

Chapter 14: Solomon Islands

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Population (1988): 304,000

Population Growth Rate (1980-88): 3.7% per annum

Land Area: 29,000 square kilometres

Sea Area: 748,000 square kilometres Capital: Honiara

GNP per Capita (1988): US\$430

Year of Independence: 1978

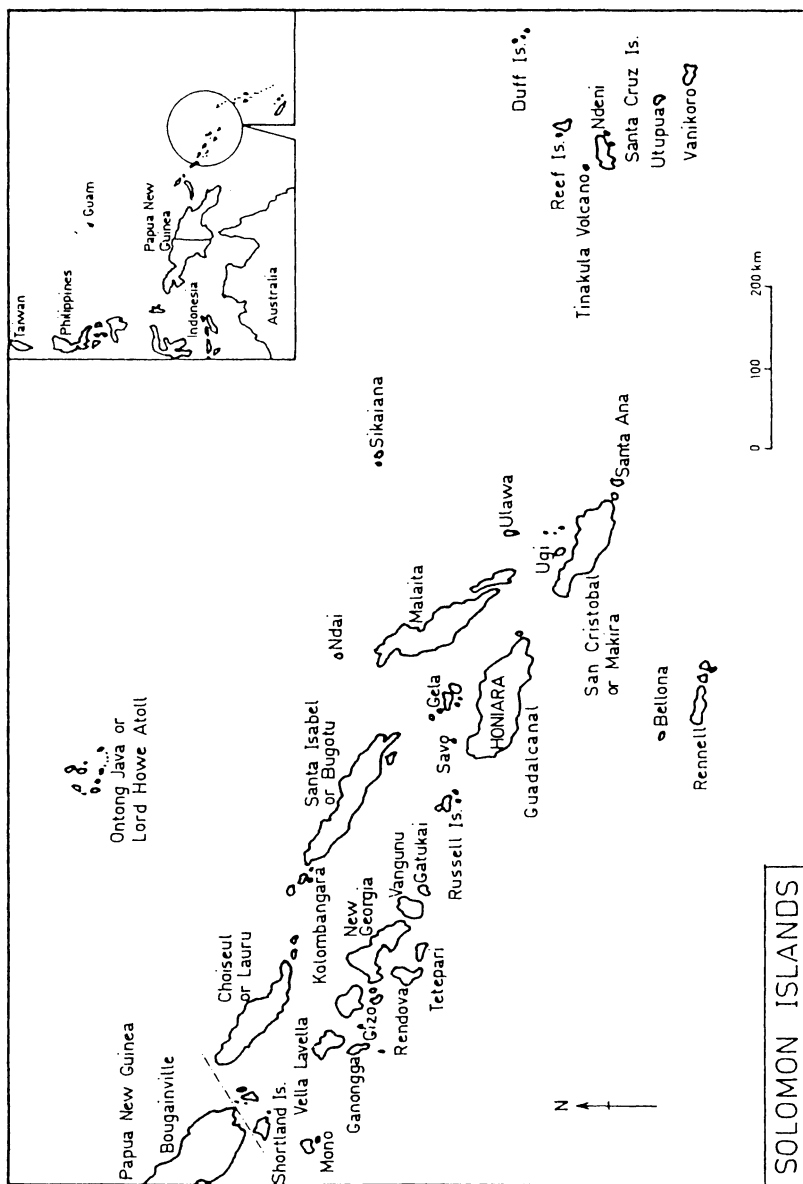
Primary School Enrolment Rate (1988): 73.3%

Human Development Index (1987): 0.349

Solomon Islands is a scattered archipelago consisting of six major islands and hundreds of small volcanic and raised atolls. The two most heavily populated islands are called Malaita and Guadalcanal. The majority of the population are Melanesian, though significant proportions are Polynesian and Micronesian. The official language is English, but over 100 different vernaculars are also used and the most effective lingua franca is Solomon Pijin. Over 90 per cent of the population are Christian.

The northern part of Solomon Islands became a German protectorate in 1885, and the southern part a British protectorate in 1893. Rennell Island and the Santa Cruz Islands were added to the British protectorate in 1898 and 1899. Germany ceded most of the northern Solomons and Ontong Java Islands to the United Kingdom between 1898 and 1900. The whole territory, known as the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, was placed under the jurisdiction of the Western Pacific High Commission which was headquartered in Fiji. The country gained internal self-government in 1976, and independence in 1978. Since that time it has been governed according to the Westminster model on a multi-party system.

