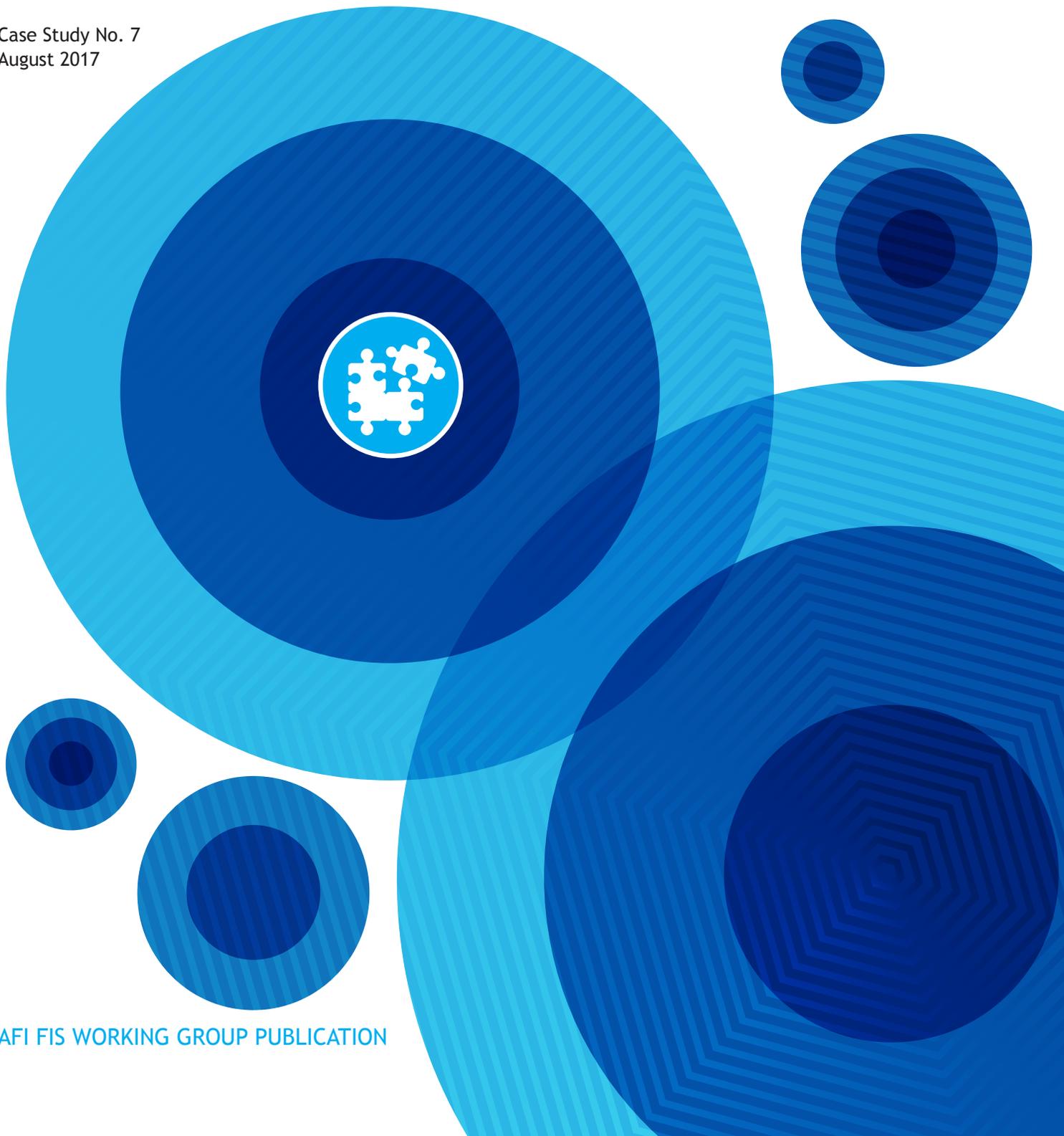




BRINGING
SMART
POLICIES
TO LIFE

WOMEN'S FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS A SIMPLE OPPORTUNITY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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BRIDGING THE GAP
Financial inclusion for gender and women

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality has been recognized as a longstanding issue in Solomon Islands. In 2015, the country's first-ever demand-side survey (DSS) confirmed there was a disparity in women's and men's access to formal financial services. The DSS revealed that only 20.1% of females have access to formal bank accounts compared to 31.8% of their male counterparts.

