

SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON EDUCATION

Executive Summary of an analysis of Solomon Islands' progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4

May 2020



Coalition for Education in Solomon Islands

Background

About COESI

The Coalition for Education Solomon Islands (COESI) is a coalition of non- government organizations dedicated to the advancement of educational opportunities for all Solomon Island citizens, especially those from marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

COESI aims to provide a focal point through which civil society can contribute to education policy debates; provide knowledge building awareness on the SDG4 agenda, targets and indicators at the national level; to undertake research on education policy issues; to act as an information source for civil society organisations with an interest in education; to strengthen the capacity of its members, and civil society more broadly, and to participate actively and with authority in public debates on education in Solomon Islands.

This Spotlight report, commissioned by COESI, provides an analysis of Solomon Islands' progress to meet the outcomes and implementation targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, as they are represented in national policy and programming.

Solomon Islands Context - Key Facts and Figures:

- Population 652,586, 77% in rural areas, 41% under the age of 15.
- Ranked 152 out of 188 in the 2017 Human Development Index. Life expectancy is 71 years
- 25% of the population live below the poverty line
- Only 19% of children complete 12 years of schooling (2005 cohort - 2017 leavers)
- Current teacher – student ratio 1:24 primary, 1:31 secondary, Honiara 1:50+
- Net enrolment ratio: primary 92%, dropping to 38% at junior secondary
- 2017 Education budget of SI\$ 1.1 billion as % of total public expenditure: 22%
- 2017 Education budget as % of nominal GDP: 13%

Solomon Islands is a small Island state in the South West Pacific, made up of approximately 1,000 Islands, many divided from each other by large stretches of ocean. A third of these Islands are inhabited, mostly by people living in small settlements. Many communities live without access to electricity or telecommunications, and few have passable roads. The majority of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture, with less than a quarter in paid employment. The official language is English, although Pijin English is widely used as the language of communication. Solomon Islands is highly vulnerable to natural disasters including cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, floods and drought.

Policy and Planning and Sustainable Development Goal 4

Solomon Islands' commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals/Agenda 2030 is reflected in the Government's National Development Strategy (NDS) 'Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders', launched in 2016. SDG4 is directly aligned to the NDS under Objective Three: "All Solomon Islanders have access to quality health and education". The Medium Term Strategy: Ensure all Solomon Islanders can access quality education and the nation's manpower needs are sustainably met' was adopted to achieve Objective 3. The NDS has a performance framework which matches selected targets from SDGs with the NDS Medium Term Strategy targets, and then details performance Indicators. The National Education Plan (NEAP) has an implementation framework that break down the strategy into 5 year chunks. The current NEAP is for 2016-2020.

Civil Society Engagement in SDG Implementation and Monitoring

Although there was some CSO consultation in the design of the NDS, the Solomon Islands lacks any regular mechanism for government and civil society to share information and monitor development progress. There is currently no CSO platform on the SDGs nationally, and links to Pacific wide SDG networks are limited. This report represents a first for civil society to advocate on SDG4 rollout and implementation in Solomon Islands. COESI found the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) open to providing information, and felt they were showing a genuine attempt to get to grips with improving aspects of data collection.

Measuring progress

MEHRD produces substantial data, but the indicators in the NDS monitoring framework do not evaluate quality or examine equity issues from province to province or rural to urban areas

There remain serious gaps within MEHRD's Theory of Change 2016-20. It addresses only formal education for children up to year 13, and does not recognize the many children and youth pushed out from the formal system at various transition points. These pushouts are not tracked, and few funds are made available by the MEHRD for further literacy and adult education programmes for them. The MEHRD has its own Standardized Tests of Achievement (SISTA), as well as taking part in the Pacific Islands National Literacy Achievement (PILNA), both of which only measure performance at school, with no reference to literacy in the out of school and adult population.

Equity

Whilst MEHRD is proud to have achieved equal access for girls in basic and secondary education, there is more in the equity domain that should be examined. Girls are performing better than boys (MEHRD's Early Grade Reading assessment) at both assessment levels (year 4 and 6) and across all strands (PAR 2018). Students attending private schools and in urban areas are also performing better. As in several countries of the South Pacific boys' participation and relative performance continues to decrease. The structure of the education budget is likely to affect equity, with the top 2% of students consuming nearly half the budget. Further, 62% of scholarship recipients are male, the large majority likely to be from urban areas. TVET, largely representing Rural Training Centre enrolment typically caters for push outs from the formal sector. Funding per student is the lowest of all sectors, just US 139 per student. Nevertheless it is heavily over-subscribed.

Education Sector spending (Solomon Island Dollars SBD)

Sub sector	Expenditure	No of students enrolled	Funding per student SBD	Percentage of students	Percentage of the education budget
Tertiary	548,643,906	3,977	137,954.21	1.78%	45.52%
Secondary	330,789,415	54,012	6,124.37	24.11%	27.45%
ECCE	52,214,491	16,067	3,249.80	7.17%	4.33%
Primary	251,423,077	130,140	1,931.94	58.09%	20.86%
TVET	22,119,425	19,835	1,115.17	8.85%	1.84%
Total	1,205,190,314	224,031		100.00%	100.00%

2019 Actual expenditure by sector, MEHRD Annual Report 2019

Possibly the biggest issue raised frequently in the media is the misuse of the scholarship programme and the amount of the education budget consumed by it. In 2019, the Tertiary sector took 50% of the budget, with scholarships the majority of that. Funding per student in primary was just SBD 1,932 (around US\$ 241), but US\$ 17,244 in Tertiary.

