

“That’s where the politics comes in”

**Factors influencing policy responses to employment
in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu**

Stephen Close

October 2025

Revised August 2026

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis is my original work. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

The thesis, excluding references and appendices, does not exceed the ANU's maximum length of 100,000 words for a Doctor of Philosophy thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Close', with a stylized, flowing script.

Stephen Close

October 2025

Acknowledgements

In 2010-11, Daniel Rove, then Director of Social Services in Solomon Islands' Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination, asked me why, when youth employment was such a major challenge for the country, his government was not able to respond to the problem. While riding a bicycle around Lake Burley Griffin in 2013 I realised that this is what I wanted to undertake PhD study to find out. From the initiation of this research I would like to thank Dr Richard Curtain who affirmed his support for me and my research and the niche it fills in addressing an important development problem. I would like to thank all participants and advisors on the research in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

In Solomon Islands I would like to in particular note my thanks to those who supported the research including Daniel Rove, Dr Franco Rodie and Dr Patricia Rodie, Judith Fangalasu'u, John and Linda Wate, Christina Bakolo, Hugo Hebala, Calvin Sese, Bob Pollard, Constance Nasi, Paul Kakai, Benedict Kausua, Joe Ririmae, Priscilla Maeniuta, Joash Maneipuri, Sandra Bartlett, Salvador Jiao, Andrea Bateman, Richard Hellyer, Dr Alan Male and Barry Peddle for their support and advice. In Vanuatu, a country I did not know well enough, I would like to thank Linda Kenni, Mia Rimon, Christelle Thieffry, Dan McGarry, the Vanuatu National Cultural Centre and in particular Richard Shing and Hendlyn Mala, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and in particular May Garae, Fremden Yanhambath, and Anna Gibert, and Georgia Noy for their support, advice and connections.

I would like to deeply thank the Australian National University for the domestic fee waiver scholarship provided for my study (the irony of which in relation to the case study topics is not lost on me) - ANU was the right place for this research, with deepest thanks to my supervisory panel of Professor Julien Barbara, Professor Ron Duncan, Dr Rochelle Lee-Bailey and Dr Colin Wiltshire. I would like to thank my peer researchers at ANU, in particular Dr Daniel Evans. I would like to thank work colleagues, in particular Dr Truman Packard, Carlos Orton Romero, Amy Luinstra, Virginia Horscroft and my incomparable professional sister Myrna Machuca-Sierra at the World Bank, Jonathan Pryke of the Lowy Institute, and all my supervisors and colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who helped me achieve my study and work goals, where individual effort is lost in a team ethic and a strict approach to conflict of interest. In the long-delayed final stretches I

would like to warmly thank my graduate peer Dr David Oakeshott for his very wise, proactive and supportive practical and emotional advice at critical final stages where completion seemed an impossible mountain, and likewise for my Nauru study-buddy Dr Carly Hawkins who provided invaluable peer support.

On a personal note I would like to thank my parents Elizabeth and David and my incredibly talented sister Susan, and my successive significant others Clive, David, Rob, Sam and now Rowan for patiently and supportively sharing this journey with me.

Abstract

This doctoral research examines specific factors influencing two important employment policy areas differently in two Pacific states.

Pacific Islanders prioritise better jobs and livelihoods for themselves and their families. However, employment in the Pacific has been described as a “*wicked public policy problem*” (Hassall, 2020, p. 124). Limited education, economic growth and jobs has impacts on poverty, under-development, and politics, including civil unrest. For decades overseas tertiary scholarships have been prioritised. Broader change has come from overseas labour opportunities in the last two decades. Pacific employment policy responses vary; with mixed impacts and unclear trends. External aid donors have been influential. How politics and societal interests shape Pacific employment policy in practice has been little researched.

The research draws on interviews with policy stakeholders in both countries, and analyses policy documentation, academic material, budget and student data and media articles. Case studies trace policy-making from 2006/2007 to 2019 (Vanuatu Government Scholarships from 1997). Applying critical policy analysis and policy ethnography, this research identifies how politics shaped employment policy: who had power and how they used it.

The case studies present multiple ways that politicians and officials responded to budget problems, political pressures and corruption, including varied approaches to distribute access. These included Solomon Islands’ formalised ‘Constituency Awards’; Vanuatu’s enforced sanctions on personalised selection of scholarships; different results of attempted student loan schemes; and inception of two contrasting national universities. In Solomon Islands, emergent national leadership and significant donor substitution helped boost labour mobility numbers at the end of the case study period. In Vanuatu strong domestic policy leadership on labour mobility from early on led to broad participation but also policy contestation and ‘problems of success’. In all four cases, significant donor influence raised questions about local policy ownership, and led to unintended consequences.

Comparison of these cases reveals that important political and institutional differences shaped how and when politicians and officials were able to develop, deliver and reform policy. Different distributions of power, incentives, accountabilities, and societal interests, shaped policy decisions and pathways. Both broader and sectoral politics shaped two distinct patterns of employment policy-making in the two states.

This thesis provides a rare, overdue, and contemporary understanding of the politics of policy-making on employment, a long-term, complex policy problem in Pacific states. It presents new insights into the agency of policy actors, and practical understanding of the operation and contestation of formal and informal institutions in Pacific policy-making. This research ‘brings the politics back in’ to build a better understanding of how public policy is developed, delivered and reformed in Pacific states, how politics affects education and employment, and how Pacific officials work across formal and informal institutions to meet demand for education and employment.

List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANU	Australian National University
APH	Australian Parliament House
APHEDA	Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad / Union Aid Abroad
AUD	Australian Dollars
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CITREC	Canadian International Training and Education Corporation
CPIA	Country Policy & Institutional Assessment
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNC	Gouvernement de Nouvelle Calédonie
GNI	Gross National Income
GoA	Government of Australia
GPA	Grade Point Average
IAD	Institutional Analysis for Development
IAU	Inter-Agency Understanding
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LMAP	(Australian) Labour Mobility Assistance Programme
LMI	(AusAID) Labour Mobility Initiative
LSU	Labour sending unit
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Industry and Employment
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MDPAC	Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination
MFAT	New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development
(NZ)DoL	(New Zealand) Department of Labour
NZG	New Zealand Government
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PACER	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PAISL	Pacific Islands Labour Sending meeting
PDIA	Problem- Driven Iterative Adaptation
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PER	Public Expenditure Review

PFM	Public Financial Management
PGPE	Problem-driven Governance and Political Economy analysis
PIC	Pacific Island Country/ies
PICTA	Pacific Islands Trade Agreement
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PIPP	Pacific Institute of Public Policy
PLMAM	Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSET	Post Secondary Education and Training
PSWPS	Pilot Seasonal Worker Programme Scheme
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer (scheme)
SABER	(World Bank) Systems Assessment for Benchmarking Education Results
SB	Scholarships Board
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPP	(NZAID) Strengthening Pacific Partnerships programme
SWP	Seasonal Worker Programme
TI	Transparency International
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission of the Asia Pacific
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollars
USP	University of the South Pacific
WRP	Work Ready Pool

Solomon Islands Acronyms

CA	Constituency Awards
CDFs	Constituency Development Funds (Solomon Islands)
CEWG	Core Economic Working Group
COESI	Coalition for Education Solomon Islands
DET	Department of External Trade
LASI	Literacy Association of Solomon Islands
LMOC	Labour Mobility Oversight Committee
LMU	Labour Mobility Unit
MEHRD	Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
MFAET	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade
MoCILI	Ministry of Commerce Industry Labour and Immigration
MOFT	Ministry of Finance and Treasury

NEAP	National Education Action Plan
NHRDTP	National Human Resource Development and Training Plan
NTC	National Training Committee
NTU	National Training Unit
OAG	Office of the Auditor General
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PS	Permanent Secretary (Solomon Islands)
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RTC	Rural Training Centres (Solomon Islands)
SBD	Solomon Islands Dollars
SIARTC	Solomon Islands Association of Rural Training Centres
SICCI	Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry
SICHE	Solomon Islands College of Higher Education
SIDT	Solomon islands Development Trust
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SINPF	Solomon Islands National Provident Fund
SINU	Solomon Islands National University
SITASN	Solomon Islands & Toowoomba Australia Support Network
SITEC	Solomon Islands Tertiary Education Commission
SITESA	Solomon Islands Tertiary Education and Skills Authority
TSI	Transparency Solomon Islands

Vanuatu Acronyms

AUF	Agence Universitaire Francaise
CRP	Comprehensive Reform Programme (Vanuatu)
DG	Director General (Vanuatu)
ESU	Employment Services Unit
GoV	Government of Vanuatu
MESS	VNPF Members Education Support Scheme
MFEM	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
MoFAICET	Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation and External Trade
MPM	Ministry of the Prime Minister
NHRDP	National Human Resource Development Plan
NHRDP	National Human Resources Development Plan
NPV	National Parliament of Vanuatu
NSTB	National Scholarships and Training Board
NUV	National University of Vanuatu
PMO	Prime Minister's Office

SPPAC	Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination
TSCU	Training and Scholarships Coordination Unit
TV	Transparency Vanuatu
VANGO	Vanuatu Association of Non Government Organisations
VCCI	Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry
VEPAC	Vanuatu Education Policy Advocacy Coalition
VERM	Vanuatu Education Road Map
VESP	Vanuatu Education Support Program
VGFS	Vanuatu Government Funded Scholarships
VITE	Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education
VNPF	Vanuatu National Provident Fund
VNSO	Vanuatu National Statistics Office
VQA	Vanuatu Qualifications Authority
VSP	Vanuatu Skills Partnership
VTU	Vanuatu Vatu

Currency conversion

During the policy case period

	<i>At 30 June 2006</i>	<i>At 30 June 2019</i>
United States Dollar (USD)	1.00	1.00
Australian Dollar (AUD)	1.37	1.42
Solomon Islands Dollar (SBD)	6.97	7.96
Vanuatu Vatu (VUV)	108.2	112.14

Source: (OANDA, 2025)

Maps

1. Solomon Islands

Source: (CIA, 2022a)



2. Vanuatu

Source: (CIA, 2022b)



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1: Introduction

This thesis investigates the development and delivery of public policy on employment in two major Pacific Island countries (PICs), addressing a gap in existing policy research. Employment presents a particular public policy challenge for Pacific states. In any country, working or having a job is important for people to earn income to meet the needs of themselves and their dependants, to overcome poverty, and to participate in their economy and society (UN, 1999). Formal employment helps provide job security and a sense of identity and status in a modern developed state (Curtain, 2001, pp. 7-10).

However, developing and implementing policies to create sufficient, quality jobs for citizens has proven a major challenge for many PICs. By the start of the 21st century, small and distant independent Pacific states struggled to sustain economic growth and employment opportunities for a growing youth workforce. The small size of PIC economies; limited higher level skills; limited work and business opportunities; poor infrastructure; and economic growth lagging behind population growth; contributed to a complex and significant Pacific employment challenge (ADB & ILO, 2017, pp. vi-ix). Three of the most populous Pacific countries – Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – still have relatively large populations engaged in subsistence and informal livelihoods, beyond or at the periphery of government services and the formal private sector (Duncan & Voigt-Graff, 2008, p. 14). High unemployment, inactivity and lack of formal jobs particularly affects young people (defined by the UN as people between 15 and 24 years old) (UNDESA, 2009). Pacific countries have among the world's highest youth populations: around a third of the working age population are aged 15-24 (UNICEF & SPC, 2011, p. 7). Many of these young people are without jobs: in Vanuatu 13 per cent and in Solomon Islands 30 per cent of those aged 15 to 24 are employed (SPC, 2019). The total share of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Vanuatu climbed from 24 per cent in 2006 to 34 per cent in 2019 (WB, 2022b). Growing youth populations find limited economic and job opportunities because of constrained formal economies. Poverty combined with demographic pressure from increasingly youthful and urbanised populations has on multiple occasions led to civil unrest (Allen, 2007; 2008, pp. 126, 168; PIPP, 2011; UNDP, 2011, pp. 14-15). This has added political urgency to the policy problem of un- and under-employment.

Employment problems in the Pacific include complex supply and demand issues. While labour supply exceeds formal sector demand for labour, there is also a skills mismatch. Labour shortages arise as local skills supplied do not meet the demands of employers, and foreign workers fill mid- and high-skill-level jobs. As the traditional destination for surplus labour, rural agricultural livelihoods are less desirable for the large number of young job seekers (Farchy, 2010, p. 23), and less feasible in a context of intensive resource use, limited or costly supply chains to markets, and climate change (Haque, 2014, pp. 5, 24; ILO & ADB, 2017, p. 41). Lack of skills and work, particularly disadvantaging youth and women, leaves people socially excluded, and politically, with less agency and voice in their societies (UNDP, 2011, pp. 19, 88). This makes employment policy a significant social sector policy area.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) considers employment policies to be integrated frameworks to provide employment of choice for all, including more and better quality jobs, based on assessments of a country's employment situation, and requiring 'whole of government' approaches (ILO, 2022a). Globally, many governments struggle to develop and deliver such approaches or deliver enough quality, formal jobs for their populations. Local and overseas employers report they could grow their businesses if they could find adequately skilled, job-ready workers to fill vacancies (ILO, 2010). In making policy, governments face difficulties translating general political commitments to increased employment into tangible reforms and policy actions (WB, 2012b). In economic terms, policy responses can focus heavily on labour supply-side interventions – such as investments in education and training – when the nature of the employment problem, i.e. a shortage of available jobs, may indicate the need for broader and demand-side measures (ILO, 2012). As it does worldwide, employment policy-making emerges as a complex and 'wicked' public policy problem in the Pacific (Hassall, 2020, p. 124).

Over successive decades, national policy responses to employment have been a repeatedly stated priority for Pacific Islanders, their governments and external development partners (APH, 2024, p. 47; Jayaweera & Morioka, 2008; UN, 2015; UNDP, 2011, p. v). However, these policy responses have varied greatly between policy intent, development and delivery. Formal policies and major investments by governments and donors have had mixed or even unknown employment outcomes. In many Pacific countries there has been little progress in policy initiatives to improve employment outcomes broadly, and little comparable data on trends in employment to assess progress. Pacific countries have faced challenges developing effective responses to employment, partly due to structural factors associated with size,

remoteness and resourcing. Many Pacific citizens have been forced to rely on informal and subsistence livelihoods, or have increasingly sought employment opportunities overseas through growing - but inequitably accessible - labour mobility opportunities. The pressing and diverse experience of Pacific policy-making on employment has been relatively little-studied. This thesis will explore the factors in national policy-making and -delivery on this vital and complex policy issue in two Pacific states.

1.1: Research question and case studies

The question this thesis investigates is: “*What factors influence policy development, delivery and change in two major employment policy responses to employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu: overseas tertiary scholarships and overseas labour mobility?*”. Investigating this question in turn raises multiple further questions. These include what policies were developed, how and why; with influence and decisions by which actors, for what reasons; and how and why actors responded to pressures and contestation that changed policy trajectories.

Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have been selected for this research because of their many similarities, but critical differences. The two countries have striking parallels in their structures, politics, institutions and economies; presenting similar challenges to policy-making. Both face similarly significant employment policy challenges and have similar structural underpinnings behind their employment outcomes. With relevance to employment policy, both states have rural and youthful populations dispersed across island groups, limited human development outcomes and, for most workers, subsistence and informal livelihoods – characteristics presented in Chapter 3. Kinship and island allegiances often trump national institutions and policy interests, and under-resourced formal state institutions are negotiated with informal institutions and pressures. In both, significant external influence shapes policy-making. As this research will present, in the last two decades, both have directed significant policy focus on employment through overseas tertiary scholarships and labour mobility schemes. These two case study policy areas selected for this research remain a high priority, and have attracted significant political and public contestation. Yet between similar policies in similar political contexts, these policy-making experiences have diverged in important ways. This thesis provides critical public policy research explaining the factors in policy development, delivery and reform in these two areas, identifying critical differences in structures, institutional arrangements, distribution of power and action by policy actors in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu that shape policy-making differently. A high level of clientelist behaviours and incentives have been identified as a constraint to economic growth and policy reform in these

contexts (Duncan & Hassall, 2011). A question arises of the role such clientelism (defined in Section 2.3.1) has in shaping employment policy. This research seeks to complement existing, largely economic studies of Pacific labour markets, to deliberately approach employment as an important area of social sector policy, subject to significant political contestation. Research significance will be further discussed in Section 1.1.3, and national contexts for employment policy-making in Chapter 3.

1.1.1: Overseas tertiary scholarships

Forming the first case study for critical policy study, ‘overseas tertiary scholarships’ refers to support provided to eligible students to study higher education overseas. Overseas tertiary scholarships have been a significant policy response to employment in both states included in this research because they are among measures governments apply to improve employment outcomes, and because of the significant resources and attention the policy response has attracted over a long time. This has been a major policy focus of many governments in small Pacific states to meet national skills, labour and development needs where local higher education opportunities are not available. In developing countries, higher education has for decades contributed to higher economic growth, employment and earnings, and improved the quality of public administration, health care and teaching at every level of education (Murthi et al., 2021; Patrinos & Montenegro, 2013; Runde et al., 2023). How people access tertiary education is much debated, with scholarships an important mechanism, including for overseas study (Ahmad & Bloom, 2000). Governments and donors use overseas scholarships to build human capital, and as a capacity development tool in national development strategies, with even greater relevance to addressing the pressures and opportunities of globalisation (Dassin et al., 2018). Overseas tertiary scholarships can be an important policy for employment.

Marking their importance as a policy priority, in several Pacific countries, tertiary scholarships have been prominent in government budgets and in the attention of politicians, policy-makers and the public. Overseas tertiary scholarships enjoy a tradition of high status linked to the overseas education of independence leaders and their successors (Chevalier, 2022, p. 80; Corbett, 2015a, pp. 31-32; Crocombe, 1976). While originally limited in number, as Chapters 4 and 5 will present, in the last two decades, rapidly increasing numbers of eligible candidates from expanded secondary education in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have increased demand for tertiary scholarships, and government expenditure on them. In both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu overseas tertiary scholarships have been the responsibility of units within respective

Ministries of Education. Policy decisions within and about these units will be the subject of case study.

In both states, aid donor scholarships have also been prominent, as well as subsidies and scholarships for domestic study. Instead, this research focuses on nationally-funded and -managed overseas tertiary scholarship programs in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. This is because they are more clearly delineable and more directly related to domestic politics and policy-making processes, as further explained in Section 3.4.3, which introduces the policy case area in greater detail. Analysis of overseas tertiary scholarships policy in Solomon Islands (Chapter 4) and Vanuatu (5) presents the key factors influencing major policy developments in the case study periods, including how policies were disputed, formal and informal institutions negotiated, and how change occurred.

1.1.2: Overseas labour mobility

The thesis presents case study analysis of domestic policy-making on labour mobility as a prominent but contested Pacific employment policy response.

With globalisation and increased global trade over recent decades, international labour mobility gained momentum as a policy response to increase employment in low income countries. Significant international evidence identifies positive impacts of labour mobility on income, poverty reduction and business activity in ‘sending’ communities (Doyle & Sharma, 2017; Ratha et al., 2011). Negative effects have included labour and social impacts at home and vulnerability of migrant workers (Abella, 2013). Nevertheless, overall economic and development benefits of labour mobility, and particularly of circular migration schemes, prioritised such approaches in global development agendas in the 21st century.

In this global context, a strong public policy case arose for labour mobility to help meet Pacific employment needs. In recent decades, employment in temporary labour schemes to Australia and New Zealand has become a major form of Pacific labour force participation. Pacific labour mobility has become a highly successful, high profile but contested area of employment policy. It has evolved from widespread advocacy for seasonal worker schemes to Australia and New Zealand in the mid-2000’s, to current debates about equity, worker exploitation and ‘problems of success’ (Dornan, 2018).

While both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu were motivated to participate in seasonal labour schemes from 2007, Vanuatu’s participation expanded rapidly while Solomon Islands’ participation followed more slowly. The available research evidence base on seasonal labour

schemes has focused on ‘early mover’ countries with more widespread participation – Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa – and more macro-economic analyses of ‘how much’, than qualitative research of the ‘why’ (Connell & Petrou, 2019). While scholarly focus has been on impacts, worker treatment and practical implementation issues, there has been an absence of research on domestic Pacific politics of policy-making on the schemes. Beyond the policy parameters of Australia and New Zealand, this research will bridge a knowledge gap by identifying significant differences in politics and policy-making on this policy area in the two countries which may help explain the important differences in participation and policy delivery. This policy area is introduced in greater detail at Section 3.4.4, and explored in detailed country cases at Chapters 6 (Solomon Islands) and 7 (Vanuatu).

1.1.3: Research significance and hypothesis

This doctoral research is significant as it contributes to two important areas of knowledge on public policy and employment in Pacific countries. Firstly, it investigates policy factors shaping two key employment policies in Pacific states, to contribute a better understanding of the contemporary politics of employment in the Pacific. Secondly, this research contributes to the understanding of the broader politics of public policy making in the Pacific. These contributions address existing gaps in public policy literature in the Pacific (see Chapter 2).

Firstly, through critical policy analysis, this research contributes better understanding of the political economy of policy responses to employment. Employment issues in Pacific states have been studied from multiple perspectives, but rarely with a political perspective, despite these policies being prominent and publicly contested. Little is known about the sector-specific politics and institutional dynamics affecting the complex policy challenge of employment. This reflects a worldwide gap. In developed countries, with rapid changes to the structure of work and social classes, multiple authors have identified that political industrial relations study has been replaced with more technocratic human resource managerialism (Ackers, 2002; Kaufman, 2004b; Kelly, 2003; Whalan, 2008). Empirical and political economy study of employment policy has been dominated by economic analyses quantifying labour market institutions and incentives (Harrod, 2002; Kaufman, 2004a; Rebitzer, 1993; Saint-Paul, 2003). In the Pacific, reports, consultations and policy recommendations have been provided from macro-economic, labour market analytical and youth employment perspectives by development agencies, international financial institutions and Pacific regional organisations (Carling, 2013; Curtain, 2013; Duncan & Nakagawa, 2006; Duncan & Voigt-Graff, 2008; Haque, 2014; Luthria, 2006; UNDP, 2011; UNESCAP, 2007; UNICEF & SPC, 2011). There have been education and skills

system needs assessments and policy studies, studies of industrial relations and labour history, and frequent media attention and blogs on economic and youth issues (ADB, 2008; DFAT, 2015b; Jayaweera & Morioka, 2008; Moore et al., 1990; PIPP, 2011; Prasad & Hince, 2001). Among the wide range of frames applied to skills development and employment in the Pacific there is rarely attention to national political factors and institutional dynamics affecting employment. This thesis meets this gap on the politics and social sector dynamics of employment policy through a critical policy analysis. It does so by identifying sector-specific political economy dynamics in the two case study policy areas and therefore contributing findings to global literature on public policy and the politics of employment.

Secondly, the thesis contributes to an emerging but surprisingly limited body of scholarship on policy-making and institutional development in the Pacific. There is limited critical or academic study of how policy and institutions are developed and changed in Pacific island states, including key differences in policy processes between states, and how policy-makers engage with influential informal institutions and practices. Much of the available analysis of public policy are reports commissioned by aid donors for the purpose of capacity building and budget support programmes. Hassall and Aiafi have studied the common structures and political dynamics of Pacific island policy-making in response to multiple public policy challenges (Aiafi, 2016; Hassall, 2020). Discussions of politics and governance in the Pacific have frequently investigated the limitations and compromise of modern state institutions in Pacific states (Cox et al., 2007; Hassall, 2020; Laking, 2010; Larmour, 1996). Institutions in the Pacific have often been framed through literatures on fragility and state-building, notably in response to issues of state collapse in countries such as Solomon Islands (Dinnen & Firth, 2008). This literature characterises the institutional environment of Pacific states in terms of ‘hybridity’ of ‘modern’ and formal state institutions with ‘traditional’ and informal social and cultural institutions (Kent et al., 2018). This framing has led to practical recommendations to external donor agencies to support ‘best fit’ policy approaches mediating this institutional hybridity (Roderick Duncan, 2011; Wallis et al., 2018). There remain gaps in understanding of how informal institutions shape policy-making, which this thesis will help bridge.

Going beyond existing technocratic and economic analyses, the research will illuminate political dynamics affecting the development of policies and institutions. Globally, in the last two decades there has been growing interest in the political economy of reform, including how power and politics interact to shape policy. Understanding political economy has been an increasing focus of policy studies, with researchers such as Leftwich and Hudson recognising

the need to move beyond technical approaches to policy to consider how politics and power dynamics interact to shape policy development and implementation (Hudson et al., 2018; Leftwich, 2009). Duncan, Hassall and others applied political economy understandings from a more macro-economic perspective to understand Pacific public policy reform (Roderick Duncan, 2011; Duncan & Hassall, 2011). Drawing on tools developed by Leftwich and others, political economy analyses have been undertaken at macro- and sector levels of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands developing understanding of national development dynamics (Allen, 2011; Cox et al., 2007; Craig & Porter, 2014; DFAT, 2013c; Horscroft et al., 2017; Wiltshire & Batley, 2018). These analyses commonly identified the influence of informal rules and practices; the role of which in Pacific politics have also been widely debated (Brigg, 2009; Fukuyama, 2008; Haque, 2012; Morgan, 2005). Linked to informal practices and rules, corruption has been widely identified as a problem (Larmour, 1997; TI, 2021b). Duncan and Hassall's study of the political economy reform in the Pacific identified the significant but varying role of clientelism in complicating policy reform in Pacific states (Roderick Duncan, 2011; Duncan & Hassall, 2011, pp. 266-267). Research findings in this thesis supplement this literature by studying policy-makers' decisions and responses to personalised and politicised selection pressures at sectoral level; in a specific time period (the 2000s and 2010s) of surging education and employment demand in Pacific states, and contestation over policy responses.

The hypothesis of this thesis is that political economy dynamics of structures, institution and agency can help explain unexpected pathways between policy formulation, implementation and reform, even in similar contexts, on the pressing public policy issue of employment. A conceptual framework of critical policy analysis using a political economy approach will help address the research question and provide the above empirical contributions. This conceptual framework, further developed in Chapter 2, will enable identification of factors influencing policy responses from among policy framing and objectives; contextual structures and resources; the role of formal and informal institutions; and the power, actions, incentives and accountabilities of policy actors.

1.2: Methodology

1.2.1: Policy tracing in cross-national comparative case studies

The research method is primarily qualitative as this is best suited to open-ended and inductive 'how and why' questions of this research (Guest et al., 2013, p. 1). Complementing existing economic analyses of Pacific labour markets, such 'how and why' questions arise from gaps

in existing knowledge on Pacific employment policy-making. Qualitative research methods are suited to providing descriptions of social phenomena in context (Vidich & Lyman, 1994, pp. 24-26). Drawing on policy ethnography, the method of this research is policy tracing in a cross-national, comparative case study. Tracing of the evolution of policy in the two case study policy areas identifies bottlenecks and decision-making processes, including who participates, pressures, influences and resists, and how. The thesis also presents factors in policy evolution by comparing case studies in similar (though not identical) structural contexts (Little, 1991). A conceptual framework of political economy analysis which synthesises political, economic and sociological perspectives enables critical analysis of public policy-making.