This is well below the global average for low- to middle-income countries, with 35.5% of females having access to bank accounts compared to 48.1% of males.¹ The Solomon Islands Government recognizes this disparity and the need to economically and financially empower women, and it has responded with a national policy on women's empowerment.

SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT POLICY ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The Solomon Islands Government (SIG) formulated a 'Gender Equality and Women's Development' (GEWD) policy to enhance the economic status of women, led by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs (MWYCFA). The GEWD is an overarching policy framework for achieving gender equality in Solomon Islands. It covers five broad priority policy outcomes:

- 1 Improved and equitable health and education for women, men, girls and boys;
- 2 Improved economic status of women;
- 3 Equal participation of women and men in decision making and leadership;
- 4 Elimination of violence against women; and
- 5 Increased capacity for gender mainstreaming.

The Solomon Islands Second National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS2) 2016-2020, which is implemented by the Central Bank of Solomon Islands, falls under policy outcome 2: improved economic status of women, which is tied to financial inclusion.

Of the 300,000 new users of financial services that the NFIS2 is anticipated to reach by 2020, half (150,000) must be women. The Central Bank, in partnership with the government and other stakeholders, is aggressively working to achieve this target.

¹ World Bank, 2014, Global Financial Inclusion Indicators. Regional Dashboard (Income Group Comparison), cited in the 2015 Financial Services Demand-Side Survey in Solomon Islands, p.3.

GEWD POLICY OUTCOME 2: IMPROVED ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN²

SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT POLICY ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

To meet Policy Outcome 2 of the GEWD, the Government of Solomon Islands launched a national strategy for the empowerment of women and girls in 2013, followed by an implementation period. The strategy specifies six key strategic areas:³

- a. Gender mainstreaming in the resource sector with a focus on agricultural and fisheries activities, especially for rural women;
- b. Financial inclusion through financial literacy, savings schemes and access to affordable financial services, especially targeting the informal sector;
- c. Support for Women's Business Associations (SIWIBA, Women's Chamber of Commerce) to provide enterprise development and business training for women in private and public sectors;
- d. Enabling legislation for microbanking activities; equal employment opportunities in the formal labor market; and secure land and property ownership rights for women;
- e. Applied research and knowledge sharing; and
- f. Institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs.

The strategy also specifies some action plans and performance outputs:

Action Plans:

- (i) Develop policies and programs that involve women and men in natural resource development and management, and that respond to women's and men's different needs;
- (ii) Improve access to, and ownership of, resources and land and development opportunities by women in the productive sectors of fisheries, agriculture, forestry and minerals;
- (iii) Improve access to, and legal protection and ownership of, financial resources and enterprise development opportunities for women; and
- (iv) Improve employment and business opportunities for women in public, private and community sectors.

Performance Outputs:

- (i) Equitable access, legal protection and ownership by women and men of land, property rights and royalty shares in the productive sectors;
- (ii) Full and meaningful participation of women in training and development opportunities in productive sectors, especially agriculture and fisheries;
- (iii) Access to, and legal protection and ownership of, financial resources and small and medium enterprises for women is approximately equal with men's access; and
- (iv) Development of infrastructure that reduces burdens for women.

Of the six key strategic areas, (b) 'Financial Inclusion through financial literacy, savings schemes and access to affordable financial services', is further elaborated as follows:

*Women need financial literacy and skills training to save, start and expand businesses, have access to financial services and be competent in financial management and investment. It is understood that micro finance schemes and banking services for women are limited in the Solomon Islands, especially for rural women, hence the focus on financial inclusion and financial competence by the CBSI and the National Financial Inclusion Taskforce to improve women's literacy and access to affordable financial services. This strategy builds on that and proposes a national drive on savings and establishing savings clubs and changing attitudes and behaviour are key objectives. Various NGOs have been involved in existing savings clubs but there needs to be stock take of the existing schemes. Concern has been expressed by some NGOs about sustainability of the savings clubs when their project funding run out which the involvement by the MWYCFCA can address. Emphasis is also on working with banks to remove the barrier faced by women for the required collateral or something to borrow against and to develop a range of financial products particularly suited for rural women.*⁴

To support strategic area (c), the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association (SIWIBA) received funding from the government and donors (see page 5) to encourage and empower women to start businesses. SIWIBA membership has increased over the years. SIWIBA recognizes the work of women by hosting an annual Solomon Islands Women in Business Award, with sponsorship from the Solomon Islands Government through the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs, the Government of Australia's aid program (AusAID) and private companies.

