World Vision®

WHEN THE CENTRE FRAYS

Climate security and corrective balance in Solomon Islands





About this report

This brief shares the findings of a participatory climate security assessment conducted in the Solomon Islands in November 2025. The assessment was led and the report drafted by Dr. Siad Darwish of Wayfare Consulting. For more information, contact Christine Lindell, WVA Conflict and Fragility Technical Advisor (christine.lindell@worldvision.com.au).

Executive Summary

Solomon Islands is among the world's most climate-vulnerable countries. Rising seas, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, intensifying cyclones, and disrupted rainfall are already displacing communities and eroding livelihoods, within a landscape shaped by customary land complexity, deep economic fragility, rapid urbanisation, extractive industry pressures, and a recent history of civil conflict. Climate change does not introduce new instability drivers into this context. It accelerates existing ones.

The paper's central finding is that climate security in Solomon Islands depends not on hazard intensity but on the condition of relational systems: the customary governance structures, wantok reciprocity networks, women's associations, church networks, and stewardship institutions through which communities negotiate environmental change, distribute resources, resolve disputes, and sustain collective agency. These systems are not social context. They are adaptive infrastructure, and the primary determinant of whether environmental stress produces resilience or instability. Recent quantitative evidence confirms that in Pacific contexts there is no automatic association between climate disasters and conflict events, because relational systems currently buffer that stress. The risk lies in their gradual erosion: cumulative, largely silent, and invisible to standard monitoring until cohesion has narrowed beyond recovery.

Fieldwork identifies five structural dynamics driving that erosion: livelihood loss weakening reciprocity networks; coastal displacement compressing customary land negotiation; governance decision load outpacing the legitimacy of authority structures; extractive industry pressure degrading ecological and relational foundations simultaneously; and the systematic exclusion of women, youth, people with disabilities, and marginalised internal migrants from the adaptation decisions that determine their futures. These dynamics are mutually reinforcing. Aid that strengthens relational capacity reduces climate security risk. Aid that bypasses relational systems increases it, regardless of its technical quality.

Significant climate finance is already flowing to Solomon Islands through DFAT's Climate Resilient Communities programme, the Pacific Resilience Facility, Disaster READY, and Gov4Res. The regional architecture is aligned. What the evidence demands is not more of the same but a different programme logic, one grounded in systems thinking, built from community strengths, and designed to treat relational systems as the infrastructure they are. Five recommendations follow, ordered from most immediately actionable to most structurally ambitious.

Recommendation 1: Reframe climate adaptation around relational systems as core infrastructure. Shift a defined proportion of climate finance toward customary governance, women's networks, reciprocity mechanisms, and stewardship institutions as primary investment categories, through multi-year flexible modalities via the Pacific Resilience Facility's Social and Community Resilience pillar.

Recommendation 2: Embed systems-based appraisal at every stage of the programme cycle. Require relational risk screening at concept note stage, systems mapping during design, explicit assessment of impacts on customary authority and gender inclusion during appraisal, and monitoring frameworks that capture relational outcomes alongside technical outputs. Integrate relational systems analysis in disaster response

Recommendation 3: Strengthen livelihood systems as the economic foundation of relational resilience. Expand climate-resilient income pathways in agriculture, aquaculture, and fisheries with explicit targeting of women and youth. Address the political economy of extraction by supporting community consent processes and investing in green and blue economy alternatives.

Recommendation 4: Position women and youth as structural levers of relational resilience. Invest in women-led networks as delivery partners, not programme beneficiaries. Target women's participation within formal and informal governance structures where consequential decisions occur. Treat youth integration as a design requirement, linking livelihood pathways, governance participation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission within the same investment logic.

Recommendation 5: Align climate adaptation explicitly with conflict prevention. Require joint design across climate, land governance, and extractive industry accountability. Co-design informal settlement adaptation with tenure security reform. Measure success in terms of both adaptation outcomes and improvements in relational cohesion.



1. Introduction

"Security is this very land that houses and feeds our community, it's where our ancestors lie."
Farmer, Malaita

In this sentence, a farmer in Malaita described climate security not as the impact of climate change on peace and human security, but as the presence of a relationship—between people and land, between the living and the dead, between daily sustenance and intergenerational continuity—that underlies this security. In his position, and that of many other research participants in the study, security, identity, and moral order are constituted through relationships, rather than through individual rights or territorial integrity. To be secure, in this understanding, is to be positioned in a network of balanced relationships.

Climate change in Solomon Islands is experienced as a disturbance to exactly this balance. Shorelines retreat and land disputes resurface. Wells turn brackish and water sharing must be renegotiated. Gardens fail and livelihoods diminish. These disruptions are not merely material. They unsettle the social and spiritual arrangements—the kastom, the wantok obligations, that erode the very relationships that underlie resilience and climate adaptation.

Effective climate-resilient development in Solomon Islands must therefore treat relational systems not as social context but as adaptive capacity: the primary means through which communities negotiate environmental change, distribute resources, resolve disputes, and sustain collective agency. Yet the resilience of these systems depends on a condition that programming too often overlooks, that they function justly. Relational systems that concentrate decision-making authority in the hands of senior men, exclude women from land and resource governance, marginalise youth from customary succession, or bypass people with disabilities are not merely inequitable. They are structurally fragile: narrower in their adaptive capacity, less legitimate in their outputs, and more vulnerable to the cumulative pressures climate change imposes. A relational system that works for only part of the community absorbs stress for only part of the community. The evidence from this study is consistent with this framing: the communities most resilient to climate stress are those whose relational systems are inclusive across gender, age, and social position, where women's knowledge informs decisions, where youth hold genuine authority over their futures, and where the obligations of reciprocity run in all directions. Interventions that reinforce this infrastructure build climate security. Those that bypass it risk undermining the very capacity that currently prevents instability. And those that reinforce it selectively, strengthening customary authority without addressing its exclusions, or funding community governance without requiring equitable participation, reproduce the fragilities they are designed to resolve. The fieldwork that follows maps the concrete pathways through which this erosion occurs and the relational systems that continue to buffer it

Relational systems

Relational systems are the practical arrangements through which communities sustain the bonds that hold life together: between people, land, sea, ancestors, and the sacred. They take concrete form in customary governance, reciprocal obligation networks such as wantok, stewardship rules over fishing grounds and gardens, and the authority of elders and chiefs to allocate resources and resolve disputes. They are embedded in local economies--shaping how labour, food, land, and credit are distributed — and may operate alongside, independently of, or in tension with the state. When climate stress fractures these systems, it is not merely social cohesion that breaks down. It is the corrective capacity on which communities depend to adapt, recover, and sustain the conditions for life.

Research Approach

This paper draws on a two-stage research design combining a structured practitioner stocktake with participatory community workshops conducted across five sites in Solomon Islands. The first stage comprised a structured survey completed by 106 World Vision Solomon Islands staff and programme associates in October 2025. The survey assessed practitioner perceptions of climate impacts, conflict risk, community preparedness, and existing resilience capacities, functioning as a scoping instrument rather than a direct account of community experience. Coastal erosion and sea-level rise were rated as having a very high impact by 52 percent of respondents; 53 percent assessed the climate-conflict relationship as strong, a finding the fieldwork examined critically.

The second stage comprised four participatory community workshops across four sites in November 2025: Maeana and Gwaunoa in Malaita Province, and the informal settlements[1] Gwaimaua and Namoliki, and in Honiara. Workshops were structured to enable separate discussion by gender and age cohort, producing approximately 150 participants across all sessions. Each workshop ran between four and six hours. Research was conducted in local language with the support of World Vision Solomon Islands staff serving as local research partners and interpreters. Data from the workshops was written up, and analysed using systems mapping approach, and sent back to World Vision staff for verification and clarification.