This research adopts elements of critical policy ethnography (Dubois, 2015; Moss, 2020) to explain influences on policy decisions and change. Policy areas which shape and order people's lives are significant for anthropological study, to understand norms and institutions, discourses, meaning, knowledge and power, and global and local frames (Shore & Wright, 1997). Multiple theorists have recognised and synthesised important contributions of sociological perspectives to understandings of institutional change (Tang, 2011), developing country policy-making (Grindle & Thomas, 1991) and development processes (Leftwich & Sen, 2011). The research presents several approaches characteristic of policy ethnography. It blends observation, interviews and document analysis to explore two policy areas in two nation state contexts (Travers, 2001). The cultural contexts and institutions shaping these policy areas are also analysed (Trondman & Willis, 2000). The research seeks to identify groups with greater or lesser voice or power in the policy area and differentiate their interests and agency. Such dimensions are particularly significant in the social sector policies studied given their potentially wide population impacts, and the potential for individuals and groups to shape policy delivery and change. Distinct from mainstream positivist policy analysis, 'critical' policy ethnography is able to reveal broader social, economic and political power relations at work in policy areas (Dubois, 2015, pp. 473-477). The research provides critical policy analysis by identifying the frames, norms and broader socio-economic structures and power relations influencing the policy cases.

Policy tracing was defined by Collier as "*the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator*" (Collier, 2011, p. 823). The research applies similar elements of policy tracing as described by Collier, including causal observations and careful description. Process tracing as applied in this research is helpful in identifying and explaining novel political and social phenomena. Careful

description of key moments in time will help identify causal factors, supported by triangulation with numerical data (in the case of this research, budget data and student numbers).

The explanatory role of case study research is particularly relevant to identifying factors in policy responses. Case studies provide understanding of a unit of analysis in its context, with the capability to describe, explain and explore phenomena (Priya, 2021, p. 10). This research builds understanding of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ aspects of real-life political and social phenomena by exploring them in depth and embedded within their context (Yin, 2009). Case study research has also faced limitations and criticisms. Cutler criticised case study researchers who failed to meet methodological standards needed to achieve validity (Cutler, 2004, p. 374), and Gilgun labelled case studies as “uncontrolled” and unable to determine causation design (Gilgun, 1994, p. 373). Design and implementation issues, and challenges in achieving rigour or generalising findings, can undermine the legitimacy of case studies as a research tool (Yin, 2009, p. 10). While such deficiencies can mean they are considered inferior in explanatory power to experimental or correlational studies, authors have argued many strengths of case studies, including that case studies can increase understanding of experience (Stake, 1978), can add unexpected findings to contribute to knowledge, theory and practice (Harland, 2014, pp. 1120-1121), and can be made more credible through attention to design and documentation (Yin, 2009). Case study research is also a relevant approach within qualitative research which does not seek to determine causation nor produce generalised findings, but seeks deep, rich explanations for understanding phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These strengths make case studies most appropriate to this research.

Cross-national policy studies present a number of strengths, some of which can mitigate the limitations of case study methods. Klein and Marmor identified that where there was greater similarity in policy problems or responses, there was increased likelihood of presenting nuances in policy formations, specific national characteristics, policy similarities, and findings that could disprove universal generalisations. Such findings could counteract “explanatory provincialism” (Klein & Marmor, 2008, p. 906). They also made the case for policy analysis being eclectic by including diverse factors, as making sense of whole policy requires synthesis. This thesis attempts such synthesis of economic, political and sociological perspectives in the conceptual framework of political economy analysis presented in Chapter 2.

Comparative political study can help scholars seeking to address real-world problems through systematic analysis of observed data across countries. Comparative political study can provide contextual description, classification and typologies; test hypotheses; help build theory; and

enable prediction (Landman & Carvalho, 2016). Some ethnographic, relativist and interpretivist scholars consider scientific comparison of political case studies either limited or impossible because all meaning is locally determined (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Landman & Carvalho, 2016; Macintyre, 1971). However, those scholars balancing relativist and universalist perspectives, such as Landman, propose managing these risks by focusing on a smaller number of countries of which the scholar employing a comparativist approach has ‘thorough substantive knowledge’, expertise in compiling cross-country data, and specifying the functional equivalence between concepts or indicators (Landman & Carvalho, 2016). I have adopted such strategies, drawing on my personal professional experience and networks in both case study countries, to mitigate the risks of comparative cross-country political case study research.

Interpretation of different frames of meaning (understandings of issues, which may be value-laden) has an important role in critical public policy analysis. Policy analysis that is ‘critical’ seeks to understand policies in political context, not only in terms of inputs and outcomes, but in terms of the political and social interests, values and norms and assumptions that shape these policy processes – integrating understandings of power in policy-making (Fischer et al., 2015). There is particular relevance to case study approaches to critical policy analysis in education policy. ‘Critical theory’ proposed the emancipatory potential of critique of existing social systems of advantage and domination, particularly in education (Giroux, 2001). Critical education theory has been applied to a wide range of educational disciplines and practices (Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999). Critical policy analysis in education typically examines discourses and power relations in the construction and function of policies, taking into account political and social context and opportunities for reform and social change (Rudolph & O’Connor, 2023). This research goes some way to identifying discourses and frames to policies in political and social context and opportunities for reform and social change, without deeper ontological or epistemological exploration.

There are also important limitations to the conceptual framework and methodology of this research. Some limitations reflect the challenges of synthesising economic, political and sociological approaches inherent in political economy analysis, and inevitably stopping short of full rigour against any of the three disciplines. Challenges of cross-disciplinary research include the ability to satisfy balances of objectivity versus subjectivity, theory versus practice, precise terminology, validity or representativity, and causality or description (Aagard-Hansen, 2007). Limitations to the data approach are presented at 1.2.2.

This research attempts a ‘neutral’ view to contribute to ‘critical’ policy ethnography of Pacific policy-making (Dubois, 2015). For some, ‘research’ itself is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (Smith, 1999), and its ‘othering’ of subjects of anthropological research (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Interpretive approaches to research recognise the importance of the ‘personal biography’ of the researcher, and ‘their particular class, gender, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspective’ (Guba & Lincoln, 2007, p. 8). Yin identified reflexivity as important in case study research (Yin, 2009). I acknowledge my own positionality explicitly in Section 1.3.1. below, and limited mitigations, within an overall positivist frame of this research. Criticisms of political economy analysis as it is conducted are discussed further at Section 2.3.

1.2.2: Data approach

In this research, secondary analysis of key policy documents, media articles and budget and participant data is triangulated with primary data from interviews with policy stakeholders to identify factors influencing policy development, negotiation, implementation, and change.

Research findings will be derived from a range of data sources:

- a) *Statistical and budget data* on Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – including demographic, economic and labour market data to understand structural context factors, and more case study- specific budget and student data to understand the context and impacts of policy decisions as part of policy process tracing;
- b) *Primary and secondary document analysis* of legislation, government policy documents and plans, government and donor-commissioned reports and reviews, and media articles; and
- c) *Semi-structured qualitative interviews* with actors (whether within responsible agencies, or stakeholders of the case study issue).

The triangulation of data from these three types of sources provides a comprehensive strength of empirical findings that goes beyond other political economy and policy case studies of these two countries. Consideration of planned and actual budget data, worker and student data, and their trends over a long time frame, against policy decisions and documentation and external and media reports and debates, supports a strength of findings to understand political economy dynamics in each country policy case area. It is important that this data is considered in coordination with the voices of Solomon Islands and ni-Vanuatu policy stakeholders

themselves to understand policy pathways and the motivations, incentives and political dynamics underlying them.

Research participant identification combined purposive and opportunistic, formal and informal approaches to interview policy stakeholders relevant to satisfactorily responding to the research question applying the conceptual framework presented at Chapter 2. Drawing on publicly known figures and policy stakeholders known to the researcher, interview participation opportunistically targeted engaged members of a ‘policy elite’ – those stakeholders able to shape policy. Participation by affected beneficiaries outside of the policy elite was limited, because the focus of this research was on policy-making processes and influences, rather than an attempt to evaluate outcomes at scale. Methods for approaching participants mixed formal and informal. I identified participants from my previous work experience, primary and secondary document analysis, advice from the supervisory panel, and suggestions and referrals from other participants prior to and during field work. This included a snowballing approach to identifying participants. Participation was shaped by availability of relevant individuals during field work, and their willingness to participate.

Semi-structured interviews combined prepared questions aligned with the conceptual framework with space for new information, ideas and perspectives from stakeholders, including unpredicted questions and conversation raised opportunistically within the research scope and research participation terms. Interviews generally lasted around 30-45 minutes;. The participant information sheet aligned with the research ethics protocol approved for this research is at Appendix 1. The research method and semi-structured interview questionnaire employed in this research is at Appendix 2. A data collection method listed at Appendix 2, ‘focus groups’, was not employed during the field research, to support anonymity.

The personalised, familiar and ‘close’ nature of institutions in both countries (explored in Chapter 3) required a sensitive balance of sufficient identification of participants to provide useful data points to develop research findings, and appropriate anonymity to protect these individuals from consequences of being identified. Applying a similar method employed in researching Pacific policy cases (Aiafi, 2016), Table 1.1 presents participant category codes divided by relevant policy stakeholder group. These codes are used to protect participant anonymity aligned with the approved research ethics protocol and information provided to participants.

Many research participants could be considered members of multiple policy stakeholder groups. Participants were assigned the policy stakeholder category best reflecting their engagement with the policy issue – many stakeholders were also sector stakeholders and former students. Participation was purposive and opportunistic rather than statistically representative. Eighty-three interviews with policy stakeholders in the two countries were conducted with the informed consent of participants.¹

Table 1.1: Participant codes and numbers

Participants by policy stakeholder category	Solomon Islands		Vanuatu	
	Code	<i>Number of participants</i>	Code	<i>Number of participants</i>
Government official	SIGO	8	VGO	5
Politician or Political Advisor	SPA	4	VPA	5
Education official	SIGE	12	VGE	5
Training provider representative	STP		VTP	3
Civil society representative	SCS	3	VCS	6
Development partner official or consultant	SDP	8	VDP	6
Private sector representative	SPS	2	VPS	2
Labour official	-		VGL	3
Education sector stakeholder or parent	SESP	5	-	
Labour mobility stakeholder	SLMS	2	-	
Student	SS	1	-	
Total participants		48		35

Analysis of qualitative data commonly involves a systematic process of idea codes to develop themes and interpret meaning. Relevant to the diverse approaches of qualitative analysis, thematic analysis has been recognised as including phases of familiarisation with a dataset,

¹ I transcribed the interviews in full from written notes and audio recordings. Direct quotes from participants and paraphrasing are included in case chapters. Please note that through this thesis, multiple participant sources are provided in some instances where multiple sources raised a policy issue. This research identifies by name some politicians and officials who are publicly known or perceived to have made decisions in national decision-making processes, in order to help understand the motives and decisions of individual political and bureaucratic actors in context.

generating initial codes, searching for themes including an 'ideas map' and reviewing, defining and naming these themes, before generating a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From an ideas map informed by the interview dataset, and my initial research and professional knowledge of the policy area, I developed a thematic coding system and coded participants' comments. This system is presented at Appendix 3, including the number of incidents of each thematic code. This coding system was refined through interviews from participant insights. Using Microsoft Excel, I grouped comments by thematic code and drew on these in drafting relevant policy case chapter sub-sections, triangulating this data with other forms of research data. Key limitations of this data analysis include that the interview data was not statistically representative, and topics discussed were raised within semi-structured interviews, which guided conversation (Appendix 1). Participant comments attributable to different codes helps illustrate participant priorities and views of key issues in each policy area. This was relevant to help answer the research question: identifying factors influencing policy pathways on employment. An overview of the most frequently mentioned ideas in each case chapter helps illuminate and elevate the overall voice of research participants as policy stakeholders in each policy area.

Triangulation is an important approach employed in the analysis of data this research. More anecdotal/ soft evidence from interviews is triangulated with primary and secondary document analysis and quantitative data such as budget and student data (Fritz et al., 2009). This triangulation helps mitigate the risks of lack of credibility of findings from case study research. Cross-case comparison yields some causal process observations, representing one element of process tracing research. While political bias cannot be completely eliminated, my positionality as a researcher is stated clearly below (1.3.1) with strategies to mitigate this risk. The critical approach in the 'framework for critical political economy analysis' presented in Chapter 2 enables some identification and exploration of divergent frames of meaning and social construction of problems and policies. Noting the discomfort with triangulation by some social research theorists (Blaikie, 1991), this use is consistent with a more positivist research methodology.

While triangulation of data supports the credibility of robust qualitative findings, quantitatively rigorous cross-case comparison was not possible nor attempted. Rather than an attempt to rigorously control for variables, the research favoured an open approach to identifying issues with meaning for policy stakeholders (Aagard-Hansen, 2007).

1.2.3: Research timeframe and organisational focus

This study focuses on distinct historical periods for each case study, centred on when policy debates were beginning around each policy issue and policy implementation began to take on momentum. While the thesis will focus on particular periods, each policy issue is situated in broader historical context and commence as follows:

- 1) Solomon Islands Overseas Tertiary Scholarships: from 2006, when there was increased media and audit attention to management of overseas tertiary scholarships
- 2) Vanuatu Government Funded Scholarships: from establishment of the scheme in 1997; and
- 3) From initial participation by ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Islanders in seasonal labour mobility to New Zealand under the RSE scheme in 2007.

In all four cases, the period of research enquiry ends in 2019, the year that I completed field research: in Solomon Islands in November 2018, and in Vanuatu in March 2019. This supports a more tractable focus in an already ambitious thesis scope over a longer time frame than most policy studies of a similar nature; and supports the data triangulation approach with interviews conducted in 2018/19. Developments after 2019 with significance for understanding policy decisions and research findings are included.

Research participants included individual actors and members of organisations involved in the case study policy arenas in the two countries, totalling 83 policy stakeholders (Table 1.1). The case research focused on the organisational units responsible for policy and program management in each case, including the:

- 1) National Training Unit (NTU) in Solomon Islands' Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD)
- 2) Tertiary Scholarships Coordination Unit (TSCU) in Vanuatu's Ministry of Education (later the Ministry of Education and Training) (MoET)
- 3) Labour Mobility Unit (LMU) in Solomon Islands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (MFAET); and the
- 4) Employment Services Unit (ESU) in the Department of Labour (DoL) of Vanuatu's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA).

The research focuses on these units as the key subjects and responsible officials for implementation in these policy areas – in theoretical terms, 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) (see sub-section 2.2.3). The research explains these units, their context, resourcing and

key challenges, explores the legislative and policy frameworks these units were tasked to implement and how the units worked, and the incentives and motivations involved officials held or were subject to by decision-makers, stakeholders and the public. Full participation by current officials and access to program data was not always possible – partly due to the sensitive and at times compromised nature of the programs. This research therefore draws on key relevant elements of policy ethnography to answer the research question, but does not constitute a full institutional ethnography of these units. Data is also captured on other organisational groups and units where relevant to understanding factors influencing policy-making in each policy area.

1.3: Positionality & Structure

1.3.1: Positionality

I have come to this topic from my own professional experience including interactions with Solomon Islands Government (SIG) officials, members of civil society and donor representatives and consultants in the education and employment sectors from 2008 to 2016. My work included policy analysis and contributions on education and labour policies in Solomon Islands, and to a lesser extent, Vanuatu (Bateman et al., 2014; Close, 2012, 2016; Levine & Close, 2016). These contributions, and questions raised by myself, colleagues and contacts about the gaps between policy, implementation and outcomes in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, motivated this doctoral research. I acknowledge these original motivations, views and assessments leading into the research; my positionality as an external researcher, and not a Pacific Islander; and my framings as a development professional working within major development institutions, including my current employment in the Australian Government.² As a researcher of skills development for employment, it is particularly important that I acknowledge the frames of my education. I have implemented strategies to mitigate the risk of bias in this research. I apply triangulation of a wide range of evidence including qualitative data from respondents and national and media debates, to help achieve the research intent to objectively identify factors in policy decisions, dynamics and actors' expression of agency. I propose findings from a position of attempted objective neutrality and critical policy analysis. While findings reflect a positivist research approach, I identify different frames of meaning

² Separately to this work I am an employee of the Australian Government. This thesis is written in a personal capacity and subject to human ethics approval and review by the Australian National University. It does not reflect views of the Australian Government and has not been reviewed for endorsement or approval by the Australian Government.

where these are apparent and relevant as factors in policy pathways and developments. Primary research was undertaken meeting ethical research protocols of the Australian National University (research protocol number 2018/413, at Appendices). Finally, this research gives voices wherever possible to Solomon Islanders and ni-Vanuatu people as the majority of research participants interviewed, and an increasing number of officials, journalists and authors cited in written work.

1.3.2: Structure of this thesis

Chapter 2: Literature review and conceptual framework draws on political economy approaches to understand policy-making as a dynamic process shaped by multiple factors. Different characteristics of policy-making in developing countries challenge predictable policy delivery, and different policy pathways reflect different arrangements of actions, power and ideas. Synthesis of disciplinary perspectives helps identify these different factors in policy-making. Such synthesis is offered through a conceptual framework of political economy analysis to develop critical understanding of factors in policy development and change, also relevant to policy-making in Pacific states.

Chapter 3 examines the political contexts shaping policy-making on employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The two states share similar structures, in which political incentives and hybridity of formal and informal institutions significantly shape national political dynamics and policy-making processes. There are specific differences in these dynamics between the two states. As in other Pacific states, public policy on employment has been a long-term challenge for policy-makers in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with mixed experiences of policy delivery and change.

Chapters 4 to 7 present country policy cases tracing policy development and change. In the case study periods, overseas tertiary scholarships policies attracted high profile, priority and expenditure. Surging demand and compromise of formal practices by politicised and personalised selection was responded to in different ways by policy actors, as explored in Chapters 4 (Solomon Islands) and 5 (Vanuatu). Also attracting a high profile but with more varied priority and resourcing, policy on overseas labour mobility differed between Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with remarkable difference in participating worker numbers in the case period. These policy cases are discussed in Chapters 6 (Solomon Islands) and 7 (Vanuatu).

Chapter 8 will then synthesise the key findings of the four policy case studies, comparing policy dynamics and factors in institutional change where possible, both between cases and with

respective national political dynamics. Chapter 9: Conclusion will propose what policy making experiences and prominent political factors and dynamics in these policy areas can tell us about the politics of employment, and of policy-making more broadly, in Pacific Island Countries.

2: Literature review and conceptual framework

Introduction

This chapter will review available literatures to develop a conceptual framework of political economy analysis which is useful to inform and structure subsequent case studies. Particular attention is paid to public policy literatures relevant to developing country characteristics most applicable to Pacific policy-making contexts. This chapter also addresses current understandings of key dynamics shaping policy-making in Pacific countries.

The development of public policy is a dynamic process shaped by a broad range of factors. Despite great diversity, several characteristics distinguish the policy-making context in developing countries. In these contexts, informal institutions tend to play a greater role in shaping policy, meaning formal policy is often less predictable and more often subject to personalised and group interests in implementation. Even in structurally similar contexts, policy paths and delivery differ, reflecting prevailing institutional arrangements, power balances, ideas, incentives and accountabilities. Capturing the multiple factors in policy processes requires integration of multiple disciplinary perspectives. Developed from this synthesis of perspectives, the conceptual framework of political economy analysis presented in this chapter is useful to enable critical policy analysis identifying diverse factors and dynamics across structure, institutions and agency shaping policy-making. Application of this framework is useful to identify key characteristics and political dynamics shaping policy-making in Pacific countries.

2.1: Policy processes as ‘chaos of purpose and accidents’

Public policy is a set of decisions taken by governments and political actors within a selected arena, setting goals, with the resources to achieve them (Hassel, 2015, p. 569). Public policy is important because it influences how public resources are managed (O. Hughes, 1998). Public policy is generally understood as being developed through a staged process. Five commonly used theoretical stages of public policy making include: (1) agenda setting and problem delimitation, (2) policy formulation, (3) decision making, (4) policy implementation and (5) evaluation. Each stage has its own dynamics, actions and actors (Howlett & Giest, 2015).

Public policy can include non-decisions (Dye, 1972; Howlett et al., 2009) and deliberate neglect (Hassel, 2015; Jenkins, 1978).

How public problems are conceived and how policies are formed in response, has been subject to significant analysis. As important perspectives in early western scholarship on public policy, rational- and public- choice theories of policy may assume that public policy problems are rationally identified and responded to in clear delineated stages based on objective evidence, with decisions leading to improved public welfare (Fischer et al., 2006). However, policy problems may not even be recognised as manageable or motivating of solutions. Different approaches to identifying and framing public policy problems can lead to wide divergence in agenda-setting, policy development and delivery. This is particularly true for complex issues with broad stakeholder participation, such as employment. Social policy problems in particular are significantly subject to social perception, values and frames (Potucek, 2017). Research on policy-making requires analytic approaches which capture diverse problem framings and policy objectives; still allowing objective comparison while considering norms, values, and power relations such as dominant ideas and discourses (Dryzek, 2009; Fischer, 2016; Wagenaar, 2016). From multiple possible policy agendas, policy elites with power ‘delimit’ a set of policy issues for attention. Engaged policy actors then interact to develop and refine options for government decision to implement. Implementation is ideally followed by evaluation and new or revised policy.

How public policy is managed and delivered has been considered by various theories of public administration. The classical theory of Max Weber focused on professionalisation, hierarchy, impartiality, efficiency and merit (Weber, 1978). Neoclassical theory emphasised efficiency, effectiveness and rational decision-making (Simon, 1973), adding focus on human relations and leadership (Mayo, 1946). ‘New public management’ applied private sector approaches to public management, and critical theory of public administration (O. Hughes, 1998)

More recent, critical scholarship has challenged views of public policy and administration as rational and linear. In reality in all countries, policy stages are blurred, with interaction, overlap and reversals among stages (Lindblom, 1968; Ronit & Porter, 1956). Rather than being distinct and sequential or cyclical, Sutton considered policy and its implementation a “*chaos of purposes and accidents*” (Sutton, 1999, p. 5). Policies can be developed without programmes, and programmes can be implemented without policies (Rein, 1976). Policy development and change is a process in which many different interests can exert different kinds of pressure, throughout the process and into implementation. Policy implementation is a particularly

important, complex and politically contested stage; and critical for understanding policy divergence. The process of implementation can significantly change policy; for example as intended policies prove unworkable, costs or benefits are experienced widely, and affected stakeholders react or resist and advocate for change, and there is feedback to policy (Sutton, 1999). Effective policy implementation requires dedicated management, and adequate capability (Grindle & Thomas, 1991). Failure to implement policy at all may be blamed on a lack of political will, resources or capacity, but in reality, many other factors are at play. More critical theories of public policy and administration analyses and challenges the power dynamics of government systems, overcoming assumptions of neutrality and rationality, and identifying who has power and how it is used.

Practically, this means that the process of public policy development is highly uncertain and complex. The experience of real world policy-making, policy implementation and institutional reform in developing countries adds significant insight into the factors involved in how and why policy processes often don't play out as designed in these contexts (Andrews, 2013; Grindle & Thomas, 1990). Hassall and Aiafi have illustrated the distance from linear policy processes, and of development assistance frames and plans, presented by the realities of Pacific policy-making (Aiafi, 2016; Hassall, 2020); as explored further at Section 2.4.

In Chapter 1, a scan of existing literature noted that predominantly economic understandings do not fully explain uncertainties in employment policy delivery in Pacific countries. In filling an important research gap therefore, a theme of this thesis is to consider the extent to which political factors can explain these policy pathways. This raises the important definitional question of what politics is. Lasswell described the study of politics as “the study of influence and the influential” (Lasswell, 1958, p. 7). While the definition of politics has been highly contested, Leftwich proposed common ground of the analysis of power – and its origins, forms, distribution and control (Leftwich, 2004, p. 2). Leftwich found that political analysts diverged greatly in their focus, levels and frameworks of study of power (Leftwich, 2004, p. 20). Elements of politics and economics shaping policy-making in developing countries is explored in the next section, while key elements to Pacific understanding of ‘politics’ are explored in Section 2.4.

2.2: Policy-making in developing countries: A political economy approach

Policy-making occurs in structural and institutional context, through the expression of agency by actors with varying power and resources. Study of policy making has recognised that fully understanding processes of policy commitment, implementation and outcomes requires understanding of the combination and interaction of three elements across the traditional ‘structure – agency’ divide of the social sciences:

- 1) *Structures*; context and environment, including geography, developmental states and historical legacies (McAnulla, 2002, p. 271);
- 2) *Institutions*; shared rules and norms of behaviour, which are formal or informal (Leftwich, 2006b); and
- 3) *Agency*; the capacity for individuals, organisations and collective groups to act autonomously, exercising power (Leftwich, 2006a, pp. 6-7; McAnulla, 2002, p. 271; Vines et al., 2005).

Full identification of factors and dynamics influencing policy-making across structures, institutions and agency requires an approach synthesising perspectives from multiple disciplines. As ‘the interrelationship of politics and economy’, a political economy approach is useful for such synthesis. Definitions of ‘political economy’ are diverse across economic, political and sociological perspectives. North led the institutional focus of economic perspectives on political economy, integrating politics and society in understandings of economic behaviour and performance (North, 1990). Political sociologists are particularly concerned with the role of institutions in political behaviour (Weingast & Wittman, 2009). In recent decades, development researchers have developed a shared understanding of ‘new political economy’ approaches, which combine politics, the incentives of new institutional economics, and social and cultural factors impacting policy processes (Landell-Mills et al., 2007). This combination provides a useful structure for the conceptual framework for this research presented at Section 2.3.

In global literature, developing countries are characterised by a lower average standard of living, and limited infrastructure and industrialisation (Aguilar & Campuzano, 2009). The following sections will describe what characteristics of structure, institutions and agency have been identified in literature about developing countries; and about Pacific states (section 2.4), which help understanding of the political dynamics of policy-making in these contexts. Within

given structures and subject to resourcing and capacity, political contestation among actors shapes and is shaped by institutional arrangements reflecting power dynamics. Two major types of such institutional arrangements shaping developing country policy-making, presented in section 2.4 of this chapter, include more programmatic policy-making, or more clientelistic policy-making.