About 75 per cent of the population depends on subsistence agriculture. The principal commercial agricultural products are copra and



oil palm, but in recent years fishing and timber have contributed larger shares of exports. The economy also gains significant income from external aid. In recent years the United Kingdom has featured less prominently as a major donor, while Australia and to a lesser extent New Zealand have played more active roles. In contrast to many small states in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the South Pacific, Solomon Islands earns very little revenue from tourism.

1. Ministry Responsibilities

The education sector is administered by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development (MEHRD). This body resulted from a reshuffling of ministry responsibilities in 1989. Before the reshuffle, education was administered by the Ministry of Education & Training (MET).

In addition to education, the MEHRD is responsible for manpower planning and for public service training. The former used to be a function of the Ministry of Economic Planning, and the latter was a function of the Ministry of Public Service. The MET had been responsible for overseas training, and thus had overlapping functions. By grouping the functions in one place, the architects of the reorganisation hoped to avoid duplication and to rationalise use of resources.

Since 1981, much administration of education has been decentralised to the governments of seven provinces and to the Honiara Town Council. Officers are commonly seconded to provincial governments by the MEHRD, but the provincial governments have a considerable degree of autonomy. This can create problems of divided loyalty. While the staffing levels provincial education offices vary, most have a Principal Education Officer (PEO), a Senior Education Officer (SEO), a Education Officer (EO), a Community Education Officer (CEO), and three inspectors.

The decentralised system is made necessary by the geographic and cultural diversity of the country, and by the problems of communication and transportation. The system permits many administrative problems to be dealt with at the local level, and can make the schools more responsive to local needs. However, decentralisation has also exacerbated problems. The system is costly in both financial and manpower terms, and particularly because the provinces are short of qualified staff the system often operates inefficiently. Another problem is that the national and provincial governments may disagree on policies and priorities.

The MEHRD also shares some responsibilities at the national

government level. For instance the Statistics Office of the Ministry of Finance serves all ministries and handles most aspects of data collection and analysis; and responsibility for secondary school buildings is undertaken by the Ministry of Transport, Works & Utilities.

As in other small states, however, some aspects of education are not undertaken by the government at all. For example the MEHRD has no officers responsible for kindergartens or adult education; and although the MEHRD does employ inspectors for primary schools (most of whom are deployed through the provinces), it has no inspectors for secondary schools.

