



Making Progress: Solomon Island businesses advance gender equality

How the **Waka Mere Commitment to Action** is benefiting companies and employees

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1 | The Waka Mere Commitment to Action

The Waka Mere Commitment to Action is a two-year initiative which aims to promote gender equality in the private sector in Solomon Islands. It was launched in July 2017 at the Australian Solomon Islands Business Forum and includes 15 of the largest companies in Solomon Islands, with nearly 6,000 employees combined.

FOCUS AREAS

Through Waka Mere, which means She Works in pidgin, each company has committed to one or more of the following three areas:



Promote women in leadership

Companies conduct a gender assessment and set targets for increased numbers of women in management



Build respectful and supportive workplaces

Companies implement or enhance policies for establishing respectful and supportive workplaces



Increase opportunities for women in jobs traditionally held by men

Companies set targets for an increased share of women in male-dominated jobs and for creating opportunities for women to fill those jobs

KEY PARTNERS

Waka Mere is led by IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, in collaboration with the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), the peak representative organization for the private sector in Solomon Islands.

“Waka Mere is about investing in women and giving them the opportunity to shine, not only by having them in leadership roles, but also by promoting them in non-traditional jobs, and building a safe and respectful workplace. If we provide opportunities to women they will grab them with both hands and have a huge impact not only for them, but also for their families, their communities, and the country as a whole.”



Dennis Meone, CEO, Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry

IFC and SICCI provide training, workshops, and peer learning opportunities to support the participating companies meet their commitments. They also help monitor and share the progress each company has made against its targets through accountability mechanisms such as this mid-term report which marks the first year of the Waka Mere initiative.

Participating companies and their commitments

Commitments:



Promote women in leadership



Build respectful and supportive workplaces



Increase opportunities for women in jobs traditionally held by men



Bank South Pacific



Bulk Shop



Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Limited (GPPOL)



Hatanga Construction Ltd



Heritage Park



National Fisheries Development



Pan Oceanic Bank



Solomon Airlines



Solomon Brewery



Solomon Islands National Provident Fund



Solomon Islands Ports Authority



Solomon Islands Tobacco Company Ltd



Solomon Islands Water Authority



Solomon Power



SolTuna





2 | The Context

GLOBAL CONTEXT

Gender equality is not only a social and moral imperative, but also an economic necessity. Women represent nearly 50 percent of the world's population, yet they account for only about 41 percent of the formal workforce. Countries are losing \$160 trillion in wealth because of differences in lifetime earnings between women and men.

Companies, however, are increasingly realizing that they can gain greater competitive advantage and improve profits by targeting women as employees, entrepreneurs, consumers, and business leaders.

Gender diverse companies report having:

Greater pool of talent	Stronger performance
Better reputation	Increased innovation

Source: Why diversity matters, Catalyst (2013)

LOCAL CONTEXT

Rates of gender inequality and domestic violence remain high across the world. Solomon Islands is not an exception. Women in the country have some of the lowest chances in the world to earn an income and some of the highest probabilities to be affected by violence.

Solomon Islands:

Gender Inequality



Ranks **124th** among **128** countries in terms of women's economic opportunity¹