Limitations. The practitioner stocktake reflects staff perceptions and cannot be treated as representative of Solomon Islands experience. Community workshops were concentrated in Malaita and peri-urban Honiara; communities in Makira, the outer islands, and other provinces, identified by practitioners as comparably exposed, are not represented in the primary fieldwork due to logistical constraints, seasonal accessibility, and resource limitations within the project timeline. Workshop findings reflect participant self-selection within World Vision programme areas. Participation was voluntary and conducted in accordance with World Vision's safeguarding and data ethics protocols. These limitations constrain generalisation and should inform how the evidence base for each recommendation is read.



[1] UN Habitat defines informal settlements as: "residential areas where 1) inhabitants have no security of tenure visà-vis the land or dwellings they inhabit, with modalities ranging from squatting to informal rental housing, 2) the neighbourhoods usually lack, or are cut off from, basic services and city infrastructure and 3) the housing may not comply with current planning and building regulations, and is often situated in geographically and environmentally hazardous areas " see UN Habitat. (2017). Habitat Iii Issue Papers 22 - Informal Settlements. https://habitat3.org/ wp-content/uploads/Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-22_Informal-Settlements-2.0.pdf

2. Climate Security as Relational Infrastructure

Pacific Island states, led by Solomon Islands and their Forum partners, have for decades insisted that climate change be understood as a security issue in the fullest sense. Carter's[2] analysis of Pacific securitisation shows how through the Boe Declaration's, Pacific leaders have broadened the definition of security from traditional military concerns to encompass human, environmental, and cultural dimensions, making climate action a precondition for conventional security engagement. The Pacific Islands Forum's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent embeds this expanded understanding in regional architecture. The strategy acknowledges that climate and economic security are inter-linked and promotes a "sustainable and resilient model of economic development" that prioritises the well-being of Pacific people through green and blue economies. It is in line with the idea that, climate science and communities-based knowledge and faith must be held together in a "whole of life" fashion for an effective approach to climate change, security, and peace, positioning the Pacific not only as a region of vulnerability but as a region of solutions, leadership, and innovation.[3]

Vaai's itulagi framework[4] supplies an ontological foundation for the translation of these ideas. As in our findings in the Solomons, in Pasifika relational philosophy more broadly, security is a quality of relationship—between people, land, ocean, ancestors, and future generations—not a condition produced by hazard reduction. Insecurity arises when the relational and moral arrangements sustaining community life are disturbed. Calling this 'corrective balance', Vaai argues that interventions driven by external, unidimensional logics violate the ethical systems of restraint, reciprocity, and collective stewardship that constitute resilience from within.

This understanding is grounded in Solomon Islands specifically by Gegeo and colleagues,[5] drawing on indigenous place-based research across Malaita, Guadalcanal, Temotu, and Western Province. They demonstrate that land and identity are not separate domains, but that they are consubstantial, each shaping the other through governance, spiritual practice, and genealogy. Environmental rupture is therefore not only material loss. It is socio-ontological erosion: the degradation of the knowledge systems, authority structures, and relational norms through which communities sustain themselves and manage conflict. They conclude that externally designed interventions that displace indigenous epistemologies risk generating the very instability they seek to prevent.

Higgins and Maesua[6] anchor this in Solomon Islands' conflict realities, identifying three mediated pathways through which climate change risks producing instability: erosion of place-based identity and the customary mechanisms that prevent and resolve conflict; the conflict-generative potential of externally imposed adaptation projects that misread local power relations; and the longer-term instability risk of climate-driven urbanisation into already-strained informal settlements. The most recent quantitative evidence sharpens this picture. A 2026 study by Ide, Koren, and Derrick,[7] the first systematic statistical analysis of the climate-conflict nexus across Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, finds that unlike in many other parts of the world, no significant association between climate disasters and social conflict events exist in the Pacific. Instead, conflict risk is mediated by exactly the kind of relational systems described here. The authors note, however, that this statistical silence may conceal lower-level, less visible dynamics: eroding social cohesion, narrowing reciprocity, declining trust in customary authority.

[2] Carter, Sālā George. "Climate 'Securitising' by the Pacific." In Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands: Politics, Priorities, and Pathways of the Regional Security Patchwork, edited by Joanne Wallis, Henrietta McNeill, James Batley, and Anna Powles. Abingdon: Routledge, 2024. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003613190-19.

[3] Vaai, Upolu Lumā, Volker Boege, John Campbell, Carol Farbotko, and Tammy Tabe, eds. 2025. Climate Change in Pasifika Relational Perspectives. Suva: Pasifika Communities University Press.

[4] Vaai, Upolu Lumā. Climate Change in Pasifika Relational Itulagi. Report No. 212. Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2025.

[5] Gegeo, David, Lincy Pendeverana, Mary Tahu Paia, Jack Maebuta, Anouk Ride, and Transform Aqorau. "Environmental Peacebuilding, Indigenous Epistemologies and Experience: Learning From Ruptures and Resilience in Solomon Islands." Asia Pacific Viewpoint 66, no. 1 (2025): 130–141. https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12431.

[6] Higgins, Kate, and Josiah Maesua. Climate Change, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands. Policy Brief No. 36. Tokyo: Toda Peace Institute, 2019.

[7] Ide, T., Koren, O., & Derrick, L. (2026). Climate-related disasters and temperature extremes are not associated with conflict risk in Pacific Island countries. Environment and Security, 0(0).

Finally, Gero, Winterford, and Davila's[8] Pacific Community Resilience Framework translates these insights into programmable form. Rejecting deficit models that enumerate vulnerability, they propose a strengths-based framework whose core finding, confirmed by this paper's fieldwork, is that resilience in the Pacific is not a technical output, but an emergent property of healthy, interconnected community systems that need to be supported by policy and practice.

Taken together, these frameworks converge on an insight that existing programming has yet to operationalise. Pacific leaders have made their point about climate security requiring a more expansive definition at the regional level. Indigenous scholars have shown why external interventions consistently fail to engage with the relational foundations of Pacific community life. Conflict specialists have mapped the pathways through which misaligned interventions generate the risks they intend to reduce. Resilience researchers have also demonstrated that adaptive capacity is an emergent property of social systems, not a deliverable.

Vaai's corrective balance is an ontological condition—the state of right relationship between people, land, governance, and spiritual order that allows a community to absorb disturbance and restore equilibrium. It is not a programme or a structure; it is what a community is when its relationships are functioning as they should. But corrective balance cannot exist in the abstract. It requires carriers—the specific social forms through which reciprocity is enacted, stewardship is practised, authority is exercised, and belonging is reproduced.

The implication for programming is direct: relational systems are not the backdrop to climate-resilient development in Solomon Islands—they are its primary mechanism, the means through which communities negotiate environmental change, distribute resources, resolve disputes, and sustain collective agency. What programmes can do is not build resilience but support the conditions under which communities sustain their own capacity to negotiate change, Vaai's 'corrective balance': the state of right relationship, between people, land, governance, and spiritual order, that allows a community to absorb stress and restore equilibrium without losing its identity or legitimacy. Programming that substitutes external expertise for local relational authority does not build adaptive capacity. It potentially erodes it.



[8] Gero, Anna, Keren Winterford, and Federico Davila. "A Pacific Community Resilience Framework: Exploring a Holistic Perspective through a Strengths-Based Approach and Systems Thinking." Asia Pacific Viewpoint 65, no. 3 (2024): 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12411.

