

# 4

## **‘Things Still Fall Apart’: A Political Economy Analysis of State–Youth Engagement in Honiara, Solomon Islands**

Daniel Evans

### Introduction

With the assistance of outsiders (donors, non-government organisations (NGOs) and their external consultants), a steady stream of state-endorsed, youth-related policies and activities have populated the urban landscape in Solomon Islands. These efforts have coincided with, and have been shaped by, the growth of the capital, Honiara, and an attendant increase in what are now universal storylines surrounding male urban youth in the country: idleness, criminality, alcohol and drug consumption, violence and, more recently, security. It is through the prism of these various pronouncements and interventions that we can glean one version of how the Solomon Islands’ state, and its outsider partners, have considered the status of urban male youth and how they have responded to them as a collective. In assessing this approach, this chapter adopts a political economy framing to understand state–youth engagement.

The proceeding discussion commences with a historical overview detailing how the state and outsiders have engaged with young urbanites in Solomon Islands. This analysis of official statements and media reporting shows that a ‘youth as a problem’ narrative (Wyn & White 1997,

pp. 21–25) is far from new, being portended in parliamentary debates in the early 1960s and evolving into a now commonly invoked youth-related trope. It documents a history of activities in this space that were spearheaded by non-state actors, particularly ‘outsiders’, as defined. A feature of pre-independence debates (pre-1978) was a perennial concern with urban youth returning ‘home’ (i.e. the village). Also documented is the evolution of state-endorsed youth policies from the inaugural version in 1980.

Turning directly to issues of political economy, an outline of archetypal state and outsider engagement relating to youth in Solomon Islands is critiqued. This discussion initially highlights the thinness of the state and the limited resources that public officers working in this space have at their disposal. It is argued that this position contributes to low-risk, non-transformative interventions and to a form of co-production: an over-reliance on outsiders—largely international donors and NGOs who apply globally orthodox methods of youth engagement. Standard iterations of their approach are presented. The second half of the chapter is concerned with documenting how outsiders, in the form of a number of international NGOs, and the state, in the form of members of parliament (MPs), are encountered by male youth residents in two urban field sites of Honiara: Burns Creek and White River. Following John Cox (2009), these entry points provide helpful contrasts between efforts for youth development that endeavour to incorporate ‘active citizenship’ (NGOs) and those that are based largely on ‘passive clientelism’ (MPs).

While it is acknowledged that ‘youth’ has a fluid, relational meaning in Solomon Islands, this chapter generally follows the official definition. Most of the young men quoted were aged between 18 and 34 years at the time that they were interviewed,<sup>1</sup> although a broader demographic of males was spoken to, some of who were mature, married men.

---

1 Youth in Solomon Islands are defined as ‘persons between 15 and 34 years of age, inclusive’ (MWYCFA 2017, p. 14). Prior to 2017, youth were those aged 14 to 29, inclusive (MWYCFA 2010, p. 4).

## A Note on Framing and Methodology

This chapter draws on traditional elements of political economy analysis (see DFID 2009; Fritz et al. 2014; Menocal et al. 2018), albeit confined to the issue of youth and telescoping between the national and the local. It seeks to broadly document and understand the relationships between actors in the youth development sphere who possess political and economic power. This involves moving beyond bald assessments of institutional responses and engaging with those political, economic, social and cultural drivers that influence youth development in Solomon Islands. The discussion presented is particularly concerned with how underlying incentives and constraints have shaped policies and activities (with a focus on youth-related 'projects'); who are the 'winners' and 'losers'; and, through the use of examples involving NGOs and MPs, what the implications are for the interventions detailed: why did things end up the way that they did (Menocal et al. 2018, p. 1)? This chapter touches on the political economy of the outsider development industry itself, including the way it represents its activities, the language it employs and the infusion of its approaches into the 'everyday' of Solomon Islands.

This chapter draws on interviews and observations that encompass a period of fieldwork from May to December 2016 and intermittently throughout 2017 and 2018.<sup>2</sup> This was conducted in Burns Creek, a peri-urban community located around 8 km to Honiara's east (population approximately 5,000) and White River, a more established urban community located around 4 km to the west of the city centre (population approximately 6,000–7,000<sup>3</sup>). Both are popularly, although perhaps erroneously in the case of White River, referred to as 'settlements'.

Differences characterise the two field sites. Most Burns Creek residents are of a Baegu or Lau-Baelelea background, language areas of north Malaita. Malaita is the most populous province of Solomon Islands. A degree of subterranean enmity characterises the relationship between these

---

2 Conducted as part of the author's PhD research focusing on male youth interactions with, and views of, the Solomon Islands state and its institutions. This entailed around 130 interviews with young male residents in the two field sites, as well as with government officials and others. Pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter. All interviews were conducted in Pijin and were then translated into English.

3 At the last census (2009), Honiara's Ngossi ward, where White River is located, had a population of 10,062 (SIG 2013, p. 5).

two language groupings,<sup>4</sup> which has a bearing on youth interactions, as discussed below. Many Burns Creek residents are squatters, in the sense that they do not hold legal titles to the land on which they reside. White River is a mixed community, with the main ethnic groupings being Malaitan, Renbel, Temotuan and Gilbertese. Most of the land is registered and, unlike Burns Creek, residents generally have access to state-provided services, including water, electricity and sanitation.

## Historical Overview of Interventions in the Urban Youth Field

In the public sphere, the emergence of urban youth as a topic of national discussion in Solomon Islands occurred in the 1960s—a time when Honiara was still in its infancy.<sup>5</sup> The dominant theme of the first parliamentary debate on this subject can be summarised by the chosen tagline: ‘the youth problem in the B.S.I.P [British Solomon Islands Protectorate]’ (BSIP 1964). This provides an insight for how the topic of young Solomon Islanders was being shaped in public discourse. Its mover, Dr John Kere, argued that ‘this problem’ (the youth problem) had not yet arisen in the Protectorate, but that the tenor of the discussion was one of impending trouble. In a prophetic portrait of youth migration to the fledgling capital, he argued:

There is a drift of the youth away from the village life into towns like Honiara and Gizo because it is attracting the youth with its entertainment and life in the town. The village life is dull for the youth and he tries to get away from the council work, and the work of the Churches. The youth is trying to get away from all this work to a much easier life. (BSIP 1964, p. 146)

The next parliamentary foray into the subject of youth occurred almost a decade later (BSIP 1973a, p. 328). In the intervening period, although Honiara had transformed—from a sleepy town of around 6,700 people in late 1965 to what was becoming, by Melanesian standards, a fully-fledged metropolis of some 11,200 people in 1970 (BSIP 1972, p. 11)—the discourse relating to youth had not. Young people had, however,

---

4 See Harold Ross (1978, pp. 122–123), who details historical mistrust and antagonisms between Baegu and Lau groupings.

5 Honiara became the capital of Solomon Islands in the mid-1940s, utilising remnant Second World War infrastructure that was left by the departing American forces (see Moore [forthcoming]).

graduated from being a budding problem. The country needed 'to take careful note of the crosscurrents which threatened to cause it to founder on the rocks of unrest' (BSIP 1973b, p. 4). The 1973 adjournment debate was replete with now common motifs: there was 'worry at the number of juvenile delinquents in towns' (BSIP 1973a, p. 4), youth had lost respect for their 'elders' (1973a, p. 4) and they were 'restless' (1973a, p. 332). Ultimately, there was 'no answer yet to the problem' of youth (BSIP 1973b, p. 4), although one issue had been firmly resolved: the Rubicon of 'youth as a problem' had been crossed with a hand-wringing narrative now entrenched in the public consciousness.