2.2.1: Structures of uncertainty and resource constraints

Despite great diversity and developmental change in recent decades, structure and resourcing present key characteristics shaping policy-making in developing countries. McAnulla explicitly linked context, structure and resourcing, “the material conditions which define the range of actions available to actors” (McAnulla, 2002, p. 271). Grindle and Thomas described many developing countries sharing ‘structures of uncertainty’ which drive policy development and outcomes which diverge widely from western theory (Grindle & Thomas, 1991, pp. 45-46). These ‘structures of uncertainty’ included vulnerability to international and domestic political and economic forces; more limited information and data for decision-making, making political power more of a determinant of policy delivery; as well as resource scarcity. The effect of historical and contingent conditions on financial and human resources is important. Expanded state capability for administration is key to modern national development (Pritchett et al., 2012). Conversely, weakness of modern state institutions is a key feature across countries with poor development performance and outcomes. With limited revenues per capita and shortages of skilled staff, capacity constraints are pervasive in many developing countries. Limited resources constrain service delivery to meet high and increasing demand, as well as capacity development and reform efforts, forming a frequent and real cause of policy implementation failure (Crosby, 1996). States that are ‘fragile’ are characterised by repeated political instability and violence, where capacity and resource limitations are more pronounced, institutions less effective, and the reach of formal state functions even weaker (Barma et al., 2013). Varying between different types of developing states, structural capacity and resource gaps are therefore major factors in how policy is developed and implemented.

The persistent structural nature of capacity and resource constraints in developing countries ensure continued relevance of aid interventions focused on technical capacity building, or substituting capacity. This gives international aid organisations power and influence in policy-making; particularly in fragile states, given the scale and complexity of their needs. In weaker states, governance may be ‘internationalised’ through ‘depoliticised’ discourses of technocratic capacity building of government functions (Chandler, 2010; Sahin & Shahin, 2019). From

decades of experience, developing country governments and aid actors can readily identify capacity and resource gaps in need of donor assistance such as finance, training and technical advisors. This sustains technocratic and shorter-term capacity-building. Development discourses have been criticised for inheriting a Euro-/ North American- centric world view of who is ‘modern’ and ‘progressive’ and who is ‘under-developed’ and ‘traditional’ (della Faille, 2011; Escobar, 1995). These critiques have often remained marginalised while the language of international development actors has evolved to embrace important ideas like social inclusion and local ownership for aid effectiveness. Nevertheless, global aid commitments such as Education For All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) still carry globalised frames, assumptions and in-built power relations, forming external influences shaping policy-making in developing countries.

Aid donors are particularly engaged with developing country governments in policy changes. Globally, policy transfer from other places remains a key way that institutions and policies develop (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). In developing countries, this began at large scale with colonial administrations, and continued after independence through institutional strengthening aid programs, as seen in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Hameiri and Jones identified that contemporary global governance approaches today involve powerful international interests pressuring states to adapt to meet new, international standards, embedding rules, regulations and procedures embedded in states’ domestic governance (Hameiri & Jones, 2016). Aid incentives shape policy making in developing countries: recipient governments adopt policies and short-term changes as signalling necessary to secure aid funds, while resisting longer-term reforms where policy elites incur costs (Andrews, 2013; Andrews et al., 2013). As a result, even over decades, technocratic capacity building has too rarely proven sufficient to support sustained effective policy development and implementation in developing countries (Andrews, 2013). Across aid recipient countries, institutional strengthening to higher levels of capability has shown very slow or zero progress toward developed country capability levels (Pritchett et al., 2012). Variations in institutional arrangements and political dynamics are key reasons for this, discussed in following sections.

2.2.2: Formal and informal institutions in developing country policy-making

Institutions have long been recognised as critical to allocation of resources and power in society, and thus the development of public policy. Arising from the interaction of structure and agency, institutions are rules and norms which constrain the behaviour and strategies of actors (Leftwich, 2006b). Shared rules and norms are mutually understood and enforced with

predictability, by agents responsible for monitoring practice and setting inducements and sanctions (North, 1990; Ostrom, 2010). Institutions can also be defined as ‘organisations’; social structures with resources, following rules to produce particular outputs (Kiser & Ostrom, 1982). A common core meaning across different definitions of ‘institution’ is that of regularities guiding behaviours of actors with some order and predictability (Greif, 2006; March & Olsen, 2009). The variance of definitions across methodologies remains problematic.

Institutions matter greatly to how policies are developed and implemented in response to public policy problems, and are significant in explaining policy making and its divergence. Institutional arrangements are also shaped by policy development and implementation, in a dynamic process (North, 1990). As the central organisational vehicle of a nation, the state is the most important institutional edifice, and particularly relevant to public policy development. Fragility and capacity constraints of state institutions, or capture by specific interests, are important to the ability of nations to develop or deliver policies.

Nation states are governed with institutional arrangements combining formal and informal institutions. The difference between these is important. Formal institutions are openly defined and legislated rights or rules, externally enforced by formal government bodies (North, 1990). Helmke and Levitsky defined informal institutions as shared rules in a society, usually unwritten, and developed and enforced outside official channels. They distinguished informal institutions from weak formal institutions, informal organisations, culture (which focuses on social values rather than shared expectations), and patterns of behaviour (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). At the basis of organising much of political and economic life, informal institutions can play an important role in policy divergence. However, they can be more difficult to identify and measure, including because informal institutions sometimes work with, and sometimes undermine formal institutions. North recognised that ‘informal constraints’ were influential to behaviour, as demonstrated by the same formal rules in different societies leading to different outcomes (North, 1990). One way to identify informal institutions is to compare different outcomes of similar formal institutions, and attribute the difference to informal institutions (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 733; North, 1990). Characteristically in western ‘Weberian’ bureaucratic states, formal institutions structure policy development and delivery, and distribute benefits impersonally to populations (Khan, 2011). In developing countries however, informal institutions are particularly important to policy-making.

The balance of formal and informal institutions in developing countries and their dynamics provide specific conditions for policy-making and implementation. Capacity and resourcing

gaps in developing countries can be long-term and durable because they can be perpetuated by local institutional arrangements in which the short-term interests of limited elite beneficiaries cause them to resist reallocation of resources required to address such gaps. Persistent weakness of the state in developing countries is significantly an issue of the weakness of formal institutions, and interaction with informal institutions which complicate developmental reforms (Khan, 1995). The weakness of formal institutions, and influence of informal institutions, reflects how power is shared, and results in unequal or inefficient distribution of limited resources. Where formal institutions are weak, perceived 'equity' in the distribution of limited resources is significantly guided by social norms and traditions, and inequitable access to information. One such social arrangement is a 'patron-client' relationship, in which a 'patron' with authority, influence or resources, provides benefits and opportunities selectively in exchange for loyalty, support or services from a 'client' (Hall, 1974). Patron-client relationships are prominent in distributing resources, advantaging certain clients, at least in the short-term, but not broader populations or longer-term development. How and why actors with power, such as politicians and officials, engage in clientelist behaviours, and the role of political economy analysis in identifying these dynamics, is further discussed in Section 2.3.2.

How institutions change is significant to policy-making, as new policies usually involve change to existing rules and distribution of power and resources. Institutions can be notoriously resistant to change. North considered institutional change overwhelmingly incremental, constrained by path dependence, and national development processes to be subject to tension between formalising institutions and influential informal institutions (North, 1990). Such incrementalism can constrain policy action (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1963). Incentive structures and distribution of power and resources can be embedded with strong vested interests, undermining disadvantaged social groups who seek change (Thelen & Steinmo, 1999). For Khan, institutional changes (such as policy reforms) were resisted if implementing them causes unacceptable political costs or instability (Khan, 2011). Politicians often engage in reform opportunistically when it is politically possible and advantageous, instead of when it is most needed (Kingdon et al., 2014). All these factors can cause disconnection between policy intent and actual delivery (Walter, 2008).

However, institutions do change. Change may occur at 'critical junctures': situations of uncertainty at which decisions by key actors are decisive of a certain institutional development pathway over others (Capoccia, 2016, p. 1), and which can change political agreement on distribution of power and resources (Thelen & Steinmo, 1999) (Roland, 2004). Policy change

can also be achieved through evolution of institutions and institutional arrangements in response to internal and external change, and through agency and political contestation, in interaction with systems and institutions (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Informal institutions often change and develop in reaction to change in formal institutions. Cultural and social norms can change within a generation, and continuously. Changes in informal institutions may occur as formal institutions strengthen or become more effective, or as resourcing changes economic incentives change, for example as voters reduce dependence on material goods distributed by politicians (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). While ‘institutionalist’ theories focused on how institutions and structures constrain policy and institutional change, more political approaches emphasised the ‘agency’ involved and the circumstances and relationships in which institutions and agency operate. Leftwich and Sen argued the importance of going ‘beyond institutions’ to consider the role of agency in interaction with economic, political and social institutions. They identified the primacy of politics in the unavoidably transformative process of development, in which resources and power shift (Leftwich, 2010; Leftwich & Sen, 2011). A range of political dynamics are essential to understanding how factors in policy-making vary even in similar structural and institutional contexts.

2.2.3: Leadership & voice: Politics of agency and change in developing countries

Agency, the autonomous exercise of power by groups or individuals to make things happen, is essential to policy-making and change. Agency includes political strategizing, framing, organising, decision-making and action (Hudson & Leftwich, 2014). Eyben identified power as relational – the ability to act upon a person or thing (‘power over’) – and when power relations are repeated and form a pattern, become institutional ‘rules of the game’. Sen identified that differences in capability shape the power people have to make choices about their lives (Sen, 2001). Agency is required initially to set policy agendas (Leftwich, 2006a; McAnulla, 2002). Agendas can be initiated outside government, through public mobilisation by decision-makers, or internally by influential groups with special access to decision makers with less public contestation (Howlett & Ramesh, 2017). Actors express agency within power structures: the distribution of power in a society (Odugbemi & Jacobson, 2008). Individuals are both constrained and empowered by their complex relationships within their institutional contexts. Leftwich argued that actors work with formal and informal institutions to shape policy, within ‘rules of the game’ but also applying strategies and political tactics to advance interests (Leftwich, 2006a). The capacity to exercise agency is therefore shaped by institutions,

but can also shape institutions in a process of contestation and reform (Hudson & Leftwich, 2014).

Actors' incentives, ideas and beliefs matter. Policy actors' motivations can be self-serving, instrumental, what they believe is in the public interest, and affected by informal constraints (Campbell, 1997; Thelen & Steinmo, 1999). Actors may act rationally as individuals, but contribute to economically irrational outcomes (Bates, 1981). Ideas, norms, beliefs and power are core to agency, and sustain actors' belief in institutions. Epistemic or policy communities play a key role in policy-making, introducing and contesting ideas, and may be wider and more open or more closed to change (Sutton, 1999). Ideas are key to technical leadership, another form of agency, including by donors (Khan et al., 2018). Technical analysis can influence the agency of policy actors, often combining with bureaucratic and political interests and ideas in actual decision-making (Grindle & Thomas, 1989).

Understanding the distinct characteristics of agency by key groups and actors is particularly helpful in explaining how policy change happens in developing countries. The agency for policy change and leadership are both fundamentally about power, which sits significantly with leaders and policy elites.

Leadership is a key form of agency. Political will can explain leaders' decisions to maintain the status quo, or expend political capital to instigate and see through institutional reform (Hudson et al., 2018). How leaders express leadership is subject to how power, authority and legitimacy is arranged in a given society, and shaped by context, structures and institutions. However, leaders cannot act in isolation. Both individual and collective action is required to respond to policy problems and change institutions. Collective action enables pooling of limited resources and increases accountability to a larger group of actors (Ostrom, 2003). Collective agency requires effective alignment of key stakeholders and citizens (Odugbemi & Jacobson, 2008). 'Collective action problems' emerge when individuals with common interests face challenges in recognising them or organising to pursue them (Olson, 1965); or if problems are too large and complex for policies responding to them (Feiock, 2013; Ostrom, 2010).

Who has agency for policy leadership matters. Groups with agency over policy processes include political, bureaucratic and 'policy' elites (Grindle & Thomas, 1991; Hossain & Moore, 2002). Policy elites are usually drawn from broader national elites: people in large organisations or movements, rarely more than 3 per cent of any population, who are strategically positioned and able to influence political decision-making (Higley & Moore,

2001, p. 176; Leftwich & Hogg, 2008, p. 4). Bureaucratic politics affects policy-making. Different bureaucrats vary in roles, interests and incentives, shaping bureaucratic commitment and delivery, even rejecting other units' policies (Abonyi, 2013). 'Street-level bureaucrats', lower- and local-level public servants facing the public, individually maintain discretion over policy implementation, and are not necessarily impartial or predictable (Lipsky, 1980). Their agency also shapes policy processes.

Theories of policy making and change vary in the agency they ascribe to different policy actors. While rational models view decision-makers as neutral managers and technicians making evidence-based decisions, empirical research has found political processes of negotiation to be important (Hodgkinson, 2012; Weiss, 1991, p. 210). In reality, policy decision making can vary by many factors including leadership style, knowledge available, degree of change from previous decisions, number and power of actors, consequences and timing (Lindblom, 1980). Policy makers usually have some scope for decision-making among policy options, but rarely perfect choice, given pressure from social and interest groups, and information and resource constraints. Decision-makers themselves are not necessarily neutral, disinterested or competent, and can be cognitively constrained through 'bounded rationality' to consider limited options which may be satisfactory enough, but imperfect (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1963). Circumstances greatly affect policy decision-making: crises pressure policy responses, but offer opportunities for more significant change in public policy. Policy implementation is subject to agency of even broader actors and stakeholders (Sutton, 1999). In contrast to theoretical positions, policy actors may have varied agency subject to context, negotiation, and circumstances.

Authors have described several characteristics of agency in policy-making in developing countries. While bureaucrats and the political executive often maintain a more important role in policy in developing countries, power, influence and vested interests of different societal groups are more likely to be expressed through informal processes. Policy elites are under pressure to respond to significant demand for services and opportunities from large populations, with limited resources to do so (Grindle & Thomas, 1991). A larger proportion of mass populations in developing countries are rural, but often rapidly urbanising in search of education and work, and often in informal or subsistence work (ILO, 2018). Rural, less-educated and less-coordinated populations are less able to organise and sustain political activity than policy elites (Hickey & Hossain, 2019). As a result, these 'non-elites' experience greater exclusion from policy-making processes and more clientelistic (see sub-section 2.3.1) and

particularistic interactions with implementing officials (Naraya et al., 2000). Civil society organisations may represent their broader interests to influence policy-making, or may not (Duncan, 2013). Where formal structures for policy feedback are weak or absent, public protest is among few available ways for making demands known to government (Grindle & Thomas, 1991). Agency in policy-making in developing countries often requires navigation of structures of uncertainty.

Elite capture factors in policy change; describing a situation in which societal elites exercise disproportionate influence and agency over services and decision-making processes to secure rents and benefits (Beard & Phakphian, 2009). The relative power of elites, and incentives for their rent-seeking, make elite capture widespread in policy making and implementation in developing countries (Acemoglu et al., 2001). Reforms create winners and losers: those with power will resist losing it (Grindle, 2001), or ‘depoliticise’ policy to technocratic approaches which do not change power relations (Shore & Wright, 1997). Regardless of performance, actors invested and benefiting from status quo institutions have incentive to organise politically to protect institutions from change, until it becomes in their interest to support change (Grindle, 2001). Policy elites may initially support change and then renege in the face of powerful domestic interests (Walter, 2008). Elite capture and incentives help explain why policy reforms are partially or wholly undelivered, and reflect the importance of the distribution of power in policy-making.

Given competing goals, how does leadership achieve delivery of stated long-term policies that contribute to broader national development goals including increased employment? Hudson and McLoughlin identified three necessary conditions for such ‘developmental’ leadership: (1) motivated and strategic individuals with the incentives, values, interests and opportunity to push for change; (2) motivated individuals overcoming barriers to cooperation and forming coalitions with sufficient power, legitimacy and influence; and (3) coalitions engaging in a battle of ideas to help reshape society’s roles. Coalitions’ power and effectiveness partly hinges on their ability to contest one set of ideas and legitimise an alternative set (Hudson et al., 2018, pp. 4-5). This offers a framework for understanding how developmental leadership may arise, further discussed in analysis of findings at 8.3.4.

Aid donors, also powerful actors in developing-country policy-making, may advocate for change toward long-term policy goals using various forms of agency, resources, and platforms. A prominent form of this has been aid conditionality: placing requirements on the agency of aid recipients. Aid conditionality has also had unintended consequences, including

undermining local ownership (Collier, 1997). Aid donor influence is all the greater in highly aid-dependent countries, such as Pacific states, making aid donor agency and incentives important factors in the policy case study chapters ahead.

2.3: Conceptual framework: Political economy analysis and application

The need to synthesise multiple disciplinary perspectives to capture the complex factors influencing policy-making makes Political Economy Analysis (PEA) important to this research's conceptual framework for critical policy analysis. PEA enables identification of factors and dynamics of policy actors working within given structures, with institutions (formal and informal) and with different distribution of power and resources, to advance, influence or resist policy change. PEA studies the interaction of political and economic processes in a society, considering how wealth and power are distributed between groups and individuals, and the institutions and dynamics that influence these relationships (Edelmann, 2009). This makes PEA relevant to critical policy analysis of policy-making including in developing contexts. Understanding both formal and informal interests and institutions helps explain why governments and societal groups support or resist policies with broader/ longer-term, or shorter-term/ narrower distribution of benefits (Landell-Mills et al., 2007). PEA is applied to this key dichotomy of policy-making in developing countries in section 2.3.1.

Criticism of PEA approaches has focused on shortcomings of its practical application rather than on theories behind it. Hudson and Marquette identified common gaps in the application of PEA by development actors, including that it was often done externally by experts rather than front line actors, and underplayed the role of ideas, politics and complex power relations (Hudson & Marquette, 2015). In 2013 Leftwich and Hudson considered much PEA emphasised economic incentives and institutions, or filled gaps in unsuccessful managerial approaches. They called for stronger analysis of actors' political contestation and negotiation of institutions (Hudson & Leftwich, 2014). Another criticism is that focus on developing country 'subjects' can fail to capture the frames, influence and behaviours of donors and PEA practitioners themselves (Copestake & Williams, 2014). Beyond the description of this researcher's positionality in 1.3.1, this research mitigates this risk by including the behaviour and decisions of influential aid donors within the scope of analysis where these decisions have significant influence on national policy decision-making.

The conceptual framework developed for this research is a political economy framework for critical analysis of policy development as a dynamic process. The conceptual framework is significantly based on the ‘Politics of Development’ (PoD) work of Leftwich and his collaborators including Hudson, but also draws on key theories and frameworks of Ostrom including Institutional Analysis for Development (IAD) (Ostrom, 2011). It also draws on two problem-driven political economy analysis approaches: Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) (Andrews et al., 2013); and Problem-Driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis (PGPE) (Fritz et al., 2009). Both integrated lessons from a history of institutional strengthening failures in development to identify change pathways. The conceptual framework also draws on Grindle and Thomas’ study of policy-making in developing countries presented earlier in this chapter.

PEA is highly suitable for critically engaging with the diverse factors in Pacific employment policies. This approach will capture the geographic, historical and politically contingent structures and conditions, and different objectives, frames, political and institutional factors, that all shape policy decisions, policy commitment and divergence. This framework will capture formal and informal institutions at national and sector policy levels, and agency, ideas, power distribution and political contestation, to identify factors shaping policy-making and change in policy responses to employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The Conceptual Framework of PEA is presented in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework: A political economy framework for critical analysis of policy development

Problem	1. Problem identification: policy framing; policy objectives; policy outcomes
Context	2. Environment and structures: context, relevant structural features, organisations and actors
Analysis	3. Institutions and agency diagnosis: the combination of rules, agency/behaviour and incentives shaping policies; and relevant analytical concepts
	4. Analysis: Emergent change, comparison between cases; theoretical lessons

Figure 2.1 Sources: Adapted from (Fritz et al., 2009; Hudson & Leftwich, 2014)

In this conceptual framework, the first stage is problem identification. Employment problems in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, public policy responses to them, and how they are framed in context, with which objectives, is the starting point of the research, introduced in Section 3.4. The second stage of critical policy analysis is identification of context – environment, structures and resources which shape policy-making. This is introduced for Solomon Islands and Vanuatu at Chapter 3. Case study chapters (4 to 7) will describe in detail these policy responses, objectives, structures and resourcing, and stage three of critical policy analysis - the formal and informal institutional arrangements that policy actors express agency within to develop, deliver, resist or change policies. Finally, stage four of analysis identifies how structures, resourcing, institutions and agency combine to form the factors influencing policy-making in these contexts. This is presented in the analysis in Chapters 8 and 9, comparing case studies for significant similarities and differences, identifying change over time, and presenting research findings and their theoretical, empirical and practical implications.

2.3.1: Political economy approaches to analyse if policies are programmatic or clientelist

Whether policies are programmatic or particularistic is a key question in analysing policies in developing states, including in the Pacific. Programmatic policies deliver longer-term benefits to broader populations, and are delivered more predictably and impartially. Particularistic or clientelist policies, with more localised or politicised benefits, can arise from patron-client relations and can deliver short-term and personalised benefits. PEA enables examination of this important dynamic of politics in policy-making, by helping to understand how power and resources are distributed and contested (DFID, 2009), and the institutional incentives for policy actors to behave in clientelistic ways (Fritz, 2012).

Much western literature considers that shared policy goals are more likely to be achieved with institutional arrangements including strong, impersonal and merit-based state bureaucracies, on the Weberian model (Evans, 1992; Weber, 1978). In this model, politicians operate with broader accountability to citizens and capacity for credible commitments to larger groups of people for services delivered by functional public administrations, resourced with broader distribution of costs. Such politicians are therefore better able to support ‘programmatic’ policies of broader and longer-term public benefit (Cruz & Keefer, 2013; Kitschelt, 2000). Developed country elites are more committed to formal, impersonal and growth-oriented institutions that better support programmatic policies and predictable policy outcomes (Khan, 2011). The World Bank emphasised the importance of accountability relationships to effective service delivery for poor people in developing countries (WB, 2003). Pritchett established the

importance of accountability relationships to education policies and commitment to reforms which supported learning, relevant to developing countries seeking to achieve education Millenium Development Goals (Pritchett, 2015). Impersonal, merit-based and accountable bureaucracies are therefore considered important to delivering policies of broader and longer term benefit.

Commitment by politicians and elites to programmatic policies is less achievable in developing countries where the state is still forming, formal institutions are limited or compromised, and collective action and broader accountability is difficult to achieve. In such contexts politicians are likely to value functional public administration systems less than short-term, transactional, self-interested policies, benefiting limited groups. In these contexts, policy-making is less regularised, strategic and predictable, and public sector reforms have proven less successful (Cruz & Keefer, 2013). Power-holding elites balance their commitment to both still-forming or limited formal, and still-powerful informal institutions – such as traditional, personal and patronage relationships - depending on how they can best protect or gain power or rents (Khan, 2011). With personalised bargaining replacing ‘rules’ with ‘deals’, developing countries experience clientelism, and unequal distribution of rents and policy benefits (Khan, 2011).

Patronage, clientelism and rent-seeking are important to understanding why policy implementation and development paths diverge in developing countries. Corruption has even been considered the most prominent mechanism of informal influence (Lauth, 2000, pp. 34-35). Helmke and Levitsky were careful to distinguish that corruption only constituted an ‘informal institution’ when its practice followed an established rule or guideline with sanctions for its violation, beyond a mere ‘informal behaviour’ (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). For Khan and North, patronage, clientelism and rent-seeking were not aberrations of policy development in developing countries – they were pervasive, and given their resistance to change, durable (Hickey, 2013; Khan, 2011; North et al., 2007). In ‘fragile’ states, formal institutions are weaker and informal institutions more dominant in citizens’ lives, and patronage, rent-seeking and corruption are more widespread (Barma et al., 2013). Informal institutions’ relevance in the Pacific (section 2.4) make them important to understand in this research’s critical policy analysis.

While different authors use these concepts differently, they are important to define for careful policy analysis and further contextualisation in this research:

- 1) **Corruption**: the “use of public office for private gain” and the “abuse of power”, with common forms of corruption including bribery, nepotism, cronyism and political corruption (TI, 2024). Anti-corruption measures are integrated within good governance agendas.
- 2) **Clientelism** is contingent exchange between patrons and clients, and is particular, as non-supporters can be excluded from those benefits. It is differentiated by being iterative (rather than a one-off exchange like a bribe) and in a political sense has a crucial element of hierarchy (Hicken, 2011, p. 290).
- 3) **Rent-seeking** is “an attempt to gain economic rent by influencing policies or their implementation” (Kingdon et al., 2014, p. 21).
- 4) **Patronage** is “support provided to specific groups, for instance rewarding individuals or organisations for their electoral support” (Kingdon et al., 2014, p. 21).
- 5) **Nepotism** is described by Transparency International as the use of power to favour a family member or friend who may or may not be qualified or deserving (TI, 2024).

The above definitions of corruption are important because imprecision has factored into the failure of policy and anti-corruption initiatives (Jancsics, 2019). Global definitions are also debatable in local contexts. Philp, Corbett and Shiu understood corruption as hinging on socially constructed meanings of perverse and ideal conduct, subject to renegotiated views (Corbett & Shiu, 2014; Philp, 1997). This research on policy-making in the Pacific will discuss ‘corrupt practices’ more broadly, or more specifically instances of the other four definitions where these definitions apply. However, this research will also open the question as to local definitions of these practices.

Globally, corruption has significant impacts on policy-making and -delivery. Corruption has a strong, systemic relationship with under-development (Gupta et al., 2000). Wood described the mutually reinforcing trap of clientelism and poor governance for developing countries including Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, undermining democratic institutions and government capability to produce policies citizens need (Hicken, 2011; Wood, 2018). Patronage is subject to path dependence: once institutionalised it is very difficult to reform (Schuster, 2016). Affected countries can enter a trap of flagging support, reduced legitimacy, and increased spending, but inability to change policies because important interest groups benefit from the status quo (Bates, 1981). Subtle differences in power distribution and ‘deals’ can help explain very different institutional evolution and outcomes, explaining diverse policy

paths. Where informal personalised and clientelistic practices are pervasive, formal institutions such as elections, bureaucratic policy-making and budget processes may still exist, but do not go according to plan as they are challenged through informal processes. However, despite path dependence, clientelistic institutions can change, evolving over time into more coherent programmatic democracies with greater capacity for harder policy decisions of greater long-term benefit (Grindle, 2019). Examination of whether policies are clientelist, programmatic, or contested or changing between the two, is particularly relevant for critical analysis of the Pacific policy-making context introduced in the next section.

2.4: Understanding Pacific policy-making through political economy analysis

The conceptual framework of political economy analysis developed in Section 2.3 is relevant for critical policy analysis in Pacific states. These states experience similar characteristics of developing country policy-making including resource constraints and institutional hybridity, but also distinct structural issues, institutional arrangements, and distribution of agency among policy actors.