Only **1 out of 4** private sector jobs is held by a woman²

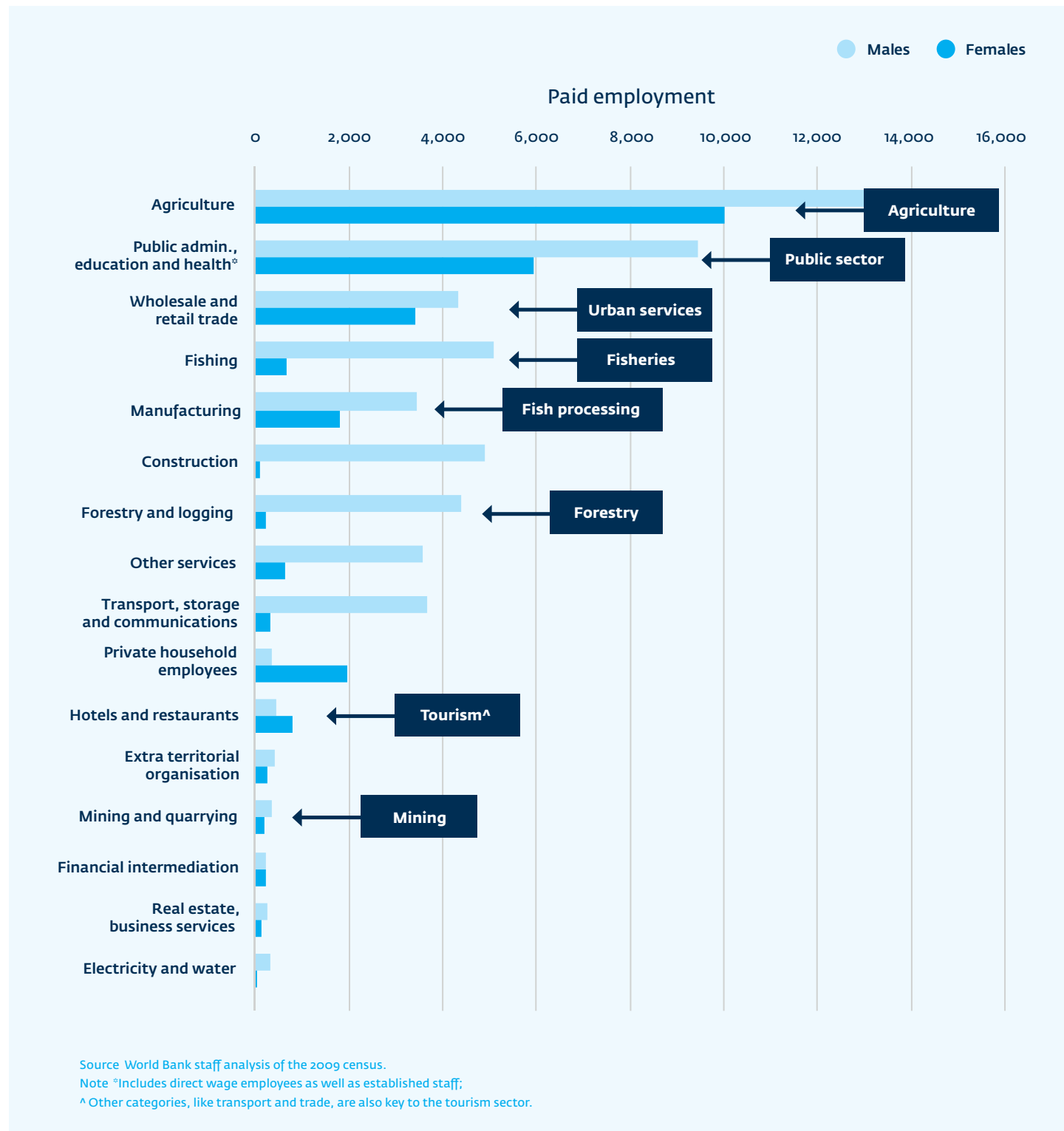
Domestic Violence



2 out of 3 women experience domestic and family violence in their lifetime³

¹ EIU's 2012 Women's Economic Opportunity Index and Report
² 2015 ADB Solomon Islands Country Gender Report
³ 2009 Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Survey