A moral dichotomy is evident in the media representations of young people in the 1960s. The most commonly reported topic was church youth group happenings: the timing of get-togethers and the activities of various denominations. These reports were interspersed and, to some extent, contradicted by articles on youth-related criminality and social disturbances, particularly public drinking. A recurring youth-related concern registered in parliamentary debates in the lead-up to independence was the utility of a 'white-collar' education as opposed to vocational and technical training, particularly in agriculture (the latter championed by first chief minister and former prime minister, Solomon Mamaloni; see Chevalier [forthcoming]).

While pre-independence governments had provided financial support to youth associations through their social welfare division, little evidence of structured engagement can be found until the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, with the establishment of the Honiara-based community centre in 1969<sup>6</sup> and the emergence of the first significant youth-related initiative in the capital in 1975: the Masta Liu Project.<sup>7</sup> Both received a portion of government funding—although they were notably initiated and managed by outsiders.

The Masta Liu Project was aimed at 'young people who come to Honiara and cannot find work' (The Solomons News Drum 1976, p. 3). Following a standard model of youth engagement (see Evans 2016), a concurrent

---

6 The Honiara Community Centre, operated by the Solomon Islands Christian Association, was largely directed towards 'young, single men' (BSIP 1969). Its early incarnation included a youth club, short courses and sporting activities.

7 Masta liu incorporates the English word 'master' combined with 'liu', derived from north Malaita (To'abaita language area) meaning to walk around aimlessly. It is typically used to describe unemployed youth who roam Honiara's streets (see Frazer 1985; Jourdan 1995; Palmer 1979).

focus on soft skills (personal development such as punctuality and reliability) and technical skills (carpentry, agriculture and electrical work) was featured.<sup>8</sup> This was done with the hope that young men would return to their village homes, where they could use their newly acquired abilities to help ‘their own’ (The Solomons News Drum 1977, p. 5). The project appealed to what was then a nascent but now common theme: that of unemployed urban males. The project coordinator encapsulated this position: ‘[I]t is really keeping the boys off the streets preventing social problems caused by unemployed gangs’ (1977, p. 5).

Government efforts to develop a youth policy emerged shortly after independence. The first policy was released following a White Paper on the topic in 1980. It was accompanied by the most extensive parliamentary debate on the status of youth to that date. As with subsequent iterations, the policy was largely concerned with matters related to education, livelihood and youth participation in ‘cultural, political and spiritual development’ (National Parliament 1980, para. 2.1). An annual government grant to a newly instituted National Youth Congress was provided, as was the establishment of a National Youth Training Centre at Aruligo, west of Honiara.<sup>9</sup>

Following the inaugural youth policy, further iterations were produced in 2000, 2010 and 2017.<sup>10</sup> ‘Guiding principles’ for youth development were released in 1988. In addition, urban youth policies directed towards Honiara-based youth were drafted by the Honiara City Council in 2006 and 2011.

Since the end of a period of civil conflict that stretched from 1998 to 2003, a parade of youth-related interventions of varying degrees of reach, duration and effectiveness has also been performed by outsiders

---

8 The project largely involved the provision of a small wage and equipment to carry out agricultural work (Palmer 1979), although it included animal husbandry, carpentry, electrical work and odd jobs for private individuals and companies (The Solomons News Drum 1977, p. 5; interview with Charles Fox, National Youth Congress).

9 This fell into disrepair during the civil conflict of 1998 to 2003. An effort to build a youth centre in Honiara in the 1990s (‘the Rainbow Project’ funded by the British High Commission) failed to eventuate (interview with Charles Fox, National Youth Congress). In 1994 the ‘Commonwealth Youth Program South Pacific Centre’, funded by the Solomon Islands government, was established in Honiara (Scales 2003, p. 46), but it was discontinued in March 2014.

10 The 2010 policy was accompanied by a series of provincial youth policies. In late 2017, a triumvirate of documents were produced: a ‘National Youth Policy 2017–2030’; a ‘Strategic Framework for Youth Development and Empowerment’; and a ‘National Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Strategy’. The first two documents were released in August 2018.

in Honiara with state consent, a number of which are touched on below. Similar to the pre-independence position, the provision of small grants to youth groups has remained the state's preferred modality for its modest recurrent funding of youth activities (see footnote 12).

## State Thinness and the Role of Outsiders

Official youth programming in Solomon Islands has since independence seen a focus on outputs over outcomes and 'process turned into product' (Yanguas 2018, p. 11). Workshops, meetings and policy development—including a never-ending need to 'consult'—have become ends unto themselves. Despite the steady stream of policies documented above, official youth-related objectives have more often than not been left unrealised. The 1998–2003 conflict stymied efforts in all areas of government service provision at the start of the new millennium, but it was the issues that were frankly outlined in the 2010 Youth Policy that better explained this inertia. Youth were identified as a 'low priority for governments from 2000–2008', with there being 'no real sense of ownership' of initiatives (MWYCFA 2010, p. 3). Similar concerns were repeated in the 2017 policy (MWYCFA 2017, p. 12), with implementation 'found wanting'.

Within the Solomon Islands' bureaucratic state, relatively innocuous foundations help account for the current position of state–youth engagement: a thinness of the state (an inability to project its authority and provide services across the country) together with a failure to dedicate the resources needed to fulfil its plans and policies.<sup>11</sup> My discussions with, and observations of, public servants working in the sphere of child and youth development and, to a lesser extent, the related areas of health and education underscored the miniscule resources that they had at hand, as well as the over-reach of plans. Allocations invariably decreased as the distance from Honiara increased. I was repeatedly told that beyond meeting recurrent costs, particularly payroll, there was little left over for policy implementation. This is not uncommon in the developing world. In an analysis that rings true of the Solomon Islands experience, Thomas

---

11 This argument is premised on an assumption that policy statements in Solomon Islands represent an agreed and intended course of action—a proposition not without contention.

(2015, p. 76–88) documents how globally poor governments ‘govern less’, with ‘the size of the gap and its implications [being] underappreciated’ (2015, p. 77).

Historical budget allocations for youth-related activities in Solomon Islands show that they are negligible on a per capita basis, particularly in relation to rich liberal democracies—a position that has seemingly always been the case.<sup>12</sup> This helps explain the lack of ownership that is documented in the 2010 youth policy and it contributes to the otherwise publicly minded state officials giving up any hope of making a difference—they simply do what they can or do nothing at all. As Luis Eslava and Lina Buchely (2019) highlight in the security and development context, I would contend that the prospect of interventions succeeding in the youth field in Solomon Islands are ‘very small’. In discussing urban Colombia, they argue that a key reason for this is macroeconomic in nature. While not to suggest that money is the sole solution, the same, somewhat banal but infrequently acknowledged, explanation can be proffered for Solomon Islands. In the absence of improvements to a raft of economic indicators and thus the budget bottom line, the prospect of consequential, encompassing change in the state–youth relationship seems remote.