Understandings of politics in Pacific countries have diverged as much as global definitions (section 2.1). Study of politics in the Pacific has significantly centred on traditions, and formal and informal institutions, including parties, parliaments and elections; rather than the nature of political participation by ordinary Pacific Islanders (Baker & Barbara, 2020). Political perceptions by Pacific Islanders themselves have been often missing from study, particularly because of the lack of population surveying to understand political attitudes (Leach et al., 2022). Understandings of political leadership have been shaped by anthropologists, including Sahlins's classic typology of Melanesian 'Big men' and Polynesian 'Chiefs' (Corbett, 2012; Sahlins, 1963). Corbett argued that western Weberian models of impartial bureaucratic function have routinely been cast in tension with Pacific political dynamics. ANU authors have argued that a Pacific understanding of democracy should consider diverse indigenous processes of leadership and representation in government, the shaping of political dynamics by factors including smallness, diverse indigenous practices and inherited colonial institutions, and marginalisation of societal groups in Pacific politics (Baker et al., 2025). Reflecting this diversity and contestation of traditional and modern, Pacific perceptions of politics – when they have been recorded - have included negative views of traditional and informal dynamics, of the practices of modern institutions, and of

their combination. In his thesis ‘Politik is Poison’ Morgan presents the reflections of church members in northern Vanuatu on ‘politik’ as a contingent state of democracy, describing unwanted aspects of modernity and nationhood including perceived hierarchies in the post-colonial state (Morgan, 2003). This combination of views of dynamics which compromise and influence predictable policy-making lies behind the title of this thesis – and a comment shared by participants – of “*That’s where the politics comes in*”.

This section will further develop the conceptual framework for this research by identifying the important characteristics shaping Pacific policy-making within a political economy structure of structures, institutional arrangements and agency of political actors.

2.4.1: Segmented structures, limited formal institutions

Geography is a major contingent structural factor shaping post-independence Pacific states. Smallness and remoteness limit economic opportunities and resources for policy delivery. Small populations with limited education constrain the pool of qualified staff available for vital government functions, sustaining key limitations in public administration capacity (Brown, 2010; Haque et al., 2015; Wettenhall, 1992). Melanesian polities are ‘segmented societies’ of numerous, diverse, isolated, autonomous groups, in which a nation-state identity is often weak, contested or absent (Morgan, 2005; Sahlins, 1961).

Formal state institutions experience important limitations, for several reasons. The formal institutional structures of Pacific states originated from colonial administrations, and are today mediated by national policy-makers to develop policy and deliver services (Hassall, 2020, pp. 99-100). As well as a post-colonial legacy of few nationals educated at high levels, inherited governance structures fit poorly with local conditions. Two decades after independence, political instability, corruption, public service politicisation, and weak executive leadership and parliaments, together characterised fragility of Pacific states (Larmour, 2005). Civil society organisations lacked the collective power, political orientation or national policy platforms to hold government accountable or advocate for people’s needs (Barbara & Haley, 2014; A. Hughes, 1998). Colonial administrations had established formal institutions aspiring to Weberian bureaucratic principles of hierarchy, procedural rules and impersonal service delivery; aspirations which post-independence Melanesian states were not able to fully deliver (Hassall, 2020, p. 53).

Limitations of formal state institutions had multiple consequences for policy-making. Pacific states struggled to develop and implement evidence-based and impersonal policy, with limited

capacity to formulate policy options and plans or implement them. Policy networks shared by actors with common policy interests remained small in size, centring on a handful of officers in responsible government departments. Amidst limited resourcing, regularly developed strategic development plans in Pacific Island states often amounted to unbudgeted ‘wish-lists’ (Hassall, 2020, p. 106). Beyond size and resourcing, coordination problems have long been identified in Pacific policy studies, including in the functioning of central Ministries (Ata, 2018; Haque, 2013, p. 19; Hassall, 2020, p. 78); Pacific regional institutions (Hassall, 2020, p. 136); and among development partners (Keen, 2023; Pryke & Dayant, 2020). Sectoral policy-making also faces critical coordination challenges. Pacific governments routinely treat Ministries as ‘silos’ of policy and practice, when effective delivery of complex policies requires broader networks (Hassall, 2020, p. 115). Aiafi described the policy-making context that most Pacific public servants work in as pragmatic environments with little regard for formal deliberate public policy processes, and limited demand by political decision-makers for data on which policy could be based. Public servants devise work programmes to deliver a service but usually don’t have the luxury of detailed scanning of policy options, choice of policy instruments, and monitoring and evaluating program implementation impact and results (Aiafi, 2016, pp. 252-253; Hassall, 2020, p. 102). Institutional limitations and governance and development problems contributed to aid dependence and strong donor influence on policy-making.

2.4.2: Informal institutions and incentives: clientelism and kastom shaping policy-making

Informal institutions and incentives are influential in Pacific states, key to why policies do not get delivered predictably, and important for this thesis. In Pacific bureaucracies, formal, impersonal institutions experience ‘hybridity’ in their combination with and contestation by influential informal, personalised institutions with traditional roots, including island networks (‘Wantok networks’) and customary practices (broadly, ‘Kastom’) (Dinnen & Allen, 2015). Hybridity has also been criticised as a false ‘international, modern’/ ‘local, traditional’ dichotomy, and that in reality resources and interests are distributed in greater complexity across different modes and levels of government (Hameiri & Jones, 2017). Interaction between formal and informal institutions at and between multiple scales (international, national, sub-national and local), more fully explains the politics of policy-making in independent Pacific nation states (Allen & Dinnen, 2017; Fraenkel, 2013).

Geographic structures of segmented polities drive personalised and localised incentives. In Melanesian island societies, interpersonal relationships of kinship, village ties and status take

precedence over broader social relationships or artificial national polities (May, 2004). Family and kinship are essential to Pacific politicians' support and actions, while smallness and proximity make impartial policies less achievable (Corbett, 2015b, pp. 55-59). Since independence, politicians selected to represent their isolated communities would meet and form loose, short-lived coalitions in national capitals, agreeing clientelist distributions of central rents and revenues. These practices undermined programmatic and impartial policy-making, and national public service effectiveness and oversight (Kabutaulaka, 2008b; Morgan, 2005). In shifting coalition governments, politicians' personal qualities were emphasised over party policy platforms, limiting credible policy commitments or interest in efficient bureaucracy (Duncan & Hassall, 2011). As a result, Pacific political decision-makers preference short-term, personalised or localised political agendas over formal bureaucratic processes (Aiafi, 2016).

Clientelist politics has been identified as pervasive in Pacific states. Hassall described clientelism and patronage flowing through all levels of government, private sector and potentially civil society actors in Pacific states. Clientelist behaviours included targeted resource transfer instead of broader policies, lack of interest in impartial contract enforcement, and 'policy rents' from state owned enterprises; while leaders hold substantial discretionary powers (Hassall, 2020, p. 74). Pervasive clientelist politics undermined public sector reform in the Pacific (Duncan & Hassall, 2011). For Roderick Duncan, 'big man' political culture was the main obstacle to governance reform, which failed because the cost of lost rents outweighed uncertain benefits (Duncan, 2013). Good governance reforms were particularly likely to fail in Ministries controlled by 'big men' in which contracts and distribution took place – including forestry, fisheries, public works, health, and education (Roderick Duncan, 2011). However, common factors where policy and institutional reform had succeeded included stable political and institutional commitment and leadership, public service strategic capability to manage change, public communication and consultation, and appropriate and coherent external technical advice (Ron Duncan, 2011a).

Whether clientelist politics is driven by culture or rational incentives has been debated, particularly for Solomon Islands. Several authors described clientelism's significance in Melanesian political culture as aligned with kastom and wantok provisioning (Fukuyama, 2008; Morgan, 2005). Fukuyama saw Solomon Islands' wantok system as the reason for systemic corruption, instability and fragmentation (Fukuyama, 2008). For May, kastom-embedded political culture shaped political commitment, and incentives for policy-making. Melanesia's "parochial, pork-barrel politics" included strong expectations of direct personal

provisioning by ‘big men’ or ‘chiefs’, and political office a lucrative opportunity for personal; and group benefit (May, 2004, p. 46). Ministers and other powerful political actors used official powers to divert national policies and resources (Morgan, 2005). This political context resulted in undermined state and democratic institutions viewed with suspicion, parliaments as frameworks for patronage rather than political participation, and wantok-influenced employment selection.

Politicians’ and policy-makers actions are shaped by powerful popular incentives. Pacific constituents criticise political corruption while expecting their representatives to deliver political rents (Corbett, 2015a). Politicians’ need to meet local demands to be re-elected reinforces patronage politics (Morgan, 2005). Citizens may place greater trust in informal institutions such as chiefs and family, and may consider politicians a better bet for delivering services than distant government departments (Laking, 2010; May, 2004). Haque proposed that like anyone, Solomon Islanders responded with rational self-interest within their political and economic context (Haque, 2012). Wood similarly found that voters made broadly rational choices in search of material ends, influenced by informal institutions which varied by culture and constituency (Wood, 2016). At an individual level, Melanesian citizens seeking to participate in the modern nation state may be caught in the uncertainty between compromised formal institutions and undermined but still-influential traditional institutions, lacking institutions to guide economic, political and social behaviour (Clements et al., 2007). Case study chapters present examples of such situations facing individuals, such as scholarship applicants and jobseekers.

Defining corruption or inequitable distribution in the Pacific can be unclear. Surveyed Pacific Islanders consider corruption a big problem in politics and business (TI, 2021b). However, Huffer found external theoretical frameworks inadequate to analyse corruption in the Pacific, as widely used western conceptualisations take an economic focus, blaming traditional culture without deeper understanding of local incentives or ethics (Huffer, 2005). Nimbtik identified the causes of corruption in the collision between two sets of values and authority. Traditional and charismatic forms of authority legitimated Vanuatu’s elected leaders and personalised power among them, but conflicted with Weberian values of legal-rational authority of imposed colonial state institutions. Vanuatu politicians and public servants operated in ways understood locally as moral and acceptable, but interpreted by western perspectives as ‘corrupt’ and detrimental to overall development objectives (Nimbtik, 2016b). Walton found that Papua New Guinean (PNG) citizens may condemn corruption, while rejecting as illogical the choice to ‘be

the odd one out' and not participate in it (Walton, 2013). 'Corruption' can be accepted as a means to realise public goods in a situation of multiple developmental constraints. In PNG, "big men" – men with influence, often self-made (Standish, 1978) – have a degree of social license for personalised transfers, voters only perceiving a problem when a different "big man" diverted public resources to others (Walton, 2013). The wantok system has strengths in communalism, but in distributing resources, entrenches existing advantage – particularly among important men - and can exacerbate ethnic and regional tensions (May, 2004). Overall, the diverse range of views of what is accepted or not in informal and corrupt practices and distribution in the Pacific suggest significant subjectivity to context.

Addressing corruption is also very challenging in Pacific contexts. Collective cultures' reduced willingness to sanction the politically powerful makes 'good governance' difficult (Hofstede, 1984). Hughes considered that apparent impunity for corrupt practices in the Pacific may stem from widespread views that modern government is intended to benefit those inside it, along with public ambivalence, and forgiving attitudes (A. Hughes, 1998). A traditional need for small island community cohesion, and loyalty to kin, may create reluctance to point fingers (Crocombe, 2001). Larmour also recognised that kastom offered age-old guidance to behaviour, dispute resolution and resource allocation, and could provide contrary traditions to corruption, which had been applied in Pacific legal cases against corruption (Larmour, 1997).

Therefore, local and policy context is important to understand to identify how informal institutions, practices and related incentives influence policy-making in social sectors. This local and policy context is more deeply explored in subsequent chapters.

2.4.3: What actors influence Pacific policy-making?

As in any region, political actors are influential in Pacific policy-making. In the decades after independence, entrenched governance problems and public concerns about corruption contributed to popular disillusionment with Pacific politicians (Corbett, 2015a). Corbett described popular negativity towards politics and politicians as 'anti-politics', emerging from the gap between political and policy ideals and their compromised reality of policy delivery. From wide interviews, Corbett presented Pacific politicians as nuanced and complex. Samoan politicians sought to uphold standards of conduct, whether legally or socially constructed. Political corruption was contingent and iterative, situated in the cut and thrust of political agency (Corbett & Shiu, 2014). Corbett proposed that politicians had diverse motivations but were caught between the public's perceptions of corruption and specific expectations of

personal benefits; and between the ideals of leadership and the messy, contingent ambiguity of political practice (Corbett, 2015a). Diversity across the Pacific also made it difficult to generalise theories about politicians' decision-making on policy (Stoil, 2015). Subsequent chapters present more specific context and institutional incentives for Solomon Islands and ni-Vanuatu politicians.

Societal and policy elite agency in influencing policy – while studied in other regional contexts (Grindle & Thomas, 1989) – has only begun to be considered for Pacific states in recent decades (Barbara et al., 2015). Hau'ofa differentiated the dominant position of national governments, including politicians, bureaucrats and statutory body officials, from subordinately positioned ordinary people, who experienced a poor flow of benefits from government, and who planned and decided their lives independently of government (Hau'ofa, 1994). Post-colonial Asian countries' clearer elite distinctions are less clear in Melanesia (Barbara & Haley, 2014; Fukuyama, 2008). In Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, kinship ties dominate social class groupings, making it more difficult to identify cohesive political and economic elites (Dressel & Dinnen, 2014). However, it is possible to discern political elites with greater access to policy decision-making, and, demographically, an urban elite with more advantaged access to education, employment and state functions. As noted in Chapter 1, policy stakeholders within the more urban 'policy elite' form the majority of the participants in this research.

A specific dynamic of agency in Pacific state policy-making is strong aid donor influence in the context of weak or partly developed modern post-colonial states. Pacific Island states continue to be among the highest per capita aid recipient countries in the world (Pryke & Dayant, 2020). Problems of aid dependence, apparent in the 1990s, included patterns of limited revenues in small states but difficulties absorbing aid, sustained incentives for dependency and disincentives for domestic saving, efficiency, effectiveness or local solutions (Bertram, 1986; A. Hughes, 1998). Failing states were unable to lead reform internally, but donor-driven reforms importing foreign institutions were unsuccessful in solving governance problems (Dinnen, 2008a; Larmour, 1996).

Aid has evolved, as has its consequences. Hassall characterised three key stages of external assistance to governance in Pacific Island states (Hassall, 2020, p. 100). Under 'colonial administration', limited education constrained local people's participation in policy-making and institutional development. Post-independence 'development administration' included significant direction by expatriate staff and advisers according to external development

agendas. The ‘development assistance’ stage saw increased leadership by qualified Pacific Islanders working to national development plans. However, significant foreign technical advice continued, as did tensions with Pacific policy-makers’ own voices. Despite donor’s international aid commitments to supporting national leadership, Pacific states’ control of their development policies has been undermined by increasing donor requirements for consultation, accountability and alignment to international systems. This has been called aid’s ‘inverse sovereignty effect’, exacerbated by sudden ideological changes in policy direction by aid donors, including in recent geo-strategic competition (Overton et al., 2019). In this dynamic, aid donors both build and support capacity and resources for policy-making, and drain them through multiple, burdensome and changing requirements. This contributes to a paradox of high levels of aid but low economic growth (Toato, 2001). Case studies (Chapters 4 to 7) will reveal further specific sector dynamics of agency by aid donors in each country policy case.

Studying policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, Aiafi assessed foreign donor actors and their consultants as more significant in originating policy than citizens (Aiafi, 2016). This raises doubts about local policy ownership and sustainability of co-drafted policy, that have been widely raised in Pacific public policy writing (Aiafi, 2016, pp. 44, 75, 217-218; Hassall, 2020, p. 117; Hughes, 2013; Pirnia, 2016). Aiafi contrasted donor influence with the generally poor understanding of, and inclusion in, policy by members of each country’s societies (Aiafi, 2016). Both countries reflect Hassall’s description of Pacific societies with weak mass media, and instead of ‘public opinion’, communities with greater or lesser consciousness of their situation, varying by education, inter-communal contact and quality of interactions with their member of parliament (MP) and with public servants (Hassall, 2020, p. 116). Many of these important structural, institutional and political characteristics apply in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu shaping employment policy-making, as presented in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In the real world, policy-making processes are dynamic, at times chaotic, and rarely linear or predictable. ‘Structures of uncertainty’ in developing countries make it more likely that policy-making diverges between initiation and delivery. It is important to synthesise multiple theoretical approaches to understand the broad range of factors in policy-making processes. This is offered through a political economy understanding of policy-making, in which policy actors within structures express agency and negotiate formal and informal institutions to make, resist or change policy. A conceptual framework using PEA enables critical study of policy-making and institutional development in employment policy in Melanesia. Identifying political

factors and dynamics in the policy cases will help explain formation of policies and institutions through processes of contestation, and how differences arise even in similar contexts. A PEA approach can identify factors behind important differences, including long-term and programmatic policy-making with broad benefits, or more short-term and particularistic distribution of benefits.

Existing research has identified key structural, institutional and agency dynamics affecting Pacific country policy-making, including smallness and segmented politics, formal institutional limitations and influential informal institutions, and resulting difficulties delivering programmatic policies. While strong donor influence is clear, societal influence and local definitions of corruption are less clear. While these factors vary widely across diverse Pacific states, political characteristics shaping policy-making on employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are presented in subsequent chapters.

3: Context: Politics, policy-making and employment in Solomon Islands & Vanuatu

Introduction

This chapter presents the political economy dynamics of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and how these shape policy-making. The two countries share striking parallels in their structures, politics, institutions and economies. With populations disbursed across island groups, kinship and island allegiances trump national institutions and policy interests. The emergence of the two fragile and hybrid post-colonial states since independence indicates similar challenges to development, policy-making and reform. These challenges have at times been most visible during political conflict and public unrest. Inherited, partly developed, and under-resourced modern state institutions are negotiated with influential but compromised informal institutions. This negotiation of formal institutions, and short-term, localised and personalised political pressures, limit the opportunity for policy-making that is rational, bureaucratic and impartial, and for delivery of formal and broad-based policy commitments over the long-term. In both, significant external influence, through changing modes, continues to shape policy-making, including with unintended consequences.

This chapter also identifies relevant differences: in the durability of the political economy dynamics, the nature of national identities, the nature of clientelistic transfers and elite commitment, and opportunities for collective action and programmatic policy and reform. These suggest critical differences shaping unpredictable and unique policy pathways to be further explored in findings chapters.

These political economy dynamics, and sector-specific characteristics, also affect policy-making on employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Beyond existing and mostly economic analysis, employment policies have important political and social implications, making them important for consideration not only in economic terms but also as social sector policy responses. Key characteristics of employment in these states include the dual nature of labour markets, in which policies and institutions focus on a minority in formal employment, while disbursed rural and youthful populations face limited education and employment

options, often in subsistence and informal livelihoods. Policy-making dynamics and characteristics of employment in both states challenge broad delivery of employment policy responses. This thesis will explore these issues in two prominent employment policy responses: overseas tertiary scholarships policy, and overseas labour mobility.

3.1: Parallels for policy-making and employment – and important differences

Structures, historical contexts and institutional arrangements in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu share striking similarities, shaping policy-making and employment, reflected in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below. Both are post-colonial states with highly rural (three-quarters) and youthful (half aged under 24) populations distributed over a large number of islands. This geographic structure shapes politics. Both countries have limited ‘modern’ state institutions. They share World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) ratings of between two and 3.5 out of six for strength of policies and institutions (WB, 2022a), which grew modestly between 2006 and 2019. Both populations had limited incomes, higher education and formal employment, with Solomon Islanders more disadvantaged. Both ranked low in human development indices, falling behind other countries over the period. By 2011, fewer than one in five Solomon Islanders had some secondary education (SIG, 2023c); compared to just over 1 in 4 ni-Vanuatu by 2009 (VNSO, 2009). While both were lower-middle income countries, Vanuatu had slightly higher GDP per capita (USD3,342 in 2019) than Solomon Islands (USD2,890 in 2019). In 2019, a higher proportion of Solomon Islanders (73.6 per cent) were in ‘vulnerable employment’ than ni-Vanuatu (58.6 per cent) (WB, 2022a). Table 3.2 presents similarities in political and economic structure, including weak coalition governments and changes of leadership. Subsistence and small-scale agriculture and fisheries provides a living for the majority of both populations. Two notable differences in political and economic structure are Vanuatu’s national chiefly system, and the profile of economic activities other than subsistence and small-scale agriculture and fisheries: more natural resource industries in Solomon Islands (Horscroft et al., 2017), and more financial services and tourism in Vanuatu (GoV, 2024a).

Table 3.1: Solomon Islands and Vanuatu: Key figures

(a) Land and population

	Solomon Islands		Sources	Vanuatu		Sources
Land Area	27,990 km2		1	12,190km2	1	
Exclusive Economic Zone	1,553,440km2			663,251km2		
Number of Islands	992 (347 inhabited)		2	83 (around 65 inhabited)	3	
Languages	English, but Solomon Pisin is the lingua franca; 63 distinct between 60 and 70 local languages		4	Bislama, English, French and more than 100 local languages	5	
Population	2006	2019		2006	2019	
Total - 2006	493,430	674,993	6	222,923	304,404	6
/ % Rural	81.7%	75.8%		76.6%	74.6%	
/ % <24 years old	52%	50%		51%	49%	
/ with some secondary education	18.9% (2011)	28.4%	7	26.4% (2009)	34.3%	8
/ at least completed upper secondary	N/A	N/A	-	9.1%	18.6%	6
/ with some post-secondary education	4.4% (2011)	7.9%	7	3.8% (2009)	2.4%	6

Table 3.1 (a) Sources:

1: (SPC, 2022); 2: (SIG, 2024a); 3: (GoV, 2024a) ; 4: (UoA, 2024); 5: (GoV, 2020); 6: (WB, 2022a); 7: (SIG, 2009, 2023c); 8: (VNSO, 2009, 2020a).

(b) Employment, migration and development

	Solomon Islands			Vanuatu		
	2006	2019	Source	2006	2019	Source
GDP Per capita, Constant Prices, US\$ PPP:	\$2,333	\$2,890	1	\$3,169	\$3,342	1
Wage and salaried workers, % of total workers	25%	34.25%		24.59%	38.98%	
Vulnerable Employment, % of total employment (2019)	74%	73.6%		64.6%	58.6%	
Migrants abroad	3,913 (2017)		2	8,785 (2017)		2
Human Development Index; global ranking	144 th	155 th	3	130 th	142 nd	3
Corruption Perception Index; global ranking	111 th (2007)	77 th	4	98 th (2007)	64 th	4
% of nationals surveyed who thought corruption in government was a big problem	97% (2021)		5	73% (2021)		5
World Bank Country Policy & Institutional Assessment ratings (1-6):	2.5	2.7	1	3.1	3.2	1
(a) Public Sector Management and Institutions Cluster Average						
(b) Transparency, accountability, and corruption in the public sector						
(c) Quality of public administration						
(d) Property rights and rule-based governance rating	2.5	3.0		3.0	3.5	

Table 3.1 (b) Sources:

1: (WB, 2022a); 2: (ILO, 2020); 3: (UNDP, 2024); 4: (TI, 2021a); 5: (TI, 2021b).

Table 3.2: Solomon Islands and Vanuatu: Politics and Economy

	Solomon Islands	<i>Sources</i>	Vanuatu	<i>Sources</i>
Political System	Westminster Parliamentary system. Coalition governments since independence, except 1989.	-	Westminster parliamentary system, with some differences including due to French influence (a President) and local adaptation (Malvatumauri). Coalition government since 1991.	-
National structure	Nine provincial assemblies, each led by a Premier and with its own executive; however central government maintains control and resourcing. Area Councils disbanded in 1998.	1	Six provincial administrations are under-resourced, area councils within each province largely limited to tax collection	2
Parliamentarians and Political Parties in 2019	50: 29 members of 8 political parties; 21 independent (42%)	3	52 members of parliament representing 19 political parties, 0 independent	4
Independence	1978	5	1980	6
Prime Ministers since independence (to July 2024)	19 (13 individuals)	-	27 (13 individuals)	-
Traditional authority system	No national chiefly system. Traditional 'kastom' authority is influential in rural areas but in significant hybridity with state and church approaches	1	Chiefly 'Malvatumauri' national system. Important to maintaining law and order, and "similar status to parliament and to executive arm of government", but without formal power, and ambiguities about the extent of its authority	7
Economy	Natural resources, particularly export of round logs, fisheries, minerals. Rural livelihoods remain largely dependent on subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture, forestry and fisheries.	8	Fishing, offshore financial services and tourism. Subsistence and small-scale agriculture provide a living for 65% of the population. Mineral deposits are negligible. Tax revenues drawn mainly from import duties and a 12.5% VAT.	6

Table 3.2 Sources:

1: (Dinnen & Allen, 2015); 2: (Cox et al., 2007); 3: (NPSI, 2023); 4: (NPV, 2024); 5: (SIG, 2024a); 6: (GoV, 2024a); 7: (Nimbtik, 2016b, p. 39); 8: (Horscroft et al., 2017; IFAD, 2021).

Note on Tables 3.1 and 3.2: The Vanuatu National Statistics Office's 'Melanesian Wellbeing Indicators' initiative balances western data approaches with local understandings of wellbeing (GoV, 2012a). Such local approaches and priorities were integrated in Vanuatu's 2016-2030 National Sustainable Development Plan (Kiddle, 2019). Noting risk of neo-liberal framing of

data, these wellbeing indicators are not included above as they are not available for comparison of both countries across the case study period.

3.2: Solomon Islands' segmented polity and clientelism shape national policy-making

Solomon Islands is one of the most difficult contexts for social sector policy-making and delivery in the Pacific. Dispersed over 900 islands with limited development and a few natural resource industries dominating economic activity, service delivery is difficult and costly (Barbara & Haley, 2014; Close, 2012). During the case study period, the population grew rapidly while undergoing significant social change. New pressures and incentives to join the urban and cash economy increased tensions over land and left the subsistence lifestyles of the majority increasingly unsustainable and unattractive (Close, 2012; MoFT, 2018). Solomon Islands Government (SIG) and leaders have found it difficult to respond to these social changes with long-term and broad policy responses and services because of a number of structural and political factors.

Solomon Islands' segmented polity and society shapes its political economy. National policy-making is undermined by the lack of a shared political community. This arises from several factors: geographic and ethnic segmentation; limited higher education; a limited communal sense of nationhood (with no sustained independence struggle that may have formed one); and inherited post-colonial state institutions lacking local legitimacy (Dinnen, 2008b). These were factors too in Solomon Islands' most significant post-independence crisis. The 'Tensions' of 1998 to 2003 widened ethnic divisions; reduced GDP by an estimated 24 per cent (DFAT, 2004, p. xi); and through deteriorating public administration and service delivery, intensified the decline of Solomon Islands' post-colonial state (Barbara, 2014; DFAT, 2004). The political factors which drove the Tensions - political instability, competing sub-national political agendas, and contestation of public sector reform and rent-seeking by politicians (Allen, 2011) – all remained very relevant for policy-making in the case study period of this research. The international state-building intervention in response to the Tensions, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), supported central Ministry functioning but failed to end rent-seeking by political actors or foster conditions for programmatic policy-making (Barbara, 2019a). Societal tensions, including between ethnicities and rural or urban citizens, also continue to challenge collective policy-making and implementation. A limited state and formal economy, and the local priorities of isolated rural constituencies beyond the reach of

government services or development investment, limit national framing of development problems or collective action, and sustain political fragmentation (Barbara, 2019a).