Employment by sector and gender in Solomon Islands





3 | The Starting Point

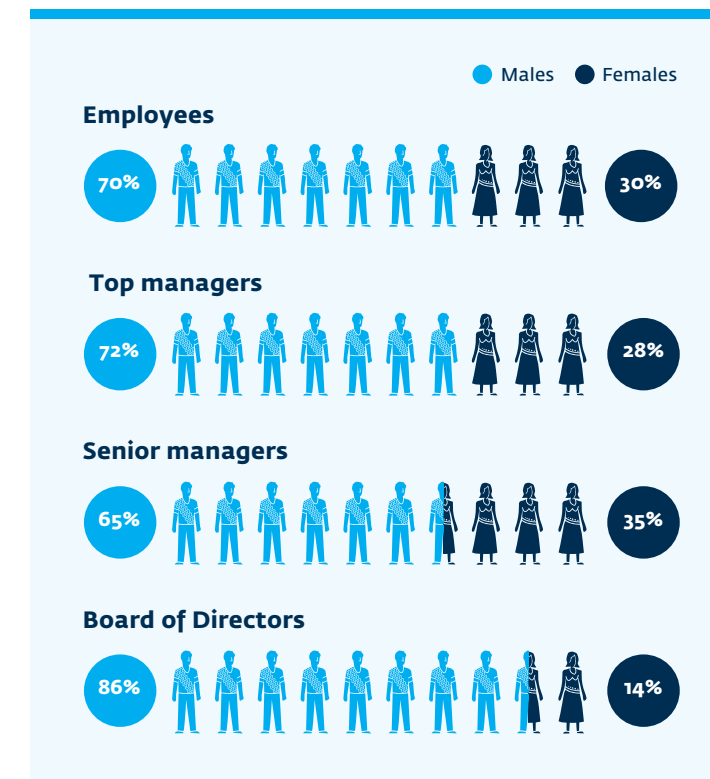
Two baseline surveys were administered by Waka Mere participating companies between August 2017 and November 2017¹:

The Human Resources Survey (HR Survey) was completed by a representative of the human resources department of all participating companies².

The Employee Survey was completed by 1,491 employees across the 15 companies. The gender breakdown was 42% female (622 in total) and 57% male (857 in total); the remaining 1% (12 people) did not disclose their gender.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Women were underrepresented at all levels of the workforce in all participating Waka Mere companies and lagged substantially behind men when it came to representation in leadership:



Targeted programs and initiatives to recruit, develop, and promote female talent were underutilized. **Three companies had targets for the percentage of women in the workforce, in senior-management and/or in board positions** at the outset. Of these three companies, one had a workforce that was almost evenly represented by men and women. Promisingly, slightly more than half (57%) of the surveyed companies had targeted leadership programs to develop a pipeline of female top talent.

¹ Note: SolTuna did not complete either the HR or Staff survey due to similar survey's having been conducted at the company recently. Results for SolTuna are not presented here, but will be presented in the final report.
² Ministry of Aviation conducted the baseline HR and Staff Surveys, with their results included in this analysis. After completing the surveys, the Ministry of Aviation put its participation on hold while it underwent restructuring. The company still expects to make progress before the end of the two-year initiative.

OPPORTUNITIES IN HIRING AND PROMOTION

Even though in most companies a majority of employees acknowledged that men and women had equal opportunities, a significant proportion disagreed.

- Nearly **one in five** (19%) employees reported that women and men did **not** have the **same chances of being hired** by their company, with little difference between women and men's responses.
- **More than one-quarter** (28%) of employees reported that qualified men and women did **not** have **equal access to jobs** in all departments and job types. Relatively more women (31%) than men (25%) reported this to be the case.
- **Nearly one-third** (31%) of employees reported that women and men did **not** have the **same chances for promotion**.
- **More than one-quarter of women** and one-fifth of men reported women and men did **not** have **equal access to training and development opportunities**.

Nearly one-third of employees reported that women and men did **not** have the same chances for promotion.

POLICIES FOR ESTABLISHING GENDER EQUAL WORKPLACES

Half of the surveyed companies had an Equal Employment Opportunity Policy or Non-discrimination Policy, and even fewer had an Equal Pay Policy. One company had a Diversity and Inclusion Policy. Despite the gap in formal policies for promoting equal opportunities, nearly three quarters of employees agreed with the survey statement: "This company genuinely supports equality between women and men."

Half of the surveyed companies had an Equal Employment Opportunity Policy or Non-discrimination Policy, and even fewer had an Equal Pay Policy. One company had a Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

Very few of the surveyed companies offered family-friendly policies beyond maternity leave, and many employees reported they did not have the flexibility they needed to balance work and personal life.