This situation has numerous consequences. The constraints described contribute to an over-reliance on outsiders in a form of co-production. Co-production, as used here, refers to a variety of actors who provide input for the provision of public goods and/or services, though it is not citizen co-production that marks the Solomon Islands’ experience (Ostram 1996; see also Mitlin & Bartlett 2018). Rather, a variety of outsiders have played the most significant role in the delivery of youth-related services, undertaking traditional state responsibilities. Contemporary and historical youth-related efforts in the country have been heavily influenced by international and domestic NGOs, regional organisations and bilateral and multilateral donors, including the multilateral banks and the ‘UN system’. It is not possible to assess the political economy dynamics

---

12 In 1973, parliamentarians lamented the miniscule budget allocation for youth—SBD\$2,000 (approximately US\$250 on October 2018 rates)—being made available by means of grants to youth groups (BSIP 1973b, p. 4). The struggle to raise funds for the Honiara Community Centre (see footnote 6) was a recurring feature of media reporting from 1968 to 1972. In 2018, the recurrent budget allocation for ‘youth development’ was estimated at around SBD\$2.5 million (approximately US\$312,500). The most sizeable portion, SBD\$690,000 (approximately US\$86,250), was allocated to the ‘national youth grant’ (SIG 2018, p. 444).

of state–youth engagement in Solomon Islands without broaching the role that this group has played. Their resources invariably outweigh those that the state has at its disposal.

The dominance of outsider engagement has one tangible outcome that is relevant to the following discussion. Owing in part to the diverse and unique position that youth are observed to occupy—ranging somewhere on a spectrum from delinquents in the making to future leaders—outsider-supported interventions are overlaid by standard global development agendas that are considered ripe for youth consumption. Fashioned in New York, Washington DC or Brussels, and often couched in the language of ‘rights’, these norms are premised on transitory—and often cyclical—development paradigms. The suite of contemporary efforts includes good governance and anti-corruption; gender and economic empowerment (or ‘livelihoods’); climate change, resilience and disaster–risk management; and peace building and security. During my period in Honiara, I witnessed all these agendas play out in one form or another. Rather than being “on the edge” of global discourses about rights’, as Sue Farran (2016, p. 401) has stated in relation to the Pacific Islands, I would argue that Solomon Islands, and its neighbours, are the ground zero of these efforts.

The situation in Solomon Islands also means that low-cost, narrow and discrete interventions are more often than not favoured. In a mimicry of the jargon of the new economy, today’s engagements in the youth field often strive to apply ‘innovation’ (the prefix ‘social’ sometimes added), to be ‘flexible’, to encourage ‘entrepreneurship’ or to foster ‘experimentation’ (during my fieldwork, one outsider held a youth peace-building innovation summit in Honiara and another was involved in ‘pre-accelerator innovation training’ for youth). These initiatives—often premised on goals of ‘building capacity’, ‘empowering’, ‘mentoring’ and ‘enhancing leadership’—seek to foster individual or group behavioural change and/or more fully integrate youth, or pockets of youth (often ‘the vulnerable’), into society. Irrespective of the slew of standard descriptors that are applied, they are frequently based on weak or non-existent evidence,<sup>13</sup> they pay little heed to contextual variation and the results are invariably limited. Positive individual cases can be pointed to, but foundational, encompassing change is absent.

---

13 On the lack of nuance in contemporary youth entrepreneurship discussions in the African context, see Irwin et al. (2018, p. 11). Similarly, for a critique of ‘youth entrepreneurship’ in Africa, see Dolan and Rajak (2016).

## Outsiders in Action: Standard Models of Youth Engagement

Operating under the constraints of funding cycles, foreign procurement guidelines and financial instructions, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks (i.e. the ‘project modality’), outsider-supported youth interventions play out in a largely predictable form in Solomon Islands. As occurs elsewhere (see Ferguson 1994, p. 259), a menu of standard form engagements are employed, some better categorised as ‘inputs’. Three will now be presented.

The first iteration—conducted by the state and outsiders—as well as being the most popular in Solomon Islands (fitting a geographically diverse, disconnected country), can be broadly tagged under the ‘awareness’ and, to a lesser extent, the ‘training’ schema. In addition to being standalone activities, these are often inputs to the other initiatives that are discussed here.

Awareness often involves international and/or domestic workshops, conferences and training sessions (variously framed as ‘summits’, ‘forums’, ‘retreats’, ‘outreach’ or ‘dialogue’). Such efforts can be cynically regarded as an effective means by which to get ‘money out of the door’. Awareness is applied equally in rural and urban communities throughout Solomon Islands—so much so that it has evolved into a verb: ‘awareness’ is something that is done to citizens across the country. An over-emphasis on awareness and training is a source of criticism that is evident in the two field sites. Accompanying this is a risk of perceived moralising on behalf of those advocating a specific agenda: a view that introduced practices are superior to extant norms. This is matched by a broader frustration that outsiders (of all persuasions pursuing varying agendas) will visit a community for a short period of time, impart messages and/or collect information and leave without any subsequent follow-up or any tangible benefit.

During my fieldwork, I experienced the apathy of ‘awareness raising’ by attending a stultifying evening presentation at the Burns Creek playing field by police and the international NGO World Vision on new family violence legislation. With the help of a makeshift projector and a sound system, the intricacies of the law—section by section—were detailed to

around 20 attendees sitting in the dark. Nearby, in the light afforded by a row of parked cars, children played and youth socialised, oblivious to the messaging.

I observed 'awareness' to have a negligible effect in terms of the subject matter presented, especially that of seeking to champion behavioural change. Many of my young interlocutors ignored requests to attend events. These frustrations were articulately summarised by Junior, aged 27, a resident of White River:

Most people who come and do awareness, the way they present it is out of date. There has to be a different way to do awareness. If I were to say 'there is an awareness being held in the playing field right now', it will be empty. Why? Because everyone knows it's just the same old approach ... If it was a business, the way they are doing sales and promotions is boring. If it was presented on paper, I would just skip it and turn to another page.

The concerns expressed here are not new. In the early 1980s, criticisms regarding 'grass root consultations' in rural Solomon Islands were recorded by Joan Herlihy (1981, p. 276–277). Simon Foale (2002) presented a more recent critique by dissecting a long-term conservation project in Western Province, Solomon Islands. He documented tensions regarding what beneficiaries ('partner communities') saw as an over-emphasis on 'awareness and information' campaigns over concrete 'development' (2002, pp. 50–51). My own encounters of 'awareness' shared closer parallels with those that were documented by Anna-Karina Hermkens (2013, para. 45) concerning Solomon Islands: '[m]any of my interlocutors are tired of having to do another workshop, or attend another meeting that will improve their leadership skills, bring awareness about their rights, etcetera'.

The final two forms of youth-related intervention can potentially involve more material outcomes, or, at the least, involve youth as direct beneficiaries. The first are, as Farran (2016, p. 407) argued, 'very much slanted towards acceptable Pacific activities such as sport, culture, scouting and ministry [church]'. While the popularity of scouting has diminished in Solomon Islands, it was a variety of NGO-supported activities that centred on these other pursuits that were most visible in the field sites, as outlined below. A further version of this form of assistance is the provision of small grants that are awarded on a competitive basis to groups who are commonly involved in undertaking these activities, often youth groups.

The last form of engagement, usually of a more sizeable nature, is in the livelihood sphere. Such undertakings, of the ilk of the 1970s Masta Liu project discussed, were the largest youth-related projects that I encountered in Honiara, both by measure of funding and by participation. Two projects of this nature were being implemented: Youth at Work was instigated and supported by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and the Rapid Employment Project was funded by the World Bank.<sup>14</sup> A further, smaller livelihood program, going by the officious title Honiara Youth Development, Employment and Small Enterprise Project, was also being executed by World Vision when I was conducting research in the two field sites.