As part of the implementation of the second National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS2), the Central Bank of Solomon Islands, through the National Financial Inclusion Taskforce (NFIT), established a new award in 2015 to recognize the contribution of women in small business: the National Women Micro Entrepreneur Award. Five small business owners received the award. These women were involved in the Microfinance Savings Club, which was introduced by the Central Bank to help people in rural communities open savings accounts.

² Adapted from the Solomon Islands Government, 2014, "A National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women and Girls", p. 13.

³ Solomon Islands Government, 2014, "A National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women and Girls", p. 7.

⁴ Solomon Islands Government, 2014, "A National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women and Girls", p. 16.

SOLOMON ISLANDS WOMEN IN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION (SIWIBA)

VISION

To inspire women to realise their full potential, importance and status, and be increasingly recognized and heard in Solomon Islands society.

MISSION

To promote, develop and empower women's participation as business owners in the private sector.

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS WOMEN IN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION (SIWIBA)

The Solomon Islands Women in Business Association (SIWIBA) is registered under the Charitable Act as a non-profit making organisation. It was established to promote and build business opportunities for Solomon Islands women to participate at all levels.

The Association is governed by a Board which oversees the running of its Secretariat.

In 2012, SIWIBA established its Secretariat in Honiara and, for the first time, SIWIBA members had an office where women could come together to plan their programs and events. The SIWIBA Board and Secretariat work together as a team.

SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES SIWIBA ENGAGES IN TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP INCLUDE MERE'S MARKET AND MINI TRADE FAIR

The Solomon Islands Women in Business Association (SIWIBA) held a successful combined SIWIBA Mere's Market and Mini Trade Fair, supported by the Australian High Commission through funding to Mere's Market and SIWIBA.

The one-week event took place at the National Art Gallery from 3-7 July 2017 and was open to members, non-members and women's church groups. SIWIBA also invited companies to set up stalls and display their products as part of its ongoing effort to forge partnerships with business sectors in Honiara. The Mini Trade Fair was hosted at this time to mark the 39th Independence Day of Solomon Islands.

Although no funds were available, SIWIBA managed to put together a successful 2017 Mini Trade Fair event with the help of SIWIBA members, board members, the Mini Trade Fair Committee and SIWIBA staff. SIWIBA acknowledged deep appreciation to the companies that agreed to participate: Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands, Bulk Shop, Premiere Groups of Company, Pan Oceanic Bank (POB) and Szeba.

SIWIBA President, Mrs. Pamela Zoleveke, also acknowledged all the women and companies who took the time and effort to be part of the event.

"I salute the Chairlady, Mrs Ethel Saelea and her Committee as well as SIWIBA staff for their tireless support in one way or the other during the event. Everyone was satisfied and really happy with their earnings, which is a positive outcome to everyone's commitment towards the program."

Mrs. Pamela Zoleveke
SIWIBA President

Story of a SIWIBA member

Theresa Haeo is a very active and happy member of SIWIBA. Her popularity among SIWIBA members rose the moment she arrived and began participating in SIWIBA, with everyone knowing her well. Theresa is a very charming lady and full of fun. After leaving her job at World Vision, Theresa decided to join SIWIBA in 2014. Through SIWIBA, she has sought out every learning and marketing opportunity she can find.

Her business, Tesa El, specializes in tailoring and dyeing lava-lavas, which she had experience with before joining SIWIBA. Theresa sews blouses, cloth holders, scarves, pillow cases and more from her dyed lava-lavas.

As time went on, she began to sell petrol and buy copra at her village home east Guadalcanal as part of her business.

Her business has helped to support her family and send her children to school.

"With SIWIBA I learnt that money is important comparing when I was employed. I learn to use my money wisely and recognize the importance of business for women."