- **21%** of companies had a **flexible work policy** in place, and **more than one-third** (34%) of employees reported that their company did **not** provide the flexibility they needed to **balance their work and personal life**.
- All companies surveyed had a maternity leave policy as mandated by law, and half (57%) offered some form of paternity leave. **Three companies** offered other **family-friendly provisions**, including providing access to a company medical clinic, education subsidies, and flexible hours.

POLICIES FOR BUILDING RESPECTFUL AND SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACES

Three-quarters of all employees agreed that **domestic violence** was affecting the ability of some employees to come to work and/or perform their best at their company. One company reported having a policy in place to support staff affected by domestic violence.

Three-quarters of all employees agreed that domestic violence was affecting the ability of some employees to come to work and/or perform.

Some companies had policies to promote respectful workplaces.

- **Two-thirds** (64%) had policies in place to protect against **sexual harassment**, while **one third** (29%) had policies to prevent bullying.
- **One-third** of employees reported they did not feel **comfortable** (33%) or **safe** (29%) at work.
- **More than one-third** (38%) of employees reported their company did **not** have adequate **mechanisms** in place for addressing worker **grievances**; and almost **one-third** (29%) reported that they would **not** feel comfortable **discussing an issue** affecting their work with a manager or other designated company representatives.

One-third of employees reported they did not feel comfortable (33%) or safe (29%) at work.



Janet Inito, *Hatanga Construction Ltd.*



Vicky Maomara, *Bulk Shop*



9 out of 12 women who completed the leadership course received a promotion or broader responsibilities

4 | Progress to Date

Waka Mere participating companies are making progress in the first year of the initiative by taking one or more measures to promote gender equality - ranging from training and promoting high potential women to supporting women to get drivers licenses for the first time, to implementing new policies for respectful workplaces.



Promoting women in leadership

Participating Companies:

Bulk Shop	Solomon Airlines
GPPOL	Solomon Islands Ports Authority
Heritage Park	Solomon Power
National Fisheries Development	SolTuna

ACTIONS TO DATE

Numerous studies demonstrate that businesses with gender diverse leadership teams perform better on a range of metrics. This includes better returns on equity, net profit margins and earnings per share¹, along with lower volatility².

The private sector in Solomon Islands has started to recognize the business value associated with having more women in leadership roles. Eight Waka Mere companies are now developing a pipeline of women leaders and have set measurable targets for increasing the share of women at different levels of leadership. These companies were given various tools and opportunities to develop women including:

- Sending high potential women to attend the Certificate IV in Leadership and Management course of the Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC). The course examines an individual's own leadership style and provides the tools to lead and manage others. This face-to-face training was delivered over a period of 6 months, with 25 days of classroom training.

- With IFC's support, five Waka Mere companies sent a total of eight women to complete this course. An additional four women from other companies were also supported by IFC to attend.
- Nine out of 12 women who completed the leadership course received a promotion or broader responsibilities in terms of budget, strategy or staff supervision.
- One-quarter received an increased salary, signed up for additional training, or joined a professional network.
- The certificate from this course was the first formal qualification for several women.
- GPPOL has supported three women to complete the APTC Emerging Leaders Training, which prepares them for taking on a supervisory role.
- Encouraging women to participate in the Solomon Islands Professional Women's Network (SIPNET), an initiative led by IFC and SICCI, which was launched in 2016. SIPNET includes 55 members and aims to increase opportunities for women as individuals through networking events and skill-building activities.
 - Six SIPNET events have been hosted by Waka Mere companies including Solomon Power and GPPOL, as well as SICCI and the Australian High Commission. The events covered topics ranging from career planning and effective communications to the impact of domestic violence at the workplace.
 - Ten participants completed a one-day business networking course and reported immensely positive changes afterwards.
 - A two-hour session on effective communications was attended by 50 women from 10 Waka Mere companies.

¹ Zuabi, R. (2015)
² Morgan Stanley, 2017

Benefits reported by companies and employees



“ As a superintendent, I had experience but not confidence. Now, through the training I received, **I have learned how to be confident** and lead others.”

Mary Pina,
Quality Control Assistant Manager, SolTuna



“ I work in a male dominated work environment. The course helped me see that women can also do what men can. That **we have to come out of ourselves to be able to lead others** – not to be shy and have the confidence to speak up.”