Solomon Islands' political dynamic continues to undermine national policy-making. Communities select Members of Parliament (MPs) to advance localised interests, which pressures MPs to extract rent from the state. Political fluidity and leaders' short-term horizons mitigate strategic or developmental policy-making (Barbara, 2019a), or programmatic policies (Steeves, 2011). Solomon Islands lacks programmatic political parties, with credible public policy stances, national policy platforms or policy infrastructure, and national-level leadership. Politicians do not work on national collective action problems, and contest power rather than ideas (Alasia, 1997). Governing coalitions of individual MPs change according to short-term transactional interests (Corbett & Wood, 2013; Steeves, 2011). Parliament spends little time in session (NPSI, 2016). A handful of 'big men' have remained fairly constant since the Tensions; Manasseh Sogavare served as Prime Minister four times (see Table 4.8). This sustains the overall political economy dynamic.

Clientelism and corruption are prominent in this political economy dynamic. Solomon Islands scores in the top quintile of countries for political clientelism (Coppedge et al., 2017). Solomon Islands rated 161st out of 166 countries in freedom from corruption in one study in 2016 (Heritage, 2019), although improving from 111th to 77th ranked globally from 2007 to 2019 according to Transparency International (TI, 2021a) (Table 3.1). Corruption is widely experienced by Solomon Islanders. In Transparency International surveying of Solomon Islanders, 97 per cent thought that corruption in government was a big problem; 34 per cent reported paying a bribe to one of eight services listed, and 21 per cent for education services (TI, 2021b). Impacting business, the World Bank recorded 81.9 per cent of firms surveyed reporting being expected to make an informal payment or gift to get things done (Chêne, 2017). It is highly likely that such widespread perceptions of corruption undermine the trust and social capital across stakeholders needed for complex inter-sectoral policy efforts such as employment policy.

Clientelism by Solomon Islands' political and elite actors is driven by intensely local and personalised politics including strong community incentives, which are both cultural and rational. The rural majority of Solomon Islanders lived by local frameworks of kinship, *kastom* and Christianity. These too are compromised: there is no shared chiefly system or single, coherent sense of 'kastom' across Solomon Islands. Local systems have also been corrupted and undermined significantly in certain provinces, for example by logging interests (Allen et

al., 2013). Local legitimization strategies emphasise distribution of rewards to personal networks while delivery by remote and weak state institutions is uncertain (Wood, 2014). Voters elect local candidates who can reward them with delivery of private goods or local public goods. These incentives explain the significant growth of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) as a modality of providing goods and services in Solomon Islands.

This dynamic increases pressure and responsibility on politicians. Hughes categorised Solomon Islands' politicians as 'developers' or 'diverters'; differing in intent and practice, but neither entirely able to avoid personalised pressures or participation in corruption (Hughes, 2001). MP Clay Forau stated in Hansard: "... *when you go for consultation in the constituency it is going to be cash-sultation, people will be asking you for money*" (Steeves, 2011, p. 345). Relentless requests pressed on MP Rick Hou: "*People call their MP in the middle of the night, they call early in the morning: they call anytime. They call on anything and everything. They call for assistance with funeral expenses of dead relatives, assistance with school fees, to attend a wedding, to follow up on their project application, to attend a meeting on the local hospital project or just to ask for 'top up'*" (Hou, 2016, pp. 1-2). Hou consulted constituents, delineated his personal and professional responsibilities, strengthened reporting, regulations and accountability for constituency programs, and delivered wide-ranging development benefits for his constituency. He argued for CDFs because they delivered tangible benefits for constituents, in contrast with weak central service delivery (Hou, 2016). Such local political preferences have changed service delivery in Solomon Islands.

Within this political economy dynamic, CDFs have been preferenced as a formal institution of service delivery. This has potentially changed the nature of the Solomon Islands state and its social contract, weakening national and sub-national government (WB, 2014b) institutionalising localised and personalised development, undermining bureaucratic function, and limiting political elite commitment to more functional policies and institutions (Barbara, 2019a). Different authors have described Solomon Islands' bureaucratic policy-making as susceptible to political capture (Kabutaulaka, 2008b), to actors with power protecting their political interests (Roderick Duncan, 2011), to resource gaps, and to weak management, performance and financial accountability (Devesi, 2018). The accountability relationship between Ministries responsible for service delivery and citizens was weak, contrasting with the prominent clientelist relationship between voters and politicians. While aid donors provide significant support, resulting in 'ring-fenced' pockets of capability and attempts at public service reform, politicians and elites divert their commitment and resources to areas from

which they can extract the rents they need to hold power (Craig & Porter, 2014, pp. 19-21), and to activities for which politicians including Ministers can claim direct electoral credit (Horscroft et al., 2017; Kabutaulaka, 2008a). Leaders have little space for major institutional reforms geared to development if such reforms destabilise rent-seeking by their coalition (Barbara, 2019a). These incentives reinforce the patronage system and limit political will or national collective action for substantive policy change.

At a national economy scale, Solomon Islands' clientelist politics continues to undermine development and policy-making (Wood, 2018). Voter pressure on MPs for rural development goods and assistance with basic needs, such as school fees, also reflects the low incomes, limited cash livelihoods and employment opportunities of much of Solomon Islands' rural population (Table 3.1). Private sector activity and investment are limited, and major revenue sources including logging and mining generate limited formal employment for Solomon Islanders. Logging represented 60 per cent of exports in 2012, and was the largest source of formal employment after government in 2012, but still only employed 5,000 Solomon Islanders (ADB, 2013). Those seeking employment have for decades migrated to Honiara, adding to urban/ rural tensions; or increasingly recently, as chapter six presents, sought overseas labour mobility.

While durable, clientelism has still been contested, and bureaucratic policy-making has been the target of significant foreign influence and support. Overseas development assistance peaked at almost 40 per cent of gross national income in 2010, down to 14 per cent by 2019 (WB, 2022a). To the end of the case study period, key state functions remained donor-reliant, and donor co-drafting of policy, significant. In order to maintain donor support, political elites committed to policy reforms to address systemic problems, but faced political costs and domestic constraints to delivering those reforms (Corbett & Wood, 2013; Sahin & Shahin, 2019). More recently, geo-political strategic competition with China limited the ability of external donors such as Australia to enforce compliance with developmental reform agendas (Sahin & Shahin, 2019). China thus offers leverage for Solomon Islands' political elites against external agendas, as well as transactional support. Domestic voices of accountability include anti-corruption and transparency institutions, civil society, social media, and the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) (Horscroft et al., 2017). Societal influence on policy-making is mixed. Roughan had identified in 1991 that while basically an egalitarian society, in post-independence Solomon Islands an elite had emerged, principally including businessmen, the more educated, religious leaders and those with political power

(Roughan, 1991). However, an emergent urban middle class which in other countries might demand better governance, is in Solomon Islands small and implicated in the political economy (Barbara et al., 2015). Divisions by ethnicity rather than class or ideology do not stimulate the kind of elite pacts which in other countries have helped develop effective state policies and institutions (Horscroft et al., 2017, pp. 7-8). While facing structural marginalisation that reflect cultural legacies of the role of youth, Solomon Islands youth have created opportunities for greater civic engagement (Craney, 2019). Looking ahead, internet-based social movements could play an increasing political role supporting programmatic and reformist policies in place of transactional rents (Wood, 2015). Such external support, influence and internal and external contestation form a pattern of policy contestation across sectors.

In summary, Solomon Islands' broader political economy is shaped by structures and resourcing of a segmented polity, compromised formal institutions and highly localised, personalised and clientelist incentives and political dynamics. Solomon Islands' policy elites and citizens both criticise and participate in this political economy dynamic. This dynamic has proven durable and significant for national policy-making, particularly affecting efforts at complex social sector policy - such as employment. Shaped by these dynamics, how policy-making, contestation and change have occurred in two major areas of employment policy are presented in Chapters 4 (overseas tertiary scholarships) and six (overseas labour mobility).

3.3: Policy-making in an 'unfinished state' – Vanuatu's 'Nakamal way'

Vanuatu too shares many of the characteristic challenges to policy-making in Pacific countries, and multiple similarities in the structure and political economy dynamics to Solomon Islands (presented above in Tables 3.1 and 3.2). Key factors also shape important differences in Vanuatu's context for policy-making. Vanuatu's island geography provides the structure of a segmented polity, with limited resources for administration and policy delivery. Significant ethnic diversity mitigated a sense of nationhood (Jowitt, 2014). Most ni-Vanuatu still live in rural areas, highly reliant on subsistence and informal livelihoods. Ni-Vanuatu are also significantly experiencing societal change through urbanisation, tension over land, the search for cash incomes to meet priorities such as school fees; and through widespread labour mobility.

A segmented polity and limited state institutions shaped policy-making. Cox and others' described Vanuatu's 'unfinished State': a new nation-state with incompletely developed- and

resourced- institutions, and a disappointing development trajectory in its first two decades of independence (Cox et al., 2007). Relying on a few key individuals, a small administration maintained hundreds of unfilled public service vacancies, adding only a few tertiary graduates each year (Cox et al., 2007, p. iii). The ‘unfinished state’ was most obvious in the limited reach of government services to the rural majority of ni-Vanuatu. Inherited Westminster system institutions had been negotiated with informal institutions, adapted to island provisioning. Complex relationships of reciprocity including traditional ‘kastom’ patterns of clan and chief loyalty shaped clientelist politics. Politicians were under constant pressure to secure constituents’ support with direct, material benefits, resolve community problems and place individuals in key posts to secure opportunities for redistribution. As a result, Vanuatu’s political system was unstable and fragmentary, with competition on power and patronage rather than policy platforms, driving corruption at the highest levels (Cox et al., 2007). Political parties were numerous, but weak and personality-focused platforms for temporary coalitions to form government. To meet voter expectations, politicians focused on short term policy decisions and local issues rather than national collective action problems (Barbara & Haley, 2014; Morgan, 2004). There was an absence of a governance tradition of leadership in the national interest, while civil society policy engagement was weak and individualised (Cox et al., 2007). By global comparison the structures of this political dynamic were similar to Solomon Islands.

As introduced at sub-section 2.4.2, Nimbtik identified corruption arising from Vanuatu’s conflict of traditional ways and norms, governance expectations of the modern legal-rational state, and international institutions supporting that state (Nimbtik, 2016a).³ Presenting a Vanuatu mode of ‘patron-client relations’, the need to secure resources to maintain power and votes incentivised politicians to enter corrupt dealings with external funding sources, or extract state resources outside formal rules, undermining developmental policy-making (Nimbtik, 2016b, pp. x-xi). Corruption, in a western sense, remained widespread. In 2013, 82 per cent of Vanuatu respondents surveyed felt that political parties were corrupt or extremely corrupt, 13 per cent reported paying a bribe, and 7 per cent reported paying a bribe for education services (TI, 2013). While 87 per cent of respondents to the ‘alternative indicators of well-being’ study rated respect for culture as important themselves, only 48 per cent considered that others did

³ Dr. Gregoire Nimbtik was formerly Director-General of Vanuatu’s Ministry of the Prime Minister

(GoV, 2012a). This suggested a society with strong respect for traditions but challenged by change and eroding trust in community and institutions.

Beyond systematic gaps in technical capability, these prevailing political incentives undermined government capability for credible, broader and programmatic development policies. Policy initiatives were inconsistent, and driven by immediate reactions to the concerns of constituents, rather than executive advice. Specific parts of government produced evidence-based policy, and public servants provided technical analysis of policy choices to politicians in annual budgets, but policy development was weaker in multi-annual and cross- sector planning and coordination (Cox et al., 2007). Cain and Jowitt identified wantokism in conflict with public servants' formal roles, making their separation of public and private life difficult (Newton Cain & Jowitt, 2004).

With these political dynamics shaping policy-making, Vanuatu experienced significant gaps between stated policy, implementation, and significant foreign aid and influence. Vanuatu had comprehensive development strategies but with limited local ownership. Significant donor support represented from 20 to 30 per cent of Vanuatu's budget to the 2000s, to under 14 per cent to 2017 (Spring, 2017, p. 30). Donor influence at times meant Ministries preferred direct dealing with donors over national coordination processes (Cox et al., 2007).

While many political economy dynamics are similar to Solomon Islands' in their effect on policy-making, a relevant difference between the two countries was Vanuatu's sense of nationhood, shared in national symbols and institutions. Efate paramount chief Roi Mata introduced a shared totemic kinship system in the 1600s (Guiart, 1964, p. 97). Vanuatu's Anglophone/ Francophone political and institutional cleavage is unique in Melanesia and a significant factor in politics, as a ni-Vanuatu elite accessed separate education and employment opportunities (Reilly, 2004). Vanuatu has a coherent chiefly system, represented nationally in the 'Malvatumauri' chiefly council, and the main authority in communities (Rawlings, 1999). Malvatumauri Chiefs settled the NPF riots in 1998 (Wittersheim, 1998), and other political and development conflicts. There is an increasing political norm that any Prime Minister must have a chiefly title (Nimbtik, 2016b). A national independence movement formed around the leaders in the Vanua'aku Party, who received church education. These leaders developed national consciousness, in reaction to issues including expatriate land alienation in the 1960s and 1970s. (Cox et al., 2007). This sense of national identity incorporated the diverse but shared cultural heritage of kastom, recognised in the constitution, and the promoted the Bislama language,

now the common language of government (Nimbtik, 2016b). These shared national institutions may provide common identity and purpose for national policy-making.

Ni-Vanuatu actors have translated ideas into institutions. Vanuatu independence leaders developed philosophies of ‘the Melanesian Way’ and ‘Melanesian Socialism’ (Premdas, 1987). Vanuatu led the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) headquartered in Port Vila. The Vanuatu National Cultural Centre (VNCC) became active in Vanuatu’s cultural and intellectual life.⁴ Describing a key traditional approach of social and policy networking, Huffer and Molisa described Vanuatu’s ‘Nakamal Way’ of community consensus building (Huffer & Molisa, 1999).⁵ Cox et al identified local customary and informal institutions as “*arguably Vanuatu’s most precious asset*”, stronger than in other Melanesian countries, alleviating pressures on communities, and important to governance (Cox et al., 2007, p. 47). Such tangible roles of local ideas and informal institutions suggests their potential influence in policy-making.

Another important difference shaping policy-making in Vanuatu was in economic structure. Rather than natural resource revenues, major economic drivers of finance, real estate and tourism all broaden the interests of an expatriate business community. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, widespread participation in labour mobility also had an economic impact – as labour mobility already accounted for 25% of export income in 2013 (Barbara & Haley, 2014).

Shaped by these economic drivers and by money politics, and while kastom institutions are strong, political clientelism has not been institutionalised in budget in the same way as in Solomon Islands and PNG. Parliamentary allocations are provided to MPs, with varying degrees of governance and accountability to constituents. However, these benefits have mostly remained small in scale – legislated at the equivalent of USD4,000 per month in 2012 (NPV, 2012). While meeting some local requests, they do not undermine service delivery, state institutions and policy-making as in Solomon Islands. How political clientelism works in Vanuatu has also changed over time. The trial and conviction of almost a third of Vanuatu’s parliament in 2016 was unprecedented in Vanuatu and the Pacific, and possibly internationally, indicating the robustness of systemic checks and balances across the executive, judiciary and legislature (Forsyth & Batley, 2016). This is likely to have changed incentives and accountability for politicians, as well as providing the opportunity for record turnover to a new

⁴ The support of the Vanuatu National Cultural Centre in this research is deeply appreciated.

⁵ A Nakamal is a community gathering place used for ceremonies and drinking kava, which in urban settings has transitioned into a place for exchange, discussion and drinking kava (Huffer & Molisa, 1999)

generation of politicians in 2016. This change is reflected in case study chapters and later analysis.

The key differences in Vanuatu's context for policy-making described above provided different opportunities for leadership of policy-making than Solomon Islands. In Vanuatu, Barbara and Haley identified developmental initiatives in more difficult policy areas, and existence of individual leaders able to mobilise coalitions for reform (Barbara & Haley, 2014, p. 48). In 2007, Cox et al. noted that the fragmented political system prevented control by any one person, but provided the opportunity for individuals to emerge, leading developmental agendas (Cox et al., 2007). Barbara noted the strength of personal relationships limiting strategic and programmatic decision-making, but important to allow reform-oriented individuals to progress change (Barbara, 2019b). Minister Ralph Regenvanu's comment of May 2014 indicates opportunities for policy change:

"Sheer bloody mindedness and the right timing is what is needed to advance policy reform and get laws passed in Vanuatu. You need to be in there for the long haul and to have done your homework, and then make the most of the political moment when the stars align, recognising that the political moment is often short-lived" (Barbara & Haley, 2014, p. 48).

Regenvanu's political opportunism could arise in any country with a political dynamic which offers such opportunities. Vanuatu's conditions and opportunities for policy-making and -reform were apparent in both case studies, presented in Chapters 5 (Vanuatu Government-Funded Scholarships) and 7 (Vanuatu Labour Mobility).

3.4: Employment policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu as social policy

Chapter 1 introduced the Pacific public policy challenge of employment as a social policy issue. Existing studies of Pacific countries including Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have identified economic issues in employment, including 'dual' labour markets with supply and demand problems, and growth constraints. Employment issues also have significant social and political impacts, which have been less well studied, beyond Vanuatu labour mobility participation (Bailey, 2009, 2013, 2014; Connell & Petrou, 2019; Craven, 2013; Petrou & Connell, 2017). Chapter 2 presented the importance of integrating analysis not only of resources and institutions but also of people and politics to understand policy action. This supports a focus on employment policy not only as economic policy but as social policy. This section will present economic, social and political characteristics in employment policy-

making in both states, and the two prominent case study policy areas for investigation in this thesis.

3.4.1: Solomon Islands and Vanuatu employment contexts

In Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, structural and economic constraints contribute to problems of high unemployment, inactivity and lack of formal jobs and other livelihood and income opportunities. Featuring dual labour markets, a relatively small proportion of workers are in ‘formal’ waged employment – favoured by employment policies - while a majority of workers are in ‘subsistence’, ‘informal’ or ‘vulnerable’ employment, such as growing food for household consumption or sale.

Colonial and donor powers’ influence continues to shape employment policy in both countries. This includes imposed western employment practices, labour market institutions and ideas, originating in the colonial period. The objective of securing labour was fundamental in the decision to found both colonial states (Munro & Firth, 1990). Labour policies, and migration, both forced and voluntary, caused major change in the lives of islander peoples (Moore et al., 1990); and were fundamental in the formation of Pidgin languages (Jourdan, 2013), and in motivating independence movements (Premdas & Steeves, 1984). External intervention remains a primary driver for reform of employment policies and labour institutions in Pacific countries (Barbara & McMahon, 2015; Prasad & Hince, 2001). Aid donors remain key employment policy actors.

Externally-influenced policy prescriptions are complicated in delivery by Solomon Islands and Vanuatu contextual realities. These dual labour markets see most workers left out of formal waged jobs – amounting to around 80 per cent of Vanuatu’s labour force (VNSO, 2020b), and 85 per cent of Solomon Islands’ (ILO & ADB, 2017, p. 4). Most workers, and disproportionately women and rural people, are not in employment or are engaged in home duties, subsistence agriculture and less- regulated informal sector livelihoods (Haque, 2014). Pacific workers may prefer this flexibility, and traditional livelihoods can help workers raise cash when needed (Farchy, 2010). However, these workers are more vulnerable to social and economic change, and more excluded from government policy responses. Lacking job-ready skills, they also face challenges transitioning to formal waged employment. Skills available do not meet employer needs, causing sustained skills mismatch in both states. Foreign workers fill jobs instead (Farchy, 2010). In multiple ways therefore, labour market characteristics make effective delivery of policy responses more difficult.

With large youth populations, youth unemployment and inactivity is a particular employment challenge in both states. Young jobseekers far exceed available jobs. During the case study period 9-10,000 Solomon Islanders entered the labour force each year while those in paid jobs increased by 3,000 per year (Close, 2012; WB, 2010b). Around 2,000 ni-Vanuatu entered the labour force each year while those in paid jobs increased by around 600 per year (GoV, 2006b, 2012d). With improved health and education outcomes, and wider access to media and communications, Pacific youth are more likely to aspire to ‘modern’, urban employment (Haque, 2014). During the case study period, rapid urbanization was doubling the size of Honiara within 17 years (Barbara & Keen, 2015). Large cohorts of young people moving to urban centres but failing to gain formal employment remain restricted to informal livelihoods (ILO & ADB, 2017), and have factored into civil unrest in both states (Allen, 2007; 2008, pp. 126, 168; PIPP, 2011; UNDP, 2011, pp. 14-15). Work overseas can be a release valve for growing populations, but persistent migration barriers affect those states with the lowest income and skills, including Solomon Islands.

Broader employment growth is limited by economic and private sector growth constraints. Globally, policies for broader economic growth can have the greatest effect on employment at scale (ILO, 2015). In both states during the case study period, economic growth was moderate overall, relative to rapid population growth, which constrained employment growth (Duncan, 2008; Wilson, 2020). Growth in private sector employment was constrained by problems of governance and labour supply. Employers in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu rated corruption, and availability of workforce skills including attitude and reliability, high among factors constraining business and jobs growth (Farchy, 2010; *World Bank Enterprise Survey*, 2017). Together, these challenges make effective employment policy responses both pressing, and difficult to get right for impact at scale.

3.4.2: Solomon Islands and Vanuatu employment policy responses

Good education and better job opportunities are high priorities for Pacific Islanders surveyed. In United Nations’ My World 2015 survey (Table 3.3), good education was the top priority for both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu respondents, and better job opportunities was the third highest priority for Solomon Islanders.

Table 3.3: What Pacific Islanders want

Country	1 st priority	2 nd priority	3 rd priority
Fiji	Good education	Better job opportunities	Better healthcare
Kiribati	Good education	Better job opportunities	Better healthcare
Marshall Islands	Good education	Better healthcare	Access to clean water and sanitation
Nauru	Good education	Better healthcare	An honest and responsive government
FSM	Better job opportunities	Good education	Protection against crime and violence
Palau	Protecting forests, rivers and oceans	Access to clean water and sanitation	Better healthcare
Papua New Guinea	Good education	Better healthcare	An honest and responsive government
Samoa	Good education	Better healthcare	Equality between men and women
Solomon Islands	Good education	An honest and responsive government	Better job opportunities
Tonga	Good education	Better job opportunities	Better healthcare
Tuvalu	Good education	Better job opportunities	Better healthcare
Vanuatu	Good education	Better healthcare	Equality between men and women

Table 3.3 Source: (UN, 2015)

Good education and employment has been a policy priority of long standing for Solomon Islands and Vanuatu governments, but with uncertain results. Broader economic growth that could have increased broader employment was constrained relative to population growth. Both governments have for decades prioritised expanded education access (Bugotu et al., 1974; GoV, 2019d; Levine & Close, 2016; SIG, 2011). Reflecting regional policy commitments, both Governments have committed to youth and skills development policies (MYDST, 2012; SIG, 2017b), prioritising education to employment transition, with objectives included in successive national development plans (GoV, 2016b; MDPAC, 2016). However, assessment of outcomes and progress of employment policies in both contexts is difficult. With much data reliant on static ‘situation assessments’ funded by external donors and population-based statistical reports, there is an absence of sustained longitudinal studies or long-term comparative assessments of progress in employment policy responses. Because policies with the broadest potential employment and livelihoods impact are also highly indirect, they are difficult to measure with clear attribution, particularly in institutional environments in which data collection is fragmented and sporadic.

Solomon Islands and Vanuatu's populations being predominantly rural, accessible income opportunities for the majority have meant rural livelihoods including agriculture and fisheries. While these have been a focus of development strategies since independence, production growth in agriculture and traditional practices has been constrained by factors including transport links, management and marketing, the small size of land and economies, and communal land ownership (Scott & Browne, 1989). In Solomon Islands, conflict significantly set back agricultural production and joint ventures, with significant loss of jobs (Hou, 2002). Improving rural livelihoods through subsistence activities as well as commercial agriculture, livestock and fisheries production remain important policies in national development strategies. However recognising the range of measures required for broad employment access, these strategies also include policies and programs for financial inclusion, labour mobility, private sector and tourism investment, and entrepreneurship training and opportunities (GoV, 2016b; SIG, 2016c).

More direct government policy responses to employment and labour institutions in both countries were also limited and unevenly targeted. Labour market institutions such as employment services, information systems, unions, or wage policies, were insufficiently developed or delivered (ILO & ADB, 2017). Policy responses with potential relevance to formal employment significantly focused on either education and training, or development and infrastructure projects, with mixed or unknown impacts on employment (Close, 2012). Major natural resource and infrastructure projects relied on foreign labour rather than training or recruiting local labour (Close, 2012; VCCI, 2025). Employment policy responses, labour institutions and laws also often focused on a minority of the labour market in formal education and employment. Workplace legislation and superannuation schemes did not cover those in informal or subsistence livelihoods (UNESCAP, 2008). These workers are excluded from higher training preferencing public sector employment; and from social welfare systems, as formal schemes focus on pensions for formerly waged employees (DFAT, 2013b; McKinley & Handayani, 2013). Overall this majority of workers faced more limited access to labour rights, education, social welfare or pathways to formal jobs.

Solomon Islands and Vanuatu public education and training investments prioritised the skilling of public sector agencies. This broader practice in Pacific states 'crowded out' the private sector growth needed for workers to transition from informal to formal employment ('formalisation')

(Laking, 2010). Dominant public sectors in small Pacific Island states absorb resources, particularly skilled labour. Public sector employment was the focus for higher trained graduates (Chand, 1999); and of labour organisations (ADB & ILO, 2017). Unions' exclusion of informal workers has been a longstanding problem (Prasad & Hince, 2001). Despite attempts to address it in Solomon Islands (APHEDA, 2010) and Vanuatu (ILO, 2021), this leaves the most disadvantaged workers without platforms to coordinate and mobilise (Barbara & McMahon, 2015). Employment policies and institutions' favouring of a minority of formal workers, particularly public servants, continues to limit the broad reach of major employment policy responses in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Importantly, the technical complexity of employment policy development, sustained implementation and regulatory compliance was particularly challenging given the broad resourcing and capacity issues described above in Chapters 2 and 3. Case study chapters will present examples of gaps in resource commitment by political actors in employment policy during the case period. This included policy agendas to which no funding was committed (Close, 2012; GoV, 2012c). Ministries of Education funded expanded schooling access, but not school-to-work transition (Close, 2012), creating a supply of jobseekers without support to get into work. Labour departments mandated for employment policy were often weaker in resources, influence and leadership to deliver policy (ILO & ADB, 2017). Complex employment policy responses proved particularly difficult for Ministries of Finance with a range of budget pressures and limited resources to meet them (Chand, 1999; Haque, 2016). Solomon Islands and Vanuatu both experienced the greatest budget vulnerability to natural disasters and economic downturns at precisely the times when employment interventions were most widely needed by populations (Nakatani, 2019; O'Higgins, 2017). Donors helped fill technical capacity gaps and reform skills development systems to respond to employer demand (DFAT, 2019c; Yanhambath & Gibert, 2023). But technically complex Australian skills systems were difficult to resource and sustain. These various factors meant both governments had difficulty moving beyond rhetorical commitment to actual employment policy delivery.