Conclusions and Recommendations

SDG4 target areas not prioritized or demonstrating limited progress:

- 4.2 Participation rate in organised learning, ECCE and secondary
- 4.4: Decent Skills for Work
- 4.5: Gender and Inclusion
- 4.6: Youth and Adult Literacy
- 4.7: Education for Sustainable Development
- 4.a: Learning Environments

Progress made on SDG4 implementation

- Providing access to basic education through fee subsidies (SDG4 Target 4.1 and 4.2)
- Improving the quality of education primarily through curriculum reform and teacher training and development (SDG4 Targets 4.1 and 4.c)
- Achieving and maintaining gender parity through primary and secondary schools
- Reforming Education sector governance as a foundation for improved quality and focus

The most critical issues that Solomon Islands must attend to towards ensuring 'No One is Left Behind' are: (1) access to education (financial, infrastructure and teachers), (2) educational pathways and lifelong learning, and (3) inclusive education.

1. Access to Education

The Government has drawn back from investing more in Early Childhood, declaring a moratorium on the establishment of further ECCE schools, and performing poorly in disbursing grants to existing schools – paying out to only 67% of ECCE schools 2019. (MEHRD annual report, 2019) Now it seems that they are putting responsibility for ECCE back into the hands of families and communities.

One of the chief barriers to access to education in Solomon Islands is poverty, and insufficient government grants. As the majority (77%) of the population live in rural and remote areas of the archipelago leading largely subsistence based lifestyles, the ability of families to meet the demands of school fees (and other schooling costs) for their children to attend school is limited. While there is generally high net enrolment at primary level (91.8% NER¹⁴), the low enrolment rate at secondary is alarming (37.4% NER for junior secondary), indicating high dropout rates between levels. As government grants are insufficient, school councils set additional parents' contribution fees, and non-payers are often excluded, conflicting with the aim of providing education for all children.

Government grants are currently completely inadequate to provide for the level of support required for children with disabilities to attend school, or learn adequately if they do. Children classified by the school census as living with a disability make up only 1.3% of the student body, meaning most do not attend.

We recommend that:

- a. To ensure that basic education is free and of good quality, and that all children are able to access and benefit from it, parents' contributions for basic education must be outlawed and the level and management of financial support (grants) provided to schools needs to be reviewed and increased.
- b. Additional school grants (per student) must be provided to schools which include children with disabilities in classroom learning, to provide more special needs teachers and assistants.

2. Educational Pathways and Lifelong Learning

Little attention is paid to post-secondary pathways. Rural Training Centres (RTCs) owned and run by Church authorities, offering the only alternative pathway in rural areas and for skills for sustainable livelihoods education are heavily over-subscribed, and only partially funded. Community learning centres, where adult and out of school youth's literacy needs could be addressed, are not supported.

We recommend that:

A nation-wide literacy assessment of youth and adults is conducted to determine the need for literacy and educational programs.

- a) Quality Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) programs for youth and adults are developed, including bridging programs to access PSET providers.
- b) Assistance to RTCs is expanded in scale and scope, and additional skills development programs are provided. Community learning centres are recognized and supported.
- c) Learning modalities and curricula adjusted to ensure education supports sustainable livelihoods in the community, and equips the population with skillsets demanded in the local economy.

3. Including those with disabilities

The Solomon Islands government has failed to take disability seriously, one of the 10 or so countries not to have ratified the Convention of the Rights of People with Disability.

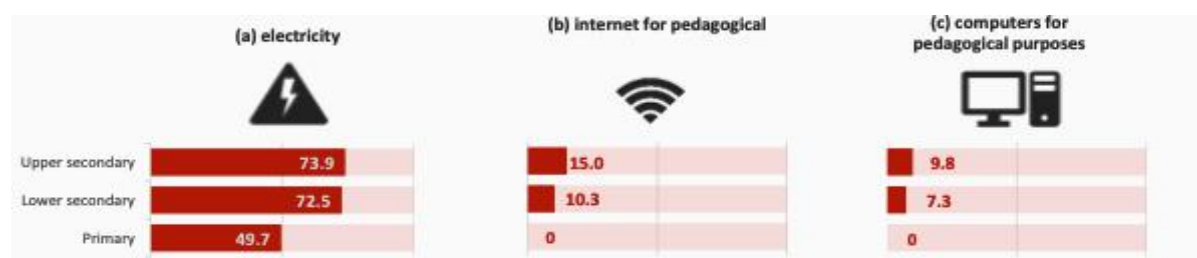
The MEHRD does not collect data on the special learning needs of children with disabilities and it is therefore unknown how much children with disabilities who are currently enrolled and participating in schools are actually learning or achieving compared to their peers. Specific teaching materials and aids have not been developed or distributed to schools. The Government and its donors are not currently directing any budgetary support to address or mainstream inclusivity. As common in many countries, civil society has been left to pick up the pieces in this space.

We recommend that:

- a. The new Education Act should legislate for compulsory education, meaning that the educational needs of those with disability have to be considered.
- b. National Disability Inclusive Education Policy needs to be approved by Cabinet. This could be a possible requisite for the ratification of the CRPD.
- c. People with disabilities must be involved in the framing of any disability policies.
- d. Specific budget must be allocated to begin the training of Teacher Aides that will support children with disabilities, and to make classrooms and WASH facilities in schools inclusive.
- e. A fair proportion of scholarships should be made available for students with a disability.

Recommendations for response to COVID 19

Whilst the Solomon Islands escaped the first wave of COVID-19 by closing its borders quickly, many are worried about a second wave and possible education strategies.



Percentage of schools with technology for digital learning Source: UNESCO

Due to lack of infrastructure and equipment, an online home schooling approach would not reach the vast majority of students. COESI has carried out a survey on the potential for home schooling (COESI, 2020), and we recommend the government urgently draws up plans for home schooling that

does not rely on technology, TV or radio to continue education services, rather printed versions supported by teachers.