3. Climate Stress and Structural Vulnerability: What Communities Experience

What makes climate change a security problem in Solomon Islands is not hazard intensity alone. It is the intersection of acute environmental exposure, deep economic fragility, and the relational systems—customary governance, kinship networks, reciprocal exchange—through which communities have historically negotiated both. The Solomon Islands is among the world's most climate-vulnerable countries.[9] Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, intensifying cyclones, and disrupted rainfall patterns are already displacing communities, undermining food security, and eroding the land and reef systems on which Solomon Islanders depend. Communities on Walande and Nuatambu Islands have already been permanently relocated due to sea level rise.

The Solomon Islands has a small, developing economy (2025 nominal GDP ~$1.9 billion) heavily reliant on timber exports, agriculture and international aid.[10] Primarily agriculture-based, the national economy is pivoting toward mining and fisheries with emerging opportunities in tourism. It is one of the poorest nations in the Pacific, ranked 156st out of 193 on the Human Development Index,[11] with roughly 25% of the population living below the poverty line[12] The country experiences one of the highest rates of gender inequality in the Pacific and globally, ranked 118th out of 173 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII).[13]

These environmental and economic pressures unfold within a complex social and political landscape with a recent history of related conflict. The civil conflict of 1998 to 2003—known locally as the Tensions—arose from accumulated grievances over land, internal migration, uneven development, and the failures of a centralised state that lacked the legitimacy and reach to manage the disputes it had in some cases helped to generate.[14] The underlying causes were not resolved by the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands; they were stabilised. Land disputes, intergenerational mistrust, and the gap between state institutions and customary governance structures remain live features of the political landscape. Climate change enters this landscape not as a new conflict driver but as an intensifier of existing ones, compressing the timelines of land negotiation, multiplying governance decisions that already exceed state capacity, and eroding the household surpluses and ecological systems on which reciprocal relations depend.



[9] Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. 2024. "Solomon Islands." ND-GAIN Country Index. University of Notre Dame. Accessed May 5, 2026. https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/country/solomon-islands.

[10] World Bank. 2025. "Solomon Islands: Macro Poverty Outlook." Washington, DC: World Bank. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/c6aceb75bed03729ef4ff9404dd7f125-0500012021/related/mpo-slb.pdf.

[11] UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2025. Human Development Report 2025: A Matter of Choice—People and Possibilities in the Age of AI. New York: UNDP. https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights.

[12] Asian Development Bank. 2025. "Solomon Islands: Poverty." Manila: ADB. https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/solomon-islands/poverty.

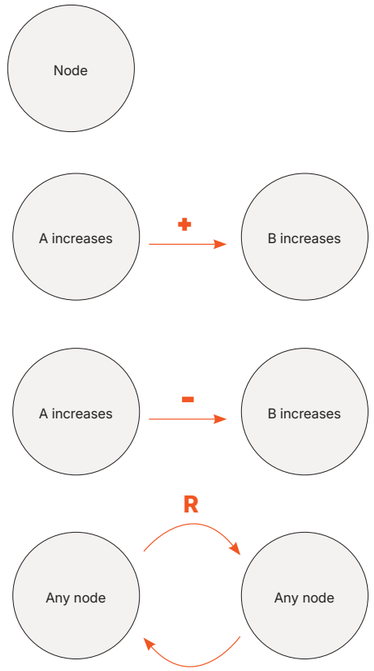
[13] UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2025. Human Development Report 2025: A Matter of Choice—People and Possibilities in the Age of AI. New York: UNDP. https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights.

[14] Higgins, Kate, and Josiah Maesua. Climate Change, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands. Policy Brief No. 36. Tokyo: Toda Peace Institute, 2019.

Figure 1: Reinforcing Climate-Conflict Loops:

The map shows five reinforcing loops through which climate stress erodes corrective balance, the relational margin on which climate security in Solomon Islands depends. R1 traces how disputes over customary boundaries, settled without women, raise perceived governance unfairness, deepen mistrust in leaders and institutions, and weaken the collective recovery and cooperative capacity on which the next dispute depends. R2 shows how rising demand for assistance and recovery support leaves losses unresolved and grievances lingering, deepening mistrust, impairing climate response capacity, and straining hybrid governance coordination until demand rises again. R3 maps the extractive economy trap: loss of livelihoods raises willingness to accept extractive resource-use agreements that entrench patriarchal elite capture, degrade ecosystems, and return households to deeper livelihood loss. R4 traces the household pathway: strained household surplus capacity and rising unpaid care burdens on women leave wantok obligations unmet, impair collective coping and recovery, and raise exposure to the next shock. R5 shows how narrowing rural livelihood pathways marginalise young people, shift their aspirations, and deepen intergenerational mistrust, which narrows those pathways further.

Loss of livelihoods and economic vulnerability sits in both R3 and R4, and mistrust in leaders and institutions in both R1 and R2, so erosion in one domain accelerates erosion in the others. Climate hazards and extreme events enter the system at four points on the outer boundary. All five loops draw down corrective balance at the centre.



A variable that can increase or decrease.
Arrows show what causes it to change.

Variables move in the same direction

Variables move in opposite directions

A self-amplifying circuit.
Each cycle makes the next cycle worse.



Loop 1 (R1). Land, identity, and the compression of negotiation. In Maeana, the sea has moved steadily inland. Saltwater has entered wells, coastal gardens have salinised, and a community-built seawall no longer holds. As families seek new gardening plots further inland, dormant questions about customary boundaries re-emerge: who has authority to allocate inland land? Which families hold recognised rights? What obligations accompany relocation? Environmental loss here is not only material. Burial grounds, ancestral sites, and long-held place identities are affected. Land and identity are consubstantial: the erosion of one unsettles the other. Climate pressure activates negotiations over identity, legitimacy, and stewardship simultaneously, compressing timelines and raising the stakes of every decision. Where customary authority manages these renegotiations in ways perceived as fair and inclusive, tensions are contained or reduced. Where legitimacy is questioned, cohesion weakens.

Loop 2 (R2). Governance under cumulative decision pressure. Authority in Solomon Islands is distributed across chiefs, church leaders, elders, women's groups, youth representatives, and state institutions. This layered structure provides flexibility but also produces overlap. Climate stress increases the frequency and urgency of decision-making processes across this governance infrastructure. Water allocation during drought, evacuation routes during floods, relocation planning, benefit distribution after disasters. As decision volume rises, coordination gaps become more visible. In Gwaunoa, the largest informal settlement in the capital, heavy rainfall now sends debris and runoff across paths and gardens several times a year, forcing repeated negotiation around water access, land upkeep, and unresolved grievances. At least 40 per cent of Honiara's urban area is currently classified as informal, though in practice this proportion is likely closer to 50 per cent by 2025.[15] Urban informal settlements are frequently situated in environmentally precarious locations with heightened exposure to climate and disaster risks.[16] In the Solomon Islands, they are typically characterised by high population density, inadequate housing, limited access to basic services, and weak or absent formal recognition by government authorities and service providers.[17]

Climate impacts do not create the grievances mentioned above. They make them more immediate and more frequent, testing the legitimacy of authority structures under conditions they were not designed to manage at this pace. Externally driven adaptation initiatives that prioritise technical speed over relational process, or that rely on narrow gatekeepers, risk bypassing customary mediation systems entirely, thereby weakening the connective tissue that maintains cohesion precisely when it is most needed.