Source: Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
(www.gallery.dfat.gov.au)

SIWIBA'S COURTESY VISIT TO PRIME MINISTER

Below is an excerpt from SIWIBA's website: [SIWIBA's Courtesy Visit to Prime Minister](#)⁵

The Solomon Islands Women in Business Association (SIWIBA) made a courtesy call to Honourable Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare where they formally introduced the Association as well as presenting some of the immediate goals in the near future.

SIWIBA President, Dalcy Tekulu in formally introducing the Association highlighted their Strategic Program Objectives and some of SIWIBA's achievement since its establishment in 2004. This includes three years funding from DFAT following satisfied outcome to its first funding support from AusAID-funded Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) at the last quarter of 2011. The current funding support that will lapse 2017 covers key areas including programs, activities and Secretariat of the Association.

She said the recent launch of SIWIBA's Business Development Centre (BDC) on 14 April 2015 located at Room 48, NPF Plaza and a well-equipped Secretariat located at Room 38, NPF Plaza administered by five young and vibrant women was made possible through DFAT funding, which ensures all the programs and activities lined up for the next 3 years are achieved.

Mrs. Tekulu also explained reason behind SIWIBA's popular bi-monthly Mere's Market. *"The Mere's Market is an event that takes place at the Art Gallery grounds every two months. Members always look forward to as it is an avenue not only to earn money but also a time where members can interact and promote their small businesses to the public."*

Mrs. Tekulu added that SIWIBA's recently launched website (www.siwiba.com.sb) that is proudly sponsored by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Office in Honiara, is a platform for SIWIBA members to promote their products and have an online presence. This will help link the Association to interested and possible business partners beyond the shores of Solomon Islands.

She said that SIWIBA is aware of the difficulties that women are facing to have access to credits in the financial institutions. To ease this, SIWIBA has established a SIWIBA Savings Club where members can save up and have the ease to access credits for business or family needs.

Mrs. Tekulu said a key highlight for this year was the opportunity for SIWIBA to be able to be part of the PNG Digicel Women in Business Expo in July, adding that this gave members the opportunity to showcase and sell products through the delegation that represented the Association.

She acknowledged that while all the highlights are positive signs of growth for SIWIBA, there is the issue of sustainability for SIWIBA after the funding term lapse in 2017.



Honourable Prime Minister of Solomon Islands and SIWIBA Executive

Mrs. Tekulu said among the many immediate priorities as part of SIWIBA's strategic plan, having a home is a key priority. *"One of our big dream is to be able to have a home for SIWIBA and its members. This is through a land that can be directly registered to SIWIBA or an existing building that will house everything for our members under one roof,"* the SIWIBA President said.

She said to own an existing building is more favourable as it will help accommodate the Secretariat, BDC, office spaces that can be rented by other businesses directly to SIWIBA and an open space where members will be able to display their products through the week instead of waiting for opportunities every two months through the Mere's Market. *"This home for SIWIBA will be a spot where tourists can get all the souvenirs they need as everything will be available through our members. This will be like a one-stop shop for visitors and the general public."*

In response, Hon. Prime Minister Sogavare acknowledged SIWIBA for the visit and expressed gratitude in being able to understand the mandate of the Association.

He assured the SIWIBA delegation who were present at the meeting that his office is committed to help the Association in securing a home for women in business in Solomon Islands through SIWIBA.

Hon. Sogavare also encouraged SIWIBA to continue working together with the government and other stakeholders to help achieve plans and dreams of the Association. Accompanying members of the SIWIBA delegation that met with the Prime Minister last week Friday are Vice President Julie Haro, Board Secretary Pamela Zoleveke, Board member Ethel Saelea and Coordinator Nina Tuhaika.

Source: SIWIBA, 2015

⁵ <http://www.siwiba.com.sb/media-releases/129-siwiba-s-courtesy-visit-to-prime-minister.html>

WEST ARE'ARE ROKOTANIKENI ASSOCIATION

Solomon Islands are made up of six major islands and over 900 smaller ones. Travel between these islands is rough, time-consuming and expensive. And, with banks several hours of travel away, women in Solomon Islands have no safe place to store their hard-earned savings.

