) and the Foundation for Marist Solidarity International (FMSI). The Human Rights concerns in this submission relate to the **Right to Education**, especially regarding children with disabilities, and the provision of a quality education for all children of the Solomon Islands. The concerns of this submission stem from a survey where 130 people were interviewed. The composition of these 130 people included students, teachers, youth and parents from St Josephs Tenaru Secondary School, Bishop Epalle Secondary School, Vanga Point Vocational School, St. Aruligo Care Centre and St Marcellin Primary School. The statistical data supplied supports their concerns.
2. The Solomon Islands with a population of around 540,000 is comprised of nearly 1,000 islands, with more than 80% of the population living in remote and rural areas, relying mostly on subsistence agriculture and fishing. This Island State is one of the poorest in the Pacific Region. Access to education is limited and the literacy rate is low.
3. The October 2010 Policy Statement of new Government commits it to ensuring that all Solomon Islanders have equal access to quality education¹. Nonetheless, access to quality education is an ongoing challenge for children in the Solomon Islands. A baseline study in almost 60 communities in the Malaita Province showed that approximately 36% of school aged children are not attending school².
4. The country suffers from an acute shortage of qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms and limited learning resources. These factors affect the entire education sector and are exacerbated by weak school administration and ineffective community engagement in many schools. The government's limited reference to child rights principles in its education policies is also a major concern³.
5. *Save the Children Australia* is just one project in the Solomon Islands that is seeking to improve children and young people's access to quality basic education. It is carrying out research to determine the reasons for poor school attendance. This research will be an invaluable source of information for the government in its own efforts to improve equality of access.

Compulsory Quality Primary Education

6. Primary school education is free but not compulsory in the Solomon Islands. Both the *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (CESCR) and the *Committee on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) in their Concluding Observations⁴ voiced their concern that primary education in the Solomon Islands is not compulsory, as required in article 14 of the ICESCR and article 28 of the CRC.
7. The 'Fee Free Primary Education' policy of the government is financed by several overseas donor countries.

¹ National Coalition for Reform and Advancement (NCRA) Government Policy Statement, Office of the Prime Minister, Honiara, October 2010, item 4.2.5, p 13.

² Source: Save the Children Australia, Education Project, December 2009.

³ Op cit: Save the Children.

⁴ CESCR, 29th Session, November 2002, E/C.12/1/Add.84 para 14; CRC 33rd Session, July 2003, CRC/C/15/Add.208, para 19.

8. It could be reasonably expected that all children aged 7 and 8 would be attending primary school. However, a body of research has shown that in 2007 about 50% of children aged 7, and 28% of children aged 8, were not attending primary school. Overall, primary school attendance is not universal, as reflected in a net 2007 attendance rate of 65.4%. In urban areas, 72% of children aged 6–13 attended primary school, compared with 65% in rural areas⁵.
9. Free education at primary school only goes half way with the government's commitment as a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of making primary education compulsory and available to all (Article 28,1a).
10. While there is appreciation for the fee free education policy, there is also a concern among Solomon Islanders, especially teachers, that there is little emphasis on the *quality* of the education being offered to the children. Quality teaching and learning is essential for any successful delivery of education.
11. Many children in the Solomon Islands do not attend school or leave school early. The Solomon Islands has experienced a growing demographic 'youth bulge' with youth unemployment rates twice as high as other working age groups. 70% of the population is under 24 years of age, and there are limited opportunities for young people in the work place, particularly the uneducated. This results in substance abuse (home brew and marijuana); teenage pregnancy; criminal activities; and sexual exploitation leading to exposure to HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases among the young. If basic quality education was to be compulsory up to the minimum working age, these social concerns would be considerably reduced by the attendance of children at school.
12. The rights of all children in the Solomon Islands should be respected by making basic primary quality education compulsory as well as free⁶.

Equal Opportunity of Access for Children with Disabilities

13. People with disabilities face many barriers to full participation in society, and this is no exception in the Pacific. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'⁷.
14. The traditional view in the Solomon Islands, as with other Pacific Island nations, is that persons with disabilities are to be looked after or cared for, and cannot be expected to take a full and active part in village community life, thus marginalizing them from mainstream life. This "charity" or "welfare" approach results in children with disabilities being consistently excluded from attending school. In 2002 it was estimated that less than 10% of children with disabilities had access to any form of education⁸. The vast majority of children with disabilities still have no real access to education in 2010. We enclose some

⁵ Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2007, item 2.8.1, p28.

⁶ Currently the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) is advertising for consultancy in addressing barriers to Education in SI.

⁷ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), article 1.

⁸ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Forum Disability Ministers' Meeting, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, October 2009, p5.

statements from people surveyed: “There are a lot of disabled people that do not receive education;” “The reports of the government on numbers of disabled children do not account for the numbers in the rural areas.”; “There is still discrimination for those who attend schools with normal children”; “People think that just because we are disabled we cannot do anything with our lives but there is hope in what we can do”; “Our voice is often not heard and our needs are not taken into consideration - we are often left out”.