Loop 3 (R3). Extractive economies & patriarchal elite capture. The extractive economy compounds these pressures by restructuring who controls land, resources, and benefit flows. Commercial logging, which has accelerated since the 1990s, and an expanding mining sector have generated deforestation, river sedimentation, coastal erosion, and reef damage that directly degrade the subsistence systems on which both livelihoods and reciprocity depend.[18] In Maeana, community members linked logging directly to mangrove loss and declining fish and shellfish stocks, compounding the effects of sea-level rise on a community already losing its coastal gardens to saltwater intrusion. The environmental damage is inseparable from the political economy that produces it: extractive industries concentrate wealth among those with access to state and customary authority, systematically exclude women from decision-making and benefit distribution, and externalise environmental costs onto communities whose land, fisheries, and water sources bear the consequences. Where logging or mining revenue enters a community, it disrupts the customary relationships through which land rights and resource access are negotiated, accelerates intergenerational disputes over inheritance, and introduces cash-driven dependency that weakens the reciprocal exchange networks on which collective coping depends. Climate stress and extractive pressure are therefore not parallel problems, they are mutually reinforcing ones, each narrowing the relational and ecological margin within which communities can absorb shocks.

[15] Vahanvati, Mittul; Lehmann, Tarsilla; Iyer-Raniga, Usha; McEvoy, Darryn; Trundle, Alexei; Likaveke, Steve; et al. (2025). Housing Context Analysis, Solomon Islands. RMIT University. Report. https://doi.org/10.25439/rmt.30025345

[16] UN Habitat. (2017). HABITAT III ISSUE PAPERS 22 - INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS. https://habitat3.org/ wp-content/uploads/Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-22_Informal-Settlements-2.0.pdf

[17] Vahanvati, Mittul; Lehmann, Tarsilla; Iyer-Raniga, Usha; McEvoy, Darryn; Trundle, Alexei; Likaveke, Steve; et al. (2025). Housing Context Analysis, Solomon Islands. RMIT University. Report. https://doi.org/10.25439/rmt.30025345

[18] Porter, Doug, and Matthew Allen. 2015. "The Political Economy of the Transition from Logging to Mining in Solomon Islands." State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2015/12. Canberra: Australian National University.

Loop 4 (R4). Compounding pressures on households and reciprocity. In the informal settlements of Gwaimaua, Namoliki, and Wind Valley in Honiara, repeated flooding and landslides intersect with tenure insecurity, overcrowding, and limited services. Climate stress here concentrates environmental exposure in settings where governance is weakest. When post-disaster assistance is delayed or unevenly distributed, hardship is interpreted through existing grievances about marginalisation. Across all research sites, freshwater stress and saltwater intrusion intensify labour burdens disproportionately borne by women, longer collection times, disrupted planting cycles and reduced participation in community activities. When reciprocity weakens not from unwillingness but from reduced capacity, tension accumulates.

Loop 5 (R5). Youth marginalisation and the erosion of the generational base. The relationship between young Solomon Islanders and traditional life is more complex than a simple rejection of customary values. The deeper dynamic is that the formal economy and state services have failed to make rural life viable in modern terms: without connectivity, market access, educational opportunity, and pathways to income that do not require relocation, the customary economy cannot compete with urban alternatives, however precarious those alternatives prove to be.

When young people cannot access land, cannot meet reciprocity obligations, and cannot participate in customary governance, they become net recipients within systems designed for mutual obligation. The scale is acute: with a median age below 21 and unemployment among those aged 15 to 24 running at roughly double the national rate[19] most young Solomon Islanders remain in subsistence agriculture, fishing, and petty trade, with no surplus, no security, and, for those who have migrated, no customary land rights.

Climate stress is accelerating urban drift while simultaneously closing the rural alternative. Coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, and declining fisheries erode the subsistence base that once made rural life viable; for youth whose access to customary land is constrained by genealogy and seniority, climate loss removes the livelihood floor before inheritance transfers rights. The apparent preference of young Solomon Islanders for urban life should not be read as a rejection of customary values alone. It also reflects the failure of the formal economy and successive governments to make rural life viable in modern terms, with connectivity, services, and opportunity. That failure intersects with a separate globalisation pressure: the penetration of global food systems into last-mile locations has introduced ultra-processed consumables that divert limited household income away from local livelihoods, reduce dietary quality, and compress the financial margin available for adaptation. The ecological indicators through which elders once integrated young people into governance—wind patterns, tidal rhythms, seasonal cycles—are becoming less predictable, quietly eroding the authority structures that gave youth a stake in customary life.

Extractive industries compound the trap. Logging and mining have generated long-standing intra-clan resentments around royalty distribution, and as gardens and fisheries become less reliable, economic vulnerability increases willingness to accept agreements that further degrade the ecosystems on which survival depends. For youth this creates a particular bind: excluded from customary land and formal employment, facing a rural base eroded by both climate change and extraction, and offered royalty income from the very industries degrading their ecological inheritance. Communities that cannot integrate their youth are communities whose adaptive capacity is quietly contracting.

Gendered vulnerability and the erosion of protective systems (see Loops 1, 3, and 4). Women in Solomon Islands carry primary responsibility for the subsistence systems most directly disrupted by climate change—water collection, gardening, inshore harvesting, caregiving—and simultaneously function as the primary relational buffer when those systems fail. Across all four research sites this dual role was consistent. In Gwaunoa, women described how church leaders and the chief convene the whole community to resolve disputes before they escalate; church "mamas" in Gwaimaua perform the same mediating role at the household level; women's savings groups absorb household shocks that formal institutions cannot. When women's agency is centred in climate planning, communities

[19] International Labour Organization. Solomon Islands Country Factsheet [Working Draft]. Geneva: ILO, 2024. https://www.ilo.org/media/533471/download.

demonstrate greater adaptive capacity and earlier identification of escalating stress. Climate stress attacks this mechanism first, then excludes women from the decisions that would repair it. In Gwaunoa, youth disengagement from gardening and fishing placed heavier responsibilities particularly on women as resources declined; in Maeana, women described building stone walls against sea-level rise, shifting garden sites, digging drainage, and re-siting wells, absorbing the physical cost of adaptation with their own labour while remaining outside the governance decisions that drive it.

Across the Pacific, as elsewhere, climate stress is closely linked to increases in Gender Based Violence (GBV) through the accumulation of stress at the household level.[21] While this study did not record such direct linkages, and was not designed to probe for these linkages, climate stress does translate into physical insecurity for women. As water sources move further and food shortages intensify, household stress accumulates. In Gwaunoa, women acknowledged that scarcity creates pressure that affects family wellbeing while stopping short of naming whether it produces violence at home. In Gwaimaua, where floods repeatedly destroy livelihood assets and push households deeper into poverty, women and girls described feeling unsafe on unlit roads at night, where attacks are a known risk, insecurity that worsens when economic stress[20] drives the drinking and disorder that make those roads dangerous. In Maeana, sexualised disrespect (kwala) was named as a recurring driver of household tension in a community already under compound pressure. But none of these issues were clearly linked to climate change by research participants.

The deeper structural problem is exclusion from the decisions that matter most. In both Malaita communities, land disputes—among the most consequential decisions affecting women's homes, gardens, and water access—are handled exclusively by men under customary structures. Married-in women are particularly exposed: without recognised genealogical claim, their access to gardens and water is contingent on relationships they cannot formally defend. Women at both sites noted explicitly that land dispute resolution is not inclusive of them. Climate adaptation decisions, resource extraction agreements, and benefit distribution follow the same pattern, concentrated through customary and state governance structures often with no or little input from women. Women are therefore excluded from both the resource decisions that generate harm and the adaptation decisions that could repair it. The constraint on women's participation is not capacity. It is access.

Across these domains, a consistent pattern holds. Climate hazards function not as primary conflict drivers but as accelerants in systems already characterised by negotiation complexity. Each shock reduces surplus relational capacity, the margin within households, kin networks, and leadership structures that allows negotiation, reciprocity, and mediation to function without escalation. The next section examines the countervailing dimension: the relational systems that continue to buffer these pressures and constitute the foundation of resilience.



