

A Pilot Project to Increase Women's Access to Justice  
Guadalcanal and Malaita Provinces  
Solomon Islands

**End of Project Evaluation**

Executive Summary



1 February 2021

Commissioned by the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) of the Pacific Community (SPC)

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Disclaimer: This evaluation report was developed by an independent evaluation team. The analysis presented in this report reflects the views of the authors and may not necessarily represent the Human Rights and Social Development division of the Pacific Community, its partners or the UN Trust Fund.

## I. Executive Summary

This End of Project Evaluation Report details the results of the 'Pilot Project to Increase Women's Access to Justice in Guadalcanal and Malaita in Solomon Islands' ('the project'), managed by the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRFT) of the Pacific Community.

The project commenced in May 2017 and has been implemented in two-island provinces of Solomon Islands: Malaita and Guadalcanal provinces. The project has been accommodated within the Women's Division of the Ministry of Women, Youth Children and Family Affairs. The two funders have been the United Nations Trust Fund for Ending Violence Against Women (UN Trust Fund)<sup>1</sup> and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The project was originally designed under the sole support of the UN Trust Fund with that element of the project concluding in December 2020. DFAT funding for the project commenced mid-way through implementation and is due to conclude at the end in June 2021.

The project has been directed towards advancing elements of Solomon Islands *Family Protection Act 2014* (FPA) which came into force in 2016. In turn, this Act is targeted at stemming, and ultimately helping to end, Solomon Islands' domestic violence problem. Gender-based violence in the country is common, pervasive and of serious concern. The key finding of the most comprehensive study on family violence in Solomon Islands (SPC: 2009) found that that 64 percent of "ever-partnered women aged 15 to 49" had experienced "physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner".

The project sought to work with Authorised Justices (AJs): a position established under the FPA. AJs are an existing group of lay decision-makers – Local Court Justices. AJs were granted the power to issue Interim Protection Orders (IPOs) which are directed towards stopping perpetrators from committing acts of domestic violence. The project worked with 46 AJs in 37 communities. In addition, the project created a new role: Community Facilitators (CFs). This role – of which there are 40 incumbents, 20 in each project province – was largely focussed on alerting the main project beneficiaries (women and girls), and others, on the role of AJs, issues of gender-based violence and their rights under the FPA.

This end of project evaluation is a requirement of UN Trust Fund. It is directed towards the project's two funders, RRRT staff, the Solomon Islands Government, project partners and others who have an interest in issues of gender-based violence in Solomon Islands and the region. It seeks to assess whether the project has met its objectives, key of which was the project goal that "women and girl survivors of domestic violence in Guadalcanal and Malaita experience higher level of safety and are better protected from domestic violence, by project end" (UN Trust Fund Proposal, 2017: 23).

The evaluation was conducted through: an assessment of available project documents; interviews with project staff; interviews with project partners in Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, including government stakeholders; quantitative data collection in six project communities involving women aged over 18, men aged over 18, and six AJs; and an assessment of various questions asked at baseline, mid-line and end-line data collection exercises. References to relevant secondary materials related to gender-based violence in Solomon Islands were also called upon. Owing to COVID-19 travel restrictions, it was not possible for the project evaluators to undertake extensive community-level travel within the two provinces where the project has been implemented. Most importantly, the evaluation was not able to engage with project beneficiaries. This is a key limitation of the evaluation and the ability to validate certain findings with the experiences of those the project

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) was established by UN General Assembly [resolution 50/166](#) and is administered by UN Women on behalf of the UN System.

was designed to benefit most. A further key limitation is that only six AJs took part in the quantitative survey that was administered for the purposes of the evaluation, limiting the perspectives that could be gleaned by this important project stakeholder group.

### **Key Findings**

At the broadest level, the pilot project was designed to test the provision for the role of AJs under the *Family Protection Act 2014*. It has played a role in advancing such provisions of the FPA and made some contribution towards its implementation. The project has progressed work and understanding regarding 'prescribed persons' and their role under the law, as well as highlighting and re-affirming certain gaps in the state justice system which present challenges in securing avenues of legal protection for Solomon Islander women survivors of family violence. However, the evaluation overall reports modest project success.

The quantitative evidence available to this evaluation suggests that the project has made some contribution to ending violence against women and increasing access to justice for survivors of domestic violence in the communities in which it was implemented. While subject to limitations, the longitudinal data captured over the life of the project does not, on the whole, demonstrate a discernible change in attitudes, understanding and responses to domestic violence by project beneficiaries in project communities where surveys were conducted. Similarly, the data collected for the purposes of this evaluation suggests limited engagement by project beneficiaries with key project activities, specifically contact with AJs and attendance at CF awareness sessions.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the survey activity, of note are figures which show that in the six survey communities only 8 women (of n=138 surveyed) had spoken to an AJ about a problem that they had, while some 77 percent of women surveyed had not attended an awareness session on the work of AJs (being 86 percent in Guadalcanal province). As noted above, it was not possible to validate these findings through interviews with project beneficiaries due to the impacts of COVID-19.