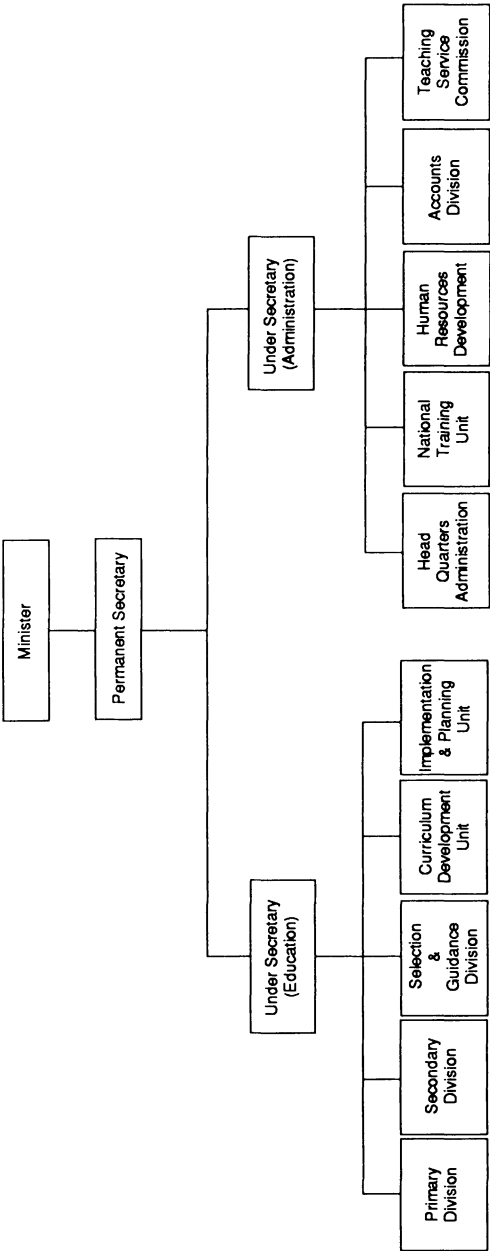
2. Formal Organisation of the MEHRD

The structure of the MEHRD is shown in Figure 14.1. The ministry has two main branches, responsible for professional and administrative matters. Each branch is headed by an Under Secretary. The professional branch has six divisions, namely primary education, secondary education, selection & guidance, the curriculum development unit, the implementation & planning unit, and the national manpower division. The administration branch has five divisions, responsible for administration of headquarters, national training, human resources development, accounts, overseas training, and the Teaching Service Commission. When designing the structure, the architects were conscious of the need to have rough balance between the two wings. They also tried to align the divisions with the expertise of the two Under Secretaries then existing.

The change from the MET to the MEHRD was an attempt to link manpower planning more effectively to education. In particular it brought under a common umbrella both a large World Bank/Australian secondary education project and a large European Economic Community (EEC) manpower development project. Some observers had suggested that manpower planning would be better conducted by the newly-combined Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning or by the Prime Minister's office, with an officer having HRD responsibilities in each province. However, the authorities decided that the merger with Education & Training was preferable.

The Curriculum Development Unit is physically located not in the Ministry headquarters but near the School of Education & Cultural Studies of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE). As well as alleviating space constraints, this promotes linkages with the teacher-trainers.

Figure 14.1: The Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, Solomon Islands (1989)



3. Ministry Personnel

(a) Numbers and Expertise

Most of the divisions are quite small. In the Education wing, for example, the largest divisions are the Implementation & Planning Unit, which has seven professional staff, and the Selection & Guidance Division which has three professional staff. The weighting of seniority is towards the top end of the scale, and there are no Education Officers at Level 6 or below. Many divisions also suffer from the lack of support staff.

However, staff shortages are relieved by cooperation and overlap between divisions. For example the CEO (Primary) is concerned with teacher training, curriculum and supplies as well as with more narrowly-focused administration of primary schools.

Shortage of expertise is a chronic problem in many areas. It is caused by several factors. First, the country depends largely on outside assistance for training, and does not have the financial power to send sufficient people to gain required skills. Second, because no proper analysis has yet been carried out on national requirements, most training is only loosely tied to the country's needs. Linked to this, selection for training tends to be *ad hoc* rather than being based on a coherent plan.

Many officers are in the Ministry more by chance than by design, and few have been specially trained for their jobs. In almost all cases, officers come into the Ministry from the classroom and make their way up.

Most officers holding the posts of Chief Education Officer and above hold degrees and/or diplomas in education. Some of these enter at the top of the system. Staff who work their way up include the accountants and administrators who are able to do short courses locally.

Because local expertise is still scarce, many individuals are first appointed to senior posts and are then given training to help them perform their tasks. No doubt when the country is swarming with qualified personnel there will be a saturation point beyond which qualified individuals are available and yet cannot be promoted since the existing occupants of posts are also qualified. Perhaps when the time comes this country will have to establish tighter selection, monitoring and assessment procedures in order to ensure that only the best are promoted. A country like Solomon Islands with few resources cannot afford to keep expanding the bureaucracy to create posts at will for the sake of promotions.

The government has been able to meet some personnel needs through external aid schemes. For example the Principal Examinations

Officer is employed through the UK Overseas Development Administration, the acting CEO (Planning) and the acting SEO (Nonformal Education) are Peace Corps volunteers, and the adviser in the Implementation & Planning Unit is paid by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB). However, employment of such expatriates is only an interim measure pending full localisation.

The Ministry also employs short-term consultants for specific tasks. In most cases the consultants are recruited to assist in work for which the Ministry lacks its own specialists. Sometimes, however, the Ministry recruits consultants even when it does have its own skilled personnel. Usually the main reason for this is that the skilled locals are already overcommitted with other tasks.

The need for consultants arises from both the small size of the system and the undeveloped nature of local expertise. However both these factors can make the Ministry more vulnerable to unsatisfactory work. In at least one recent case, the Ministry commissioned a report on an aspect of the education system, paying two consultants with funds provided through an external agency. The consultants were technically well-qualified, but lacked familiarity with the administrative and political arrangements which govern decision-making in Solomon Islands education. Faced with a complex situation, the consultants presented a report which allocated too much space to description and explanation to the external funding agency and which did not greatly advance the knowledge of Solomon Islands officials.