Salome Tahisihaka,
Head of Training, Solomon Power



“ I am very **fortunate to work for a company that sent me to this leadership training**. They believed in me and saw my potential when I could not see it myself. Now, I am more mindful of recognizing the potential of others and helping them grow.”

Shabella Rathamana,
Compliance Officer, Hatanga



“ I supervise 70 people - all men. My biggest challenge has been to get them to listen to me, especially the older ones. In the leadership course I learned the power the **tone of my voice** can have. Now I speak more softly when I need to calm them down and I know how to fine tune myself to get them to respond – how to be polite and assertive at the same time. It's interesting to see how their attitudes towards me have started to shift.”

Jaydita Malika,
Field Supervisor, GPPOL



“ I have been sharing what I learned in the leadership course with my mum. I teach her the value of good posture, eye contact, body movements and everything else I learned. That way she can also share these lessons at church and **spread the word to other women in our community.**”

Celia Otoara'a,
HR Manager, Solomon Islands Ports Authority

Visit www.ifc.org/gender/EAP to find more testimonials and inspiring stories about Waka Mere.



“ At times I would micromanage and tend to try to do everything myself. After the course I **started to delegate more tasks** both at work and at home. I even did a board for sharing house duties.”

Lyn Fa'arodo,
Internet Banking Manager, Bank South Pacific



“ We sent 18 of our employees to attend the women's leadership course this year, recognizing how it helps them become more effective. In fact, we were planning to hire an expat for a managerial position but decided to give it to one of our local staff when we noticed how she had grown after attending the course. Today, she thrives in this role and does a remarkable job. From a company perspective, we were happy to help **develop local talent while also saving costs** associated with bringing in someone from abroad.”

Tele Bartlett,
Director, Bulk Shop



“ I persistently asked to attend the leadership course – primarily because I wanted to learn how I could **present myself in boardrooms.** I just wish I had the opportunity attend this course at the beginning of my career – my life would have been so different if I did.”

Antoinette Wickham,
Engineer and Project Management Consultant at Solomon Water



Building respectful and supportive workplaces

Participating Companies:

Bank South Pacific	Solomon Islands National Provident Fund
Bulk Shop	Solomon Islands Ports Authority
GPOL	Solomon Islands Tobacco Company
Hatanga	Solomon Islands Water Authority
National Fisheries Development	Solomon Power
Pan Oceanic Bank	SolTuna
Solomon Airlines	
Solomon Brewery	

ACTIONS TO DATE

Nearly all the Waka Mere participating companies have made commitments to build respectful and supportive workplaces for their employees. This reflects the growing recognition of the impact that domestic violence has on employees and on business (e.g., increased absenteeism, lower productivity, higher turnover rates, and risks to occupational health and safety). It also reflects a recognition of the negative impacts that bullying and harassment can have on productivity as well as the morale and well-being of employees.

Waka Mere companies making this commitment can act in either or both of the following areas: (i) domestic violence and/or (ii) sexual harassment and bullying. Companies have access to tools and advice from IFC on policy implementation, training of managers and in-house trainers, and monitoring & evaluation practices. They also get the opportunity to share best practices and lessons learned among each other.



Florence Tione, Solomon Power

11 companies completed training and began implementing a Policy for Addressing Domestic Violence at the Workplace to better support affected employees

Addressing Domestic Violence

Waka Mere companies can implement a Policy for Addressing Domestic Violence at the workplace which helps them take a structured approach through a wide range of measures such as:

- Special leave to attend medical, counselling, and legal appointments or move to safe accommodation.
- Safety planning for any necessary adjustments to schedules, locations, or working environments to ensure workplace safety.
- Referral to available support services including medical and psychosocial support, counselling, police, emergency accommodation, and welfare services.
- Financial or other assistance for accessing support services and protection outside the workplace.
- A policy to manage employees who are perpetrators through referral to counselling, disciplinary action including dismissal and/or reporting the case to the police

These measures are tailored to individual company needs and the local culture. They take into consideration the limited public and community resources available for people affected by violence.