[20] Howard, Elise. 2023. "Linking Gender, Climate Change and Security in the Pacific Islands Region: A Systematic Review." Ambio 52 (3): 518–533. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-022-01813-0

[21] UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office. 2014. Climate Change, Disasters and Gender-Based Violence in the Pacific. Suva: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. https://www.uncclearn.org/wp-content/uploads/library/unwomen701.pdf.

4. Relational Systems as Adaptive Infrastructure

Relational systems are not the backdrop to climate security in Solomon Islands—they are its operative mechanism. The same customary governance structures, kinship networks, reciprocal exchange systems, churches, and women's and youth organisations that Section 3 shows under pressure are, where they remain functional, the primary means through which communities negotiate land, distribute resources, absorb shocks, and prevent grievance from hardening into conflict. No external programme has replicated what these systems do, and none has succeeded where they have failed. Across all four research sites, communities identified these relational systems as their first and most reliable line of defence. This is not to idealize these relational systems, but to recognise that no substitute for them exists, and that their internal faultlines – the exclusion of women from land and resource decisions, the marginalisation of youth from customary authority – are the same structural inequalities that Section 3 shows accelerating relational breakdown.

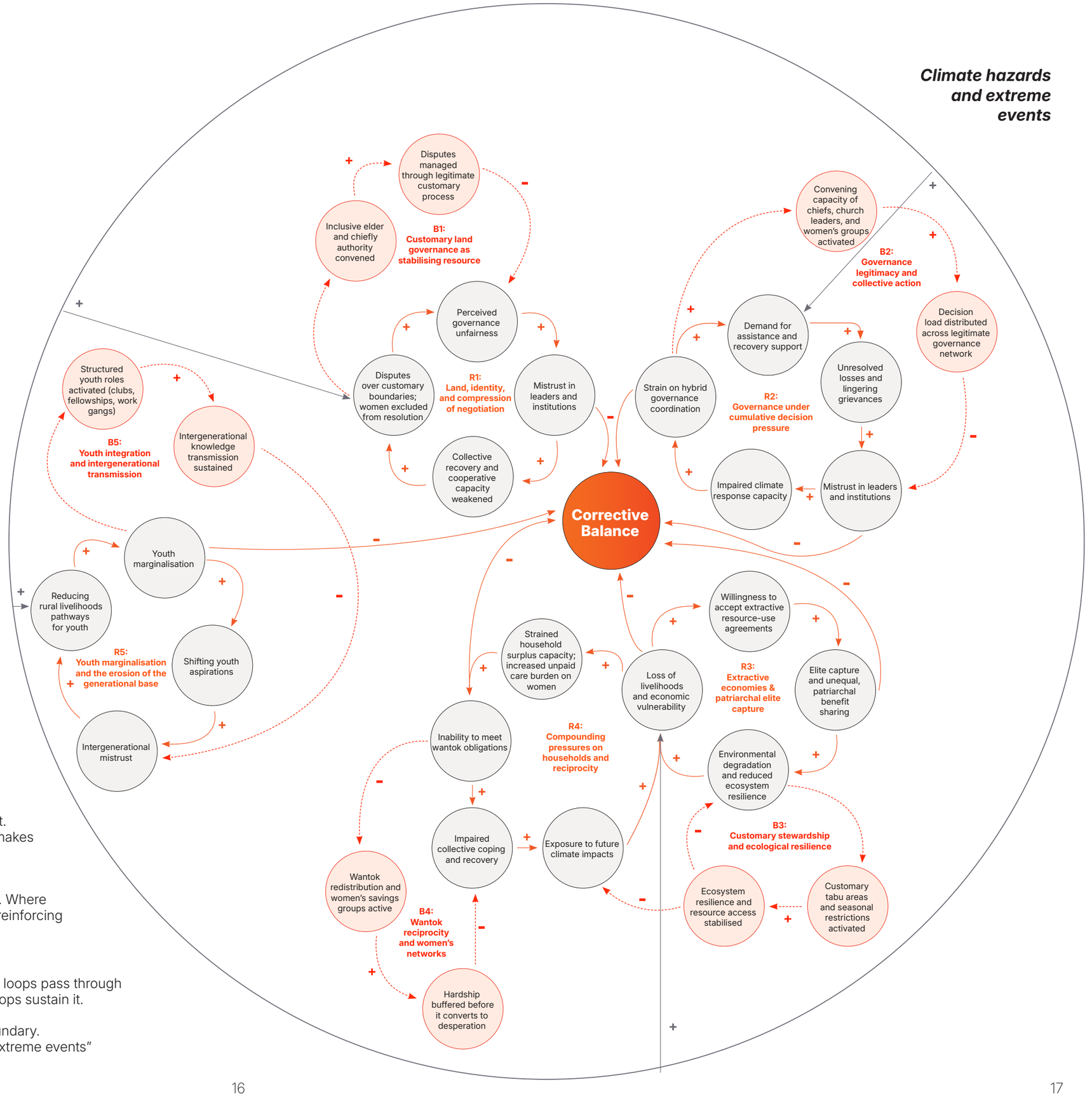


Figure 2: Balancing Loops

The map adds five balancing loops to the reinforcing dynamics shown in Figure 1. Where R loops trace how climate stress erodes corrective balance, B loops trace the relational systems through which communities counter that erosion. Each B loop shares two nodes with its R loop counterpart, branching off at the point of stress and rejoining at the point of potential restoration.

B1 shows how recognised elder and chiefly authority channels land disputes into legitimate customary process, restoring perceived governance fairness rather than allowing it to collapse. B2 shows how the convening capacity of chiefs, church leaders, and women's groups distributes the decision load climate stress multiplies, sustaining trust rather than allowing grievance to accumulate. B3 shows how customary tabu areas and seasonal restrictions embed ecological restraint within social norms, stabilising the resource base that extractive agreements degrade. B4 shows how wantok redistribution and women's savings groups buffer household hardship before it converts into desperation, sustaining the collective coping capacity that reciprocity erosion narrows. B5 shows how structured roles for youth convert marginalisation into active contribution, sustaining the intergenerational transmission on which institutional trust depends. The balancing loops do not eliminate the reinforcing dynamics. They counteract them where they remain functional. What programme investment must protect are not services but the relational systems these loops represent.

Element	Visual	Meaning
Node	Variable now	A condition that can increase or decrease
Reinforcing link	A + B	A and B move in the same direction
Inhibiting link	A − B	A and B move in opposite directions
Reinforcing loop (R) Grey nodes and orange arrows	R: Node ↔ Node	A self-amplifying circuit. Each cycle of erosion makes the next cycle worse.
Balancing loop (B) Pale pink nodes and dashed orange arrows	B: A ↔ A	A countervailing circuit. Where active, it dampens the reinforcing loop it runs against.
Corrective Balance	Corrective Balance	Central variable. All ten loops pass through it. R loops erode it. B loops sustain it.
Outer circle		The climate hazard boundary. "Climate hazards and extreme events" closes every R loop.



B1: Customary land governance as stabilising resource. Where customary authority manages land renegotiation in ways perceived as fair and inclusive, climate-driven displacement and boundary pressure are managed rather than escalated. In Gwaunoa, community members described their relationship to land not in economic terms but as inherited responsibility—"born here, living here, and dying here"—a formulation that captures how land governance and identity are consubstantial. Elders were identified across gender and age groups as respected figures for dispute resolution precisely because their authority is genealogically grounded and relationally recognised, not institutionally assigned. Where chiefs are too closely related to a dispute, or not seen as impartial, agreed-upon chiefs from other clans are brought in to negotiate disputes. Where that recognition holds, the negotiation compression that Section 3 describes as a source of fragility becomes instead a source of resolution capacity.