Beyond resourcing, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu's policy-making context described in preceding sections constrained the multi-stakeholder coordination of complex reforms needed to increase jobs at scale. International evidence reflects that coordination of wide-ranging reform efforts requires the authority and resources of core agencies such as Prime Minister's Offices or Ministries of Finance (Wang, 2021). In both states, as Sections 3.1 to 3.3 presented,

policy processes were fragmented, collective action not mobilised, and incentives misaligned across bureaucratic agencies. This prevented programmatic policies and successful reform efforts. Similarly, with very limited reach of government services, limited ownership and little resourcing per capita, Evans found very limited prospects for success of formal youth policies and interventions in Solomon Islands (Evans, 2019, p. 86). Relevant to employment policies, case area policy processes and incentives will be further explored in case study and analytical chapters.

Social ideas and attitudes of states undergoing change also shaped employment policy responses. These included leaders' attitudes that younger and jobless people should return to the village for traditional and rural livelihoods (Garae, 2017a; Mitchell, 2013; RNZ, 2006b). These expectations had long been less realistic for urbanising and modernising Melanesian populations aspiring to formal jobs and urban opportunities (Close, 2012; Haque, 2014). Urban migration had shifted from temporary to permanent, as urban settlers maintained their tenuous hold on land and employment, some having lost connection to rural support systems (Connell, 2006; Petrou & Connell, 2017).

The broader policy-making environments of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu presented in this chapter therefore shape employment policy-making and interventions in several ways. Despite stated policy priorities, constrained economic growth limited broader jobs growth. Institutional employment policy responses focused on formal education and formal and public sector workers, excluding the disadvantaged majority of the labour force. Coordination and capacity constraints impeded effective employment policy responses at scale. While those most excluded lacked platforms for collective action, continually urgent and pressing problems such as high youth unemployment became more of a consistent background noise, rather than a specific agenda for policy action for Ministry of Finance budgets and politicians' decision-making. These dynamics will be investigated within detailed case studies in Chapters 4 to 7, in the following two case study areas.

3.4.3: Overseas tertiary scholarships: High profile and contested

Chapter 1 introduced policy on overseas tertiary scholarships as a high priority employment policy response in both countries, that was a high profile, contested policy area prioritised in Government budget. This research focuses on nationally-funded and -managed overseas tertiary scholarship programs in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, in case study Chapters 4 and 5.

Overseas tertiary scholarships had objectives of improving employment outcomes for participants. However, as the policy cases will show, these were among a long list of explicit and implicit objectives and expectations of these programs. This diversity of objectives affected their effectiveness and delivery as an employment policy response, particularly as they related to the broader needs of jobless workers.

Both countries' overseas tertiary scholarships policies and practices were defined by geography, history and institutions, forming strong links to leadership and public service employment (Dommen & Hein, 1985). Missionaries and colonisation introduced western education, but for many years, its reach was limited, and secondary and higher education required travel overseas (Palmer, 1977). By the 1970s education was an increased priority to 'localise' administrations (Bugotu et al., 1974). However, by independence, tertiary qualifications had only been gained by small cohorts of Solomon Islanders and ni-Vanuatu (Chevalier, 2022; Gannicott, 1990; Jourdan, 1995). This overseas experience was important to formation of national leaders, and where they formed lifelong political networks (Corbett, 2015a, pp. 31-32; Crocombe, 1976). This reflects a wider international phenomenon. In African states, overseas education was central in the formation and replication of post-independence leadership elites and access to government employment (Miller, 1974). In Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, public sector human capital has remained the focus of both donor and government scholarships, to meet capacity gaps to lead and deliver state functions and public services. In 1993, 88 per cent of all Solomon Islands' scholarships were sponsored by government departments as intended employment destinations on graduation (WB, 1993b). In 2006, two-thirds of recently returned graduates of overseas universities worked in government (WB, 2006). The minority of students who gained tertiary-level qualifications remained the labour force participants most likely to be employed for a wage (Strachan et al., 2007). The linkage of publicly funded higher education overseas to national leadership and public service employment could be considered a durable norm or even informal (or semi-formal) institution in this policy area in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Aid donor scholarships were important in both countries but are outside the focus of this research. External tertiary scholarship programs are among the most long-running forms of development aid in both states. After national independence, tertiary education, through support to the University of the South Pacific (USP) and tertiary scholarships, dominated Australia's education aid to the Pacific (Gannicott, 1990). Students from Solomon Islands and Vanuatu accessed scholarships funded chiefly by Australia, New Zealand, China, Taiwan,

Japan, and France (in Vanuatu) for tertiary qualifications at metropolitan or Pacific regional institutions (Bateman et al., 2015; MoET, 2001-2023). During the period, Australia Awards and the New Zealand Aid scholarships had goals of supporting partner countries' development outcomes, and advancing donor country strategic interests and mutual relations (DFAT, 2016b; MFAT, 2019). Program eligibility considered individuals' ability to contribute to national development outcomes, academic competence, and personal skills and qualities such as resilience, good judgement and leadership skills (DFAT, 2016b) (MFAT, 2019). Donor-funded scholarship programs have been frequently evaluated as part of donor aid management: including by Australia (ANAO, 2011; DFAT, 2015a; Taylor et al., 2024) and New Zealand (MFAT, 2019). Increasingly in recent years donor-funded scholarships became a tool of soft power diplomacy, and scholarship opportunities and donor countries significantly increased (Taylor et al., 2024). Donor scholarships are not included as a primary focus of case study research given their variable local engagement, and distance from domestic public policy decision-making and local political debate. However, they are discussed in the case study chapters where there is intersection with national policy-making.

Study of policy-making on nationally-funded overseas tertiary scholarships programs has been rarer, but offers greater potential for understanding Pacific state decision-making on employment policy. While presenting similar structural and political issues, domestic tertiary scholarships are also not the primary focus of the research. Subsidies for domestic study can blend support from varying Ministry budget lines or training provider fee exemptions for local study. Policies and expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships are more clearly delineable, with more clearly demarcated selection, travel and completion, greater media attention, and larger budget impacts. In both countries overseas scholarships have been the responsibility of respective Ministries of Education units which are the focus of both case study chapters.

Key aspects of contestation over this policy area were the strong competition for scholarships selection and how budget resources were allocated. Low cash incomes and high tertiary costs meant that students depended on government, aid donor or training provider scholarships (Strachan et al., 2007; WB, 1993a, 2022a). Both countries faced management, financing and delivery challenges due to rapid growth of tertiary student numbers. These were typical challenges for tertiary education policy-makers in developing countries (Ahmad & Bloom, 2000). Later in the case study period of this research, in Solomon Islands, between two and five hundred students received overseas tertiary scholarships each year, and in Vanuatu, a high

of 613 in 2015.⁶ As will be presented in Chapters 4 and 5, these scholarships accounted for a tiny proportion of the total number of students in education, but their high cost would absorb up to fifty per cent of annual education budgets.⁷ In both countries, overseas tertiary scholarships' high cost, demand, status, and personalised selection pressures, attracted significant political and public attention. Donor-supported education reforms also affected overseas tertiary scholarships policy and funding, and these reforms were variably led, contested and shaped by local policy actors.

There was particular contestation over the policy issue in both states because of selection pressures amounting to corruption. Global experience indicates a wide range of forms of corruptions in higher education, particularly where large numbers of qualified students compete for limited places (Osipian, 2013). Particular drivers of corruption risk in cross border higher education include information asymmetry, and pressure on tertiary institutions to increase income sources (Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Corruption risks were high in the governance context of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu presented in this chapter. As the case study chapters detail, merit-based selection was compromised, and policy actors responded in a range of ways. The strong political, economic and social dynamics in this policy area are investigated in case study Chapters 4 and 5 and analysed in Chapter 8.

3.4.4: Overseas labour mobility: Significant impacts - and inequities

Chapter 1 also introduced policy on overseas labour mobility as a high profile, contested policy area in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with a significant impact on employment, but with key differences in participation between the two countries.

Labour mobility has a long history in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Since the 19th century, external countries have significantly influenced labour opportunities and participation by Pacific Islands peoples (Craig et al., 2014). In post-independence Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, existing domestic development and employment initiatives had not delivered for the less-educated and unwaged (Luthria, 2006, p. 1). Reflecting the global agenda for labour mobility introduced in Chapter 1, by the early 2000s labour mobility schemes were increasingly recognised as a vitally important opportunity for participatory employment and economic activity, overcoming long term structural barriers to employment (Craig & Bedford, 2013; WB, 2010b). Regional seasonal employment schemes to New Zealand and Australia were

⁶ See details and sources presented in Tables 4.1, 4.4 and 5.2

⁷ Details and sources presented in Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 5.2

conceptualised at this time, drawing on existing schemes in New Zealand and Canada (Luthria, 2006; Pritchett, 2006; UNDP, 2009). Calls for these schemes came from Pacific Island leaders (PIFS, 2005), New Zealand farmers (Whatman et al., 2017, p. 2), economists and development researchers (Luthria, 2006; UNESCAP, 2007) and policy commentators (Mares & Maclellan, 2005). Pacific advocacy was driven by growing demand for employment for rapidly growing youthful populations, and by regional trade liberalisation processes (Chan et al., 2004; Whatman et al., 2017, p. 6). This advocacy instigated the most significant change in labour mobility in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in over a century.

Three broad-reaching and prominent labour mobility schemes to 2019 were New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme; and Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP), and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS). Developing from existing New Zealand and Canadian schemes (Bedford, 2013), the RSE started in 2007 with a cap of 5,000 workers, growing to 19,000 for 2022/23 (NZG, 2023c). Its aims included to help New Zealand employers fill sectoral labour shortages through seasonal employment, maximising benefits for Pacific workers and supporting economic development of Pacific states (MBIE, 2023). Workers were selected from nine PICs, including Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and could stay for terms of up to seven months in any 11 month period (MBIE, 2023). The Australian Government resisted introducing Pacific guestworker schemes until political change in 2008 (Maclellan, 2008). The Howard government (1996-2007) had responded to Pacific calls for labour mobility with a focus on domestic education and training instead (Howes, 2021; Rose et al., 2009). After election of a Labor government in 2007, the initial Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (PSWPS) of 2008 was followed in 2012 by the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP), including eight PICs and Timor-Leste with a cap of 12,000 workers (DFAT, 2011; Doyle & Howes, 2015, p. 9). With policy and implementation changes, including extension to all Pacific countries, removal of a cap on workers and increased interest by farmers, the SWP grew rapidly to exceed RSE worker numbers by 2019/20 (12,200 to 11,152) (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 18). The Australian Government added the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) in 2018, expanding sectors and industries, and increasing opportunities for women (DFAT, 2022a). Policy on participation in these three schemes forms the focus of this research.

Popular demand for labour mobility opportunities among Pacific Islanders has remained strong, fuelled by population growth, large youth populations, and limited employment and incomes at home (GoV & SPC, 2022; SIG & SPC, 2017). Young Pacific Islanders aspire to the income and experiences gained through overseas labour mobility (Underhill-Sem &

Marsters, 2017, pp. 13, 17). This demand led the region to experience among the world's highest rates of skilled emigration (ADB & ILO, 2017, p. xii).

Significant economic and employment benefits have been realised by Pacific Islanders from increased labour mobility in the last two decades. These impacts have been described as 'transformational' (Howes et al., 2022). Research has quantified 'triple-win' benefits to labour sending countries, labour receiving countries, and employers and workers (Ramasamy et al., 2008). Impacts have been recorded in higher savings and higher GDP (Doyle & Sharma, 2017); investment in businesses (Brown & Walker, 1995); higher levels of education (Bedford & Hugo, 2012, p. 34); and benefits to poor households (Luthria, 2006, pp. iii-iv). Considerable impacts on participating ni-Vanuatu households included new assets, home improvement and school participation (Gibson & McKenzie, 2010, 2014; Gibson et al., 2014). The World Bank estimated AUD144 million in net income gains to the region in the SWP's first five years (Doyle & Sharma, 2017, p. 58). These impacts have made labour mobility a high priority for employment policy and development aid responses.

These gains weren't achieved equally. Realizing labour-mobility benefits required administrative capacity, leadership, and coordination, which posed particular challenges for small Pacific island states already struggling with service-delivery capacity (Bedford, 2013, pp. 188-193; Curtain & Howes, 2020). This was particularly so where there was little experience of labour sending, and where corrupt practices were widespread. These issues are investigated in the two case study chapters.

Participants and communities also experienced costs to labour migration. These included loss of agricultural production and other labour shortages at home, worker vulnerability in destination countries, and family separation (Doan, Dornan, et al., 2023, pp. 12, 69; Underhill-Sem & Marsters, 2017, pp. 37-38). Debating the schemes, multiple politicians, academics, campaigners and journalists have compared current worker conditions to the nineteenth century labour trade of Pacific workers, often labelled 'blackbirding' (Craig et al., 2014; Fonseka, 2022; Kekea, 2018b; McKenzie, 2017; Petrou & Connell, 2023; Smith, 2021; Tuiburelevu & Wagner-Hiliau, 2020; UNSW, 2022). These multiple sources present recurring experiences of worker exploitation in Australian and New Zealand labour schemes. These issues and criticisms have sustained contestation of the schemes.

The equity of labour mobility participation has been a persistent policy problem. One factor is employers' preference for returning workers and male workers (Bedford, Nunns, et al., 2020; Petrou et al., 2023). Some Pacific countries have participated longer and more than

others. While Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji have accounted for the great majority of Pacific remittance incomes, PNG and Solomon Islands make up smaller shares, and continue to regularly experience among the lowest rates of outmigration in the world (Appleyard & Stahl, 1995; Bedford & Hugo, 2012, pp. 13, 26, 28-29). Inequitable access between countries is therefore significant.

Solomon Islands and Vanuatu shared similar institution and labour structures and historic barriers to migration, and strong economic and development rationale for contemporary labour mobility participation. While Vanuatu participated earlier in these schemes and expanded to very broad participation, Solomon Islanders' participation increased much more slowly, despite strong demand from job-seekers. By the end of the case study period, ni-Vanuatu participants in the schemes significantly outnumbered Solomon Islanders. This contrast arose from specific differences in structures and domestic policy-making between the two countries which will be revealed through the policy case analysis of this research presented in Chapters 6 and 7. Key questions that will be explored in this research include:

- 1) Specific differences in leadership and politics among Solomon Islands and Vanuatu policy actors shaping labour mobility policy differently;
- 2) What policy and implementation problems emerged and how policy actors approached and contested them; and
- 3) Factors in the long delay (over ten years) in both countries between early political advocacy, and launching of comprehensive, formal national policy frameworks for labour mobility.

Conclusion

Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are both segmented Pacific states with similar structures, resources and institutions, as well as employment and development outcomes. These factors shape policy-making in similar ways, challenging predictable and rational policy-making and delivery on formal policy commitments. Closer inspection of the two countries reveals distinct institutional, economic and political incentive factors and dynamics shaping policy-making differently. Solomon Islands' short-term, personalised and localised elite and institutional deals sustain a durable political economy dynamic. Resource transfers focused on MPs and difficulty mobilising collective action make reforms and rational programmatic policy-making and reforms difficult. How this political economy dynamic shaped specific processes of policy-making and change in two important employment policy responses in Solomon Islands is

presented in Chapters 4 (overseas tertiary scholarships) and 6 (labour mobility).

In Vanuatu the nature of national identity, the negotiation of formal and informal institutions including the role of kastom and chiefs, in economic structure, and in ideas and opportunities, shape key differences in policy-making and -change. Vanuatu's political economy dynamics have been in greater flux, with more volatility and opportunities for individuals to emerge leading collective action and policy-making. How Vanuatu's political economy dynamic shaped specific processes of policy-making and -change in two significant employment policy responses will be presented in case study Chapters 5 (overseas tertiary scholarships) and 7 (labour mobility).

This chapter has presented the ways that each country's broader political economy context for policy-making shapes the national leadership and collective action on the complex reforms needed to achieve employment outcomes at scale. Within these broader dynamics, national policy responses to Solomon Islanders' and ni-Vanuatu high priority for better jobs have faced challenging sectoral characteristics and dynamics of resourcing and institutions. These include skills mismatches, and a mismatch of policies emphasising public service and formal workers while excluding the informal majority, who lack platforms for collective action. Within these broader and sectoral dynamics, key issues in employment policy development delivery will be illustrated in detail in the two policy case studies: overseas tertiary scholarships and overseas labour mobility. Tracing policy-making, decisions and change, the case study chapters will investigate structures, resourcing, institutions and politics to identify the factors shaping these prominent and contested national employment policy responses.

4: “Everyone wants a piece of the cake”: Solomon Islands’ overseas tertiary scholarships

Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of policy-making on Solomon Islands overseas tertiary scholarships from 2006 to 2019. With a large youth population with limited higher education, government-funded overseas tertiary scholarships were a sustained and prioritised policy response to employment since before independence. While more students accessed tertiary education in the period, the large majority of Solomon Islands students remained excluded, and high expenditure on scholarships came at the cost of broader education policy goals. This chapter analyses evolving policy-making in this area, drawing on evidence to identify factors influencing policy responses and change.

Within Solomon Islands’ broader political context for policy-making, important sectoral dynamics shaped policy-making in the area. These included rapidly increased student numbers, high and volatile budget expenditure, weak and opaque programme management and politicised and personalised interference in selection processes. Behind these challenges lay a long term tertiary education financing problem which was difficult to resolve in Solomon Islands’ political and structural context. Policy-makers’ decisions and responses to these challenges balanced contradictory pressures and political incentives, from politicians, bureaucratic institutions, development partners and the public.

Over the case study period, unregulated formal practices were replaced with stronger formal institutions to respond to informal pressures. Audits and development partner advocacy pressured the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) to respond to budget, implementation and selection problems, to strengthen scholarships management and accountability. This influenced a period of policies and reforms led by Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) officials, including Tertiary Education policies and guidelines (2010 and 2014) (MEHRD, 2010, 2014b), new management systems (Peddle, 2014), and broader education policies and legislation set out in a 2015 Education White Paper (Bateman & Fangalasu’u, 2015). Policies, reforms and policy alternatives were aimed to reassert

government control over tertiary education and financing, and shift to inclusive, demand-oriented and locally-provided post-secondary education, under new governance structures.

Political factors including the distribution of power and accountabilities and incentives for scholarships and personalised selection influenced policies and reforms. MEHRD officials' attempt to protect merit-based selection from political interference and meet political concerns of geographic equity saw the development of a separate category of Constituency Awards (MEHRD, 2014a). This formalised politicised selection as an institution. A long-term reform aim to replace overseas scholarships with local tertiary provision led the government to establish the Solomon Islands National University (SINU). The experience of policy-making on these alternatives further reveal factors influencing policy change, and the difficulties of political and bureaucratic commitment and delivery of complex policies and reforms in Solomon Islands' policy-making context.

4.1: Policy on overseas tertiary scholarships: Prominence and rapid growth

Despite a long-term tertiary education financing and access challenge, government-funded scholarships for overseas university study have been a priority for SIG, and provided to local students since before independence in 1978. Low incomes, capability gaps and the lack of quality domestic tertiary institutions sustained the need for government and donor support for tertiary study overseas (Feeny & McDonald, 2016; WB, 1993a). Overseas tertiary scholarships continue to be open to applications from students who attain sufficient grade point average (GPA) scores at completion of senior secondary education, to study university-level courses. Since before independence, traditional destinations for study were regional institutions including the University of the South Pacific (USP) (in Fiji and other regional campuses) and the University of Papua New Guinea. Some scholarships also supported study outside the region, including to Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and the Philippines. Overseas tertiary scholarships have long represented an important symbol of national development and personal achievement, adding to their high status and public profile.

4.1.1: Overseas tertiary scholarships policy and long-term financing challenge

Solomon Islands' tertiary education policy was significantly shaped before independence by the comprehensive nationwide 'Education For What?' education policy review led by Francis Bugotu in 1974 (Bugotu et al., 1974). The Bugotu review planned rapid expansion of locally relevant basic education for the majority of Solomon Islanders, but planned for no more than

12 per cent of students to continue to tertiary education (Palmer, 1977). The review recognised a fundamental tertiary education financing problem:

“The harsh fact remains that there is simply not sufficient money available to finance these areas of education in the present manner as well as providing an educational system which will benefit directly the greater proportion of the population” (Bugotu et al., 1974, p. 147).

To ensure tertiary education access could be funded within Solomon Islands’ limited resources, the 1974 vision prescribed that tertiary education would have to rely on cost-sharing by the students who benefited from it (Bugotu et al., 1974, p. 147). The report’s plans for education more broadly were codified in the Education Act of 1978, but the Act entirely excluded tertiary education, or any tertiary education cost recovery (SIG, 1978). Bennett estimated numbered only a dozen Solomon Islanders holding university degrees at independence (Bennett, 2002, p. 7).

From this low base and despite this long-term financing challenge, publicly-funded scholarships for overseas study have continued to be prioritised in Solomon Islands for several reasons. In a labour market with limited formal employment, a large youth population and shortages of skilled workers, Solomon Islanders still have among the lowest access to tertiary education per capita in the world (Close, 2012; Smets, 2022). Expanding tertiary education access has been a continued policy priority to get more Solomon Islanders qualified for jobs locally, and remove skills constraints on Solomon Islands employers (Close, 2012). As introduced in Chapter 3, overseas tertiary scholarships also carry important status linked to leadership and national development.

In the case period, Solomon Islands had access to tertiary scholarship programs funded by a growing list of countries, many with limited engagement of Solomon Islands politicians and officials. Major scholarship providers in the case study period included Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Japan and Cuba. During the period, Australia Awards and New Zealand aid scholarships had goals of supporting partner countries’ development outcomes, and advancing donor country strategic interests and mutual relations (DFAT, 2016b; MFAT, 2019). This research focuses on national government-funded overseas scholarships, but will identify the influence of donor programs on national policy-making.

Table 4.1 presents an overview of the main SIG- funded tertiary scholarship opportunities close to the end of the case study period, drawn from an Australian education financing study

(Bateman et al., 2015). Major scholarship types in 2013-2015 included ‘pre-service’ (before employment); ‘in-service’ (during employment) and ‘skills development’ (including vocational training). A key difference between donor- and nationally- funded scholarships was the scale of participation. The three largest donor programs included Australia Awards (53 students in 2012), New Zealand scholarships (48 in 2012), and Taiwanese scholarships (9 in 2013) (Bateman et al., 2015, pp. 67-73). Across government schemes, limited sharing of information made it difficult to quantify precise numbers in a single year, but the study estimated 942 SIG scholarships granted in 2013. This included 742 for study in the Solomon Islands National University (SINU), and estimated 200 for SIG-funded overseas tertiary scholarships. Among these were 51 for ‘Constituency Awards’ allocated to MPs (Bateman et al., 2015, pp. 67-73). Of 3,347 students enrolled in USP’s Distance Learning campus in Solomon islands in 2012, it was not clear how many were full- or partial-scholarship holders (ADB, 2014b).

Table 4.1: Solomon Islands Government scholarship programmes (2012-2015)

Tertiary Scholarships Programs	Managed by	Description of scale (source)	Relevance in this research
Scholarships to students at Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE)/ Solomon Islands National University (SINU)	NTU or SICHE/ SINU	The largest program; 800-900 per year were provided in 2013-2016 (1)	<i>Discussed in this research in relation to overseas scholarships policy</i>
USP Solomon Islands Distance Learning	NTU or USP	The number of full or partial scholarships for 2013 was unknown, however the total enrolment in Solomon Islands in 2012 was 3,347 (2)	<i>Not detailed in this research</i>
Training – Overseas: <i>(The focus of this case study research)</i>	NTU	Confirmed data on overseas tertiary scholarships during the period was difficult to obtain. Final or comparable data was rarely shared by MEHRD NTU. It was not shared for the Bateman study. - DFAT estimated 200 SIG scholarships per year, with 68 for the 2013 intake (3) - CSO Transparency Solomon Islands noted over 180 overseas scholarships awarded in 2013 (4) Consultations towards the 2015 NEAP Costing analysis indicated a target cap of 300 new scholarships annually, but that this was regularly exceeded (5).	<i>The focus of this case study research</i>
Constituency Scholarships Awards <i>(The focus of this case study research)</i>	Unclear between NTU, MP's Constituency Offices, or SINU	There was minimal information on 2013 Constituency Awards. There were 51 overseas awards intended in 2013, and 63 provided to SINU (6). In 2015 200 new scholarships were provided (7).	<i>A focus of this case study research (sub-section 4.3.2)</i>

Sources for Table 4.1:

1: (SIBC, 2019); 2: (ADB, 2014a, p. 67); 3: (DFAT, 2013a, p. 20); 4: (TSI, 2014); 5: (Levine & Close, 2016, p. 35); 6: (Bateman et al., 2015, p. 72); 7: (Inifiri, 2015)

The case study period of 2006 to 2019 is particularly important partly because it was the first time formal policy was developed and recorded on overseas tertiary scholarships. Solomon Islands provided overseas tertiary scholarships from independence without formal policy or legislation in place. Reviewing a complaint about a scholarships award, a Solomon Islands Ombudsman's report from 1982 mentions a policy requirement that “*all Solomon Islanders on completion of a course of studies to return to the Solomons and work for a period of time of*

which two years is a minimum” (Ombudsman, 1982, p. 13). This report also referred to a Scholarships Selection Committee, which expressed issues the Ombudsman considered “*important but not in the policy*”. The Ombudsman went on to recommend “*formalising rules governing awards of scholarships*” (Ombudsman, 1982, p. 13). This research did not locate any such policy document until the policy launched in 2010 (MEHRD, 2010).