This report should have been sent back to the authors for rewriting. But because the Ministry was small and had few specialist officers sufficiently capable and confident of challenging the work, the report was accepted as it was. In return for a considerable fee, therefore, the Ministry received a document which was put aside because nobody knew what to do with it.

Of course not all reports are of this type. The Ministry is assisted by many individuals who are not only experienced, diligent and sensitive, but who can also report clearly and appropriately. Their inputs are especially valued because of the limitations of local expertise. However, the case is highlighted because it illustrates one aspect of the vulnerability of small states.

(b) Job Definition and Appraisal

The MEHRD has recently gone through the job descriptions of some of its officers in order to update them and make them more detailed. The job descriptions indicate the tasks to be performed and outline the

expected results. However, officers rarely take time to check on what they should be doing. The job descriptions are normally consulted only when individual officers' actions are in question.

To improve the situation, induction sessions have recently been introduced for some new staff. In these sessions, the duties of the new staff and their expected modes of operation are explained. Yet the induction sessions do not always have a strong or lasting impact.

Within the MEHRD some specialisation is possible, especially in the Implementation & Planning Unit, the accounts section, and the secondary schools division. However, specialisation is not so easy in other parts of the ministry, either because the system is too small or because qualified personnel are not available.

In many cases jobs are grouped according to convenience rather than on carefully-planned models. As a result, the Chief Education Officers in the divisions of both primary and secondary education, for example, find themselves required to be planners, project officers, recruiting officers, and supply & distribution officers. This practice allows a lot to be ignored, especially in areas in which officers lack expertise. The officers tend to perform best in their professional areas and simply try to make do in others. Sometimes officers are so preoccupied with meetings relating to their many tasks that in the end they have little time to implement anything.

The Ministry has begun to use specific tools for staff assessment and appraisal. Unfortunately senior personnel lack experience with these tools and have experienced some difficulties. In practice, assessments tend to be based on guesstimates, and coherent use of formal indicators of performance is yet to become a feature of the system. There is also a need for a self-appraisal system. In essence, a lot of 'weighing' is practised, even in the only staff confidential report which is made out annually. Officers tend to give more weight to the reports on people whom they know personally.

Many ministry officials perform tasks for such external bodies as the Censorship Board and the Council of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE). Some individuals are also members of school Boards of Governors. The main advantage of these linkages is that they help the Ministry to remain in touch with developments elsewhere. Where the organisations have an educational role, the ministry officials can also play a control and support function. However, some of these bodies have nothing to do with education, and work for them may therefore be a distraction and a burden. Also, officers may get so involved in the activities of other organisations that they neglect their own duties. Conversely, because they are so busy at the Ministry they cannot always attend the meetings of the external bodies regularly.

Lack of neutrality in personnel matters is obvious in two areas. First, many senior officers in the Ministry only hold their posts on an acting basis. When their cases come before the Public Service Commission, decisions can be swayed, for better or worse, by recommendations from the Ministry. These recommendations are often influenced more by seniority and the length of time officers have been in post than by tangible indicators of performance.

The second area concerns the lowest-level, non-established posts, for which recruitment is made directly by the Ministry. Favouritism may or may not be a factor in employment; but even when it is not, the process is excessively casual.

(c) The Hierarchy

The MEHRD, like other ministries both in Solomon Islands and in other small states, has a rather short pyramid. Table 14.1 shows that there are only four national public servants above that of principal of a National Secondary School (NSS), and there are 23 public service positions at Level 8 or above. The latter includes the principals of the

Table 14.1: Senior Posts within the Solomon Islands Education Service

Level	National Government	Provincial Governments	Schools
12	Permanent Secretary (1 position)		
11	Under Secretary (2 positions)		
10	Director, Implem. & Planning Unit (1 position)		
9	CEO (4 positions)		NSS Principal (8 positions)
8	PEO (8 positions)	PEO (7 positions)	NSS Deputy Principal (8 positions) PSS Principal (12 positions)

Provincial Secondary Schools (PSSs). Because of this structure, Solomon Islands does not seriously suffer from the complaint common in large bureaucracies where teachers leave schools in order to further their careers in administration.