## Outsiders on the Inside: Clarification, Inclusion and Exclusion

Continuing the political economy framing, the rest of this chapter follows Stuart Corbridge et al. (2005, p. 7) and inverts the lens that has been applied thus far: instead of ‘looking at the ways in which the state might see its citizens’, it is interested in the way the state is viewed by urban male youth. State and outsider-supported projects can play out in Honiara in vastly different ways from that which is envisaged in design documents, strategies or ‘log-frames’, having ‘unintended consequences’ (McDougall 2005, p. 96). Often community–outsider mismatches lie in axiomatic rationales with conflicting worldviews being evident. While much of the Melanesia-related literature in this space has focused on Western approaches to environmental conservation (see Filer & Sekhran 1998; Foale 2002; McDougall 2005, 2016; West 2006), it is also evident in youth and child-related programming. The key flashpoints in this domain are equally foundational concerns related to ‘rights’. A Western human rights discourse in Solomon Islands (the lens adopted by almost all international NGOs and donors operating in the country) is, in the main, contested and opposed by the public—most commonly on the basis that it is regarded as contrary to what are perceived indigenous norms, which are sometimes equated with the Pijin term *kastom*.

---

<sup>14</sup> This project was not exclusively targeted at youth, as it sought to have 50 per cent youth participation, defined as those aged between 16 and 29. A new phase of this project, using the acronym CAUSE, commenced in 2018.

However, resistance to the standard form project modality that is employed by outsiders (and that is internalised by the Solomon Islands' bureaucratic state) extends beyond a repudiation of rights. Such are the misgivings regarding outsiders' motivations and actions—forged by decades of encounter and anecdote—that almost all proposed interventions in the familial and social arena are subject to suspicion and contestation. 'Project' has become a dirty word across the archipelago.

The initial site for analysis is the *modus operandi* of youth engagement. Debra McDougall (2005, p. 81), in the context of analysing property rights and indigenous land tenure in Solomon Islands, talks of efforts to 'transform complex, crosscutting, localized relationships into rights that are commensurable, predictable, and knowable to outsiders'. The dominant concern of this approach is legal clarification seeking to encourage economic development and make Solomon Islands 'safe for capitalism' (2005, p. 83). Just as McDougall described Ranonggans'<sup>15</sup> desire to elucidate property rights in a foreign form, now divorced from any form of external influence, a preoccupation with clarification—documenting and ordering—was evident among portions of my young urban informants. In practice, this translated to a focus on a variety of administrative tasks: forming groups capable of being officially recognised and producing an array of written documents to demonstrate competence and order. This too, at its core, had an economic imperative, an underlying goal to make engagement by and with outsiders easy by facilitating the transfer of resources in a safe and predictable form.

In the ultimate form of 'institutional transfer' (Larmour 2005, p. 2), clarification is concerned with the appropriation of the language, aspirations and ethos of 'development'. Terms such as 'awareness', 'sustainability' and 'capacity building' were spoken by a segment of my young informants, seemingly absorbed into Pijin. In describing the most frequent requests for assistance by youth groups, a staff member at the Youth Division of the Honiara City Council said that the main priority of 'every' youth group (18 were active) was assistance with 'building the capacity of their executive'. This translated into help with, *inter alia*, understanding roles, writing minutes, public speaking and managing finances.

---

15 Residents of Ranongga, a small mountainous island in the Western Solomon Islands (McDougall 2005, p. 81).

While there were advantages to the form of engagement described, particularly for outsiders, there were potential downsides. This was demonstrated during my research with the international NGO Oxfam while implementing a small grant program for Honiara-based youth groups.<sup>16</sup> Their entry point was those youth groups who were affiliated with the Youth Division. In line with the political economy dynamics that were discussed, the project's fiduciary requirements undoubtedly contributed to this, allowing Oxfam to readily access an assemblage of youth who, owing to a proven ability to organise, were less likely to squander resources. Those closely associated with the project stressed the principal funder's desire to support groups that were 'sustainable'. This approach exemplifies a tension that I observed in forms of outsider youth engagement linked to legal clarification—the risk-averse modalities of outsiders often pare involvement. Owing to this methodology, outsiders and state agencies frequently engage with a narrow cohort, arguably those youth with the least-demonstrated need. Depending on the nature of the activity, beneficiaries are often far from marginal, being those that understand how the 'system' works: they are connected, urbane, educated, possess the confidence to engage and have some appreciation for what outsiders seek. This is a small assemblage of youth in Solomon Islands. It excludes most of my interlocutors in the backblocks of Burns Creek or White River who were oblivious to the opportunities available or how to unlock them—this is to say nothing of parochial social and class rivalries among segments of youth in Honiara, which can also stymie involvement. The flaws of this approach were not lost on some. When I asked Peter, a 30-year-old resident of Burns Creek, what the main problems were that young people in his community faced, he stated: 'They [the collective of outsiders] always forget the perpetrators [marginal youth]. They don't involve them in the activities that happen in the community'.

The outlined approach also exemplifies the supply-side nature of youth engagement. All significant youth-related activities that I came across involved outsiders taking the lead. While state agencies had often been conferred the title of 'implementing partners', 'implementing agencies' or simply 'partners', in truth, I saw little evidence of state implementation, agency or, indeed, partnership. This is not necessarily a criticism of such a practice, with co-production of this nature often a legitimate development praxis, especially in the face of state ambivalence

---

16 This went by the Pijin title, *Statim Faia* ('start a fire').

or incapacity. There was, however, little open acknowledgement of this reality, thought for how it could be surpassed and concern that it had become omnipresent and representing 'business as usual'.

The approach detailed allows outsiders to act with the imprimatur of the state, lending their involvement the legitimacy that is required, while essentially implementing projects unilaterally. This too can be partly explained by the political economy dynamics that are discussed. Outsider funds are highly ring fenced. None of the youth-related initiatives that I came across involved outsiders financing initiatives through Solomon Islands government systems. This was explicable. A public servant working in the youth arena lamented, 'No one likes to give money [direct to government] because it is mismanaged'.

## Getting Burned in Burns Creek: NGO Youth Engagement in an Urban Community

The forms of outsider engagement that I observed in the field sites entailed a degree of youth organisation, but not of the same magnitude as described above. This, together with the fact that there were no direct fiduciary responsibilities imposed on youth participants, helped ensure broader involvement. These were the in situ activities most frequently performed by international NGOs, with target locations chosen owing to their perceived vulnerability. They most commonly involved activities such as sporting events or talent competitions. Conducted with the assistance of community contacts, these public occasions presented an opportunity to 'raise awareness' of any number of issues. The other forms of NGO engagement that I documented were forays into the realms of crime prevention and livelihood.

While having a somewhat ordinary appearance, outsider-devised and implemented activities in the field sites were, more than other interventions I encountered, sites of divisiveness, competition and, at times, violence. It is not possible to insulate projects in Solomon Islands from an amalgam of correlates that can conspire to frustrate, including pre-existing contests. They can become very visible arenas for acting out disputes. My observation was that the word 'project' had become synonymous with personal benefit and 'gaming the system'. Outsiders actively contributed to this situation, the modalities employed often being a direct cause of contest, as can be observed in the following examples.

Burns Creek was labelled by various informants as a ‘red mark’ place—a dangerous and insecure environment regarded by some as off limits. This had various repercussions. One was that it had attracted the attention of outsiders. During the time that I resided in Burns Creek and, to a lesser extent, White River, casual conversations revealed all manner of defunct NGO-led endeavours; a plethora of project detritus littering both sites, including manufactured committees and youth groups; and abandoned project infrastructure. Burns Creek appeared as the epicentre of these efforts, with post-conflict security concerns and flooding in 2014 having attracted major NGOs operating in Honiara. Its young, ‘vulnerable’ population was particularly predisposed to outsider assistance. This included youth-specific interventions involving the local arms of international NGOs Save the Children and World Vision. At the time of my research, only World Vision remained active in the area.

