

Malaita Women Highlight Development and Peace Priorities at National Level



Women leaders representing every constituency in Malaita Province joined the dialogue with Members of Parliament in Honiara on 20 June 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

Honiara, Solomon Islands, 21 June 2018 – Women leaders representing all 14 constituencies in Malaita Province and women's organizations in Auki yesterday shared their recommendations on key provincial women's priorities that affect development and peace with Members of Parliament.

The dialogue between the 20 Malaita women and eight MPs representing Malaita Province aimed to highlight the issues and concerns of women in Malaita to ensure influence, information and resources are targeted at women's empowerment and development initiatives.

"I see this national dialogue as a step forward for a prosperous Malaita," participant and President of the Auki Market Vendors Association Janet Ramo said.

"It has brought us face-to-face with our MPs to urge them to hear the concerns of women from the grassroots. It is a positive and direct approach for them to seriously consider the needs of women in the rural areas."



Joy Salome Iro presents a policy intervention at the dialogue with Malaita Province MPs in Honiara, Solomon Islands on 20 June 2018.
Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

UN Women facilitated the dialogue in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) and the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace (MNURP) through the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) project as part of the implementation of the Malaita Women's Empowerment and Development (MWED) Policy, which was launched in March.

In opening the dialogue, the Minister of Women, Youth and Sports of the Malaita Provincial Government, Honourable Rose Liata, presented the seven policy outcomes.

"The policy recognizes that investing in women's empowerment is vital to improving the well-being of families and communities as well as achieving gender equality. This means that strategies must recognize the need for women and men to work together to address attitudinal and institutional barriers to women's empowerment and development," Honourable Liata said.

She added, "The MWED Policy provides a framework for all Malaitan women and men to embrace their development and contribute to the growing economy of Malaita."

The women representatives drew on experiences in their communities to suggest policy interventions. They addressed the outcome areas, which include improved women's access to land, water and sanitation; improved economic status of women; and building peaceful communities and acknowledging women's role in peacebuilding, and the preservation of cultural identity.

The MPs responded to each intervention, often citing examples from their own constituencies, and proposed ways to make them more achievable.



Prime Minister Rick Houenipwela responds to women's policy interventions at the dialogue in Honiara, Solomon Islands on 20 June 2018.
Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

In his closing remarks, Prime Minister and MP for Small Malaita Rick Houenipwela said the participating MPs share the women representatives' desire to progress the interventions.

"This is not just your agenda. This is the agenda of our communities, not only of Malaita but of the whole country."

"We want to make something that is good for all of us, and of course, you Malaita women representatives have taken the initiative to come and see us at the national Parliament to speak with us about this," he said.

UN Women's Solomon Islands Country Programme Coordinator, Alvina Erekalu, highlighted that the issues Malaita women face are complex and can only be addressed through collaborative efforts that include support from members of the provincial and national governments.

"It is time we connect and raise the profile of the untapped resources — and I'm referring to the women right in front of us — of marginalized women, especially from the rural places, and empower them as game-changers with regards to the development aspirations of Solomon Islands," Ms. Erekalu said.

Western Province Bolsters Women's Inclusion With Launch of Women's Policy



Western Province Minister of Women, Youth and Sports receives the first-ever women's policy from Provincial Secretary Jeffery Wickham and Women's Desk Officer Lisi Wong in Gizo, Solomon Islands on 18 July 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

Gizo, Solomon Islands, 18 July 2018 – The Western Provincial Government has affirmed its commitment to addressing gender and women's issues with the launch of its first-ever women's policy.

The Western Province Women's Empowerment and Transformation Policy for Development is a blueprint for the strategies the province can use to address obstacles that prevent women from fully participating in provincial development.

Women representing all 26 wards in Western Province and women's organizations in Gizo attended the launch and spoke about how the policy would impact them personally and improve the status of women in the province at large.

"I think it's a big step forward for us in Western Province," said Barbara Unusu from Ward 21 in Marovo Constituency.

"If we make our plans and programmes for women, we now have something to back us up, which is something we never had previously."