Eleven companies completed training and began implementing a Policy for Addressing Domestic Violence at the Workplace to better support affected employees: Bank South Pacific, Bulk Shop, Hatanga, National Fisheries Development, Pan Oceanic Bank, Solomon Airlines, Solomon Brewery, Solomon Islands Ports Authority, Solomon Islands National Provident Fund, Solomon Islands Water Authority, and SolTuna.

- A group of staff from each of those companies completed training on how to serve as the first point of contact within their business for employees affected by violence.
- Nine of these companies completed training on how to monitor and evaluate the policy.
- Ten of these companies are in the process of completing an employee survey to assess the current impact of domestic violence on their workplace.

Addressing Sexual Harassment and Bullying

Respectful Workplaces training assists companies to increase productivity by promoting a respectful workplace culture free from all forms of bullying and harassment, where employees and others associated with the company treat each other with dignity, courtesy and respect. The training is underpinned by a Respectful Workplaces Policy (anti-bullying and harassment) and grievance mechanism and focuses on effective communication.

Bulkshop, Hatanga, Sol Tuna and Solomon Water trained line managers on Respectful Workplaces. The training covered why having a respectful workplace is good for business, the purpose and content of the Respectful Workplaces policy, and tools and techniques to encourage effective communication in the workplace.

Solomon Water has taken this one step further and hosted two-hour training sessions with more than 80 of its operational staff to raise general awareness about the Respectful Workplaces Policy and to educate staff on how to raise issues effectively at work. Solomon Water also completed a baseline survey with staff to assess the current levels of bullying, harassment and comfort of staff at the workplace. The company will use this baseline information to monitor progress and adjust its policy, procedures and training as needed.

Benefits reported by companies and employees



“ Domestic violence is a big contributing factor to absenteeism in a company. Violence is affecting the family and, at the same time, has a direct effect on business operations and turnout.”

Suzy Aquino,
Plant Operations Manager, SolTuna



“ 60 percent of our workforce has already been trained on Respectful Workplaces, which aims to sensitize staff to the new policy and its implications. This has been key in helping our employees recognize the importance of effectively and timely raising any issues that come up.”

Ian Gooden,
General Manager, Solomon Islands Water Authority



“ As a victim of violence myself, I know it's very important to be more open at the workplace about experiencing domestic violence. In the case of SolBrew we have raised awareness about violence and have encouraged employees to come forward. We already had one staff come forward and we referred her to the responsible authorities that can assist her. I expect more will follow.”

Grace Campbell,
HR Manager, Solomon Brewery



“ Employees have started to disclose incidents of violence, receive structured support, and be able to carry on with their jobs. This has helped us increase productivity and save associated medical, security, and new recruitment costs. In fact, we have already recouped the costs of implementing the policy and we recently saved two jobs of employees affected by violence. In the past, we would have terminated their employment as we would not have known why they were absent, seemingly without cause.”

Freda Fa'aitoa,
HR Manager, Bank South Pacific

Visit www.ifc.org/gender/EAP to find more testimonials and inspiring stories about Waka Mere.



“ Most of our employees did not recognize that there are different types of violence. They would think it can only be physical. Now they know that even the words they use might be verbal abuse if they hurt someone. It felt like looking ourselves in the mirror and checking where we stand.”

Manasseh Taloafiri, *HR and Corporate Services Manager Solomon Islands National Provident Fund*



“ The training we received on domestic violence built our confidence to stand up for what we stand for – and not just for issues related to violence. It also taught us how to provide more constructive advice and we are sure this will be useful in our work across the board.”

Team of first responders,
Solomon Airlines



“ Initially I was a bit reluctant, not knowing how exactly how our Waka Mere commitment to build respectful workplaces would work. But now I see the value. It is important to be more open about domestic violence and have a policy to guide the way we can systematically address it at the workplace. We have already trained six people. Giving equal opportunities to women is also key: our motto here is 'empowering the nation' – but you cannot empower a nation without empowering women.”