World Vision’s engagement in Burns Creek was part of an Honiara-based, five-community initiative, with places chosen because of their perceived ‘marginality’ (a common label, although one I never saw defined; see Auerwald et al. 2017). John, a former contract employee of World Vision, said that the choice of Burns Creek as a ‘target’ site was due to it being a ‘low place’, with the idea being to ‘lift the youths’.

World Vision’s key undertaking in Burns Creek was part of a larger gender-based violence project. It included marshalling resident youth on a periodic basis to participate in sporting and singing competitions. The *raison d’être*, however, was not recreational activities per se, but the social messaging that was imparted on the sidelines, delivered with the goal of behavioural change. On paper, the project’s objective was to use ‘faith-based messaging to address community attitudes about gender and gender-based violence’ (Wu & Kilby 2015, p. 4).<sup>17</sup> For those male youth with whom I spoke in Burns Creek, this was in many respects one of the least important by-products, and relevant messaging was quickly forgotten. Few of the young participants could provide details of what awareness sessions canvassed, and they showed little interest talking about it. An informal roadside discussion with a group of five young male residents in mid-2018, over a year since World Vision’s last awareness

---

17 The undertaking described here was World Vision’s Communities for Hope project. It involved the adoption of World Vision International’s Channels for Hope endeavour, an initiative that commenced in Africa. An ‘end of project outcome evaluation’ incorporating Solomon Islands (Meyer & Nikulainen 2018, p. 41) observed that youth involvement in the project had not been ‘systematic nor ... strategic’.

effort, was demonstrative. Asking what these awareness activities had involved was met with silence and blank stares until one of the boys provided a one-word response: 'violence'.

While the activities of World Vision were welcomed, unintended consequences conspired to frustrate efforts. This had nothing to do with the project's objectives. Instead, it had everything to do with the undercurrents running deep within Burns Creek. In part, these spoke to broader intra-Malaitan relations and the modalities by which youth grievances are frequently aired in Honiara, both of which have deep historical dimensions.

The most overt act of disaffection under the auspices of the World Vision project occurred following a soccer game that occurred in Burns Creek in 2015. The losing team, comprised of Baegu-language speakers, was angered with what they believed were unfair refereeing decisions. Their opponents consisted of boys who had a Lau-Baelelea background, as did the offending referee. In what is a common motif in male sporting contests in Solomon Islands, linked to masculinity and perceptions of *wantokism*,<sup>18</sup> the end of the game saw the losing team's anger spill over, resulting in the destruction of the soccer net and rocks being pelted at a World Vision bus, shattering its windscreen.

This was not the first time that an NGO vehicle had been targeted in Burns Creek. Peter, a 27-year-old resident of Burns Creek, detailed an incident that happened a few years earlier, invoking the familiar 'red mark' tag:

Save the Children put a red mark on Burns Creek. One incident happened here. They [Baegu-speaking boys] stopped a Save the Children vehicle ... They took the keys from the driver, demanded money and took things from inside. After that, Save the Children called the chairmen of the [youth] groups in the Burns Creek area. We went down to [their office]. They told us that Burns Creek was a red mark area and that they wouldn't be coming back.

Save the Children had a particularly fractious relationship with Burns Creek, eclipsing the problems that other NGOs had faced. At the time of my fieldwork, they no longer worked in the community. The episode

---

18 Relationships of mutual obligation and support, most commonly between those who speak the same language.

described above was not an opportunistic act of criminal conduct, but part of a pattern of destructive behaviour that was targeted at the organisation. Various buildings that they had constructed in the community were destroyed. A youth centre was the subject of arson. A community hall—described to me by a group of boys as a ‘crime prevention centre’—had been dismantled and its materials looted, with only a concrete slab remaining. A third building—the remnants of a youth livelihoods project—sat forlornly idle, essentially co-opted by a neighbouring resident.

At the time of my research, some three years after their decision to pull out from Burns Creek, Save the Children’s engagement remained a sore point. They had earned the facetious title of ‘Save the Big Man’, a title reflective of a belief that their involvement in the community was only benefiting one or two leaders. If this was the case, a Baegu leader that I spoke with who had been involved in the NGO’s endeavours relayed little sense of benefit, or gratitude, explaining that they were ‘banned’:

Because they made a lot of promises but did nothing. They told lies. I was chairman twice,<sup>19</sup> for about four years. Nothing happened. I don’t really know what they were doing too. They would just come and visit, sing [makes clapping noise with hands] and that was it. I think if they really wanted their project to work, they would have someone come and stay in the community all the time. Have an office here. That’s the way to do it. But they would aimlessly hang around and then go back to their office.

This portrait was an exaggeration designed to denigrate Save the Children. Nevertheless, it was demonstrative of a fracturing of trust, with portions of the Baegu community deliberately targeting the organisation and the default position becoming one of contestation. The Baegu youth that I spoke with shrugged their shoulders when I quizzed them on this, explaining that maybe ‘community leaders’ did not cooperate with the NGO. The underlying, unspoken trigger for the breakdown was, however, directly related to the political economy of youth engagement. In a theme that I was to hear occasionally, it was apparent that the Save the Children’s failure to pay community members (‘leaders’) involved in the project was the underlying cause of angst. A 29-year-old Baegu youth, related to the leader quoted, explained:

---

19 The project being referred to was named ‘Children and Youth in Conflict with the Law’, which was implemented with donor funding from 2006 to 2013. The reference to ‘chairman’ is likely a reference to chairing a ‘Crime Prevention Committee’ that was established under the project.

[B]ecause our view is ... it doesn't matter even if you do small work, you must pay ... So, when they [Save the Children] came here and some people did work, but they weren't paid, that's what some people didn't like.

It is a position discussed by Cox (2009, p. 975), who decries NGO–beneficiary negotiations in Solomon Islands around money, particularly in which arguments ‘hamper the implementation of projects which, after all, are intended for the common benefit’. Exacerbating this situation for Save the Children was that those they failed to remunerate could muster a cohort of youth. The consequences of the breakdown of trust were clear: with the imprimatur of various ‘leaders’, young Baegu men performed acts of violence and sabotage against the NGO. According to others, the leader I spoke with was a key instigator of this, being the main beneficiary of the timber and iron roofing from the ransacked crime prevention centre. As an ultimate irony, a project premised on preventing crime had become a cause of community crime and conflict.

Acknowledgement of the situation was conveyed by a staff member of Save the Children who had been involved in the project. Like various youth that I spoke with, she laid responsibility for the breakdown on the shoulders of ‘leadership’, explaining that they were failing their youth and that they were not interested in developing their community. An initial flaw in this view was a belief that there was a coherent and legitimate cadre of leaders in Burns Creek. There was a false hope in the convening powers of various individuals who were not universally acknowledged or respected. A further mistake was a belief that NGO activities should not cost anything—that altruism should be welcomed, which is a compounded position when overlaid by a view of communities as essentially homogenous and always eager for assistance. These erroneous perceptions, not limited to Save the Children, rested on a failure to appreciate complex communal power dynamics. They helped to explain why the NGOs’ projects were ultimately unsuccessful. Her assessment was also accompanied by a standard characterisation of Burns Creek youth as ‘aggressive’.