MEHRD’s Tertiary Scholarships Policy prepared in 2014 stated:

“The principal objective of the Policy is to provide a mechanism and rules to enable merit based access and support for high achieving Solomon Islander people to quality tertiary level studies, both in higher education and TVET that will directly contribute to the economic and social development of the country. To achieve this objective, the Policy is to be implemented without compromise or external interference.” (MEHRD, 2014b, p. 7)

These approved policy objectives contrasted with broader expectations of scholarships held by policy stakeholders and identified by authors. According to research participants and one media article, these expectations included training national leaders (SCS-3), achieving personal and community status and ‘getting ahead’ (SDP-4), political patronage to voters (SDP-2), and substitution of failures to invest in communities (SIG-12)(Wilson, 2013). Some MEHRD officials interviewed recognised that such diverse objectives and expectations diluted the employment focus of the policy (SIGE-2,-7). A development partner said: “*The political economy doesn’t care about work when they return – because it’s about status, not employment*” (SDP-2); indicating a more important political and social function of scholarships than their formal objectives. A second development partner echoed this view that “*the end point is not work – it’s the status of going to Fiji, that’s why there’s so little focus on the labour market outcomes*” (SDP-4). Solomon Islanders, meanwhile, shared complex and nuanced views on status and objectives. A tertiary scholarship graduate reflected on this elite status:

“All my children got tertiary scholarships. That means I’m in the elite, privileged class. I worked hard... Because of a lack of jobs - people with a university education come back and hold [jobs]. People look up to people who are able to go to university and have a degree. They have a high regard for people with a tertiary education. Before only a few would go – and they regard them as the elite population of the country.” (SESP-2)

A senior education official described how this status motivated political involvement in scholarships:

“Tertiary scholarships can bring MPs a lot of status – more than training a group of illiterate women how to read.” (SIGE-12)

Among Solomon Islanders, views diverged on objectives, including employment, and their achievement. Two political advisors noted the difference between intent, delivery, and employment:

“The policy intent is clear. Policy implementation is not achieving the policy goal.” (SPA-1)

“Main policy reason is high unemployment rate of population. Many university graduates when they return have no employment.” (SPA-3)

Two former NTU officers themselves shared diverging objectives and delivery:

“[It’s] for benefit of human resources of this country. For social and economic development of Solomon Islands” (SIGE-8)

“Main objective was to train Solomon Islanders for the workforce but at the same time wasn’t focused –understanding of the workforce wasn’t clear. Training for development or for individuals’ good – there’s a clash.” (SIGE-7)

This high priority and status combined with divergence in objectives and complex and uncertain relationship with employment had significant implications for both the effectiveness of overseas tertiary scholarships as an employment policy response with broader impact, and for the implementation and reform pathways of this policy. The implications of high status and accountabilities are explored further in Section 4.4.

Despite the previous gap in legislation and policy, a limited number of interviews of education and other officials and stakeholders, and policy documentation from 2010, provided some insight into scholarship policy and management practices before the Tensions conflict. At least as early as the 1990s, a cross-government National Training Committee (NTC) of government, private and civil society sector representatives, had institutional responsibility and oversight of merit-based scholarship allocation and administration. The NTC continued to be supported in administration of the program by the Ministry of Education’s National Training Unit (NTU) (SIGE-2). Routine scholarship processes included that the NTC prepared an annual ‘Opportunity List’ for scholarships for identified subject courses at Pacific regional

universities, based on candidate submissions, national development priorities, and employment demand. Labour demand information was coordinated in a 'manpower planning' database of employment needs, based on surveying of national and provincial public agencies; the private sector, church and civil society employers and representatives. The list would be coordinated by the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination (MDPAC) with the support of MEHRD and the Ministry of Commerce, Immigration, Labour and Industry (MoCILI) (MEHRD, 2010). Each year upper secondary students graduated and accessed government and development partner-funded overseas tertiary education scholarships, finding out in November whether they had made the 'selection list' (SESP-2; SIGO-5; SPA-1). Education officials commented that scholarships selection in the 1990's was generally merit-based, based on Grade Point average (GPA) of Form 7 (Year 13) results, resulting in limited qualifying student numbers (SIGE-5; SIGE-7). Students would be sponsored by SIG ministries for scholarships in relevant fields of study, and complete ministry work placements during university break periods (SIGO-5). Scholarship destinations were controlled. A former education official recalled that only those with Australian or New Zealand-funded scholarships would go to those countries (STP-2). Research participants generally understood these as routine scholarships management practices in place before the case study period. These structural responsibilities of MEHRD, the NTC and NTU are presented in the organisational structure at Table 4.2. These structures were tested by the policy challenges emergent in the case study period, and eventually reformed (Section 4.4).

Table 4.2: Solomon Islands overseas tertiary scholarships: Organisational structure (2016)



Table 4.2 Source: Researcher's fieldwork in November 2018

4.1.2: Rapid student growth, high expenditure and its impacts

Rapid growth in eligible students competing for tertiary scholarships in the case study period pressured officials and politicians to increase expenditure on costly overseas tertiary scholarships. This constituted a major challenge in the policy area, impacting other education goals.

After the major national disruption of the Tensions (2000-2003), government education budgets and donor funding for basic education escalated, as did school enrolment and completion at all levels (Pollard, 2005). Rapidly expanded secondary education access and completion in turn significantly increased the number of students eligible for and expecting publicly supported tertiary education. As presented in Table 4.3, 39 times more Solomon Islanders were in secondary education in 2018 than 1972, but only nine times more were in tertiary education (Bugotu et al., 1974; MEHRD, 2019). This meant it was much less likely that a secondary graduate would be able to continue to university study, making competition for places tougher.

Table 4.3: Solomon Islands student numbers, 1972 – 2018

Note: Numbers are best estimates from available sources. There is significant variance in numbers due to significant dropout of numbers and variation in measurement approaches and data quality.

	1972	1990	2005	2018
Primary Education	26,232	52,979 (1988)	99,670	133,604
Secondary Education	1,303	5,811	24,554	52,326
- Source:	1	2	3	4
Post-Secondary Education (excluding Rural Training Centres)	833 (1973)	1,635	4,366	6,558
- Source:	5	6	3	7

Table 4.3 Sources:

1: (Bugotu et al., 1974, p. 19); 2: (WB, 1993a, pp. 8-9); 3: (WB, 2006, pp. 2-2); 4: (MEHRD, 2019, p. 23); 5: (BSIP, 1973, pp. 67-69); 6: (WB, 1993a, pp. xx, 35); 7: The Post-Secondary Education estimate includes a training provider's estimate provided to the author of 3,000 SINU students attending regularly in 2018 between higher initial enrolment and lower final graduands (STP-1); with USP student numbers of 3,558 locally and overseas (USP, 2018).

Table 4.4 presents significant growth in tertiary scholarship numbers from 2002 to 2020, although information is partial due to opaqueness of information sharing (reasons for which are discussed further in sub-section 4.4.1). The breakdown between domestic and overseas tertiary scholarships was often not available, but the number of Solomon Islands students at USP (the main destination for scholarships) was indicative.

Table 4.4: Solomon Islands scholarship numbers 2002-2020

Note: Numbers are best estimates from available sources.

	2002	2008	2014	2018
New scholarships announced (actual) (overseas)	233	311	99	700-900
- Source	1	2	2	3
SI students at USP (overseas)	256	928	1,092	1,161
- Source	4	5	6	7

Table 4.4 Sources

1: (SIG, 2002, p. 49); 2: (TSI, 2014); 3: (SIGE-10); 4: (SIG, 2002, p. 57); 5: (MEHRD, 2010, p. 31); 6: (USP, 2015, pp. 19-20); 7: (USP, 2018, pp. 20-21)

The total number of students accessing higher education had increased, but had reduced per capita in a rapidly growing population. By the case study period still only around one in 10 Solomon Islanders had attained any post-secondary education (SINSO, 2015) (ILO & ADB, 2017, p. 36). As Bugotu had anticipated, Solomon Islands policy-makers remained challenged by escalating demand and expectations of education, with finite government resources to respond.

A large youth population facing limited opportunities to secure ‘good’ jobs drove intense public pressure and competition for tertiary scholarships, felt by students, parents, politicians, and responsible officials. This pressure was illustrated in one tragic newspaper report of 2013:

“A 20-year-old exceptional student from Temotu province who was officially granted a scholarship at the beginning of this year committed suicide after his award was withdrawn and given to the child of a member of parliament.” – (Wilson, 2013)

Pressured officials and politicians responded by awarding more scholarships over the case study period, at high cost. An unusually large amount of budget was spent on overseas tertiary scholarships, over a long time. Even as education budgets increased to cater for rapidly growing total student numbers, tertiary education took a disproportionately large share during the case study period. Table 4.5 illustrates that by one World Bank analysis, tertiary education regularly accounted for around fifty per cent of all sub-sector- attributable expenditure.

Table 4.5: Solomon Islands education expenditure 2006-2013 by sub-sector (attributable ‘other charges’ expenditure’)

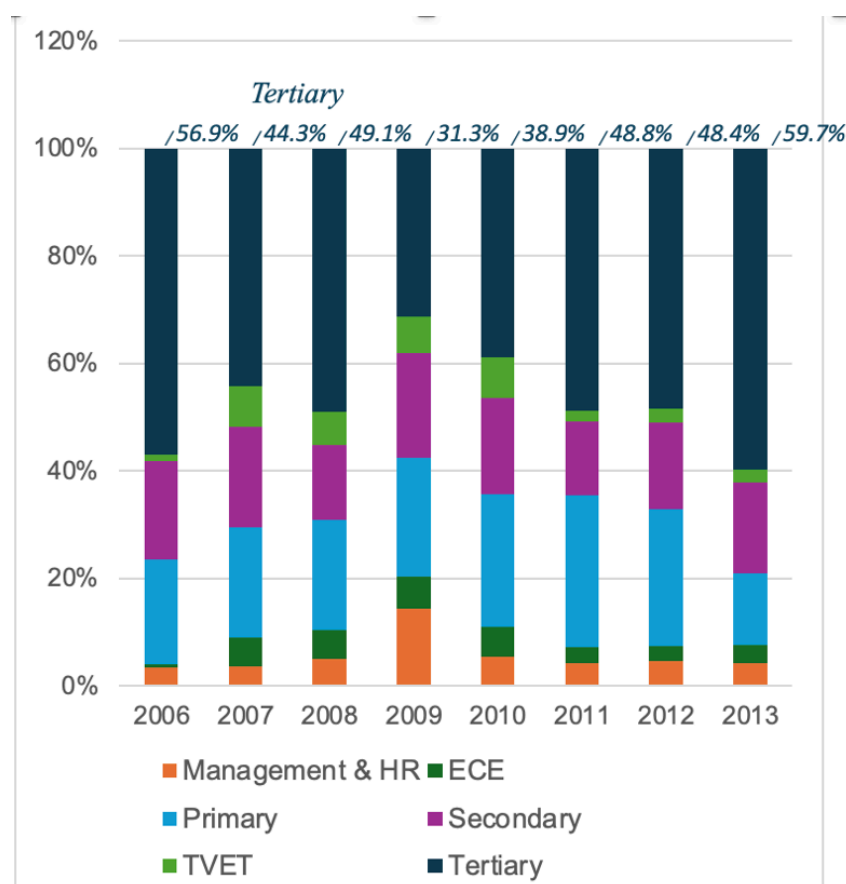


Table 4.5 Source: (WB, 2014a)

Table 4.6 illustrates that a high proportion of expenditure on tertiary education was a longer term issue. While a major expenditure component even from 1967, ‘recurrent’⁸ tertiary education expenditure exceeded primary education expenditure from 1998 to 2019, still exceeding 50% of total recurrent expenditure even while education officials attempted reforms over 2017-2019 (MEHRD, 2019).

⁸ Solomon Islands budget lines are divided into ‘development’ expenditure (for example, capital investment and new projects) and ‘recurrent’ expenditure (recurring costs, for example salaries, regular grants and maintenance)

Table 4.6: Tertiary vs primary education expenditure as % of recurrent education expenditure, 1967 – 2019

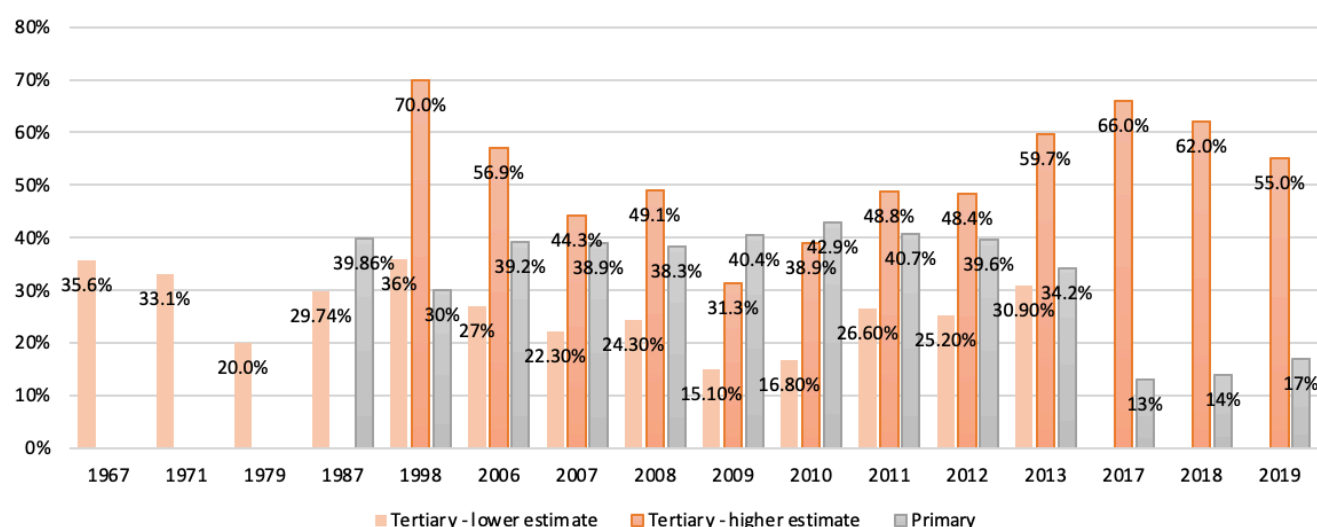
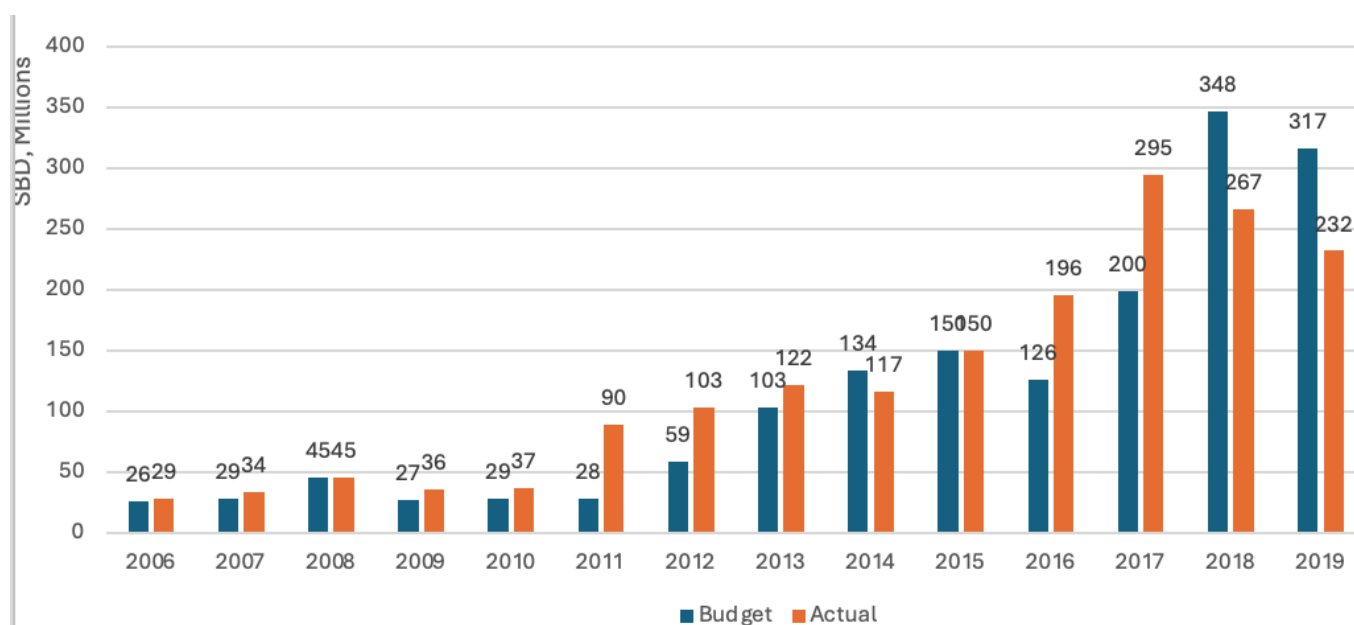


Table 4.6 Sources: 1967, 1971 (Bugotu et al., 1974, p. 29); 1979 (WB, 1982); 1987 (SIG, 1990, p. 149); 1998 (Otter, 2002, p. 54); SIG MOFT Budget documents, 2006 – 2023 (MoFT, 2006-2023).

The case study period stood out in particular for its significant growth in overseas tertiary scholarships expenditure quadrupling from 2010 to 2017 (Table 4.7). Table 4.7 also compares budgeted and actual expenditure, illustrating that even rapidly increased planned expenditure was frequently exceeded (MoFT, 2006-2023). This required supplementary budget transfers, a pattern that was only brought under control from 2018.

Table 4.7: Solomon Islands overseas tertiary scholarships spending; Budget vs actual (2006-2019)(SBD, Millions)



Source: SIG MOFT Budget documents, 2006 – 2023 (MoFT, 2006-2023)

High expenditure was driven by high demand and high cost. World Bank expenditure analysis found that in 2019, educating a tertiary student was 45 times the cost of educating a secondary student and 100 times the cost of educating a primary student (Smets, 2022, p. 16). Benefits accrued to a limited number of individual graduates (WB, 2006), who constituted only around one per cent of total students in the education system (Levine & Close, 2016, p. 12). This disproportion of benefits suggests elite capture, discussed in section 4.4.1.

During the case period, MEHRD senior officials acknowledged tertiary education budgets were out of control, compromising administrative processes and depleting other investments (Close, 2012; Levine & Close, 2016; MoFT, 2015). Overspend was partly funded by MEHRD budget reallocations from other education sectors, impeding achievement of broader education goals (Levine & Close, 2016). High and volatile expenditure caused tensions and disagreement over formal policy, resource allocations and actual awarding and benefits of scholarships. As this chapter goes on to present, these issues attracted a high public profile, including persistent media attention, two auditor-general investigations, parliamentary discussions, anti-corruption advocacy and foreign aid conditionality. In 2013 and 2014, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury (MOFT) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) noted tertiary scholarships as a risk to national finances and fiscal sustainability (IMF, 2014; MoFT, 2015). The fundamental problem of financing identified by Bugotu - who paid for tertiary education in Solomon Islands - remained unresolved across the stakeholders in the policy area. There were conflicting expectations of government funding, politicians' interests, and students. In discussing this difference between policy goals and budget reality, a phrase used by one research participant, and echoed by others, was: *"that's where the politics comes in"* (SIGE-9). The comment indicated the strong political incentives for tertiary scholarships selection, further explored in section 4.4. The phrase reflects the title of this thesis, and the political characteristics of Pacific policy-making introduced in section 2.4 – in which there are negative views of the compromise of impartial policy implementation by personalised interests and contestation over resources.

The confluence of rapid growth in student demand and expenditure and increasing political influence made overseas tertiary scholarships a highly politically contested policy area.

4.1.3: Timeline: The relationship of leadership, policy events and budget

The timeline at Table 4.8 presents national and education sector leaders, key policy events, and expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships over the case study period, to trace policy decision-making and important trends in evolving policy.

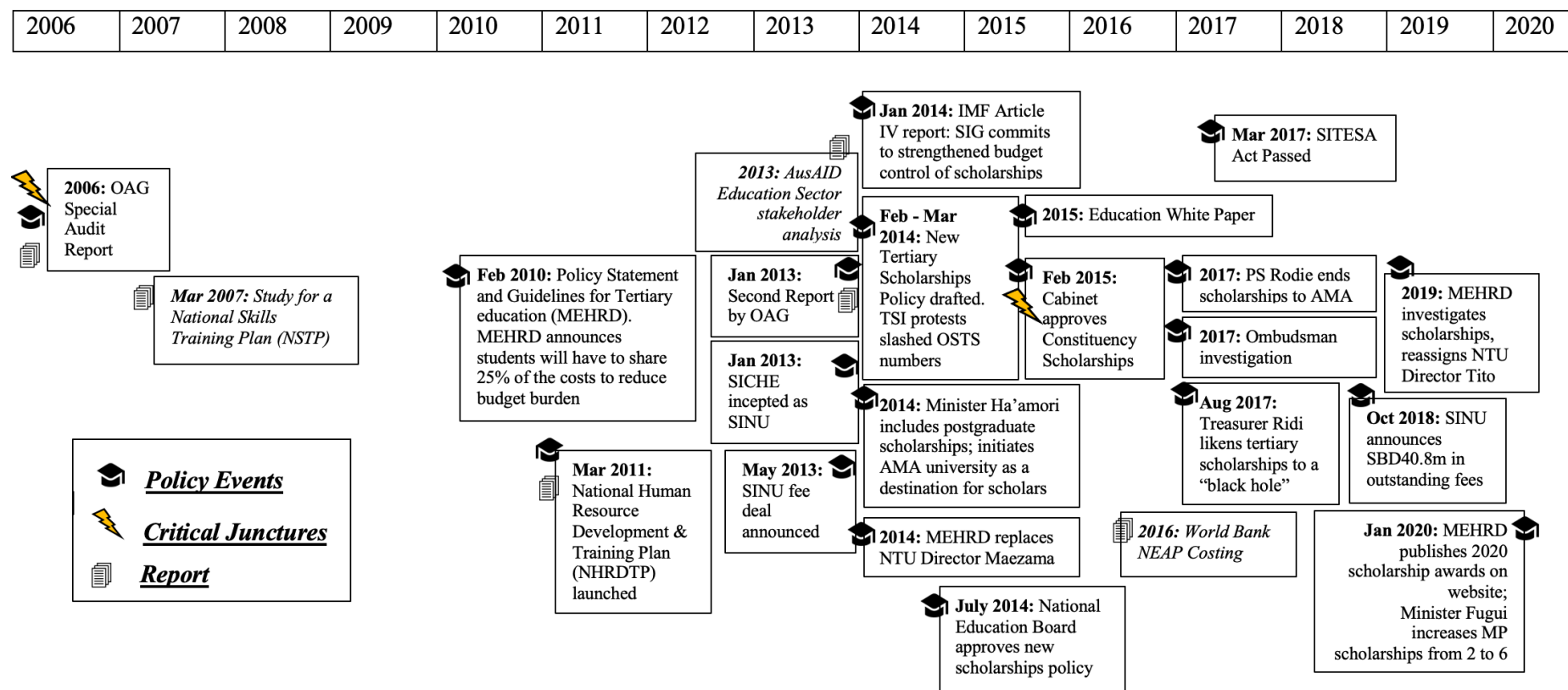
The first component at Table 4.8-a, ‘Leadership’, records Prime Ministers, Ministers of Education, Permanent Secretaries and Governing Coalitions over the case study period. There was remarkable stability in MEHRD, with only three Permanent Secretaries, but nine changes of Ministers of Education and six changes of Prime Minister, indicating greater political than bureaucratic volatility. Stable leadership in MEHRD likely enabled continued or renewed tertiary education policy development and reform initiatives. Volatility in Ministerial leadership meant a changed political environment for decisions on policy, and decisions on scholarships selections.

Table 4.8-a: Leadership

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1. Prime Ministers														
Sogavare (‘06-‘07)		Sikua (‘07-‘10)			Phillip (‘10-‘11)	Lilo (‘11-‘14)		Sogavare (‘14-‘17)		Hou’ (‘17-‘19)		Sogavare (‘19-‘24)		
2. Ministers of Education & Human Resource Development														
Sikua (‘06 –‘08)		Tausinga (‘08-‘09)	Wale (‘09-‘10)	Dick Ha’amori (‘10-‘14)				Sikua (‘14-‘15)	Fugui (‘15-‘17)		Kuku (‘17-’19)		Fugui (‘19-‘20)	Tanangada (‘20)
4. Permanent Secretaries of MEHRD														
Mylin Kuve (‘06-‘12)							Fred Rohorua (‘12-‘14)		F. Rodie (‘14-)					
6. Governing Coalitions														
Grand Coalition for Change (‘06-‘08)		Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement (CNURA), 2008-10			National Coalition for Reform and Advancement (NCRA), 2010 – 14				Democratic Coalition for Change (DCC), 2014-19				Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DCGA), 2019-24	

The second component (Table 4.8-b), 'Policy Events' records major policy events and initiatives including key pieces of advice to Government, audit and Ombudsman reports, policy decisions and legislative changes. The intensity of policy events by SIG and donors increased in 2013, including the inception of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) as a university, but was followed by continued policy problems, criticism and reassignment of individuals.

Table 4.8-b: Policy events



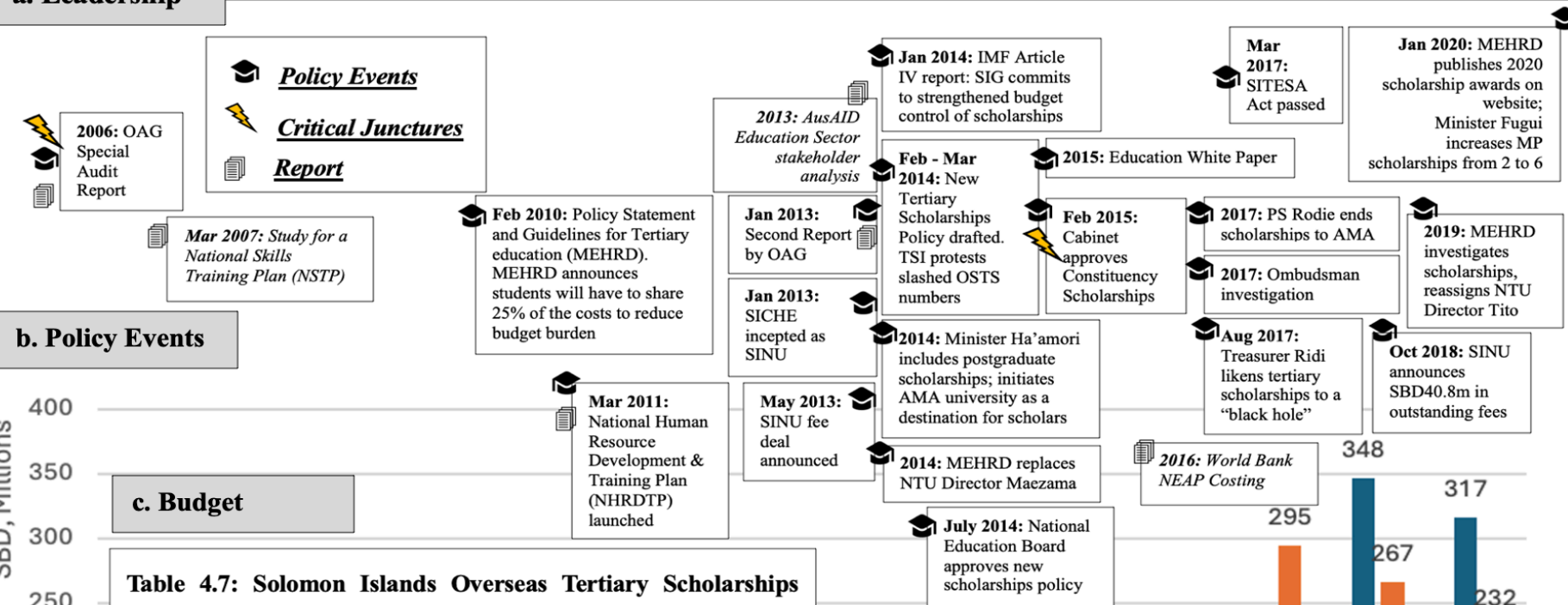
Sources: Policy events presented above are illustrative of sources presented in this chapter text.