Although the shortness of the pyramid causes problems when individuals feel deprived of promotions, it facilitates consultation and communication. Generally speaking, the shorter the hierarchy, the faster information can get to the bottom.

The trend up to now tends to show that transfers or promotions to the Ministry favour classroom teachers and principals, though this is not a planned strategy. One of the Under Secretary posts has been held by two different principals, one of whom is now a Permanent Secretary in another ministry. Prior to taking up the post the present occupant gained a masters' degree in educational administration and management.

4. Curriculum Development

(a) Staffing

Recent years have brought dramatic improvements in curriculum development, particularly at the secondary school level. Until 1985 there was only one full-time post of Curriculum Officer for secondary schools. Since then, seven posts have been created for specialists in agriculture, home economics, industrial arts, English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Most curriculum development has been generated by teachers' panels for each subject. The full panels meet once a year in a 10-day workshop for writing syllabuses and curriculum materials, setting examinations and sometimes in-service work. During these workshops each panel is advised by an overseas consultant. The teachers in the four NSSs and one PSS near Honiara hold panel meetings every two weeks to continue the work of the workshops. It is more difficult to involve teachers from the other four NSSs and the other 11 PSSs. However, the schools located near Honiara represent a high proportion of the total number of institutions, and Solomon Islands is therefore able to achieve far greater proportionate participation of teachers in curriculum development than would be possible in a larger system. Moreover the panels in Honiara are encouraged to correspond with their counterparts elsewhere.

The appointment of Curriculum Officers has allowed the Ministry to provide much more guidance in the development of each subject.

However, the Curriculum Officers still work with and through the panels. The Curriculum Officers coordinate the panels, assist in writing and editing teaching materials, organise the annual curriculum workshops in their subjects, visit schools to trial materials, and advise teachers on the use of materials and the teaching of the subject.

These school visits are especially important because of the lack of secondary inspectors. The visits provide a way in which the small system can to some extent cover both functions with one set of personnel. They have greatly helped to improve linkages between the Ministry and the schools.

(b) Curriculum Materials

Syllabuses and teaching materials for all subjects have been produced by the teachers' panels, the former subject advisers and the Curriculum Officers. Most subjects rely mainly on local teaching materials produced in this way, especially in Forms 1-3.

The largest amount of material so far has been produced by the Panels themselves. Output has been remarkable considering that this has all been done by unpaid, voluntary efforts by full-time teachers. Chairpersons work particularly hard in addition to their normal teaching load.

Experience has shown, however, that although teachers in their panels can write syllabuses, examinations and some teaching materials, they do not have the time, experience or skill to produce full courses of teaching materials. That is why the creation of full-time Curriculum Officer posts and increased assistance from overseas consultants was considered essential.

Overall, the quantity and quality of material produced has been remarkable for a small system. It helps teachers and pupils to feel that the Solomon Islands system has an identity of its own, which in turn increases the feelings of relevance and pride. However, the Ministry does not rely entirely on locally-produced materials. Where commercially-published overseas materials are considered suitable they are purchased instead of or in addition to local materials. English, for example, uses the 'Link' series published in Fiji, and is considering replacing this with 'Create and Communicate' published in Australia for Papua New Guinea. Christian Education has used texts from Papua New Guinea, though is now replacing them with local materials. Science is considering adopting an Australian series to supplement local units.

In Forms 4 and 5 there is more extensive use of overseas books, mainly chosen and purchased by individual schools. Only since 1984

has the Curriculum Centre been allowed to buy sets of overseas books for schools if they are adopted as approved texts by the panels. In addition, much of the material produced locally has been adapted from Papua New Guinea and other countries.

All locally-written or adapted materials are printed at the Curriculum Development Centre. This can print by off-set litho or by duplication, and has a graphics section with three artists. Production has often been slowed by old machinery and lack of skilled supervision, but we now have a new printing machine and proposals have been accepted for the post of Curriculum Development Officer (Production) to supervise the printery.

In spite of the problems of lack of full-time writers and the inadequacy of the printery, many books have been produced over the years. Table 14.2 shows the output between 1978 and 1987. The books vary in length from 150 to eight pages, averaging between 30 and 40 pages.