A myriad of additional concerns regarding outsider engagement were relayed to me while in Burns Creek. Some believed that NGO staff were dishonest. A 30-year-old resident told me: ‘The community facilitators aren't honest. They mislead because they don't have the heart for the community. They act for their own interest.’ Relatedly,

there was a perception that NGO staff and/or putative beneficiaries would misappropriate project assets: ‘How did the project breakdown? I don’t know, I think they [project beneficiaries] most have eaten [misappropriated] the money’ (interview with Sam, a 42-year-old Burns Creek resident). Robert, a 26-year-old male, commented on the strictures imposed by outsiders’ time-constrained engagement: ‘Save the Children don’t work in Burns Creek now. They must have gone to some other place. That’s how NGOs work.’ Finally, I recorded frustration that was felt when dealing with the wash-up of expired projects. Trevor, a public official, summarised this: ‘These projects kick off for two years ... and then they’re all gone ... donors pull them out and take their money. So, we are left with the problems. The beneficiaries are cross with us.’

## ‘The Honourables’: MP Youth Engagement in Two Urban Communities

If the approaches adopted by international NGOs can be critiqued for failing to deliver on a number of fronts, the simplicity of youth engagement as practised by urban MPs, arguably the most visible embodiment of the state in the field sites (see also Tucker 2017, pp. 138–139), stood in stark contrast. An initial point needs to be made about the status of MPs in Solomon Islands. Among many youths with whom I spoke, MPs were not considered part of a collective. Generally, there were low levels of understanding regarding the prescribed roles of MPs and the manner in which the parliamentary system worked.

The straightforward transactional nature of the MP–constituent relationship in Solomon Islands—as documented elsewhere (Batley 2015; Cox 2009; Fraenkel 2011; Hiriasia 2016; Hou 2016; Tucker 2017; Wood 2014)—played out true to form in Burns Creek and White River. Textbook clientelism took place with unconditional cash handouts being received by those youth with whom I interacted.<sup>20</sup> Sponsoring of a variety of youth-related activities was also featured. Among many informants,

---

20 This was funded by MPs’ constituency development funds: public funds allocated to individual MPs for their discretionary use (Wiltshire & Batley 2018, p. 1). As at 2018, the amount allocated to each MP ‘hovers somewhere between SBD8 and 10 million (USD1–1.3 million) per annum’ (2018, p. 1).

leadership was largely measured by these forms of largesse, together with an MP's willingness to engage with young people. These attributes overlapped, helping to shape youth voting intentions.

The visibility of MPs in the two field sites was a common topic of discussion. This was particularly so in Burns Creek, which is situated in Central Guadalcanal constituency, but being where the MP for Lau-Baelelea constituency (located in north Malaita) resided, his house was a visible landmark in the community. The presence of MPs in Burns Creek and White River, as well as the distinctive styles of politicking employed, speak to distinct state–youth engagement in the two sites as well as to other contextual variations.

Place of residence, or even birth, often bore little resemblance to the constituency in which my informants exercised their franchise. In Burns Creek, most of the people I interviewed voted 'at home' in Malaita. The most popular candidate among my Burns Creek, Lau-Baelelea-speaking informants was an MP from the northern region of Malaita. The standard quantum that he was said to have provided individual youth in return for their vote in the 2014 national election was SBD\$2,000 (US\$250).<sup>21</sup>

The incumbent MP for East Honiara constituency, bordering Burns Creek, was Douglas Ete. He drew mixed reactions among resident youth. He had no relatives living in the community, perhaps not surprising, given his mixed Malaitan/Guadalcanal heritage and, in 2010, less than a handful of his campaign managers were located there.<sup>22</sup> By most accounts, Ete had received few votes from Burns Creek in 2014, though this was not possible to quantify. He reciprocated by doing little there beyond reportedly providing direct cash payments to supporters, including youth. Early in his campaigning, Ete had endeavoured to build a health clinic in the community. A flagship of his election campaign in 2010, some eight years later, the shell of the incomplete clinic had become a symbol of how political rivalries can conspire to block development. Various resident youth that I spoke with had played a pivotal role in frustrating Ete's ambitions to complete the building, spreading rumours that the clinic was not his idea and that he had not contributed financially to the project.

---

21 Six informants stated that they had received this amount from the MP following his election.

22 In the 2010 election, Ete had about 400 people who were campaign managers (representatives for Ete in their communities, helping to marshal voters). Only four or five of these were in Burns Creek—a very low share of the overall number (personal communication, Terence Wood).

When discussing what voters in his constituency sought in the context of the 2010 election, Ete had told another researcher, ‘it depends ... [f]or the Burns Creek area, what you do for them [directly]’ (Wood 2014, p. 159). This was demonstrated in my discussions with various Burns Creek men who had voted for Ete in 2014 and who told me that they had received monetary handouts in the weeks prior to our interviews, well after the campaign and election. Some had received one-off payments of several hundred dollars, while others had visited Ete’s house regularly to request smaller sums. Brian, aged 27, described his last interaction with the MP a few days before we spoke: ‘I went direct to him and I asked ... “sshhh... Honourable. I’m hungry. There’s nothing [to eat] at my house”. He said, “Oh, here is \$100 [US\$12.50] son”’.

I observed benefits in the form of cash payments or in the provision of other items to be a normalised course of action, which was tolerated and expected by many youth of Burns Creek. These allocations were openly discussed, a perennial concern being to ‘pick the winner’ come election time to benefit throughout his or her term in office. Among various interlocutors, there was a belief that this ‘top-up’<sup>23</sup> or ‘bus fare’ mindset was ingrained in voters’ psyche with a dependency mentality that was now an entrenched feature of Solomon Islands politics. It was perceived as being highly unfair and a potential spark of future unrest.

Many of the young men I spoke with were also acutely aware of their marginal position relative to their senior peers when it came to interactions with MPs. Clayton, a Burns Creek resident aged 19 years old, told me how he was given \$2,000 (US\$250) after voting for a particular Malaitan MP in 2014:

After I took the \$2,000, I went and saw him again. I asked him [for assistance] and he gave me \$350 [US\$43.75]. This was only last week. I said to myself, ‘eh, I need to go and check him for any money to buy betelnut or food’ ... With some leaders, us small men [youth] ask [for money] but it’s hard for them to give it to us. They don’t like to talk with us small men. But our [ballot] paper is the same as big men. If someone does [talk to us], it makes us boys happy.

---

23 A ubiquitous term in Solomon Islands referencing the purchase of mobile phone credit.

Emmanuel, aged 22, voted for a different Malaitan MP and had not received any benefit: 'Twice in a row I have voted for you, but you still forget me ... My [ballot] paper is the same paper as all of the big men. But you give everyone a project ... at least try and help me once'. He went on to describe how youth are treated when seeking an MP's assistance:

You know what it's like in Solomon Islands. Honourables are treated like a God. So, it's hard for him to be free [to meet]. He's busy all the time in meetings, so us kids keep away. Sometimes we go past: 'Eh, you kids go away. Us big men are sitting down here.' That's the kind of experience we have.

The Constituency Development Officer (CDO)<sup>24</sup> of the MP for East Honiara provided his thoughts:

They [youth] think that they are small. Low self-esteem is one issue they have. They think if they come to the Honourable, Project Officer or CDO, then they won't regard them as true people or as genuine about their request.

