

Country profile

Solomon Islands

LAND

The Solomon Islands archipelago consists of 922 islands located to the east of Papua New Guinea. There are six main islands. The larger islands are volcanic, densely forested mountain ranges with steep, narrow river valleys and thin coastal plains. They are covered with mangrove and coconut palms, and little of the land is suitable for crops. Coral reefs provide plentiful fishing resources and the outer islands are small, coral atolls.

Lying 8 degrees south of the equator, the Solomon Islands experiences a tropical monsoonal climate all year round. The mean temperature is 27°C and cyclones occur regularly during the summer months.

PEOPLE

The majority of Solomon Islanders live in small villages scattered over 347 of its 922 islands. About 30,000 people live in Honiara, the capital city. There is great variation between the people in each settlement and there is a complex customary ownership of the land.

The population of Solomon Islands is predominantly Melanesian (about 95 percent) although there are smaller Polynesian, Micronesian, Chinese and European communities. Most communities recognise strong kinship links and obligations with the broad language group.

All major Christian denominations are represented in the community, but in many cases these beliefs are held alongside traditional beliefs.



In 2007 an earthquake and following tsunami hit the Solomon Islands, displacing thousands of people. These communities received aid from World Vision in an effort to prevent disease and restore sanitation in the face of malaria, cholera and dysentery.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries.
The University of Texas at Austin.

HISTORY

In the 1860s, large number of Solomon Islanders were recruited, sometimes by force, to work on sugar plantations in Queensland. Then, in the 1890s, the United Kingdom established a protectorate over the Solomon Islands. During World War II the island of Guadalcanal saw some of the fiercest fighting in the Pacific as the US battled to gain control of the territory from Japanese occupiers.

Self-government was achieved in 1976 and independence two years later. However, ethnic violence and endemic crime have undermined stability and order in the country.

In June 2003, then Prime Minister Sir Allen Kemakeza sought the assistance of Australia in re-establishing law and order. In the following month, an Australian-led multinational force arrived to restore peace and disarm ethnic militias. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has generally been effective in restoring law and order and rebuilding government institutions.

ECONOMY

The economy relies heavily on timber exports, which are vulnerable to price fluctuations. Economic hopes have been pinned on the resumption of palm oil production and gold mining.

The bulk of the population depend on agriculture, fishing and forestry for at least part of its livelihood. Most manufactured goods and petroleum products must be imported. The islands are rich in undeveloped mineral resources such as lead, zinc, nickel and gold.

Unrest and conflict since 1998 have severely affected the economy, destroying personal property, health and transport infrastructure, schools, water supply and sanitation systems, and government buildings as well as investor confidence. In areas unaffected by the conflict, life continues as a subsistence economy with barter the main

form of exchange. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has helped to restore stability and build modest economic growth.

The main crops are copra, cocoa, palm oil, rice, fruits, vegetables, spices and tobacco. There is also some processing of fish (tuna), mining, and timber production. Tourism is limited by a lack of facilities, but some visitors are attracted by diving opportunities.

The main imports include plant and equipment, manufactured goods, fuels and chemicals. 38.5 percent of imports come from Australia and the main export destination is Japan (35.5 percent).

LIVING CONDITIONS

Fresh seafood, chicken, green vegetables and tubers (cooked in coconut milk or baked in the ground) form the basis of most meals. Bush materials, such as thatched coconut leaves and woven bamboo, are used for housing in the villages. Electricity is generated using imported fuel and is only generally available in five urban centres. Roads link some major settlements but few are sealed.

Life expectancy is improving but malaria and tuberculosis continue to be major problems. The government has been unable to maintain health services for all people and many babies die before their first birthday (67 per 1,000 live births). The leading causes of death in children under the age of five include acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, malaria, peri-natal complications and injuries.

In April 2007 an earthquake and tsunami hit the western Solomon Islands affecting 36,500 people. About 6,300 houses were damaged or destroyed across 304 communities.



Quality, early childhood education is vital for building stronger communities. World Vision has established effective education programs that are changing the lives of thousands of children in the Solomon Islands.

Comparatively speaking...

| CATEGORY | SOLOMON ISLANDS | AUSTRALIA |
|--|-----------------|--------------|
| Population | 0.5 million | 20.3 million |
| Urban population (as % of total) | 17% | 88.2% |
| GDP per capita (PPP US\$) | \$2,031 | \$31,794 |
| Population with sustainable access to an improved water source | 70% | 100% |
| Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above) | 76.6% | 99% |
| Net primary enrolment ratio | 63% | 97% |
| Life expectancy at birth (years) | 63 | 80.9 |
| Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) | 29 | 6 |
| Internet users (per 1,000 people) | 8 | 698 |
| Cases of tuberculosis (per 100,000 people) | 201 | 6 |

Source: United Nations Development Programme 2007 Human Development Report, Oxford University Press, New York

EDUCATION

Conflict and poverty mean that many children, especially girls, miss out on school education through non-enrolment or dropping out because of the cost of school fees. Approximately 30 percent of children miss out on any schooling.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

World Vision Australia supports World Vision Solomon Islands in the following areas:

- Health promotion
- HIV and AIDS awareness and prevention
- Early childhood education and development
- Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs.

This work is located on the islands of Guadalcana, Malaita, Makira and Gizo.