B2: Governance legitimacy and collective action. Inclusive customary governance produces the fair distribution and responsive leadership on which trust depends. In Gwaunoa, women described how church leaders and the chief can convene the whole community, sometimes using a conch shell, to address issues before they harden into grievance. In Wind Valley, weekly community clean-ups and collective maintenance of drainage systems function as governance in practice: structured participation that reinforces shared responsibility and distributes the decision load that climate stress multiplies. That convening and collective action capacity is the balancing counterpart to the governance compression Section 3 identifies, it works not by reducing decision volume but by distributing authority across a network with the legitimacy to absorb it.

B3: Customary stewardship and ecological resilience. Communities across all research sites identified active ecological adaptation grounded in local knowledge, although often influenced by development programs: mulching and organic techniques in Gwaunoa, mixed cropping and garden shifting in Maeana, kakake cultivation as a flood-resilient crop during wet seasons, stone wall construction to hold coastlines against sea-level rise. Community members in Gwaunoa expressed a collective desire to stop slash-and-burn practices and plant more trees along waterways, a stewardship aspiration embedded in relational obligation rather than external requirement. These practices, alongside customary tabu areas and seasonal fishing restrictions where they persist, embed ecological restraint within social norms, stabilising resource access in ways that align with green and blue economy alternatives far more naturally than externally designed conservation programmes have managed.

B4: Wantok reciprocity and women's networks. The wantok system redistributes food, water, labour, and shelter through reciprocal obligation, buffering hardship before it converts into desperation. Women's savings groups, including S4T programmes documented across both Malaita research sites, extend this function into the financial domain, providing liquidity and mutual support that formal institutions do not reach. In Maeana, communities described resilience as fundamentally collective: sharing wells, building stone walls together, supporting one another after storms through shared labour rather than waiting for external assistance. Church networks and women's and men's fellowships sustain everyday stability between shocks and create the relational density through which recovery is organised. The wantok system is not without its tensions. Obligation networks that bind within kin groups can exclude those outside them, married-in women and internal migrants among the most consistently exposed. The same relational closeness that buffers hardship can, under Big Man dynamics, shield elite capture from accountability.[22] These are not reasons to discount the system's adaptive function. They are reasons to understand it accurately: as a mechanism whose protective capacity is real but unevenly distributed, and whose internal hierarchies shape who benefits from reciprocity and who bears its costs. These are the balancing mechanisms that household reciprocity erosion in Section 3 is actively narrowing, and the faultlines within them that Section 3's structural dynamics exploit.

B5: Youth integration and intergenerational transmission. Where structured roles exist (sports clubs, youth groups, church fellowships, community work gangs) young people are active contributors to resilience rather than bystanders to it. In Wind Valley, youth participation in collective drainage maintenance and weekly clean-ups creates exactly the kind of structured engagement that customary governance requires. In Maeana, men described gaining new fishing and agricultural techniques from development projects alongside strengthening cultural and relational knowledge, intergenerational transmission operating in both directions, though not without tension: the same process through which youth bring new technical knowledge into communities can displace the ecological indicators and seasonal markers through which elders have historically read environmental change. Traditional knowledge in the Pacific represents accumulated place-based understandings of local residents, communicated orally across generations, about the causes of natural phenomena and the optimal ways of responding to them. That oral chain, where it has been weakened by urbanisation, migration, and the displacement of local knowledge systems by external expertise, requires active reconstruction rather than passive support. Youth in Maeana identified access to nearby land, transport, and education as their primary resilience needs: a practical formulation that reframes youth engagement not as a values question but as an infrastructure and opportunity question. It is a reminder that the structural conditions that make rural life viable are the same conditions that make intergenerational transmission possible

These five systems are mutually reinforcing in the same way that Section 3's pressures are mutually compounding. When wantok networks hold, governance disputes are less likely to escalate. When customary stewardship holds, livelihoods are more stable. When livelihoods are stable, reciprocity is sustainable. When reciprocity is sustainable, youth can participate. In Vaai's terms, what these systems collectively produce, and what climate stress collectively erodes, is corrective balance: the condition through which communities sustain the right relationship between people, land, governance, and spiritual order, and restore equilibrium after disturbance. The security variable is not hazard exposure. It is corrective balance.

5. When Pressure Outpaces Cohesion

Climate insecurity in Solomon Islands develops through accumulation, not rupture. Each shock reduces relational surplus slightly: a failed garden limits communal labour contribution, a contaminated well sharpens water-sharing tensions, flood damage diverts savings from ceremonial obligations, leaders face decisions about allocation and relocation under compressed timelines. None produces instability alone — their interaction does. As shocks compound, reciprocity networks narrow, authority structures face greater scrutiny, and where extractive grievances already exist, climate-driven livelihood loss deepens dependence on the same industries generating harm. Urbanisation concentrates these dynamics further: repeated flooding, uneven assistance distribution, temporary nature of informal settlements, and youth unemployment interact with environmental exposure in settings where governance is already weakest. These reinforcing loops remain contained where relational systems retain legitimacy and adaptive flexibility, which explains why recent regional modelling finds no automatic relationship between climate hazards and conflict events in Pacific contexts.[23] **The risk lies not in isolated hazard events but in the gradual erosion of the connective tissue, the strength and functionality of these multiple relational systems, that makes buffering possible.** The implications for programming are direct: hazard reduction is necessary but insufficient. Aid that strengthens relational capacity reduces climate security risk. Aid that bypasses or weakens relational systems increases it, regardless of its technical quality.



[22] Craney, Aidan, and Ali Tuhanuku. 2023. Accountability Ecosystems Political Economy Analysis: Solomon Islands Country Study. Melbourne: La Trobe University Centre for Human Security and Social Change / UNDP. October 2023.

[23] Ide, T., Koren, O., & Derrick, L. (2026). Climate-related disasters and temperature extremes are not associated with conflict risk in Pacific Island countries. Environment and Security, 0(0).

Figure 3. Climate Security in a Relational Perspective: Corrective Balance Across Three Security Domains