Politics played out somewhat differently in White River, in line with important contextual variations. None of the youth that I spoke to had received money from the incumbent MP for the West Honiara constituency, Namson Tran.<sup>25</sup> Instead, I observed Tran to be the first port-of-call among those seeking funding for one-off recreational activities. This appeared to be the MP's preferred modality of youth largesse. Tran's CDO explained that the MP no longer provided unconditional cash handouts, having ceased doing so in 2015.<sup>26</sup>

Tran was not a visible presence in White River and he did not allow constituents to visit his house, which was not located in the community. He did, however, sponsor several youth-related activities. During my time in White River, the MP had given SBD\$10,000 (approximately US\$1,250) to a male hip hop dance group, assisting them to travel overseas. Being home to a sizeable Renbel population<sup>27</sup>—with a strong

24 A public servant responsible for managing government funds for the constituency (Wood 2014, p. 173).

25 There are likely a number of reasons for this. Many of my interlocutors resided in Namoruka, an area of White River where, anecdotally, Tran did not receive a great deal of support. Similar to Burns Creek, many White River youth did not vote in the West Honiara constituency. Anecdotally, West Honiara also saw a large number of non-resident voters cast their vote there.

26 A position disputed by a number of informants.

27 Those hailing from the Polynesian outliers of Rennell or Bellona islands.

affinity for sport—he had also provided funds for rugby tournaments; his generosity was lauded. Similarly, while I resided in White River, he provided trucks to three schools.

While adopting modalities of assistance more straightforward than the NGOs that I encountered, contest and violence were also a feature of the youth–MP relationship. The physical violence that youth directed at MPs or ‘the government’ was a topic of discussion among my interlocutors. It also visibly played out during my time in Honiara. The mildest examples of this that I came across were the threats made by those youth who had sought assistance from MPs being rebuffed. Emmanuel, aged 22, having twice had his request for assistance rejected, had warned his MP’s driver not to venture past his residence (the inference being that he would damage his vehicle should he do so). Brian, aged 27, adopted a facetious tone, laughing as he told me that because he had not received the support that he expected from his MP, he should ‘shoot [throw rocks at] his ‘blue three-tonne [truck]’.

Direct violence and destruction featured in the youth–MP relationship. During my fieldwork, an incident occurred in another well-known Honiara settlement in the east, Gilbert Camp.<sup>28</sup> According to newspaper reports, this involved an unnamed government MP who was driving his family to church on a Sunday morning. His vehicle was ‘punched’ and ‘youths threatened him and his family members’ (Solomon Star News 2016, p. 1). The precise nature of the threat or the rationale behind it were not disclosed, with simplistic references to marijuana and *kwaso*<sup>29</sup> consumption used to explain away the incident.

The Gilbert Camp episode paralleled an occurrence in Burns Creek some years prior, the ructions of which remained ongoing. Many of my young informants recounted the targeting of the MP for Lau-Baelelea. This involved boys from Baegu partaking in the well-versed act of throwing rocks at the MP’s vehicle. This incident had a complex backstory, with several violent confrontations having occurred. However, the underlying motivations spoke to the already detailed enmity between Baegu and Lau-Baelelea youth and the partisan political rivalries that saw Baegu speakers supporting a political opponent of the MP.

28 For a detailed, albeit dated, portrait of Gilbert Camp, see Stritecky (2001) and, for a more recent engagement, see Maggio (2018).

29 A homemade, distilled alcohol.

## Conclusion

Political and economic incentives and constraints have shaped state-implemented and/or endorsed approaches to urban youth development in Solomon Islands. From the first forays in this area in the 1960s to its present-day guise, a continuity has been evident. Outsiders have dominated, acting with the consent of the state, but rarely as equal partners. Superiorly resourced, they have adopted a consistent methodology that is premised largely on the 'project modality'—an approach internalised by the Solomon Islands state. After around 50 years of effort, this has not observed an encompassing change in the youth field, nor, arguably, has it improved 'leadership'.

It is easy to point to a lack of contextual appreciation when critiquing outsider approaches to youth engagement in Solomon Islands. While it is difficult to deny that aspects of context had been underplayed in the examples presented above, the approaches that were discussed point to a dilemma. In engaging with state bureaucratic actors who work in the youth field, outsiders invariably narrow the cohort of young people that they can reach. In venturing into 'the field', irrespective of levels of contextual knowledge, they risk exposing themselves to a low-trust environment, with communities having experienced decades of problematic or unsatisfactory encounters.

MPs who have benefited from significant increases in discretionary funds at their disposal (Batley 2015) have mainly practised a direct form of youth engagement in Solomon Islands, premised on a hope of reciprocity come election time. It is difficult to assess the extent to which this particularistic approach of MPs has shaped the expectations of young people towards outsiders. There can be little doubt that the provision of direct benefits has not made the latter's job any easier, helping to entrench a handout model based on clientelism.

A number of observations can be made about the approach of outsiders and MPs as described in this chapter. First, it is the collective of MPs that should regulate, and guide, outsiders. There is little evidence of this in urban Solomon Islands. Instead, the two neither cooperate nor compete, being driven by different incentives. By no means can it be said that the Burns Creek interventions, unlike 'development projects' elsewhere,

operated as a 'machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power' (Ferguson 1994, p. 255). Rather, the state was completely absent.

Second, and related to the first point, part of the reason for the problems that outsider-supported youth initiatives encountered was a lack of local ownership and/or a local champion. The Burns Creek NGO-initiated youth projects were left floating, with little evidence of local support. The incumbent MP for East Honiara, who, like all MPs in Solomon Islands, practised a localised form of politicking, clearly saw no political advantages in cooperating with outsider-led endeavours, nor did outsiders involve him.

Third, when MPs strive to move beyond direct, personal benefits and to implement 'projects', such as establishing a health clinic, they quickly see themselves facing the same issues that outsiders do, albeit overlaid with overt political considerations. Both MPs and outsiders respond to similar temporal pressures: the four-year electoral cycle and the two- to three-year project timeline. When faced with obstacles, the fall-back position of MPs becomes the provision of 'cargo' or the engaging of the sponsorship of one-off activities, just as outsiders are prone to favour standard form, input-based, sequestered 'projects'. The result for both actors is the same: little evidence of broad-based youth development (or, indeed, community development) and a risk of communal conflict.

It has been argued that the position towards youth development described in this chapter is understandable when applying a political economy lens. Efforts to address the status quo lie, initially, in appreciating the interwoven political, economic, social and cultural drivers that are discussed. Even then, interventions in this area that adhere to the project modality come with a high probability of 'failure'.<sup>30</sup> Above all, the elemental question of how to best undertake youth development in urban Solomon Islands needs to be revisited if anything beyond transitory, non-transformational change is to occur.

---

30 Acknowledging that, even in failure, there may be positive, often invisible, 'side effects' (Ferguson 1994, pp. 251–256).

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to those young men of Burns Creek and White River who so generously shared their stories, as well as to Honiara-based public officials and NGO staff. Thank you also to the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and Guadalcanal Provincial Administration for permission to conduct this research. Gratitude is extended to John Van Den Akker who carefully proofread an earlier version of this chapter. For their sage advice on content, I wish to thank Terrence Wood, Joanne Spratt, Michael Goddard and Helen Lee. Finally, appreciation is extended to Clive Moore for his monumental work in digitising and generously sharing historical documents that were used in the preparation of this chapter.

## References

- Auerswald, C, Piatt, A & Mirzazadeh, A 2017, 'Research with disadvantaged, vulnerable and/or marginalized adolescents', *Innocenti Research Brief 2016–06*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.
- Batley, J 2015, 'Constituency development funds in Solomon Islands: State of play', *SSGM In Brief 2015/67*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) 1964, *Legislative council debates*, fourth session, second meeting of the Legislative Council, 10 June 1964, p. 145.
- BSIP 1969, 'Community centre opened', news sheet, 30 June 1969, p. 5.
- BSIP 1972, *British Solomon Islands: Report for the year 1970*, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London.
- BSIP 1973a, *Governing council debates*, 10th meeting of the Governing Council, 20 July 1973, p. 328.
- BSIP 1973b, 'Govco 2nd session 1973 continued', news sheet, 14 December 1973, p. 4.
- Chevalier, C (forthcoming), *Understanding Solo: A biography of Solomon Mamaloni*.

- Corbridge, S, William, G, Srivastava, M & Véron, R 2005, *Seeing the state: Governance and governmentality in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492211
- Cox, J 2009, 'Active citizenship or passive clientelism? Accountability and development in Solomon Islands', *Development in Practice*, vol. 19, no. 8, pp. 964–980, doi.org/10.1080/09614520903220784
- Department for International Development (DFID) 2009, 'Political economy analysis how to note', *DFID Practice Paper July 2009*, DFID, London.
- Dolan, C & Rajak, D 2016, 'Remaking Africa's informal economies: Youth, entrepreneurship and the promise of inclusion at the bottom of the pyramid', *Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4, pp. 514–529, doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2015.1126249
- Eslava, L & Buchely, L 2019, 'Security and development in question: A story about petty crime, the petty state and its petty law', *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, no. 67, pp. 40–55, doi.org/10.7440/res67.2019.04
- Evans, D 2016, 'Hard work: Youth employment programming in Honiara, Solomon Islands', *SSGM Discussion Paper 2016/7*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Farran, S 2016, 'At the edges and on the margins: Hearing the voices of young people in South Pacific island countries', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 105, no. 4, pp. 401–414.
- Ferguson, J 1994, *The anti-politics machine: 'Development', depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Filer, C & Sekhran, N 1998, 'Loggers, donors and resource owners', *Policy that works for forests and people series no. 2: Papua New Guinea*, National Research Institute, Port Moresby.
- Foale, S 2002, 'Where's our development? Landowner aspirations and environmentalist agendas in Western Solomon Islands', *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 44–67, doi.org/10.1080/14442210110001706105
- Fraenkel, J 2011, 'The atrophied state: A supply-side perspective on politician "slush funds" in Western Melanesia', in R Duncan (ed.), *The political economy of economic reform in the Pacific*, Asian Development Bank, Mandaluyong City.
- Frazer, I 1985, 'Man long taon: Migration and differentiation amongst the To'ambaita, Solomon Islands', PhD thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra.

- Fritz, V, Levy, B & Ort, R (eds) 2014, *Problem-driven political economy analysis: The World Bank's experience*, The World Bank, Washington DC, doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0121-1
- Herlihy, J 1981, 'Always we are last: A study of planning, development and disadvantage in Melanesia', PhD thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Hermkens, A 2013, "'Raitis blong mere?'" Framing human rights and gender relations in Solomon Islands', *Intersections: Gender and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 33, viewed 9 September 2015, intersections.anu.edu.au/issue33/hermkens.htm
- Hiriasia, T 2016, 'Kin and gifts: Understanding the kin-based politics of Solomon Islands—the case of East AreAre', *SSGM Discussion Paper 2016/4*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Hou, R 2016, 'A day in the life of a member of Parliament in Solomon Islands', *SSGM Discussion Paper 2016/2*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Irwin, S, Mader, P & Flynn, J 2018, 'How youth-specific is Africa's youth employment challenge?', *K4D Emerging Issues Report*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.
- Jourdan, C 1995, 'Masta liu', in V Amit-Talai & H Wulff (eds), *Youth cultures: A cross-cultural perspective*, Routledge, London.
- Larmour, P 2005, *Foreign flowers: Institutional transfer and good governance in the Pacific Islands*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.
- Maggio, R 2018, 'According to Kastom and according to law: "Good life" and "good death" in Gilbert Camp, Solomon Islands', in C Gregory & J Altman (eds), *The quest for the good life in precarious times: Ethnographic perspectives on the domestic moral economy*, ANU Press, Canberra, doi.org/10.22459/qglpt.03.2018.04
- McDougall, D 2005, 'The unintended consequences of clarification: Development, disputing, and the dynamics of community in Ranongga, Solomon Islands', *Ethnohistory*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 81–109, doi.org/10.1215/00141801-52-1-81
- McDougall, D 2016, *Engaging with strangers: Love and violence in the rural Solomon Islands*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford.
- Menocal, A, Cassidy, M, Swift, S, Jacobstein, D, Rothblum, C & Tservil, I 2018, *Thinking and working politically through applied political economy analysis: A guide for practitioners*, USAID, Washington DC.

- Meyer, A & Nikulainen, N 2018, *Evaluation report: PTL reducing gender based violence project*, Finnish Overseas Consultants Ltd, Helsinki.
- Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) 2010, *Solomon Islands national youth policy, 2010–2015*, The Ministry, Honiara.
- Mitlin, D & Bartlett, S 2018, 'Editorial: Co-production—key ideas', *Environment & Urbanization*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 355–366, doi.org/10.1177/0956247818791931
- Moore, C (forthcoming), *Honiara: The village city, urban social space in Solomon Islands, 1942–2018*.
- MWYCFA 2017, *Solomon Islands national youth policy, 2017–2030*, The Ministry, Honiara.
- National Parliament (Solomon Islands) 1980, *Solomon Islands youth policy*, National Parliament Paper No. 2/1980.
- Ostram, E 1996, 'Crossing the great divide: Coproduction, synergy, and development', *World Development*, vol. 24, no. 6, pp. 1073–1087, doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(96)00023-X
- Palmer, P 1979, 'Masta liu farmers', in P Larmour & B Waita (eds), *Land in Solomon Islands*, Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva.
- Ross, H 1978, 'Baegu markets, areal integration, and economic efficiency in Malaita, Solomon Islands', *Ethnology*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 119–138, doi.org/10.2307/3773139
- Scales, I 2003, *Youth in Solomon Islands: A participatory study of issues, needs and priorities, final report*, Hassall and Associates, Canberra.
- Solomon Islands Government (SIG) 2013, *Report on 2009 population & housing census*, Honiara, Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, Honiara.
- SIG, 2018, *2018 recurrent budget*, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Honiara.
- Solomon Star News 2016, 'MP threatened: Leaders must be protected, a leader's plea', 13 September 2016, p. 1.
- Stritecky, J 2001, 'Looking through a moral lens: Morality, violence and empathy in Solomon Islands', PhD thesis, University of Iowa, Iowa.
- The Solomons News Drum 1976, 'Master lius move in on the potato market', 12 November 1976, p. 3.

- The Solomons News Drum 1977, 'Meet the masta-lius: Youth of all trades', 26 August 1977, p. 5.
- Thomas, MA 2015, *Govern like us: US expectations of poor countries*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Tucker, A 2017, 'Incorporating the archipelago: The imposition and acculturation of the Solomon Islands state', PhD thesis, UC San Diego, San Diego.
- West, P 2006, *Conservation is our government now: The politics of ecology in Papua New Guinea*, Duke University Press, North Carolina.
- Wiltshire, C & Batley, J 2018, *Department of Pacific Affairs in brief 2018/4*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Wood, T 2014, 'Ties that unbind? Ethnic identity, social rules and electoral politics in Solomon Islands', PhD thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Wu, J & Kilby, P 2015, *Evaluation of Honiara community vision for change project*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Wyn, J & White, R 1997, *Rethinking youth*, Sage, Sydney.
- Yanguas, P 2018, *Why we lie about aid: Development and the messy politics of change*, Zed Books, London.

This text is taken from *Pacific Youth: Local and Global Futures*,  
edited by Helen Lee, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian  
National University, Canberra, Australia.

[doi.org/10.22459/PY.2019.04](https://doi.org/10.22459/PY.2019.04)