Ms. Unusu participated in the consultations to develop the provincial women's policy and has worked for years to address women's issues through the government and non-governmental organizations.

She cited increased funding for women's initiatives and collaboration among the provincial government, organizations and churches to implement activities as examples of how the policy will affect rural women in the province.

"I think a majority of the women in Western Province have been neglected — neglected in the way that none of these services, trainings and similar things have reached them," Ms. Unusu said.

"This policy can address that, and it shows that we have achieved something for the future of our communities of Western Province."

In remarks during the launch, Director of Women in the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs Pauline Soaki said the policy, which the Western Provincial Government Executive endorsed and was noted in the Provincial Assembly earlier this year, is in line with the National Development Strategy 2016-2035. The strategy aims to achieve full gender equality by eliminating gender discrimination in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres.



Women leaders from across Western Province witness the launch of the provincial women's policy in Gizo on 18 July 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

"Indeed, the policy's goal that women and girls are empowered to transform their status to improve their livelihoods and ensure full participation in the sustainable development of Western Province is bold, smart and compelling," Ms. Soaki said.

"This goal, translated into eight strategic outcomes, offers many entry points for various stakeholders, including development partners, civil society, the private sector and academia, to work together with the Western Provincial Government on the interlinked pillars of social, economic and political empowerment of women."

The policy also reflects the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognizes gender equality as a fundamental right and a driver of progress in achieving all development goals.

In her keynote address, Western Province Minister of Women, Youth and Sports Honourable Oelyn Moala said the policy launch was a proud moment in the province's history.

"This policy would not have been realized if not for the high regard that our government placed on women. I wish to thank my predecessor, Honourable Leong Mamu, for the initiative to develop this policy and the support and commitment throughout the whole process of its consultation and eventually its endorsement by the previous government," she said.

Provincial Secretary Jeffery Wickham said that commitment will continue with 20 percent of the total 2018-2019 provincial budget likely to be allocated to developments affecting women.

UN Women's Solomon Islands National Programme Coordinator, Audrey Manu, emphasized the need for the provincial government to include the policy priorities in its development plan and engage with partners to ensure they are implemented.

"Without action, the policy is only a lofty goal for the inclusion of women in provincial society. We need to work together to make sure it is more than a list of outcomes," Ms. Manu said.

"We want the outcomes outlined in the policy to become the reality for every woman in the province."

The UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) project in collaboration with UN Women supported the development of the Western Province women's policy and organized the launch in partnership with the provincial government, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and women's organizations in Western Province.



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Minister of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs Honourable Freda Tuki and Prime Minister Rick Houenipwela launch the National Youth Policy in Honiara on 24 August 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

Government Launches Policy to Tackle Youth Issues

Honiara, Solomon Islands, 24 August 2018 – More than a hundred youth on Wednesday joined the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs in launching the National Youth Policy 2017-2030, which will support the development and empowerment of young people in Solomon Islands.

Youth make up about 70 percent of the country's population and face significant obstacles to participation in employment, politics and decision-making. The national youth policy will guide the government in efforts to address those barriers and emphasize youth welfare.

In his remarks at the launch, Prime Minister Rick Houenipwela said the policy provides a platform for encouraging youth as nation builders.

"We will work to harness the untapped potential of our youths to contribute effectively to the long-term economic development of our country," Prime Minister Houenipwela said.

"All our youths have their God-given talents and skills to transform their own future. The three-tier policy framework for youth development and empowerment is a roadmap that can assist them to achieve their development aspirations."

The Minister of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Honourable Freda Tuki, said the country can only prosper if there are dedicated efforts to invest in youth.

"This new Solomon Islands youth policy 2017-2030 demonstrates the government's commitment to prioritize and address the aspirations and wellbeing of the youths of Solomon Islands," Honourable Tuki said.

As part of a three-tier policy framework for youth development, the national youth policy focuses on six priority outcomes that cover educational and economic empowerment, health, sustainable development, governance and access to information.

The national government launched the policy as well as the supporting Strategic Framework for Youth Development and Empowerment in Solomon Islands and the Solomon Islands Youth Status Report 2018 in partnership with the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) project.