Table 14.2: Production of Materials, Solomon Islands, 1978-87

Year	Students' Books	Teachers' Books and Syllabuses
1978-81	32	12
1982	26	9
1983	53	20
1984	21	3
1985	23	4
1986	17	3
1987 (to June)	17	7

This production has had a considerable impact on the schools, especially the PSSs. In 1981 they were teaching largely without any textbooks at all, and often without detailed syllabuses. Most subjects now have a complete or nearly complete set of materials up to Form 3 level, and many more materials are also available for the later forms. The emphasis is now turning to in-service work to assist the teachers to use the materials.

5. International Linkages

(a) Aid

The MEHRD depends heavily on outside aid for development projects in school expansion, curriculum development and manpower training. Table 14.3 shows the number and range of aid projects existing in 1988. Eight different donors or international agencies are named. Liaison with these bodies is a major task for officers of the Ministry.

Table 14.4 adds the projects which had been approved but which had not yet commenced, the projects which had been prepared but not yet funded, and the projects in the process of preparation. The table mentions a further three international agencies. As is implied by the second part of the table, preparation of projects does not always bear immediate or even ultimate fruit. Projects have to be proposed to agencies which may or may not be willing to take them on, and this requires a great deal of effort. Fortunately some agencies are willing to send specialists to help in project preparation as well as in implementation.

Aid is good when it is injected into essential services such as health and education. However, it may also have problematic aspects. Because aid does not usually provide for maintenance, the government finds itself committed to increasing recurrent expenditure. Also, training is frequently provided only on the terms and in the locations determined by donors, even though such terms and locations may not be in the best interests of the country. Further, in some instances aid is tied to persons and goods from the donors' countries, even though other sources might be more suitable. And finally, the types of project favoured by the donors are not always the ones favoured by the governments of the recipient countries.

The Ministry can minimise the detrimental effects of aid in several ways. First, the government should be sensitive to the dangers of distorting effects, and should only accept aid which can be used in beneficial ways. Officers should be particularly wary of aid which is only available for capital costs. Also, the government must train more personnel to handle aid donors and programmes. Only in this way can we ensure that we know what we want, after which we can tactfully approach donors so that ideas may be sold to them. The Implementation & Planning Unit (IPU) also deserves specific mention in the context of aid. The IPU was established as part of the secondary education project, which is jointly funded by the World Bank, AIDAB and the Solomon Islands government. Because strengthening of planning was itself one aim of the project, creation of the unit made sense in it-

Table 14.3: Ongoing Projects in the Education Sector, Solomon Islands, 1988

<u>Project Title</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Cost (SI\$)</u>	<u>Funding</u>
Primary education development	classroom construction teacher training curriculum development	1981-88	7,400,000	IBRD AIDAB SIG
Vacation school for primary tchrs	annual in-service training	1985-90	79,000	NZ
Health education curric. development	writing & publication of materials; training	1987-88		WHO
Secondary education expansion	school construction teacher training curriculum development equipment/materials fellowships/attachments studies/research	1987-92	16,070,000	WB AIDAB SIG
Curriculum development	consultants for workshops	1986-89	75,000	NZ
Goldie College water supply	provision of reliable water supply	1988	40,000	AIDAB
Secondary teacher education progr.	resources for English and Social Studies	1988	44,600	NZ
SICHE School of Education	lecturers in English & Home Economics; houses; attachments	1987-90	780,000	NZ
Overseas Scholarships	various subjects	annual	5,100,000	AIDAB, NZ, EEC, UK, CFTC, SIG UNEP
Education planning	assistance to prepare education plan	1988		UNEP
Cyclone Rehabilitation	primary school bldgs. secondary sch. bldgs. materials/equipment	1987 1987-88 1987-88	800,000 700,000 509,000	AIDAB UK NZ, UK, EEC
School broadcasts	feasibility study	3 mths	600,000	NZ

Notes (a) IBRD = International Bank for Reconstruction & Development [World Bank]; AIDAB = Australian International Development Assistance Bureau; SIG = Solomon Islands Government; NZ = New Zealand; WHO = World Health Organisation; EEC = European Economic Community; UK = United Kingdom; CFTC = Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation; UNEP = United Nations ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre.

(b) In mid-1988, SI\$1.00 was equivalent to US\$0.47.