Suresh Amarasekera,
CEO, Pan Oceanic Bank



“ I am now more comfortable and better equipped to respond to disclosures of violence. I know what to ask, what to say, where to refer them, how to encourage them to do something about it. It feels very good to know I can help and I already see a positive change. This is also good for the company as it shows we care and builds employee loyalty.”

Janet Inito,
HR Manager, Hatanga



Increasing opportunities for women in jobs traditionally held by men

Participating Companies:

Bulk Shop	Solomon Islands Ports Authority
GPPOL	Solomon Power
Hatanga	SolTuna
National Fisheries Development	

opportunities for women to step into these occupations can therefore help improve their financial security and allow them to better support their families.

Seven Waka Mere companies have recognized the underutilized pool of talent that women represent. They are taking commendable steps to change their organizational cultures in ways that attract female employees to male dominated roles and help them to thrive.

Bulk Shop, National Fisheries Development Limited, Solomon Islands Ports Authority and Solomon Power sponsored female employees to obtain their driver's licenses. To date, eleven women have passed their provisional license and are completing practical driver training. For many of these women this is the first step in obtaining a heavy vehicle license. **GPPOL** has supported two female employees to take on roles – one on a cadetship and the other as sustainability officer – that require the women to ride motorcycles around the plantation.

Overall, the companies that have made this commitment, are also **playing an advocacy role** by helping change mindsets. They serve as agents of change whether they set the example (e.g., by teaching women how to drive or having female engineers) or by speaking publicly about the business value of women in male dominated roles.

ACTIONS TO DATE

There is growing evidence from diverse sectors and countries which shows that investing in opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated jobs – such as technical roles and trades and sectors such as engineering, construction, mining and other heavy industries - is good for productivity, innovation, safety, and efficiency.

Male dominated occupations also tend to be higher paid than traditionally female dominated positions. Creating more



Salome Bitiai, SolTuna

Benefits reported by companies and employees



“ I like this job. It's a men's job but I have the capability to do it. And when I leave for work, my boy always hugs me and says **“mum, I am really happy because even though being a driver is a men's job, YOU are doing it!”**”

Salome Bitiai,
Forklift Driver, SolTuna



“ Being a driver will help me raise my productivity as a sales representative because it will allow me to drive rather than relying on walking around. Having more female drivers can also help reduce road accidents as women tend to be more defensive drivers. This **driving training also helps address gender bias in our culture and ensure women are empowered.**”

Dulcy Wate,
Sales Representative, Bulk Shop



“ I typically take the bus or depend on someone to drive me to external meetings. Currently, only men drive company cars and when they go on holiday or get sick, we have a major shortage. But, thanks to my driving lessons, I will start driving company vehicles too. This will allow me to **save time and costs.** It is also a sign of status.”

Bridget Wafuni,
Management Accountant, SIPA



“ There is stigmatization of women in jobs that were traditionally held by men. Waka Mere helps address that. It helps change mindsets. It demonstrates that it is all about job results – not about whether a position is held by a man or a woman. It helps **companies think about productivity – not stereotypes.**”

Regina Gatu Pokana,
Sustainability Manager, GPPOL



“ Being a driver enables me to complete my tasks faster. It is an achievement in my career and will help with my future growth. I am thankful to my company for giving me this great privilege. **Having more women drivers is important for gender balance in terms of duties and responsibilities both at home and at work.**”