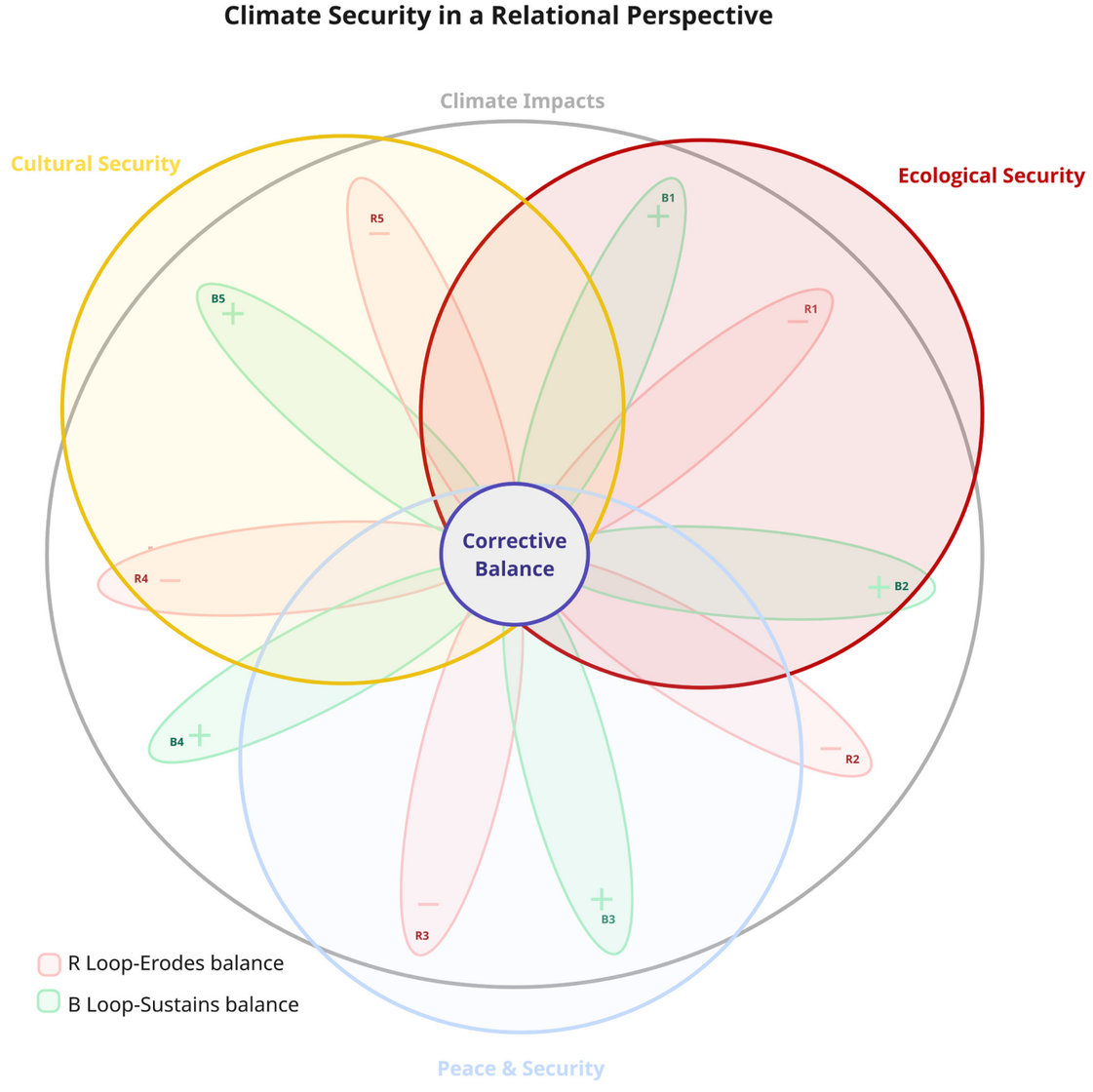
The diagram reframes climate security from a Pacific relational perspective. Rather than asking what threats intersect to produce insecurity, it asks what conditions must hold simultaneously to sustain it.

Three overlapping circles represent the dimensions of security that communities in Solomon Islands identify as constitutive: cultural security, encompassing identity, spiritual order, wantok reciprocity, and intergenerational transmission; ecological security, encompassing land, reef, freshwater, and ocean systems as the material base on which all other security depends; and peace and security, encompassing the social cohesion and governance legitimacy that prevent grievance from hardening into conflict. These domains are mutually constitutive: ecological integrity sustains cultural life; cultural coherence sustains the relational norms through which ecosystems are stewarded; governance legitimacy holds both together under stress.

Corrective balance—Vaai's term for the state of right relationship between people, land, governance, and spiritual order—sits at the intersection of all three. Climate impacts exert pressure across all three domains simultaneously. The five reinforcing loops (R1–R5, red petals) trace the pathways through which that pressure erodes corrective balance. The five balancing loops (B1–B5, green petals) trace the countervailing dynamics through which communities sustain it where relational systems remain functional.

The security variable in Solomon Islands is not hazard exposure. It is corrective balance. Programming that strengthens the relational systems sustaining all three circles builds climate security. Programming that addresses one domain while neglecting the others narrows the corrective balance on which community resilience depends.







6. Programming for Relational Climate Security

Despite a USD 1billion climate adaptation finance gap towards Pacific Islands states,[24] significant climate finance is already flowing to Solomon Islands through DFAT's Climate Resilient Communities (CRC) program, Australia's contribution to the Pacific Resilience Facility, Disaster READY, Gov4Res, and a network of bilateral investments in infrastructure, agriculture, and governance. The regional architecture is aligned. And yet, across this portfolio, the relational systems demonstrated by this study as primary mediators of climate security remain peripheral to programme design.

What this gap demands is not additional finance in the same vein but a different programme logic, one grounded in systems thinking and freed from the deficit discourse that continues to dominate development practice in the Pacific. Resilience in the Pacific[25] is not a technical output that can be delivered. Resilience to both climate change and conflicts is an emergent property of healthy, interconnected relational systems. Programming that treats it as the former consistently misses the contextual dynamics that determine whether interventions strengthen those systems or quietly undermine them.

Systems thinking treats communities not as collections of individuals with discrete needs but as interconnected systems in which changes in one variable (women's labour burdens, a chief's legitimacy, a youth group's inclusion in planning) ripple through the whole. It identifies reinforcing dynamics, locates leverage points, and reveals tipping thresholds: the points at which cumulative pressure outpaces relational capacity. Programming designed without it treats symptoms. Programming designed with it addresses causes and strengthens the relational systems through which communities already govern themselves.

The following five recommendations are addressed to DFAT and their programme partners operating in Solomon Islands, specifically the Pacific Islands Forum, which is currently refining its climate security policy. They are ordered from the most immediately actionable to the most structurally ambitious, recognising that recommendations one and five will require the greatest institutional and financing redesign. Each is framed as a strengthening of practice already present within the portfolio rather than as a departure from it.

Recommendation 1: Reframe Climate Adaptation Around Relational Systems

Climate adaptation policy and programming in Solomon Islands should explicitly recognise relational systems as the primary means through which climate risks are mediated and resilience is produced. Current approaches tend to prioritise technical, sectoral, or asset-based interventions, while treating social relations, customary authority, kinship systems, church networks, and community-based women's groups, as contextual factors. However, the analysis demonstrates that these relational systems constitute the underlying architecture that shapes how shocks are absorbed, decisions are made, and collective action is sustained.

Operationalising this shift requires a reorientation of funding and programme design toward strengthening these systems directly. This includes supporting locally legitimate governance structures, reinforcing norms of reciprocity and collective responsibility, and investing in the social processes that enable coordination and conflict resolution. Financing modalities, such as through the Pacific Resilience Facility's Social and Community Resilience pillar, should move beyond short-term, output-driven projects toward longer-term, flexible support that allows relational systems to adapt and evolve. By treating relational systems as central rather than context, climate adaptation efforts can more effectively influence the conditions that determine whether environmental stress leads to resilience or fragmentation.

This reorientation aligns directly with DFAT's existing localisation commitments, which position locally owned institutions as more effective and accountable delivery partners than externally managed structures. It also requires that social and relational systems analysis be integrated alongside the market systems thinking that already informs DFAT's programming approach: market systems involve social systems and power dynamics, and interventions that address economic relations without attending to the relational architecture that shapes them will find their gains contested or reversed.

Recommendation 2: Embed Systems-Based and Strengths-Oriented Approaches in Programme Design and Appraisal

Climate and development investments should be systematically designed and assessed through a systems-based and strengths-oriented lens that foregrounds relational dynamics. This should consider economic, social and environmental systems. The prevailing linear model of programme design, moving from problem identification to discrete interventions, fails to capture the feedback loops and interdependencies that shape outcomes in complex socio-ecological systems. As a result, well-intentioned interventions can inadvertently undermine the very systems that sustain resilience.