In launching the youth status report with Honourable Tuki, UNDP Solomon Islands Country Manager Azusa Kubota highlighted the importance of youth in boosting the economy and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Solomon Islands.

"Young women and men can and do play active roles as agents of change," Ms. Kubota said.

"We all want a society in which young people have dreams to aspire to. This is a big agenda, and no one can do this alone. UNDP will continue to work with all stakeholders in this journey to support youth of the Solomon Islands."

Peacebuilding Innovation Forum Inspires Malaita Youth to be Social Problem Solvers



George Faubata explains his team's social innovation to Deputy Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare at the Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum in Auki, Malaita Province on 4 September 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

Auki, Solomon Islands, 5 September 2018 – In response to the need for new approaches to address social issues, more than 200 young people from across Malaita Province are in Auki to attend the Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum this week.

As Solomon Islands has a young population with a median age of 19.7, youth are critical to reinforcing peace and achieving sustainable development in the country.

The three-day Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum is aimed at helping young peacebuilders and changemakers develop solutions to challenges in their communities through social entrepreneurship and innovation.

In opening the forum yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Honourable Manasseh Sogavare said the path to making an impact on society is mired in obstacles.

"Never give up. I encourage you to develop a warrior attitude in your journey to success," Honourable Sogavare said.

He also shared his own struggles and achievements in becoming a national leader.

"If you're a school dropout and feel inadequate, you just need to look at the man standing in front of you now and talking to you — welcome to my world," he said.

"This man dropped out of school at Betikama not completing Form 4."

The forum in Malaita is the first provincial follow-up to the inaugural Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum held in Honiara last year. The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) project, jointly implemented by UNDP and UN Women, organized the forum in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and the Youth Division of the Malaita Provincial Government.

To highlight entrepreneurship, 2018 Beijing Youth Co:Lab winner Esmeralda Lo Tam of Samoa explained how personal setbacks and passion ultimately helped her create an athletic equipment and apparel business.

She encouraged participants, including 11 teams who will pitch their social innovations on Thursday for a chance to win seed funding, not to forget their vision.

"In your homes, your villages and your families, no matter how far you go in life, always remember why you started," Ms. Lo Tam said.

"You're here for yourselves, you're here for your family; most of all you're here to do your little piece for your country, and also in the wider picture, for the Pacific."

Coordinator of the Young Entrepreneurs Council Solomon Islands, John Wopereis, spoke about how youth can help revitalize the country through social enterprises and small businesses.

Participants also heard from provincial government officials on the importance of crafting policies that support youth development and empowerment.

The discussion followed the provincial launch of the Solomon Islands National Youth Policy 2017-2030 and the Strategic Framework for Youth Development and Empowerment in Solomon Islands, which were launched in Honiara last month.

In her remarks at the opening of the forum, UNDP Solomon Islands Country Manager Azusa Kubota emphasized the need for stakeholders to continue collaborating to encourage youth to become a source of peace and development solutions.

"The three-day forum itself will not solve all the challenges that young people face," Ms. Kubota said.

"It is an important step, however, to illustrate their achievements and their potential and to inspire innovative solutions to longstanding issues."

Solomon Airlines, Heritage Park Hotel and Bmobile supported the Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum, which will close on Thursday.

Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum Empowers Social Entrepreneurs and Changemakers



The Stone Raisers team pitches their prototype at the Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum in Auki on 6 September 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

Auki, Solomon Islands, 7 September 2018 – The Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum in Auki, Malaita Province aimed at helping young people use innovation to spark change in their communities concluded yesterday.

More than 200 youth from across Malaita joined the three-day forum, which opened on Tuesday. Discussions and activities encouraged participants to use innovation and entrepreneurship to address unemployment, poor sanitation and other challenges they face.

“Innovation is everywhere,” Youth Economic Empowerment Consultant from the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub Cynthia Cheung said.

“I think a lot of us need to look and see opportunities around us and see how we can help each other and help ourselves in making a social change.”