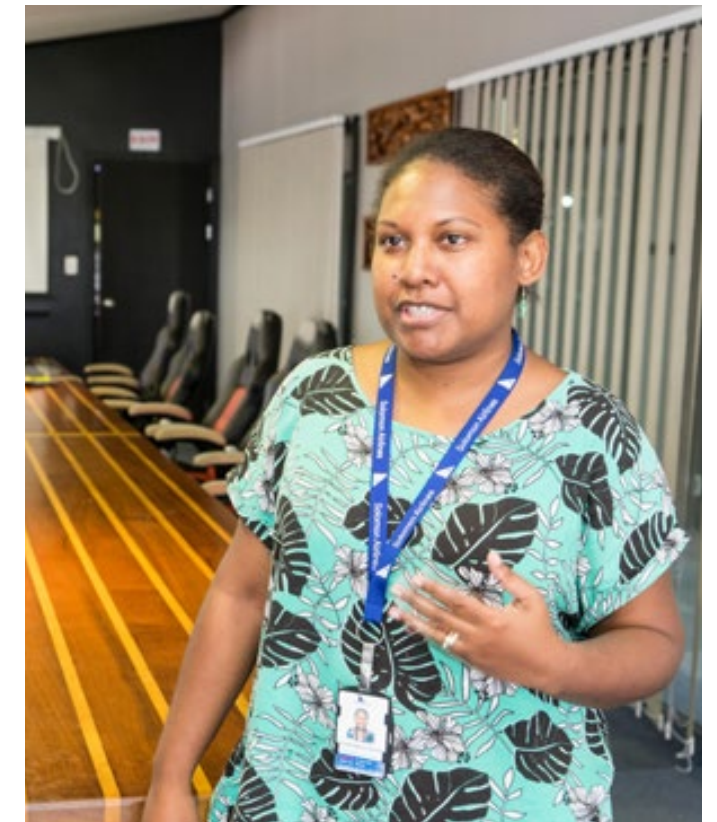
*Andrea Ruth Ngenere,
National Fisheries Development*

Additional activities

While delivering support to the Waka Mere companies across the three commitment areas, an opportunity was identified to improve the knowledge and experience of human resources managers and their teams in relation to the design and use of human resources policies. Building the capacity of HR managers and their teams was identified as an important part of ensuring sustainable change through the Waka Mere Commitment to Action.

In response, HR managers from seven companies completed training on the fundamentals of developing Human Resources Policies, particularly as they relate to gender equality, and on effective implementation of those policies: Bank South Pacific, Hatanga, National Fisheries Development, Solomon Airlines, Solomon Islands National Provident Fund, Solomon Ports and SolTuna.

Seven companies completed training on the fundamentals of developing Human Resources Policies.



Hernandia Zoleveka, Solomon Airlines



Lyn Fa'arodo and team, Bank South Pacific



5 | Next steps

The Waka Mere Commitment to Action is mid-way through implementation.

There is one year to go and companies are increasingly gaining speed.

Here is some of what's to come across the three commitment areas:

- **Twenty women from eight companies will complete a six-month long Certificate IV Course in Leadership and Management.** Upon completion of the course these women will be well positioned to take on greater levels of responsibility within their organizations.

Bi-monthly SIPNET events will continue to be held for women from Waka Mere companies at all levels as well as other SICCI member companies. Each event will address a different topic and be hosted by a different company.

- **Ten companies have committed to completing a staff survey on domestic violence.** Results from this survey will allow companies to monitor progress and assess the business impact of implementing a workplace response. Additional learning workshops will also be delivered for contact team members and HR teams from companies who have implemented the domestic violence policy. This will include a forum with local service providers such as the police, medical services and legal services, to help companies build relationships with domestic violence services available in Honiara. Four companies have committed to train additional staff to be the first point of contact for employees affected by domestic violence.

- One additional company has committed to training all staff in Respectful Workplaces and adopting and operationalizing a Domestic Violence Policy, including training 10 staff to be the first point of contact for employees affected by domestic violence.

- **There will be a second opportunity for participating companies to sponsor female staff to obtain their basic driver license.** For those who already obtained their basic license, a second phase of driver training will be made available for those wishing to obtain a heavy vehicle license.

At the completion of the two-year commitment period, all Waka Mere companies will be invited to repeat the human resources and employee surveys. Results will be analyzed against the baseline surveys to assess progress over the two years.

“ In our experience in IFC, as the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets, we have consistently seen how gender equality in the workplace drives productivity, profitability, and performance. It is exciting to see Waka Mere companies break new ground by establishing more gender equal and respectful workplaces in Solomon Islands. We hope this will set the example for others to follow. Such initiatives benefit not only the employees and the companies, but also, ultimately, the economy as a whole.”

*Amy Luinstra,
Lead of IFC's gender program
in East Asia and the Pacific*



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