The evaluation data shows mixed results when assessing the overall project goal. Some positive findings included increased understanding that gender-based violence is against the law in Solomon Islands (including forced sex within married couples) and increased knowledge of existing laws on domestic violence (from 27 percent of women respondents in the baseline survey to 61 percent in the end-line). However, across the two project provinces the majority of female respondents to the end-line survey (n=138), some 69 percent, believed violence had either increased or stayed the same over the project period. Male respondents across the two provinces (n=81) provided a similar response, with 64 percent believing there had been an increase or it had stayed the same. While this suggests the overarching project goal has not been met, again it is noted that it was not possible to corroborate this observation with qualitative interviews of beneficiaries or communities where AJs are resident.

At the start of the project, no IPOs had been issued in Solomon Islands. Project data discloses that as at April 2020, 35 IPOs had been issued by AJs over the course of the project, with seven of these said to have been served on perpetrators by the police. The issuing of IPOs is directly relevant to the success of the project. Late in the project it was identified that the majority of AJs had not been formally appointed Local Court Justices although they have been functioning in that role. Steps to clarify the legal status of AJs remains a priority going forward.

The qualitative data collected for the evaluation demonstrates a generally positive attitude and perspective regarding the project by Honiara-based interlocutors, with mixed levels of understanding of the project. The majority of those spoken with understood that the project was working with AJs, predominantly through training. Less interview informants were familiar with the

position and role of CFs. On balance, there was a desire to see the project continued, with some stressing that any continuation of the project would need to remedy the low numbers of female AJs.

This evaluation finds that over the course of its three years the project has made progress, but been unable to fully address a number of important issues which have limited its effectiveness. While the project did build some connections and have contact with the appropriate breadth of justice sector stakeholders in Solomon Islands, two issues stand out regarding whether the depth of engagement needed to be enhanced. First, the need for stronger linkages with, and embeddedness within, government and governance systems and institutions at the national, provincial and community levels. Second, the need for further vertical and horizontal linkages with other actors working in the domestic violence space at the provincial and community levels, including deeper engagement with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). The work of the police is highly interconnected with the work of AJs. Without police service of IPOs on perpetrators, the orders are of no legal effect. While engagement did occur with the RSIPF, including through some trainings, it was not sufficient for overcoming these limits to effectiveness. Fundamental problems which have arisen due to the project being linked with Local Court Justices are also addressed in this evaluation. As discussed, key amongst these is the lack of female AJs – of the 46 AJs the project has worked with only two are women.

In regards to management, the project faced a number of challenges during the set-up phase which initially delayed its implementation. While some pertained to issues during the design process, it largely related to the accuracy of information provided to the project regarding possible AJ participants and other delays in local recruitment. The project team, supported by RRRT staff in Suva, demonstrated an ability to respond to these challenges and adapt the delivery of the project.

## **Recommendations**

This evaluation makes a number of recommendations relevant to the future sustainability of the project. These recommendations are based on a holistic view of the project and the context within which it operates, going beyond the specific parameters of the original pilot project to focus on its future contribution as part of the justice system landscape in Solomon Islands. The recommendations are as follows:

- ***Ministerial integration:*** Efforts now need to be concluded on the future incorporation of the project's management into the MWYCFA or MJLA. All remaining project decisions and activities up until June 2021 should be undertaken in conjunction with relevant officers from whichever ministry agrees to continue the management of the project activities.
- ***Institutional home of AJ training:*** It cannot be expected that the SIG ministry which continues with the management of the project will take up all of the project's activities. While likely to be challenging, discussions must now commence with the Chief Justice and the National Local Courts Coordinator around training AJs on their statutory responsibilities under the FPA. The Office of the National Local Courts Coordinator must continue to be invited to participate in any further project discussions/activities around the training of AJs.
- ***Resolution around non-confirmed AJs:*** It was discovered in late 2019 that the majority of AJs that the project had been working with had not been formally appointed Local Court Justices despite operating in this role for some time. Given the effort and resources that have been expended in training this group under the project – and the time the project

has invested in determining which AJs are capable and which are not – efforts must now be advanced to have this group officially appointed Local Court Justices.

- *Police training:* While acknowledged as being outside of the direct scope of the original project design, it is recommended that police training on the FPA, including the role of AJs and their responsibilities, must be integrated into the training curriculum of the RSIPF Police Training Academy going forward. It is strongly recommended that alignment with police training on the FPA take place to complement and further work achieved through the project.
- *Prescribed Persons:* The project needs to build on the political will expressed by key stakeholders to support the prescribed persons' role and endeavour to marshal other actors to pursue this. This will help to ensure the utility of the 2020 training that the project delivered to prospective prescribed persons. Even more importantly, this path holds the best prospect of women becoming AJs. Two interlocutors should continue to be actively engaged with by the project: the Legal Policy Unit of the MJLA and the DFAT-funded 'Solomon Islands Justice Program' (SIJP).

The key learnings and recommendations from this evaluation will inform the continued implementation of the FPA and other access to justice projects in Solomon Islands.