Table 14.4: Anticipated Projects in the Education Sector, Solomon Islands, 1988

Project Title	Description	Duration	Cost (SI\$)	Funding
<u>A. Projects Approved but not Commenced</u>				
Preparatory education	materials, training	2 years	140,000	Unicef
Primary schools	water supply, sanitation	2 years	210,000	Unicef
Provincial Secondary Schools	stoves and firewood lots	1 year	175,000	EEC
<u>B. Projects Prepared but not yet Funded</u>				
Community education	adviser	1 year		UNDP/ILO
Sixth Forms	microbiology equipment	1 year	50,000	
Provincial Secondary Schools	upgrading	1 year	1,000,000	
Curriculum Development Centre	printing equipment	1 year	50,000	
<u>C. Projects being/to be Formulated</u>				
Su'u Sec. School	ablution blocks, dormitories			
Kamaosi, Alardyce & Tangarare PSSs	building works			
Secondary schools	water supply and sanitation			
KGVI School	maintenance and upgrading			
Headteachers and Inspectors	Unesco regional project for upgrading			
Tech/voc. training	general development			
Cyclone Anna rehabilitation	primary schools in Temotu Province			
Sixth Forms	equipment, textbooks (all subjects)			
New Selwyn College	construction			

self. The IPU also provides a convenient single reference point to the two external agencies, who would otherwise have to liaise with a large number of people at all levels of the Ministry.

The importance of the unit is reflected in the fact that its Director occupies a Level 10 position, senior to the CEOs and junior only to the Under Secretaries and the Permanent Secretary. It must be admitted, however, that the special treatment of the IPU does cause problems. In contrast to the main part of the Ministry the IPU has its own air-conditioned suite of offices, its own photocopier and its own vehicle. It has also been the principal commissioning agent for many external consultants. The fact that the IPU has been perceived to have resources and prestige lacked by other parts of the Ministry has caused some elements of internal friction.

(b) Regional Organisations

Two regional organisations relate very strongly to the operations of the MEHRD. The first is the University of the South Pacific (USP), and the second is the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

The Minister of Education is a member of the USP Council. This helps Solomon Islands to benefit from the institution. The MEHRD gains staff development through the USP Institute of Education and the USP Extension Studies centre located in Honiara. The USP also provides consultancy advice and support for the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education.

However, some USP courses much needed by this country have recently been abolished. Among them have been the B.Ed. and Diploma courses, which were cut simply because only Solomon Islands and a few other smaller countries still needed them. In this respect, the service by USP is less than optimal.

The SPBEA operates a regional examination and assists with national examinations. It also sets criteria for assessment, and helps train personnel to carry out assessment. In 1989 the Solomon Islands Permanent Secretary was Chairman of the SPBEA. The SPBEA is a fairly young body about which it is too early to make conclusive statements, but initial experiences have been very positive.

Responsibilities for dealing with the regional bodies are vested with different divisions of the Ministry. The Training & Manpower Planning Division works with the USP, and the Selection & Guidance Division works with the SPBEA. The latter Division is also responsible for national examinations and selection.

(c) Management of Information

The capacity to respond to external requests for information is not yet well established. The Ministry will eventually establish a good information system, but it needs additional expertise and time. Meanwhile, responses to requests for information are often time-consuming, and in the absence of a good information system the data provided are sometimes unreliable and out of date.

Reports received from international bodies are often read and filed away if they do not call for an immediate response or action. Reports requiring actions relating to developments in education are generally attended to more actively than reports which are merely informative.

(d) Absence of Individuals

When officers go abroad for meetings, workshops or seminars, the problem of who takes over temporary responsibilities can be chronic, especially in divisions where posts are unfilled due to lack of suitable manpower. In some cases officers simply leave, and things come to a standstill while they are away. A 1989 initiative emphasised the value of team work and helped reduce the problem at the upper level. Also, when the Permanent Secretary or Under Secretaries are away, priority tasks may be given to the appropriate caretaking officers. In general, however, this issue needs to be addressed so that standard procedures may be devised.

Overseas trips have a significant effect on the life of a small Ministry for personal as well as professional reasons. They are generally prized because they allow individuals to save money by living within the allowances and by not spending their normal salaries, and they provide opportunities to buy the latest fashions and electronic goods. The trips also boost prestige, firstly because the individuals have been chosen in competition with others, and secondly because while abroad the delegates usually receive great respect and courtesy in the host countries.

Unfortunately, one effect of the attractiveness of overseas trips has been the temptation to view selection as a reward rather than a function of need and merit. In many cases decisions are at least partly based on perceptions of whose turn it is to go abroad rather than who is the most suitable candidate. As a result, English lecturers may be sent to study the implementation of technical education, administrators rather than teachers examine school-based health programmes, and administrators attend workshops for school principals.

