

Background Information on the Solomon Islands

(November 2013, with data from 2011 Census)

The Solomon Islands lie north east of Australia and south of the island of Bougainville, PNG.



It consists of an archipelago of six large islands and many small ones stretching over 1500 km.

It is in an active earthquake and volcanic zone.



The climate is moist tropical with a 'wet season' from November to April. It is subject to cyclones (hurricanes, typhoons).

The soils on the main islands are fertile. Most rural people grow their own food. Those close to urban centres sell fresh food and fish in the markets. Some also produce cash crops like copra and cocoa. Some rice is grown.



In 1978, Solomon Islands became an independent country within the British Commonwealth of Nations. It is a parliamentary democracy.

There are six main provinces. Dominican Sisters are currently in ministry in the Provinces of Guadalcanal, Western, Choiseul and Malaita.

Transport is mainly by sea or small planes. Where there are roads, trucks and small buses carry people and goods to market.



Economy

The country exports fish, timber (as round logs), copra, palm oil, cocoa and gold. It imports fuel, machinery, manufactured goods and food.

The exchange rate is around \$7 SID to \$1 USD.

The country generates around 75% of its income and Aid Donors contribute the rest.

([Central Bank of Solomon Islands, Annual Report, 2012](#))



The Solomon Islands has an external debt. This began in the early 1980s when it accepted a World Bank Loan for Education development. Civil unrest over a number of years caused loss of income and increased debt repayments. The country is now stable. The multinational RAMSI force (Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands) is gradually phasing down.

There is a growing tourism industry, especially for diving on the reefs and ecotourism.



Visale sunset

The following information based the Solomon Islands Government Statistics, 2011. The figures have been rounded off for this summary. Accurate data is available on the web.

Population

The population is just over 500,000 people, 80% of whom live in rural villages.

Population growth is 2% per annum, with an average family size of 5.

The median population age is 19.

Life expectancy is 60 years.



Kindy, Auki



Children, Nila

Health

In good seasons, the diet is good for coastal people with access to fish, shell fish and vegetable gardens. Inland people are sometimes short of protein, if they do not have nuts. Local nut tree are seasonal and nuts have to be stored carefully after harvesting.

Malaria, gastro-intestinal upsets (diarrhoea or 'belly-runs'), skin infections and TB are endemic.

There is a growing problem in towns of obesity, high blood pressure, Type II diabetes and STIs.

Government hospitals and clinics are free but under-resourced. Patient's families are expected to provide them with food. Custom medicines are used locally. Some are very effective; others are not. Patients tend to go to the clinic or hospital only after local remedies have not worked.

In the last census, 907 people were recorded as blind; 1398 as deaf, 2975 as 'lame' and 3293 as senile.

Employment

Employment figures are skewed because of the subsistence food production of the villagers.

Those in paid employment number about 80,000.

Those working as subsistence farmers are self-employed – 35,000 men and 52,000 women.

Around 18,000 men and 24,000 women are unpaid workers (mostly helping family members) and those categorised as 'unemployed' number about 4,000.

Wages and salaries are low.

Social service

There are no universal aged, sick or social service pensions. There is a National Provident Fund for those in paid employment. It comes as a cash payment on retirement. It is not enough to live on, independently of family.

Education

Around 80% of primary aged children are in school.

In the general population around:
16% have had no schooling,
57% have completed primary,
19% completed secondary,
5% completed tertiary education and
1% vocational training.



Wagina school

Literacy is now between 80-90% in most provinces.
In Malaita, it is recorded as 78% for men and 60% for women.
The official language is English.
The lingua franca is SI Pidjin.
There are over 85 distinct languages in the country.
There is primarily an oral culture with a rich tradition of music, dancing and custom stories.
Family and language links ('wantok') are very strong.

Living arrangements

Housing

There are around 90,000 households in Solomon Islands.
of these, 35,000 live in wooden houses and
50,000 in traditional woven leaf houses.



Combination House, Gizo

Drinking Water

30,000 households have a community standpipe.
23,000 use river or stream water.

Washing water

24,000 use a standpipe.
30,000 use rivers or streams.

Toilets

30,000 households have no toilets.
Villagers near mangroves use these for toilets.

Waste disposal

17,000 households dispose of rubbish into the sea.
54,000 use back yard disposal. (People are being encouraged to bury rubbish, rather than just leave it in a pile. Environmental education and action are both increasing).

Lighting

11,000 households are attached to an electricity grid.
8,000 have solar.
70,000 use kerosene lamps.

Progress

Solomon Islands has made great progress over the past 40 years. Life expectancy has increased. More children are being educated.

Mobile phone coverage started about eight years ago and has spread. It has made a big difference to people in the villages who can now communicate with family members in town more easily by texting. Charging mobiles can be a challenge in some places. There is not wide internet coverage.

The greatest resource in Solomon Islands are its people. They are friendly and willing to learn from and share with people interested and respectful of their culture. The majority are Melanesians from many different tribes and clans, with a smaller number of Micronesians (mostly from Kiribati) and Polynesians (Rennell-Bellona Islands).



Canaan Women



Visale students

Religion is very important. The main Christian denominations are Church of Melanesia (Anglican), Catholic, United Church and Seventh Day Adventists. There are small numbers of Ba'hai, Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses, and some traditional pagans, mostly in Kwaiao, Malaita.



Cathedral, Auki