To address this, DFAT and partners should require all programmes to analyse how proposed activities interact with key reinforcing and balancing dynamics, including those related to land, migration, governance legitimacy, and social cohesion. Programme appraisal processes should explicitly assess potential impacts on relational systems, including risks of bypassing customary authority, exacerbating inequalities, or weakening informal support networks. At the same time, design processes should begin from existing strengths, local knowledge, adaptive practices, and social institutions, rather than deficits. This approach shifts programming from delivering predefined solutions to managing system dynamics, enabling more adaptive, context-responsive interventions that reinforce, rather than disrupt, locally embedded resilience processes.

In practice, this means embedding systems-based appraisal at each stage of the programme cycle: relational risk screening at concept note stage; systems mappingw during design; explicit assessment of impacts on customary authority, gender inclusion, and benefit distribution during appraisal; adaptive management triggers during implementation that respond to changes in relational dynamics; and monitoring and evaluation frameworks that capture relational outcomes alongside technical outputs.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen Livelihood Systems as the Economic Foundation of Relational Resilience

DFAT should explicitly recognise livelihood systems as the economic foundation of relational resilience and design programming accordingly. Climate-smart livelihood investments should be integrated into adaptation portfolios rather than siloed in food security or agriculture sectors, and emergency response protocols should include rapid market and relational systems analysis from the outset. Income and subsistence from fisheries, agriculture, and informal trade underpin participation in reciprocity networks, ceremonial obligation, and customary governance. When climate stress erodes these foundations, through crop failure, fisheries decline, or the diversion of labour to water collection and post-disaster recovery, the capacity to sustain relational systems contracts with them.

[24] Spruce, Damian. "Caritas Draws Attention to $1bn Pacific Climate Finance Gap at COP29." Media release. Sydney: Caritas Australia, 15 November 2024. https://www.caritas.org.au/news/media-releases/caritas-draws-attention-to-1bn-pacific-climate-finance-gap-at-cop29/.

[25] Gero, Anna, Keren Winterford, and Federico Davila. "A Pacific Community Resilience Framework: Exploring a Holistic Perspective through a Strengths-Based Approach and Systems Thinking." Asia Pacific Viewpoint 65, no. 3 (2024): 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12411.

[26] Gero, Anna, Keren Winterford, and Federico Davila. "A Pacific Community Resilience Framework: Exploring a Holistic Perspective through a Strengths-Based Approach and Systems Thinking." Asia Pacific Viewpoint 65, no. 3 (2024): 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12411; Vaai, Upolu Lumā, Volker Boege, John Campbell, Carol Farbotko, and Tammy Tabe, eds. 2025. Climate Change in Pasifika Relational Perspectives. Suva: Pasifika Communities University Press.

In the immediate term, when climate-related shocks disrupt livelihoods, DFAT should ensure rapid market and relational systems analysis is conducted simultaneously, so that emergency responses, including gender-sensitive social protection measures, are designed to sustain rather than bypass existing reciprocity mechanisms. Social protection in this context should be calibrated to the payment infrastructure and governance realities of Solomon Islands, and co-designed with provincial authorities and customary structures rather than substituting for them.

In the medium and longer term, programming should reduce reliance on extractive industries by expanding climate-resilient income pathways in sectors where poor and marginalised communities, particularly women and youth, are already economically active. Climate-smart agriculture and aquaculture offer the most direct opportunities: they can generate inclusive livelihoods while restoring the ecological systems on which subsistence depends, and they align with DFAT's existing investments in food security and sustainable fisheries. Sector-specific interventions should target pro-poor outcomes, gender equality, and climate adaptation simultaneously, treating these not as separate objectives but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of livelihood resilience. Youth pathways deserve explicit design attention: programming that creates income and social recognition for young people simultaneously addresses economic exclusion and the reciprocity deficit that drives intergenerational fragility.

Recommendation 4: Position Women's and Youth's Relational Roles as a Central Lever of Resilience and Stability

Climate adaptation policy should move beyond treating gender as a cross-cutting consideration and instead recognise women's relational roles as a primary mechanism through which social stability is produced and recovered. These functions are essential to the operation of relational systems, yet they remain largely invisible in programme design and measurement frameworks.

That shift must be grounded in the safety realities women face. In Solomon Islands, where intimate partner violence affects the majority of women and where customary authority remains predominantly male-led, efforts to strengthen women's roles must engage men and male leaders as active partners rather than treating women's empowerment as a parallel track. Advancing women's decision-making authority without that engagement risks exposing women to reprisal rather than expanding their influence.

Operationally, this means targeting women's participation within the governance structures where climate, land, and resource decisions are actually made (customary councils, sector-specific bodies governing agriculture, fisheries, and logging, and community-based natural resource management) rather than creating separate women's structures where consequential decisions do not occur. It means investing in the women-led networks (savings clubs, church fellowships, women's associations, and informal caregiving networks) that already perform critical resilience functions and that require sustained, flexible funding rather than project-cycle support. It means addressing the structural barriers, time burdens, safety constraints, limited access to productive resources, that restrict women's capacity to exercise influence even where formal participation exists. And it means ensuring that monitoring and evaluation frameworks capture changes in women's relational influence and the functioning of the networks they sustain, not only their headcount in programme activities.

Youth-led networks, including the Solomon Islands National Youth Congress, warrant equivalent investment as delivery partners for climate adaptation programming. As the analysis in Section 3 demonstrates, young people excluded from economic and governance participation become a source of relational fragility; young people with structured roles, income, and recognition become a source of adaptive capacity. Programming should treat youth integration as a design requirement rather than an add-on, and should explicitly link livelihood pathways, governance participation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission as mutually reinforcing objectives within the same investment logic.

Recommendation 5: Align Climate Adaptation with Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention Objectives

Climate adaptation investments should be explicitly designed to strengthen social cohesion and reduce the risk that environmental stress translates into conflict. The evidence from Solomon Islands indicates that climate-related pressures, on land, livelihoods, and mobility, interact with existing social and governance dynamics, creating pathways through which stress can erode relational cohesion and increase the likelihood of tension and dispute. To mitigate these risks, programmes should prioritise interventions that reinforce locally legitimate governance over land and natural resources, support inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, and address key pressure points such as youth marginalisation and unplanned urbanisation. Adaptation initiatives should be assessed not only for their technical effectiveness, but for their impact on trust, cooperation, and the capacity for collective action.

This requires a more integrated approach that brings together climate, development, and peacebuilding objectives within a single operational framework. Success should be measured in terms of both adaptation outcomes and improvements in relational cohesion, recognising that these are mutually reinforcing dimensions of resilience. By aligning climate action with the strengthening of social systems, policy and programming can more effectively address the underlying drivers of fragility in a changing climate.

Concretely, this requires joint design across climate, land governance, livelihood systems, and extractive industry accountability. Informal settlement adaptation should be co-designed with tenure security reform rather than proceeding in isolation. Environmental oversight of extractive industries, including community benefit-sharing requirements and cumulative impact assessment, should be treated as a climate resilience investment, not a regulatory burden. Women's participation in land governance decisions is both an equity requirement and a resilience requirement, but advancing it demands sustained engagement with the customary authority structures that govern land tenure, and recognition that structural and legal constraints on women's land authority cannot be resolved by programming alone. Success should be measured in terms of both adaptation outcomes and improvements in relational cohesion, recognising that these are mutually reinforcing dimensions of climate security.





Fore more information, please contact:

Christine Lindell, Conflict and Fragility Technical Advisor,
World Vision Australia, christine.lindell@worldvision.com.au

© World Vision Australia. World Vision Australia ABN 28 004 778 081 is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice.