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The Human Rights Situation in Solomon Islands

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Joint Stakeholders' Submission from:

Franciscans International (FI)
Society of Saint Francis, Province of Solomon Islands (SSF)
Dominicans for Justice and Peace
Dominican Network in Solomon Islands

Geneva and Honiara, 15 October 2020

I. Introduction

1. This joint submission highlights key concerns related to the human rights situation in Solomon Islands, focusing on the impact of logging activities on human rights.¹ The data and information for this submission came from various sources, in particular from Franciscans International,² the Society of Saint Francis (SSF)³ of Solomon Islands, Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers)⁴ and the Dominican Network in Solomon Islands.

II. Legal framework on logging

2. Solomon Islands has a total land area of about 2.8 million hectares. About 87% of the land is under customary land tenure, with the Constitution guaranteeing customary control over the land and forests. Most customary land titles are unregistered, meaning that there has been no formal survey and registering of boundaries or other characteristics. In 2015, the FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment estimated Solomon Island's total forest cover to be around 78%⁵ the highest percentage in the Pacific region. Other assessments have found that this figure is more likely to be around 76%, due to extensive logging in recent years.⁶
3. Our organizations note that in September 2020, the Ministry of Forest and Research issued the Corporate Plan 2020-2022 and the National Forest Policy-2020 (NFP). Given that these policies have just been issued, their impact on logging generally, and on the issues mentioned below in particular, is still unclear. Moreover, as noted by our partners, issues related to mining are not so much caused by a lack of laws or policies, but rather by a lack of monitoring and enforcement of them.
4. The Government recognizes the sovereignty of the traditional owners of land and sea resources. Under the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act, the granting of commercial logging rights is subject to both the approval of the National and Provincial

¹ During Solomon Islands' second review under the UPR in 2016, two recommendations related to the environment and climate change received support from the government. The first recommends to further strengthen the necessary measures to address climate change, environmental degradation, and disaster management and the second to adopt measures to mitigate climate change risks. Two recommendations did not receive governmental support and were merely noted. They recommended creating a permanent national protection group responsible for addressing displacements caused by climate change or natural disasters and to ensure that corporations, particularly those active in the forest industry, respect human and environmental rights, based on the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

² **Franciscans International (FI)** is a faith-based International Non-Governmental Organization with General Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. It was founded in 1989 to bring to the UN the concerns of the most vulnerable.

³ **The Society of Saint Francis (SSF)** is a Franciscan religious order within the Anglican Communion. The SSF of Solomon Islands started in 1970. The environment and human rights issues have been one of the main concerns of SSF work in Solomon Islands.

⁴ **Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers)**, represents the Dominican Order at the United Nations. It is a non-profit NGO, with the UN ESOCOC Status since 2002. It is dedicated to the promotion of justice and peace in the world and to the promotion and protection of human rights for all, which is an integral element of the Dominican Order's mission to preach the truth. Dominican Network in Solomon Islands is its national partner in Solomon Islands.

⁵ Just under 2.2 million hectares.

⁶ Solomon Islands Forestry Outlook Study, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok 2009, <http://www.fao.org/3/am626e/am626e00.pdf>

Government, and the consent of traditional landowners before agreement is required. The act requires the companies to identify areas which must be excluded from the logging agreement based on environmental and social values. In a report to the FAO, the government noted its development of a comprehensive forest policy in 1989 "to encourage large scale reforestation, control of harmful logging practises, market study and diversification, aiming at a fair return for both the state and landowners, and the development of local processing capability."⁷ The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries also noted that "[f]ailure to achieving these aims was attributed to inadequate and weak forestry legislation, institutional capacity and lack of public awareness and participation."⁸ We note that the NFP also calls for reforestation.⁹

5. The Forest and Timber Utilisation Act 2017 is the primary law regulating logging activities in Solomon Islands. It stipulates that the determination of timber rights on customary land differs from the determination of the ownership of customary land. Under this Act, a Timber Rights Meeting/Hearing must be held between the applicant seeking the license, the customary landowners, and the Provincial Government. The application is rejected if no agreement is reached.¹⁰ The Timber Rights Meetings must be public, and there is a right of appeal. While such hearings are critical, as "the only formal opportunity for the customary landowners to be consulted,"¹¹ issues regarding transparency and corruption have been documented.¹²
6. The Ministry of Forestry and Research is the main focal point of the government regarding forest management. It has the mission to utilize, conserve and manage forest resources for the continuing benefit of the environment and the people. The Ministry, via the Commissioner of Forests, issues logging licences and permits.
7. The Solomon Islands Code of Logging Practice also regulates logging activities, including by defining prohibited areas, in favour of sustainability and of minimizing adverse environmental and social impacts.¹³ Yet, companies often fail to comply with this Code, leading to illegal logging and other harmful practices, with impunity. Our partners underscored that the "poor enforcement of forestry legislation" was a "widely recognized and longstanding problem." The Code is expected to be reviewed and updated with "recognized

⁷ Solomon Islands: Country report to the FAO International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources (1996), Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/agphome/documents/PGR/SoW1/asia/SOLOMONI.pdf>, accessed on 28th September 2020

⁸ Id.

⁹ See Solomon Islands National Forest Police (NFP) 2020, which was launched in September 18, 2020. See <http://www.sibconline.com.sb/national-forestry-policy-launched/> Franciscans International received a copy of NFP 2020 from its partners in Solomon Islands.

¹⁰ The Timber Rights Acquisition Process for Landowners, Public Solicitor's Office- Solomon Islands, <https://solomons.gov.sb/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Timber-Rights-Aquisition-Process-Factsheet-English1.pdf>

¹¹ The Timber Rights Acquisition Process for Landowners, Public Solicitor's Office- Solomon Islands, <https://solomons.gov.sb/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Timber-Rights-Aquisition-Process-Factsheet-English1.pdf>; See also Goal 16 of the National Forest Policy 2020 (NFP), Transparency to combat corruption.

¹² Global Witness report, p.11

¹³ Helping communities with best practice for logging in the Solomon Islands: A Summary of the Code of Logging Practice, Solomon Islands Government, 19 March 2019, <https://solomonislands-data.sprep.org/dataset/summary-code-logging-practice/resource/20c9e53a-b6df-42f0-abcc-f8b1e835f86b>

criteria for sustainable forest management planning” as per the NFP.¹⁴

8. In 2018, in a positive move at provincial level, the Central Island Provincial Government announced its will to ban new logging and mining activities following concerns raised by local communities and NGOs.¹⁵ Despite this positive announcement, issues seem to still prevail regarding monitoring, compliance, enforcement, and “[E]ndemic corruption allow[ing] firms to circumvent nearly all of it. [...]”¹⁶ The organization Global Witness, in its 2018 Report “Paradise Lost”, presented several cases of bribery during the processes for acquiring logging licenses from the top levels of government, down to local officials and chiefs.¹⁷
9. The NFP has noted that “87% of round logs exports go to China... whereas sawn timber is exported mostly to New Zealand (43%) and Australia (33%).”¹⁸
10. The Government has recently acknowledged that logging practices are unsustainable, and have a “hindering effect on the country’s sustainable future.”¹⁹ A report from the Ministry of Finance mentions also that if logging practices continue unabated, forests in Solomon Islands will be exhausted by 2036.²⁰ In recognizing this dire issue, the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement called for the National Forest Policy.²¹

Impacts of logging on human rights

Participation and consent of local communities on their customary lands

11. Major issues remain concerning the respect for meaningful participation and consent of local communities affected by logging plans and operations. Even when environmental and human rights issues are raised during Timber Rights Hearings, our partners have reported that the issues are not taken into consideration by the Provincial Government. This was exemplified in the Western Provincial Executive Timber Rights Hearing on 10th April 2018 for the Kadiki Kaleongo customary land in South Vangunu, Marovo. Kadiki Development Company was the applicant in the Timber Rights Hearing for logging in the Kadiki customary land. Kadiki Customary land’s holding groups and surrounding communities objected to the concession partly due to the anticipated adverse impacts on the local and nearby communities. Despite concerns and objections to logging by environmental groups together with the community

¹⁴ See Goal 4 of the National Forest Policy 2020.

¹⁵ Solomon Islands province bans logging in bid to protect environment, Mongabay, 21 January 2019, <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/01/solomon-islands-province-bans-logging-in-bid-to-protect-environment/>

¹⁶ Logging is corrupting these islands. One village fights back – and wins. National Geographic, 3 January 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/01/deforestation-in-the-solomon-islands/#close>

¹⁷ See the Publication of the Global Witness, “Paradise Lost: How China can help the Solomon Islands protect its forests,” published in 2018.

¹⁸ See Goal 11 of the National Forest Policy 2020 p.6. on Harvesting and timber export regulation. It has put the target of expected result as “Reduction of unsustainable harvesting rates and log export volumes and maintenance of economic stability.”

¹⁹ Solomon Islands Voluntary National Review, June 2020 p.54, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26795VNR_2020_Solomon_Report.pdf

²⁰ Paradise Lost: How China Can Help the Solomon Islands Protect Its Forests, Global Witness, p.4

²¹ See National Forest Policy 2020, p.1

and the customary landowners, the Western Provincial Executive granted the licence to Kadiki Development Company.

12. Similarly, in Central Bugotu, Isabel Province, in March 2020, a logging company named Burwood Limited Company set up its machines for logging. The licence for logging in that area was granted in 2016 by the Isabel Provincial Executive, despite objections from the public.
13. As will be noted further below, our partners also drew attention to the lack of consultation of women during various stages of logging activities. We note that the Goal 12 of NFP calls to “regulate the application and monitoring of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) for the expedition of the felling licenses, ” while Goal 12 of NFP calls to “ recognize the traditional governance and decision making systems (e.g. TLCC- Traditional Local Council of Chiefs) in the timber rights acquisition and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes.”²²

Right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment

14. In Laovavasa, in Guadalcanal Island, logging activities have left behind great devastation.²³ Loggers harvesting the largest trees also end up destroying other small trees. One landowner witnessed that the hillsides in Laovavasa were destroyed by the extraction of one or two large trees, bringing down many smaller trees as they were cut. Loggers also cut many smaller trees to provide a slipway on which to drag the trees down to the river. This slipway was then treated with gallons of diesel oil to make it slippery and to facilitate getting trees down to the water or logging track. This resulted in pollution and loss of soil fertility within two or three years, severely affecting people and the environment. The consequences of the destruction of forest and land are considered very severe by the community, as soils are now eroding being exposed to sun and rain; water sources dry up; rainfall is not dispersed efficiently and flash floods happen, as well as droughts and landslides.
15. Current logging practices have led to soil erosion that has increased sediment in coastal areas and waterways,²⁴ and more broadly have led to poor water quality.²⁵ The Government is conscious of the negative impacts of logging activities on human rights and the environment.

²² See Goal 4.2 and Goal 12 of National Forest Policy 2020.

²³ Information collected by the member of the Society of St Francis (SSF) in Solomon Islands in August 2020. A similar research was done by the Dominicans Order (Friars, Sisters, Brothers and Laities) in conjunction to the one that was carried out by SSFSI in the West Guadalcanal. The research targeted five (5) catholic communities where there is an ongoing logging activity. The field assessment aimed to provide a reflection on the human rights situation and identify critical issues faced by the communities as a direct impact of logging operations. The research was carried out between 28th– 30th September 2020 within two provincial wards in Guadalcanal Province namely Saghalu western end of the island and Malango at the eastern side of Guadalcanal island.

²⁴ “In the meantime, logging methods are damaging the soil and exacerbating soil erosion, with increased sedimentation of waterways contributing to the flash flooding of Honiara in 2014 and increased sedimentation of coastal areas damaging in-shore fisheries and environmental assets important to tourism.” World Bank, p.54-55, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/416501528199593828/pdf/Solomon-Islands-SCD.pdf>

²⁵ Logging operations leading to soil erosion and poor water quality for Solomon Islands community, 30 April 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacificbeat/logging-operations-leading-to-soil-erosion-and/9711564#:~:text=Chromecast-.Logging%20operations%20leading%20to%20soil%20erosion%20and,quality%20for%20Solomon%20Islands%20community&text=The%20Solomon%20Islands%20government%20is,is%20having%20devastating%20environmental%20consequences.>

In its 2020 Voluntary National Review, it reports that unsustainable logging, and the resulting depletion of forests, may “alter local watersheds and increase the risk of flooding for local communities. The lack of windbreak provided by forests also exposes cleared land and villages to stronger winds, endangering agriculture and putting settled areas at greater risk during storms.”²⁶ The NFP calls for a review of forest and environmental regulations and legislation, with stricter enforcement of penalties and prosecution where relevant.²⁷

Right to An Adequate Standard of Living, including food, water and sanitation

16. Some 84% of Solomon Islanders engage in subsistence smallholder farming and rural communities rely on agriculture and forest products for their food and fuel.²⁸ The forest has traditionally played an important role in the livelihood of rural communities. Forests are a source of food, building materials and traditional medicines for the people.²⁹ The diversion of the economy towards logging has impacted farming and traditional ways of life. One person interviewed by our partners stated, “Before logging started, we ate good food, but since logging came we [...] are not interested anymore in going to the garden, we eat rice all the time and forget about our garden foods. After logging, the people will struggle hard to buy rice whenever they are hungry. Then they must go back to the ways of before, and they are not used to it anymore.”³⁰

Fisheries

17. Logging activities also adversely affect fisheries. Food security and income generation is largely dependent on agriculture but also on marine resources.³¹ As an archipelago country, fishery is a key source of livelihood for the population, in particular for communities in coastal areas.³² Its contribution to Gross Domestic Product has been increasing at a steady 1-2% a year and this growth is expected to continue. Coastal resources are an essential supply of protein with average annual fish consumption meeting 50% of required protein and amounting to 33.7kg to 35.4kg per capita.³³

18. Fish resources have declined as a result of sedimentation of rivers and reefs. This is a result of runoff from upstream cutting areas, and log-pond and wharf construction. Riverbanks erode as the prescribed buffer zones, which is 25m for streams and 50m for rivers, are often disrespected, and riverbeds are damaged by logging machinery as bridges are not consistently and properly constructed. If the coral reefs die there can be serious effects on the shore line because reefs can absorb up to 97% of the wave energy and thus constitute key

²⁶ Solomon Islands Voluntary National Review, June 2020, p.63-64, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26795VNR_2020_Solomon_Report.pdf

²⁷ See Goal 15 of National Forest Policy 2020

²⁸ Idem

²⁹ Idem

³⁰ Respondent 30, August 30, 2020

³¹ Allen MG, Bourke RM, Evans BR, Iramu E, Maemouri RK, Mullen BF, et al. Solomon Islands Smallholder Agriculture Study. Volume 4: Provincial Reports. 2006;4.

³² See https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255994016_Food_security_and_the_Coral_Triangle_Initiative#read

³³ National Development Strategy 2016 to 2035 Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders, see <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/sol175587.pdf>

protection against natural hazards.³⁴

19. In Laovavasa, fisher communities reported, “[A]s rivers turn murky and brown, especially when it rains, diving and spearfishing are getting increasingly hard, and in some places impossible. In downstream areas, and notably in narrow bays, runoff is also causing problems.”
20. Women engaged in the fishing industry noted the impacts of logging on the quality of water, and impact on fisheries. One interviewee stated that “fishing inside the bay is a problem now because the mud is covering the corals to die. But the people who like logging they don’t like to listen to us women. They say they don’t worry about these things. They like logging, they like development. But what kind of development is this when it damages everything? Is that development? Or is it damage?”³⁵

Jobs and livelihoods

21. More generally, individuals interviewed underscored the adverse impacts of logging on the rights of residents individually, on the community and on the environment. Local criticism of logging relates to its failure to benefit the local economy and its short and long term negative environmental and social impacts. The impacts on land and water often have direct implications for livelihoods. For example, the people in Laovavasa had been promised a better life through job creation, improvement of infrastructures and other services by the logging companies. However, as the logging activities started, their livelihood did not improve, instead the presence of the companies created general frustration and conflict.³⁶
22. A man from Maravovo, in Guadalcanal Island, reflected on the situation as follows “In logging, they take all the trees and all we get in return are some leaves from the tree [i.e. a handful of royalties]. It is like we are hunting dogs: the dogs do the work, but all they get are some bones to eat, while the hunter eats the meat.”³⁷
23. According to partners from the communities in Kolombangara,³⁸ the local population, including the landowners were very disappointed and felt deceived by the government and foreign companies operating in the area. The Government conducted an environmental impact assessment and laid down conditions, such as limiting logging to a fixed band of trees away from the river. However, thanks to bribed government inspectors and monitors of the landowner, the companies ended up taking many more trees, including those in the river. People also complained about the failure by the companies to clean up the log storage site on the coast, leaving thousands of logs, including species that cannot be exported, to rot or be used by the local community.

Conflicts

³⁴ See <https://news.mongabay.com/2014/12/reefs-reduce-97-percent-of-wave-energy-could-be-better-than-artificial-barriers/>

³⁵ Respondent 23, Interview on 30 August 2020

³⁶ Interview with women from Laovavasa, 29 August 2020.

³⁷ Interview with a man from Maravovo, 29 August 2020

³⁸ Based on the information from the Kolombangara Island, during a visit in February 2020, on the impact of logging activities.

24. The unity of the community around Laovavasa has been affected, including through increased tension. There are allegations that some members of the community who received money or jobs from the logging company have oppressed those who were marginalised and did not receive compensation for the destruction of their lands. This tension caused frustration over the lack of fair distribution of monetary and other benefits.
25. Wherever logging takes place, conflict appears to occur at every level: within households, villages and clans, between clans, and with the company. One community elder asserted “Logging pollutes the land, sea, bush, river and at the same time it pollutes the relationship between people. Everything touched by logging gets polluted and possibly lead to conflict.”³⁹

Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and impact on health

26. According to Mr Ray Andresen, Solomon Islands Water Strategic Manager, logging activities by Tabilo Timber, which operates in the area of Capital City Honiara, have reportedly affected the quality of Honiara’s main water source due to silt causing a milky colour to the water.⁴⁰ Although different government authorities were alerted, no action was taken to address the problem.
27. In February-March 2020, major floods in the Guadalcanal Province impacted Selwyn College of the Church of Melanesia, located in a coastal area surrounded by forest. The flood affected access to safe drinking water, sanitary facilities,⁴¹ food gardens of the school, as well as the rural health centre next to the school. As the septic tanks were flooded, there were serious concerns regarding the health impacts. The floods forced students to be evacuated from their dormitories, alongside staff,⁴² to Honiara. This was not the first time the school was flooded.⁴³ Floods are believed to be exacerbated by logging activities in the upstream area around the school compound. Due to the heavy rain, the water drainage system could not cope with the water debris and disrupted education activities for up to ten days.
28. In Paru, in Guadalcanal Island, an interviewee reported that oil leaking from a logging barge resulted in dead fish floating on the sea surface. Women and men from Paru reported that their children could no longer swim in the bay adjacent to the village because of oil spills. In villages along the seacoast near the log pond, people experienced oil pollution during high tide. One local woman stated, “Once while having our meal, we noticed a bad taste. The river which we used to fetch water for cooking had been polluted by oil. We had to throw away our meal.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Interview with an elderly man from Laovavasa, 29 August 2020.

⁴⁰ See <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/01/deforestation-in-the-solomon-islands/>

⁴¹ Information collected by the member of the Society of St Francis in Solomon Islands in February 2020.

⁴² Selwyn Flooded and Evacuated, The Melanesian Mission, 12 February 2020, <http://www.mmuk.net/news/selwyn-college-flooded-evacuated/>

⁴³ Selwyn College on Hold Amid Flooding, Solomon Times, 2 February 2009, <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/selwyn-college-on-hold-amid-flooding/3495>

⁴⁴ Interview with woman from Paru, 30 August 2020.

29. Partners from Tamboko, Ando, Titaraho and Pao Catholic communities in Saghalu and Malango ward of Guadalcanal Province stated that they are vulnerable to flash flooding, changing water course and sedimentation of drinking water sources. The water is unsafe for consumption due to the continuous logging activity and the changing nature of the natural habitat.
30. Logging companies do not only adversely impact water quality but have also reportedly limited access to water and sanitation for their employees. On 6th September 2020, employees of the Rima-Shalom logging company working in Vella-la-Vella in the Western Province complained that they did not have access to running water in the camp or even a nearby stream. Foreign and local workers complained to the camp manager, as working conditions became unbearable.⁴⁵

Women's and Children's Rights

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation in the context of logging activities

31. Solomon Islands is a “source, transit, and destination country for local and Southeast Asian men and women subjected to forced labour and forced prostitution, and local children subjected to sex and labour trafficking.”⁴⁶ Trafficking is closely linked to logging and mining activities, with such abuses often occurring at logging camps. A study in 2007 found that the presence of logging companies was a contributor to these abuses.⁴⁷ It shows that commercial sexual exploitation of children was a serious and substantial problem in some areas where logging is present.
32. There have been several allegations of sexual violence related to the presence of logging companies and their foreign workers. A report on the gendered effects of corporate logging in Malaita Islands found that women in the region experienced sexual exploitation.⁴⁸ The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women reported that the increased number of men working for logging companies in Solomon Islands had created a “market” for sexual services, and has also resulted in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.⁴⁹ Such cases were reported by our contact from the communities in Kolombangara Island, where several local girls were allegedly “sold” by their parents as sexual workers to logging workers, resulting in several pregnancies. One partner noted that after logging operations are finished, women and children are often abandoned. The UN Special Rapporteur stated that the problem is largely due to poverty and “is rendered possible due to a lack of awareness regarding commercial

⁴⁵ Information collected by the member of the Society of St Francis in Solomon Islands in September 2020.

⁴⁶ 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report- Solomon Islands, United States Department of State, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0a844.html>

⁴⁷ “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Solomon Islands: A Report Focusing on the Presence of the Logging Industry in a Remote Region,” a report prepared by Tania Herbert of the Christian Care Centre, Church of Melanesia, Solomon Islands, published in July 2007. See <https://www.abmission.org/news.php/137/solomon-islands-report-on-commercial-sexual-exploitation-of-children-and-logging>

⁴⁸ See <https://forestsnews.cifor.org/57820/in-the-solomon-islands-the-gendered-cuts-of-corporate-logging?fnl=>

⁴⁹ See the country visit report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the violence against women, its causes and consequences, A/HRC/23/49/Add.1 para 31.

and sexual exploitation among the communities and the lack of monitoring of these camp sites by labor and environmental authorities”.⁵⁰

33. In an interview conducted by our partner, one woman who was concerned for her daughter’s well-being noted, “there is security on the log pond, but they don’t pay attention to the girls who are roaming around or walking up to the logging camp. They are paid to protect the machines, so that is what they do, but nobody protects our girls.”⁵¹
34. Solomon Islands has one of the highest rates of family and sexual violence in the world where 64% of women aged 15–49 have reported physical and/or sexual abuse by a partner.⁵² The presence of logging companies might be contributing to the high rate of abuses, as there were reports on the increase of alcohol consumption among men in areas of logging companies. It also underlined the frustration of women who cannot secure jobs in the local industry themselves, while their husbands, brothers or sons were not earning enough money to make a substantial contribution to household needs.

Right to education for children

35. Although the Government has adopted the Free Education policy, parents are supposed to pay a tuition fee for 10-12 levels. The high cost for primary and secondary education has been considered as a contributing factor for parents living in rural areas to work and engage in logging activities. For example, the Honiara City Council adopted a policy requiring parents to pay as much as \$1000 annually for 10-12 level students, in addition to other fees that are approved and charged at the schools by the Honiara Education standing committee.⁵³
36. Parents place great hope on what education will bring for their children and are willing to sacrifice their long-term economic future (the forest) for it. There is an expectation that if universal free education is extended to the secondary level, it would reduce the pressure on parents to seek employment in the logging industry.

Women, Livelihoods and Gender Equality

37. Logging activities have other broad impacts on women’s lives and reinforce gender inequity in rural areas. A report by the World Bank found that women are disproportionately affected by logging and mining activities, in particular where women have a limited role in negotiations on land. Land deals “rarely reflect women’s land use, including for livelihoods and for child nutrition,” and land disputes lead to increased conflict and other negative impacts borne disproportionately by women.⁵⁴ This sentiment was reaffirmed in an interview,

⁵⁰ Idem.

⁵¹ Interview with a woman from Laovavasa, 16 August 2020.

⁵² See <https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SolomonIslandsFamilyHealthandSafetyStudy.pdf>

⁵³ See information from Honiara City Council at <https://honiacitycouncil.com/index.php/education-and-recreation-2/hcc-schools-parents-2/school-fees-2/>

⁵⁴ Solomon Islands: Systematic Country Diagnostic Priorities for Supporting Poverty Reduction & Promoting Shared Prosperity, World Bank, 1 June 2017

p.56, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/416501528199593828/pdf/Solomon-Islands-SCD.pdf>

where a respondent stated, “We have been neglected in decision-making process.”

38. Logging has been considered a male dominated sector, although gender should be irrelevant to land rights under Solomon Islands customary land tenure system. The domination of logging and other forms of commercial negotiations by men has marginalized women in land issues,⁵⁵ in particular in Guadalcanal Island where matrilineal ownership is practiced.⁵⁶ The Tamboko communities, adjacent to the logging operation, said that women were not consulted regarding the possible mitigation plan on the adverse impact of logging on their livelihood.
39. Partners found that the negative impacts of logging activities, especially on the environment and its ecosystem, are unbearable for women.⁵⁷ One woman pointed out that “with the culture of silence, women are not able to speak up in public or in front of men even though they know full well that it is their right in the matrilineal society.”⁵⁸

Environmental human rights defenders

40. In 2018, five environmental activists were imprisoned for opposing the logging activities of Xiang Lin Solomon Islands Ltd, which operated in the primary forest on Nende in Santo-Cruz Island in Temotu Province.⁵⁹ Its parent company is Xi Lin SI, a Malaysia-based logging company. The five protesters, known as *Nende Five*, tried to stop the company’s logging operations, which they alleged to be illegal,⁶⁰ and were accused of burning the company’s machinery. While three of the activists were acquitted, one activist, Mr Clement Tauto, is facing life imprisonment for arson and another, Mr Jerry Meioko, was convicted of larceny and unlawful damage; their lawyer stated that their confessions were given under duress.⁶¹
41. Mr. Titus Godfrey Meoblir, one of the five activists, said that there was no consultation with the community and landowners, nor a Timber Rights Hearing in accordance with the forestry legislation.⁶² Concerns over adverse environmental and social impacts and the lack of adequate consultations with communities were also raised in regard to mining activities.⁶³ The *Nende Five* case has helped expose the human rights violations that Solomon Islanders

⁵⁵ Dyer, M. 2017b. Growing down like a banana: Solomon Islands village women changing gender norms. *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 18:193-210. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2017.1301544>, accessed on 28th September 2020

⁵⁶ Maetala, R. 2008. Matrilineal land tenure systems in Solomon Islands: the cases of Guadalcanal, Makira and Isabel Provinces. Pages 35-72 in E. Huffer, editor. Land and women: the matrilineal factor. https://lrd.spc.int/land-use-managementPDF_file , accessed on 29th September 2020.

⁵⁷ The data is based on the interview of 100 women respondents in Solomon Islands, where 55% expressed that the logging activities brought negative impacts to environment.

⁵⁸ Information received by the Dominicans Network in Solomon Islands in August 2020.

⁵⁹ See <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/2018697773/the-battle-to-save-the-forests-of-the-solomons-nende>

⁶⁰ See <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/solomon-islands-xiang-lin-si-allegedly-linked-to-illegal-logging-in-the-solomon-islands-%E2%80%9Cnende-five%E2%80%9D-protestors-imprisoned>

⁶¹ <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/09/solomon-islands-environmental-defender-faces-life-sentence-for-arson-charge/>

⁶² See <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/05/solomon-islanders-tried-to-stop-the-logging-of-their-forest-and-may-pay-the-price/>

⁶³ Solomon Islands: Minister should meet directly with local communities over mining concerns, Amnesty International, 9 December 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/12/solomon-islands-minister-should-meet-directly-with-local-communities-over-mining-concerns/>

face as a consequence of systemic corruption within the logging sector.⁶⁴

Impact of logging activities on climate change

42. Solomon Islands is vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, similar to other island states in the Pacific region, and “is already experiencing the effects of climate change through trends of increasing temperature, decreasing precipitation, changing patterns of weather and extreme events, and accelerated coastal erosion due to rising sea levels.”⁶⁵ The right to health of the Solomon Islanders is affected. A joint report by the World Health Organisation indicated that climate change has increased health risks in the country. Particularly concerning are “vector-borne diseases, respiratory diseases, waterborne and foodborne diseases, malnutrition, and non-communicable diseases.”⁶⁶ The Government recognised that a rise in temperature will have big impacts on the future of Solomon Islands in areas such as agriculture, water, health, fisheries and the coast; affecting livelihoods and threatening food security if left unaddressed.⁶⁷
43. Despite its commitment to mitigate climate change, the Government of Solomon Islands has not submitted its revised Nationally Determined Contribution. The forest in Solomon Islands has been contributing to the world’s carbon sink. However, if the deforestation continues, the impact of logging activities will be very significant for the environment, not only for Solomon Islands but also the global efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
44. We note the primary goal of the “protection and conservation of biodiversity and forest ecosystems” in the NFP, and that these and other identified measures can positively contribute to both the environment and combatting climate change.

III. Recommendations to the Government of Solomon Islands

1. Protect human rights against abuses and environmental degradation by logging companies and ensure effective remedies when abuses have occurred.
2. Take appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that the use and exploitation of natural resources do not adversely affect the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.
3. Ensure that, through all stages of the logging process, the rights to participation and information of affected communities are fully respected, in accordance with international standards.

⁶⁴ See <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/05/solomon-islanders-tried-to-stop-the-logging-of-their-forest-and-may-pay-the-price/>

⁶⁵ See Solomon Islands State of Environment Report 2019, at <https://www.sprep.org/publications/state-of-the-environment-soe-report-2019-solomon-islands>

⁶⁶ See Solomon Islands, Health & Climate Change, Country Profile 2020 by WHO and UNFCCC at <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/329973>

⁶⁷ Information obtained from the Ministry of Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology , see <http://www.mecdm.gov.sb/climate-change.html>

4. Undertake awareness-raising programs on the environmental, social and human rights impacts of logging and on the rights and protections people shall enjoy, including programs targeting women and youths.
5. Take appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that the use of exploitation of natural resources do not infringe the rights of local communities to dispose freely of their lands, territory, and natural resources, in accordance with international standards.
6. Guarantee the effective protection of people at risk because they defend their rights or the rights of communities, the land or the environment in the context of logging projects and ensure that all violations committed against them are thoroughly and impartially investigated and that victims are provided with effective remedies.
7. Ensure effective protection against violence against women and children, including sexual abuse and exploitation and domestic violence, with a focus on communities affected by logging activities.
8. Ensure access to sufficient safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for the entire population, including those who are affected by, or even active in, logging activities.
9. Adopt a coherent and comprehensive mitigation and adaptation climate policy and actions based on human rights norms and principles.
10. Extend universal free education to the secondary level.