15. According to the MEHRD’s document titled ‘Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) 2006-2008’ “only a very small proportion of children with disabilities are attending school 2% in Primary, 1% in Junior Secondary and less than 1% in Senior Secondary.”⁹
16. The Solomon Islands Education Ministry purports to have an ‘Inclusive Education’ Policy. However, it has not been implemented. 2011 is the year set down for it to be implemented, according to the “National Education Action Plan 2010-2010” for children with disabilities. This is more in line with a rights-based approach to persons with disabilities (PWD) and would bring about a paradigm shift from the traditional charity or medical models if implemented in full. The rights of PWDs and their participation are central to this approach. Such a policy development needs to include advocacy and awareness-raising in communities.
17. In line with the government’s policy on equal access for all children, the highest priority must be given in government’s education spending to improve the situation of access for children with disabilities in the rural and urban areas.
18. The Solomon Islands have signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹⁰. We urge the government to take the next step and ratify this Convention in order to give dignity and equal opportunity to persons with a disability in their society.

Capacity Building in the Education Sector

19. Whilst the ‘Fee Free Education’ policy has increased enrolments, it has put a strain on teachers and the learning environment for the children. This has been a similar problem in many countries that have introduced free and compulsory education without provision for enough professionally trained teachers and classrooms to accommodate them as well as other resources such as materials and finance. More support for the conditions of service and faster processes for paying teachers’ salaries and other entitlements is needed.
20. Some statements from people surveyed are included here: “Teachers do not take interest in what they are doing, do not know what they are doing or because most complain the money they get can’t help them with their families”; “There are teachers who have never been teachers - for example accountants - and are teaching. We don’t sometimes understand what they are talking about”; “Teachers are boring as they are not creative enough in their teaching skills”.
21. A UNICEF mid-term report on education in 2010 indicates that up to 50% of primary teachers in the Solomon Islands are unqualified or uncertified¹¹. Government needs to be mindful of developing the necessary infrastructure at the tertiary level to train more teachers, and to build more schools and classrooms for the successful implementation of

⁹ Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) 2006-2008, July 2009, p11.

¹⁰ CRPD signed on 23/9/2008.

¹¹ UNICEF Pacific Education Programme, Mid Term Review: Ensuring Children’s Rights to, in, through Education, 2010, p8.

its education policy of providing access to a quality basic education for all children. Not only will government have to rely on donor countries for this but it will also have to increase its own budgetary allocation for education.

22. The government needs to look at ways to improve the commitment and skills of teachers, once they are certified. This may mean addressing their conditions of service, professional development and mentoring.
23. Children deserve the best. All teachers who enter a classroom should be properly trained and well qualified. There should be enough classrooms for all children and they should be well equipped for creative learning.

Secondary Education

24. The 2006-2007 Demographic and Health Survey mentioned earlier indicates that overall only 29 out of every 100 children of secondary school age (12-18) in Solomon Islands attend secondary school. The secondary school net attendance ratio (NAR) is better in urban areas than in rural areas (47% versus 26%). As regards wealth quintile, ignoring the second wealth quintile (26%), the secondary school NAR rises with wealth from about 11% attendance in the lowest wealth quintile to 45% in the wealthiest quintile¹². This finding suggests that poverty and factors related to poverty play an important role in whether children attend secondary school.
25. Drop out rates in 2008 have increased compared to 2006 and 2007. In particular senior secondary where half of the students (63%) dropped out¹³.
26. Article 28 1(b) of the CRC requires governments to encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, available and accessible to every child, and to take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need. Making secondary schooling more accessible to all children, especially the poorer population should be a target of the government if it is to promote “economic growth in the country by developing an educated and skilled population labour force”¹⁴. Statements for people surveyed were similar to this: “School fees are too high for most families – that’s why there are only few students who attend school because parents can’t afford it.”
27. There is virtually no harmony between the Technical Curriculum in the vocational centres and the secondary curriculum. It was noted most students who cannot make through in the formal secondary schooling ended up in the vocational centres.
28. The curriculum offered must be relevant to the developmental needs of the students, offering both general and vocational in order to provide optimum opportunity for the development of the individual’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities¹⁵. A common comment in the survey was that “the education system is not suitable for most of us – not all of us will be working in offices.” Another comment was: “Because most of us come from the village education should be directed towards skills training.”

¹² Op cit: Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2007, p29-30.

¹³ Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) 2006-2008, July 2009, p11 and 21.

¹⁴ Op cit; NCRA Government policy Statement, item 9.1, p 27.

¹⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29 1(a).

Water and Sanitation

29. An AusAID project in 2010 found that around 355,000 people are at risk of the debilitating effects of water borne diseases as a result limited access to water and sanitation. Whilst fresh water is abundant in some areas, it is not so all year round. The more remote islands suffer frequently from severe water shortage. Access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation were major concerns of those interviewed in the survey mentioned in the introduction. The lack of these basic needs cause many children to be ill and as a result don't go to school. An improvement in these health conditions will bring about a better attendance at school. These comments were reflected in the survey: "Lack of water results in students not going to school"; "Sickness by unsafe drinking water stops children from going to school".
30. Only half of primary schools have access to safe and clean water and situation is worse for Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Community High Schools (CHS)

Recommendations:

31. In light of this report we would respectfully recommend the following to the Government of the Solomon Islands:
1. Make basic primary quality education compulsory, in accordance with article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
 2. Allocate priority spending towards children with disabilities in order to provide them with equal access to education.
 3. Ratify the core International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
 4. Increase government's spending on education so as to develop its infrastructure, namely more professionally trained teachers, and more schools and classrooms that are adequately equipped.
 5. Ensure that teachers receive their salaries regularly and on time.
 6. Increase accessibility to secondary schools for all Solomon Islands children.
 7. Develop both formal and non-formal education curricula that provide relevant developmental skills of the students.
 8. Introduce Human Rights education into the school curriculum.
 9. Improve access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation in rural areas.