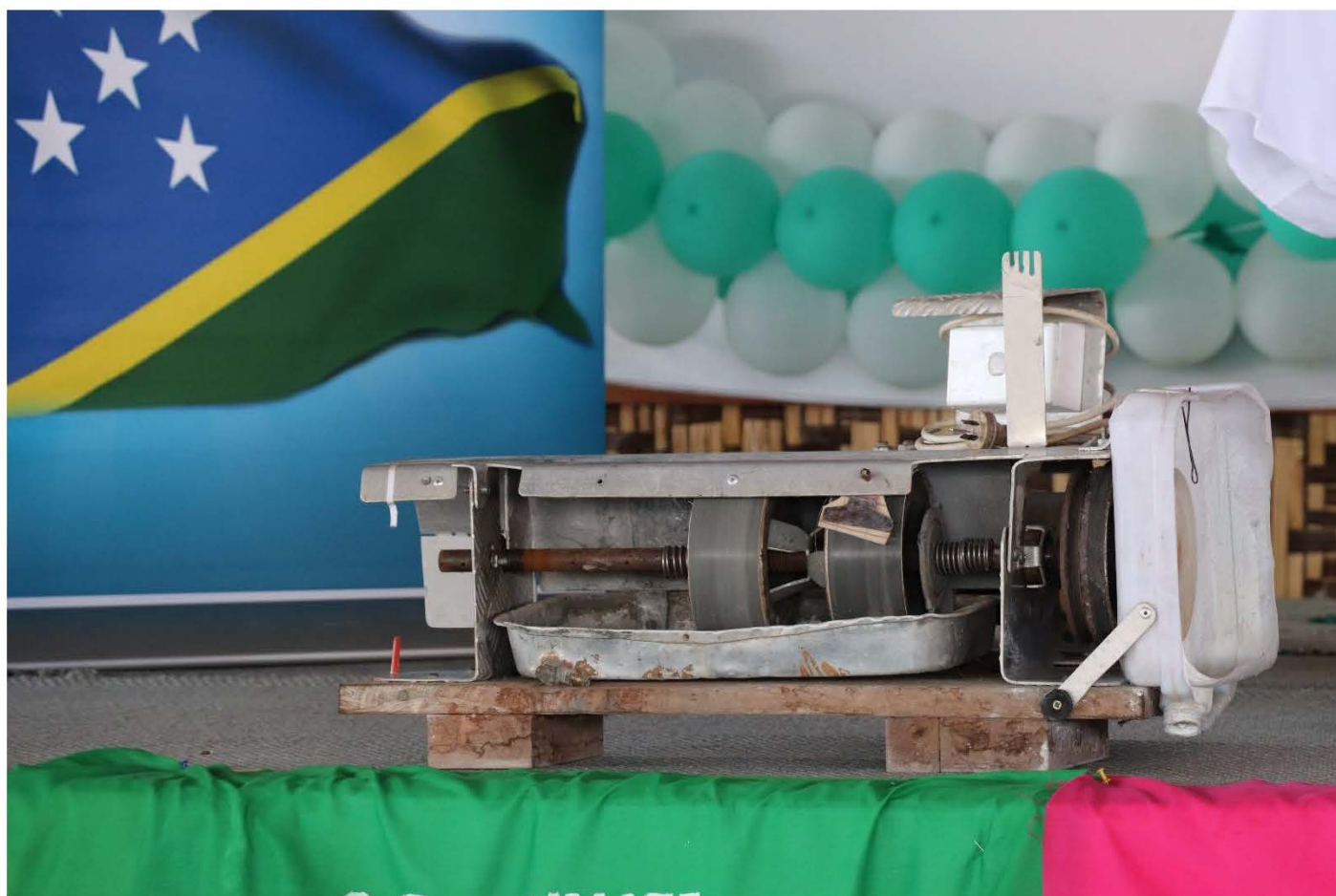
Ms. Cheung shared examples of successful innovations from across the Pacific region and spoke about how youth in Solomon Islands can innovate to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The forum in Malaita was the first provincial follow-up to the inaugural Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum held in Honiara last year. The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) project, jointly implemented by UNDP and UN Women, organized the forum in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and the Youth Division of the Malaita Provincial Government.