With no savings, women are left dependent on their partner, and have little control over where their money is spent. It was this situation that inspired a group of women to found West 'Are'Are Rokotani Keni Association (WARA). (The woman behind this is Dr. Alice Pollard).

WARA is a women-led, volunteer-run savings club that gives women a place to come together, learn more about managing finances and store their savings safely. There are branches of these savings clubs all over the country, which means women living in remote areas are not excluded.

More and more women have been volunteering at WARA each year, and in 2015 it had 1,065 members. In the 10 years of the savings club, members have taken out over 1,000 loans and saved more than a million Solomon Islands dollars (SBD). Rural women have saved an average of SBD 480 each in the last 15 to 18 months, an amount that has kept them above subsistence level. Women are now more likely to plan their spending and feel they have greater control over their finances. The savings clubs do more than simply collect money, however. Women members have found the clubs give them the confidence and skills to play a more active role in household and community decision-making.

The solidarity and support network these women have built is a true achievement of the savings clubs. Each club can use their pool of funds to loan each other money when they need it, and some members are even going on to start their own small businesses.

Community is at the heart of these clubs - every woman has a key, and several keys are needed to withdraw funds. Money is collected regularly and taken to banks, giving women access to the formal economy they were previously excluded from.

WARA has brought together thousands of women from all over Solomon Islands and empowered them to gain more control over their own money. It is more than a service; it leads to long-term, self-sustaining livelihoods, and is transforming the lives of thousands of women across Solomon Islands.



Dr. Alice Pollard

JORIO JAVA DOVELE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION SAVING CLUB

The Jorio Java Dovele Women's Association has turned its savings club into one of the fastest growing clubs in the country. Formed back in 2012, the club now has around 700 members with savings totalling almost SBD 200,000 as of the end of 2013.

The manager for NFIU, Ms. Caroline Kanoko, recently met two of the club's senior members, Mrs. Virginia Pilua and Mrs. Hilda Domuo, both from north Vella la Vella in Western Province. She received encouraging news about the new club. According to the two women, the club's fast growth and success was due mainly to the many opportunities that were made available for women in the group. "Virginia and Hilda expressed their excitement to have an avenue where their women were able to save for their children's school fees, medical needs and other family needs", Ms. Kanoko said. The club was established under the guidance of Dr. Alice Pollard, who has also promoted saving clubs with West Are'are Rokotanikeni Women (WARA).

For administrative convenience, the club was divided into five zones, with money collected on a monthly basis and deposited regularly into the club. The association acknowledged their Member of Parliament for North Vella la Vella for supporting the women's initiative. The MP assisted by providing transportation resources (OBM and canoe) and office space with computers in Gizo. This encouraged and empowered the Association to continue and to promote saving among their members.

GIZO ENVIRONMENT, LIVELIHOOD AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Another savings group was formed in Gizo, Western Province by the Gizo Environment, Livelihood and Conservation Association (GELCA) in January this year. The focus of the group is conservation and reliance on small activities to generate income and savings. Dr. Alice Pollard guided the group to establish savings through a workshop she conducted in and around Gizo. Dr. Alice commended the fast growth of GELCA, which saw 400 women join within two months and almost SID 20,000 in savings with the bank.

According to Dr. Alice, her training covered simple, very basic concepts and applications, such as budgeting, recording, savings and planning, and focused on encouraging women to get into the habit of saving. Regular withdrawal is discouraged unless there is an urgent need or the withdrawal is for a goal that was set at the beginning.



Caroline Kanoko (M/NFIU) speaking to Mrs. Virginia Pilua and Mrs. Hilda Domuo of the Jorio Java Dovele Women's Association Saving Club from north Vella la Vella, Western Province

CONCLUSION

The Solomon Islands Government is serious about improving the economic status of women. The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs, which is mandated to lead the formulation and implementation of policies relating to women, is working closely with other relevant stakeholders to empower women. Additionally, the Central Bank of Solomon Islands, through the Financial Inclusion Unit, is also partnering with the Ministry and other stakeholders to expand financial inclusion for women. This partnership has seen women's groups set up savings clubs in rural areas of the country. The Central Bank continues to encourage and support more women through the provision of basic financial management training and financial literacy programs.

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