Of course this does not always happen. But when it does happen the needs of the country suffer. To reduce the problem, the Ministry needs a clear selection system. But this, of course, requires personnel to establish and maintain the system; and such personnel are difficult to find in a small bureaucracy.

5. The Culture of the Ministry

Despite the fact that the MEHRD is one of the largest ministries in the country, people all know each other intimately. This is partly a function of educational history, for the early schools which served only a small minority of the population recruited broadly across ethnic groups and regions. Officers also have many non-work linkages, e.g. through the churches.

Some advantages of this situation are that it facilitates assessment for appointment and promotion, it promotes teamwork, and it assists mutual understanding and establishment of trust. However, if mis-managed the situation can also create problems. Subordinates may find it difficult to respect their superiors, and they may ignore procedures governing bureaucratic relationships. Interpersonal links may interfere with disciplinary decisions; and senior staff who are appointing or confirming individuals in posts may give preference to those already in the Ministry simply because they already know them.

To maximise the advantages, managers must know their limits when it comes to language usage, joking and so forth. Managers may motivate or reward and encourage positive achievements resulting from knowing each other, but must also punish negative attitudes and behaviour.

While official means of getting information through are maintained, i.e. minutes to officers, much information is passed verbally. This is especially true of information from superiors. For example, the Minister, Permanent Secretary and Under Secretaries may call on another officer to provide some information or make an instruction.

However, experiences have shown that frustration may result if it is simply assumed that information has passed through these channels. A classic example in 1989 was a curriculum workshop which was to be opened by Ministry officials. Although the officials were informed, communication was inadequate with the teachers. As a result, the officials turned up to an empty hall.

A small organisation also provides scope for personal impact. This is advantageous when the scope is for positive developments, though there is also a danger of costly damage. To maximise scope for desirable change, it is vital that those with insight are identified and are involved as much as possible in discussion and decision-making. Such people should be given responsibility and guided autonomy.

To limit undesirable change, it is important to create a sense of belonging by encouraging team effort within the Ministry. Although consensus is the ideal, collegial collaboration must also allow for individual opinions. It is also necessary to monitor and appraise officers' performance to ensure conformity to standing procedures.

6. Conclusions

Solomon Islands is a geographically dispersed country with great linguistic and cultural diversity. These factors have combined to require a decentralised system of government, even in what may be described

as a small state. However, relationships between the national and provincial governments are not always smooth, and the manpower demands of provincial governments make worse the already serious shortages of qualified personnel.

One corollary of linguistic and cultural diversity is a strong sense of clan identity among people of the same ethnic group. This is known locally as the 'wantok' system (from the Pijin word, meaning 'one talk'). Senior officers in the Public Service Board are aware of the problems that the wantok system can create for a bureaucracy that they wish to operate along neutral lines, and for this reason are wary of making appointments which could lead to excessive placements of people from the same ethnic group in related key areas. Of course such considerations also hold in many other countries, including both neighbouring Papua New Guinea and more distant countries in Africa. But in a small state they cause particular difficulties because they cause further fragmentation of an already limited pool of expertise.

Yet despite these and other constraints, the MEHRD has many achievements to its credit. Particularly notable has been progress in curriculum development and in publication of textbooks. The country has also successfully attracted much foreign aid. Such aid has been especially valuable not only for capital works but also for tertiary education outside the country, and the projects managed by the IPU have significantly improved the quality of education. Aid projects have also given access to external expertise, and for many people in the Ministry they have broadened what might otherwise have been rather narrow professional horizons.

Finally, it is worth returning to the fact that in Solomon Islands Education has been merged with Human Resources Development in a single ministry. This, of course, has a problematic as well as a beneficial side. The problems include that HRD is highly technical, and demands from education staff types of expertise which they may not have. For example the EEC project mentioned above included a component on development of tourism rather outside the experience of most of the old Ministry of Education & Training staff who had been recruited from the school system.

But on the other side, this broadening is beneficial. Too many educators simply assume that education is a good thing in itself, and have very hazy ideas about the performance of school leavers in the labour market. The fact that HRD is in the same ministry as Education helps educators to see the need for more careful analysis of the nature and role of education. The linkage therefore has much to commend it.