After hearing from inspirational speakers during the first two days, 11 teams that completed an innovation boot camp before the forum pitched their innovative business ideas on the third day.

Each team had seven minutes to pitch their idea and were judged on its viability as a business, how it addresses market needs and the Sustainable Development Goals, and the team's ability to implement the idea.

The winners were Malcassava, which will process cassava into chips and flour; Stone Raisers, which created a prototype of a toilet raiser that suits rural settings and accommodates the elderly and others with special needs; and Malamanila Juice, whose idea is to process pineapple juice.



Malcassava's prototype of a cassava grinder on display at the Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum in Auki on 6 September 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

The winning teams were awarded mobile phones from Bmobile and will also receive a package that includes seed funding, mentoring and training to kickstart their ventures.

Malamanila Juice team leader, 19-year-old Philip Kaota of Fasitoro, said the forum and his group's success in the competition helped him understand how social entrepreneurship can drive development in Malaita.

"This has pushed me and made me eager for what I want to achieve in my community — to work with young people to solve some of the issues that we're trying to address," he said.

In closing the forum, Deputy Project Manager of the UNPBF project, Gaylyn Puairana, said the project will continue to support the winning teams by connecting them with resources and partner organizations that can offer specialized mentorship and assistance.

"It is clear that youth are the key resources in the community and that involving youth in local, provincial and national development and peacebuilding is a must," Ms. Puairana said.

The forum was made possible with support from Solomon Airlines, Heritage Park Hotel and Bmobile.

Article featuring leader of one winning team from the Malaita Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum: <http://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/presscenter/articles/2018/soi-youth-tackle-social-issues-with-innovation-entrepreneurship.html>



George Faubata, Stone Raisers Program Coordinator in Auki, Malaita Province. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

Western Province Youth Get Crash Course in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship



Youth from west Gizo discuss community issues at the social innovation and entrepreneurship workshop in Gizo, Western Province on 31 October 2018. Photo: UNDP/Merinda Valley

Gizo, Solomon Islands, 1 November 2018 – In an effort to empower youth to develop new approaches to social issues, nearly 100 young people from across Western Province gathered in Gizo for a social innovation and entrepreneurship workshop this week.

As youth make up about 70 percent of the population in Solomon Islands, they play a critical role in peacebuilding and achieving sustainable development.

The two-day workshop, organized by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) project in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs through the Western Province Youth Desk, introduced young leaders and changemakers to the concepts of social innovation and entrepreneurship to help them solve challenges affecting their communities.

In opening the workshop on Wednesday, UNPBF project Youth Empowerment and Engagement Officer Regina Lepping challenged participants to consider how they can make a social impact and work towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

"Youth are creative and have ideas about how to make a better future for themselves and their country," Ms. Lepping said.

"This workshop will connect young people with information and opportunities to help turn their vision into a reality."

In addition to sessions on key principles of social entrepreneurship and innovation, participants received an interactive lesson about design thinking and startup methods.

"The activities we did broadened our way of thinking, so it helped us," said participant Giftson Semi, who developed a small business model to improve waste management in Gizo and create job opportunities for unemployed youth.

"I think if we implemented the ideas, it would really help our community," he said.

The workshop was the first in a series of activities leading up to the Western Province Youth Peacebuilding Innovation Forum to be held in Gizo from 20 to 22 November.

Workshop participants will be invited to apply for an innovation boot camp that will help them refine solutions related to social cohesion, peacebuilding, civic engagement and youth unemployment or underemployment.

Teams of innovators will build and test prototypes before pitching them at the provincial innovation forum for the chance to win seed funding and other support to start their social enterprise.

The UNPBF project's manager, Tony Cameron, emphasized the importance of harnessing the potential of youth in Western Province and aiding their efforts to tackle persistent social challenges.

"Young people are valuable resources. Their inspiration and enthusiasm needs to be considered as part of national peacebuilding discourse," Mr. Cameron said.

"Supporting young innovators brings communities and the country closer together, fulfilling the vision for sustainable peace and development."