Combining with these two components the table of expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships at Table 4.7 into a Table 4.8-c, ‘Leadership, Policy Events and Expenditure’, suggests possible leadership and policy decisions impacting expenditure. Two government audits had no apparent impact on expenditure. The greatest period in increased expenditure on scholarships began under Minister Ha’amori in 2011 and peaked under Minister Fugui in 2017 – both Ministers’ terms featured expansionary scholarship decisions. Only once did donor conditionality appear to impact expenditure – when expenditure matched allocation in order to (temporarily) meet World Bank budget support conditionality in 2015. Later years from 2017 appeared to indicate that while planned scholarships expenditure remained high, reform and management efforts (under PS Rodie’s leadership, including the 2015 Education White Paper) may have brought actual expenditure under control.

Table 4.8-c: Solomon Islands overseas tertiary scholarships timeline: Leadership, policy events, budget expenditure

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1. Prime Ministers														
Sogavare ('06-'07)		Sikua ('07-'10)			Phillip ('10-'11)	Lilo ('11-'14)		Sogavare ('14-'17)		Hou' ('17-'19)		Sogavare ('19-'24)		
2. Ministers of Education & Human Resource Development														
Sikua ('06 –'08)		Tausinga ('08-'09)	Wale ('09-'10)	Dick Ha'amori ('10-'14)				Sikua ('14-'15)	Fugui ('15-'17)		Kuku ('17-'19)		Fugui ('19-'20)	Tanangada ('20)
4. Permanent Secretaries of MEHRD														
Mylin Kuve ('06-'12)							Fred Rohorua ('12-'14)		F. Rodie ('14-)					
a. Leadership														

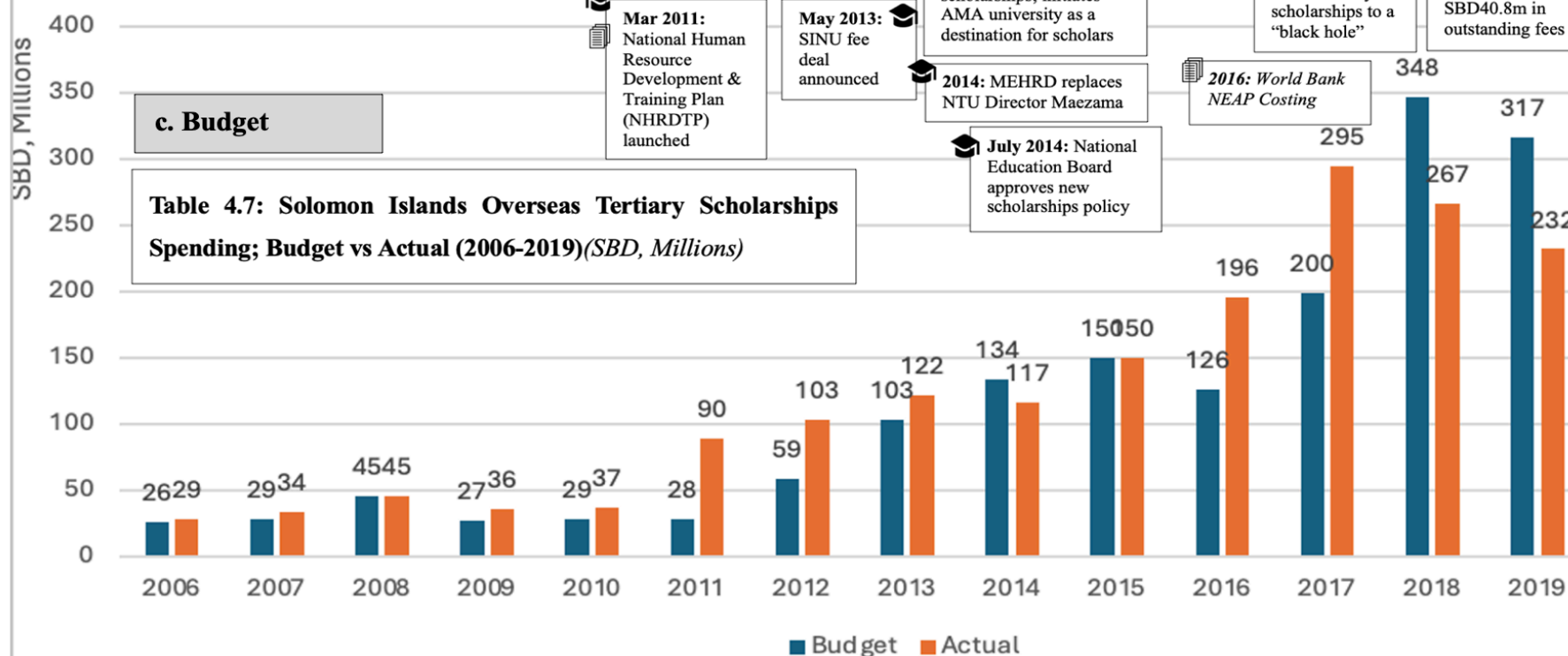
a. Leadership



b. Policy Events

c. Budget

Table 4.7: Solomon Islands Overseas Tertiary Scholarships Spending; Budget vs Actual (2006-2019)(SBD, Millions)



Scholarships policy-making and reform became a significant education policy problem because of the impact of high budget expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships on resourcing required to achieve Solomon Islands' stated policy goals for education. Solomon Islands' education policy goals were presented in successive National Education Action Plans (NEAPs). High tertiary sector costs, specifically expenditure on scholarships, were recognised by senior education officials and development partners to to reduce limited government budget available to meet goals of broader benefit, including achieving minimum schooling standards and expanding vocational training (Gannicott, 2012; MEHRD, 2016a; Sahin & Shahin, 2019). Repeated donor-supported economic analyses recommended more effective control of tertiary scholarships spending as essential to enable achievement of educational goals (Bateman & Fangalasu'u, 2015; Levine & Close, 2016; MEHRD, 2014a, 2016b).

4.1.4: Participant views

Education officials interviewed in this research were well aware of the difference between broader stated policies and scholarships budget impact. As one MEHRD officer commented: *"Everyone wants a piece of cake. So the other cakes in MEHRD become smaller"* (SIGE-8). Another official described the impacts:

"Too much funds go to tertiary education, depriving other education system sectors. The government wanted for years now to implement fee-free education from Kindergarten to Form 3. But it has not worked. Parents are still spending so much money paying fees, attending fundraising to fill the vacuum because of imbalanced allocation of funds." (SIGO-6)

In contrast, some Solomon Islands policy stakeholders interviewed shared the view of several Education Ministers that because scholarships were *"a good thing"*, that government should provide more (SIGO-7; SCS-3)(Gwamani, 2020; Inifiri, 2014). These views did not factor in the cost of increasing scholarships. Diverse views about scholarship objectives, and the number needed, served to constrain shared priorities and solutions, or shared acceptance of the costs of policy change. These incentives and accountabilities are further discussed in section 4.4.

Merit-based selection and patronage were the most prominent issues in the understanding of the policy issue held by policy stakeholders who participated in the research. Table 4.9 presents the number of times participant comments referred to different ideas and themes, categorised as 'idea codes' introduced in the Section 1.2.2 'Data approach' and detailed at Appendix 3. The significance of several themes could be linked to the semi-structured

interview questions I asked – such as ‘strengths and weaknesses’, ‘chronology’, ‘equity’, and ‘objectives’. Most of the other themes reflect specific issues that were significant to participants in their views and understanding of the policy area. ‘Merit-based selection’ and ‘patronage’ were the second and third most frequently raised themes and reflect their importance, profile and contestation for policy stakeholders inside and outside MEHRD.⁹

Table 4.9: Solomon Islands Overseas Tertiary Scholarships: Top participant comments

Rank	Idea codes	Number of mentions	% of total comment code data
1	Strengths & weaknesses in tertiary scholarships program	97	4.3%
2	Merit-based selection	95	4.3%
3	Patronage in tertiary scholarships	88	3.9%
4	Development partner role	66	3.0%
5	Tertiary scholarships budget	65	2.9%
6	SINU	64	2.9%
7	Chronology of tertiary scholarships	61	2.7%
8	Post-secondary education and training reform	61	2.7%
9	Trade-off with basic education	60	2.7%
10	Equity	53	2.4%
11	MPs’/ constituency scholarships	52	2.3%
12	Ministers and their influence	50	2.2%
13	Objectives of tertiary scholarships	50	2.2%

Through the policy case study period, policy actors led decisions through political volatility and increased policy responses to scholarship management and implementation problems. Diverse views of policy stakeholders focused on concerns with interference in selection as a key divergence between policy and delivery. The next section explores these implementation problems and the contested policy pathway taken by Solomon Islands policy actors.

4.2: Implementation problems, corruption, audits and policy responses

As student demand for scholarships surged, special audits of the management of SIG-funded overseas tertiary scholarships linked the policy problem of high scholarship expenditure to deficient scholarships management. Beyond these management problems, personalised and

⁹ Others related closely to these themes in cause or implications: including ‘tertiary scholarships budget’, ‘MPs’/ constituency scholarships’, and ‘Ministers and their influence’. Other prominent issues related to education issues and reform, such as ‘SINU’, ‘trade-off with basic education’, and ‘post-secondary education and training reform’. The significant role of development partners in the policy area was reflected in it being raised the fourth most frequently among issues.

politicised selection pressures amounting to corruption formed the primary challenge to overseas tertiary scholarships policy-making and reform, identified by policy stakeholders interviewed. Section 4.2 traces MEHRD's policy and reform efforts to address these management problems and corrupt practices under significant pressure, for further analysis in this chapter.

4.2.1: 2006 – 2010: Contested selection, Special Audit and policy response

Solomon Islands' broader and institutional context at the time influenced scholarships policy problems emerging at the start of the case study period. Chapter three described the Tensions' breakdown of the post-independence state, its services and the rule of law, causing major change in Solomon Islands' broader political economy dynamic and context for policy-making and -implementation. Discussions with research participants involved in MEHRD scholarships as officials or stakeholders in 2006 outlined the breakdown of previous 'normal' programme management practices discussed in section 4.1.1. Within a wider breakdown of government services, participants noted that key scholarships management practices ceased, including Ministry work attachments (SIGO-5) and use of the workforce database (SPA-1). A research participant from civil society (SCS-1) suggested that the breakdown of management provided conditions for expanded practices of graft and personalised selection of scholarships. As eligible student numbers increased post-Tensions (Table 4.2), merit-based selection was compromised. A parent of scholarship recipients commented *"before things were straightforward... one list was up, that was it. Since Tensions it has been different"* (SESP-1). A MEHRD official noted that MPs had interfered in the past, but less visibly, and that the *"policy was very strong and people respect it, but when Tensions came, the whole thing becomes like a loophole and people just pushing through"* (SIGE-5).

One involved education official noted that possibly as a result of this selection pressure, the Education Minister approved a larger intake of scholarship recipients in 2003 (SIGE-6). Senior education officials raised concerns about increasing budget outlays. A donor (New Zealand) education financing analysis commissioned in 2005 found that the tertiary education sector was absorbing approximately 40 per cent of education budget despite representing only 2 per cent of enrolled students (800 students), diverting significant funds away from other levels of education (OAG, 2006, p. 16). This was an enduring budget and equity problem.

Politicised selection emerged more clearly, potentially with foreign influence. One training provider noted that in the 1990's, Taiwan-sponsored scholarships directed by the Prime

Minister's Office to MPs may have introduced and legitimised politicians' selection of tertiary scholarships (STP-1). A university graduate labelled this "*the MP's Scholarship*", because so many recipients were politically selected (SPS-2). In 2011, Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI) criticised the Taiwanese scheme for awarding 8 of 12 scholarships that year to children of MPs (SolTimes, 2011). The stage had been set for increased politicised selection of scholarships.

Issues with scholarships selection were aired in the media in October 2005. The Minister of Education and opposition leader were accused of securing university scholarships to Australia and New Zealand and higher allowances for their children outside of normal NTC approval processes, and without meeting the 3.0 GPA requirement (SolStar, 2005). Multiple research participants inside and outside MEHRD indicated perceived or actual corruption and nepotism in individual officials' awarding of tertiary scholarships during this period and political interference in selection by members of parliament (SIGE-5,-12; SPA-2; SCS-1). A former MEHRD officer involved in scholarships stated:

"In 2006 there was a lot of politicians interfering, pressing for their children and there was a lot of media pressure. NTC wasn't keen on supporting students in that direction, we would take it back to the Minister. It was only in 2006 that politicians started appearing in the office and demanding scholarships. Media got wind of it and blew the issue out." (SIGE-7)

The issue was addressed by Solomon Islands accountability institutions. In 2006, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) undertook a Special Audit into management, selection and monitoring in MEHRD's tertiary scholarships programme. The audit recognised "*the urgent need for the Ministry to improve its budgeting and selection processes in relation to the funding and selection of tertiary scholarships*" (OAG, 2006, p. 14). It sought to respond to the budget problem of MEHRD exceeding its annual budget for tertiary scholarships in three of the previous four years. World Bank analysis identified loose scholarship management practice including students swapping, dropping or extending courses without MEHRD control, increasing the cost of their studies (WB, 2006). The audit sought to provide assurance to Parliament of the transparency of the scholarship process and effectiveness of systems to award scholarships, aligned with government expectations and skills requirements. It reviewed the adequacy of NTU administrative systems and processes for provision and monitoring of tertiary scholarships, and expenditure controls (OAG, 2006).

Findings identified poor budgeting practices and failure to cap scholarship numbers leading to budget overruns. There was a lack of systems, guidelines and criteria to select, manage and monitor scholarships; missing applications, fees, approvals and record-keeping; preferential treatment of applicants at Minister or Permanent or Under-Secretary's discretion; awardees not meeting requirements; an ad hoc approach to bonding agreements; and student allowances paid late and outside policy. Overall the audit identified *"serious breakdowns in critical management systems and procedures"*, compromise of the integrity of scholarships awarding, and that the scholarship programme was *"poorly managed and not providing value for money"* to SIG (OAG, 2006, p. 5). Audit findings also linked specific institutional capacity issues with the compromise of policy and systems for merit-based selection.

Focusing on management problems, key audit recommendations were to strengthen NTU management, urgently develop a tertiary scholarship policy, outsource scholarship selection and management to protect merit-based selection, and to remove outside interference. Recommendations placed particular focus on budget controls, including suspending new awards until scholarships were fully costed and planned within costed budget limits (with a 2006 cap of 140 scholarships), ceasing funding expenditure outside 'normal' student charges, and to fully record and review expenditure. The report also recommended consideration to 'means testing' scholarships and providing scholarships as 'repayable loans'.

Audit findings reflected a management team struggling to cope. A small (2-4) number of staff working with unclear policy, no guidelines and inadequate systems faced increasing numbers of students and parents visiting MEHRD's office with scholarship enquiries and complaints (SIGE-7)(OAG, 2006). A quotes from a former NTU officer described challenges:

"Real challenges: to keep track of all applications, to keep track of all suspensions, terminations, fails. No proper system for training". (SIGO-8)

The NTU's problems were also recognised by policy stakeholders such as one training provider:

"The NTU sometimes cannot track who is supposed to be graduating this year or when... Sometimes they did not return and without realising it the Ministry approved an extension for them to do a Masters". – (STP-3)

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The Special Audit had comprehensively detailed policy and management failures over tertiary scholarships, but did not make any reference to the political interference and selection identified by research participants and media reports.

One Solomon Islands Education leader and politician was explicit about the political nature of the scholarship problems. Previously Education Permanent Secretary (PS) from 1993 to 1994, Dr. Derek Sikua completed a PhD in education at Waikato University in New Zealand and returned to the role in 2003 (NPSI, 2023). Indicating the importance he attached to the issue of political interference in tertiary scholarships selection, Sikua later commented to the media that he only accepted the post again on the condition that the NTC be moved back to MEHRD from direct control of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) (SolomonTimes, 2007). Sikua became Minister of Education and Human Resources Development in May 2006 (Table 4.6). In August 2007 Minister Sikua blamed former Prime Minister Kemakeza's government for "*the huge anomalies of tertiary scholarships highlighted in the auditor-general's report*", claiming that selection had become a "*one man decision*" (indicating Kemakeza) (SolomonTimes, 2007). The four previous years of exceeded scholarships expenditure cited in the audit occurred during Kemakeza's term as prime Minister (2001 to 2006)(NPSI, 2023). Sikua's comments and the expenditure figures indicate Kemakeza as the first politician publicly linked to compromised scholarships selection and exceeded expenditure.

Education leaders acted on audit findings. Sikua became Prime Minister in December 2007, and under him served MEHRD Permanent Secretary from 2006 Mylyn Kuve, formerly Director of Policy and Planning. PS Kuve actioned audit recommendations, including budget caps on 2007 scholarship numbers, recruiting additional NTU staff and terminating poorly performing students. Kuve committed to basing tertiary awards on evidence of skills needs and strengthening scholarship management system (OAG, 2006; Puia, 2009). Among education strategy and policy work led by Kuve and supported by donor New Zealand, MEHRD launched the 'Policy Statement and Guidelines for Tertiary Education in Solomon Islands' in February 2010. The document set out policy aims driving reforms for the coming decade, to:

- expand equitable access to responsive and relevant tertiary education for all Solomon Islanders;
- develop a coordinated, comprehensive tertiary education system delivering benefits in quality and reduced unit costs, and
- increase capacity for national delivery of high quality tertiary education, gradually decreasing the number of students abroad (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 10-11).

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The policy statement set out new governance structures for tertiary education. Delivering the National Human Resource Development Plan (NHRDTP), a Council (NHRDTC) would oversee national policy and implementation. A Tertiary Education Commission (SITEC) would be funded to manage tertiary education (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 12-13). A MEHRD Tertiary Education Division would lead tertiary education policy development and regulation, within which the NTU would continue to support the NTC with the administration of government and donor funded scholarships (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 19-20). Scholarships would be subject to periodic independent review (MEHRD, 2010, p. 23).

The policy statement determined that financing would be better balanced between education sub-sectors, in consultation with development partners. Funding to national tertiary education providers would transition from lump sums to block grants based on a funding formula and monitoring of efficiency and revenues. The policy recognised continued need for overseas study, but in transition to more local delivery. SIG would develop contracts or partnerships with overseas tertiary education providers to educate Solomon Islands students, on a 'value for money' basis, integrating distance and flexible learning. These partnerships would support development and institutional strengthening of Solomon Islands' own tertiary education provision, prioritising awards for local study (see section 4.3.3) (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 25-29).

The policy statement introduced a principle of cost sharing with students and parents for annual fees of scholarships. Like the 1974 Bugotu report, the policy statement pointed out the financing challenge and significant benefits of scholarships accruing to a small number of individuals (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 31-37), as PS Kuve informed the media (RNZ, 2010). Cost sharing was initially set at 25 per cent, subject to skills need, and to be adjusted by the PS as required. The policy also committed the government to implement a feasibility study on a Student Loans Scheme to be administered by banks (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 25-29).

Tertiary Scholarships policy and processes were significantly tightened, with a policy objective for strict maintenance of merit based selection criteria for government-funded scholarships, and alignment to development priorities (MEHRD, 2010, p. 43). There was even deliberate policy to meet concerns about equitable access across the fragmented Solomon Islands: forty per cent of scholarships would be divided into provincial quotas proportionate to census population, to achieve geographic equity (MEHRD, 2010, p. 27). The policy statement and guidelines set out SIG-Award policy regulations, detailing eligibility criteria, scholarship selection and management processes by the NTC and NTU including key dates, decisions, notifications and funding entitlements. Award recipient responsibilities were detailed with a

declaration to be signed by awardees (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 48-54). During this time, implementation and political problems mounted. In response, comprehensive policy and management measures were clearly set out – but not all were implemented.

4.2.2: 2010 – 2014: Audit, political pressures and escalation

While handling of scholarship cases tightened, there was initially no progress delivering the key policy changes. One education official involved admitted MEHRD was unable to implement much of the policy statement and guidelines due to the persistence of inadequate staffing and management systems, and demand pressures (SIGE-7). Instead, budget overspending (Tables 4.4 and 4.47) and compromise of merit-based selection got worse.

Over 2011 to 2013 OAG’ conducted a follow-up to the 2006 audit, similarly assessing scholarships programme management and finances but also policy adequacy (OAG, 2014, p. 128). It largely found the 2006 Audit’s recommendations unimplemented and unaddressed, and that “*the Ministry had made minimal progress after five years*”. The audit found that it was not clear that staff involved in scholarship management were following the 2010 policy statement and guidelines. Students were selected outside clear selection criteria, and exceeding approved annual funding, with unpaid tuition fees debts accruing with tertiary institutions. The audit criticised the four years MEHRD took to develop the policy statement and guidelines (2006 to 2010), as a failure to take necessary timely action, while budget expenditure continued to exceed allocations (OAG, 2014, pp. 129-130)(as reflected in budget figures in Tables 4.3 – 4.5 and 4.7).

Management system gaps again dominated audit findings. OAG found that the 2010 Policy Statement and Guidelines were not supported by procedures for MEHRD officials to implement them. This resulted in significant non-compliance in scholarships administration, including inadequate, missing or late application forms, receipts, documentation and NTC meeting minutes recording award selections. The lack of a student database remained a major constraint to monitoring student performance (OAG, 2014, pp. 130-131). The audit found that MEHRD continued to give scholarships to students who did not meet selection guidelines, including to meet GPA, resulting in too many students failing courses. OAG also noted MEHRD as the first Ministry to not reply to an audit report (OAG, 2013).

Importantly, neither the audit nor MEHRD’s policy statement addressed the issue of political interference in scholarships selected. The audit concerned itself with management system gaps but not the political pressures and choices which influenced MEHRD’s bureaucrats agency

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over scholarships management and resourcing decisions. Other evidence suggests that it was these political pressures which appeared to drive a sharp increase in student numbers and budget from 2011, illustrated in Tables 4.3 to 4.7, undermining the 2010 policy. These increases came at the cost of other critical inputs to improve scholarships management. During this period, donor analysis and participant comments indicated that selection pressures from parents and politicians outside set processes appeared to increase and even become institutionalised.

Commissioned by AusAID in 2013 to inform Australia's increased engagement in education and skills development, a 'Stakeholder Analysis' of Solomon Islands Education identified strong domestic political incentives for tertiary scholarships. The analysis described a "preoccupation" by Solomon Islands political leaders with tertiary level education, coming "*at the expense of increased investment by SIG in basic education*" (DFAT, 2013c, p. 2). The analysis linked the political pressure to vote-buying, and suspected corruption among MEHRD officials:

"it is generally assumed that politicians' interest in increased expenditure on tertiary scholarships is because they promise scholarships to constituents to secure additional votes. MPs' influence over MEHRD enables them to push these through under the table, bypassing the scrutiny of a transparent selection process and blowing out scholarship numbers and associated costs. With Solomon Islands' public service increasingly expecting to receive bribes or 'speed fees in order to progress even basic operations, it may also be suspected that some MEHRD officials are benefiting financially from these transactions". (DFAT, 2013c, p. 3)

The broad impacts of the issue brought it to the attention of external partners. Section 4.1 noted IMF recognising scholarships expenditure risking national fiscal sustainability (IMF, 2014). In 2013, a UNICEF education on Solomon Islands recorded an interviewee comment that tertiary scholarships were "*politicized, allowing substantial funding to be used outside of the country for those who may not have earned it*" (UNICEF, 2014, p. 9). ADB analysis at the time also identified that the NTC's agreed selection lists were often overruled by Ministerial intervention. Merit-based students were withdrawn from lists, or included with politicised selections, to exceed planned student numbers (ADB, 2014b).

Research participants also described increasing student numbers and pressure from parents and voters on MPs from 2010-2011, described by one former education official as "increased pushing in" by parents (STP-2). As one education stakeholder and parent explained:

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“MPs started to add on the list just after 2010. Everyone pushed for their own children. Everyone wants a piece of the cake” (SESP-3)

Another education official involved in 2010 described how selection was undermined:

“We have a set number of scholarships we give. But it usually increases because of influences. We also have other players within the Ministries who involve.” (SIGE-8)

Another Ministry official involved with scholarships in 2010 described how politicians would interfere with selection lists:

“In my time – when NTC list is up we know there will be another 2 or 3 lists. That is where the Permanent Secretary, Under-Secretary and I would need to go back to Cabinet, and say “ok, maybe we can squeeze in another 200”, but there is always a lot of pressure from politicians on MEHRD to award scholarships, I saw that a lot” (SIGE-7)

MEHRD officials were squeezed between political and accountability pressures. Permanent Secretary Rohorua stepped down at the end of 2013, attributed in one rumour to his frustration at an inability to reconcile the conflicting pressures of politicians’ demands to select tertiary scholarships, and public accountability institutions demands for rigour and accountability in tertiary scholarships management (DFAT, 2013c, p. 11). While both audits pressured MEHRD senior management for action, AusAID’s Stakeholder Analysis noted that the audit report was not tabled in parliament or its public accounts committee, missing the opportunity for political commitment and leadership to take forward audit recommendations (DFAT, 2013c, p. 4). AusAID’s Stakeholder Analysis identified issues with political leadership, noting that several individuals consulted for the analysis had raised the need for the Prime Minister and Minister of Education to be strong leaders able to champion quality education for improved outcomes. *“Most individuals consulted did not feel that Solomon Islands’ current Minister of Education possesses these qualities”* (DFAT, 2013c, p. 4). The analysis noted that some of those consulted attributed weak leaders as a cause for the increased focus on and diversion of funds to tertiary education (DFAT, 2013c, p. 4).

Solomon Islands’ Minister for Education over 2010 to 2014 was Dick Ha’amori. Tables 4.4 to 4.8 show student numbers and scholarship expenditure significantly increasing during Ha’amori’s term. One education official indicated that this reflected Ha’amori’s priorities (SIGE-11). With a Masters in Education, Ha’amori was a former teacher, education official and Director of SICHE (NPSI, 2023). Minister Ha’amori’s priority for overseas tertiary education

was reflected in his comments quoted at the graduation of 22 medical students in Cuba in 2014: *“Solomon Islands has the potential to become a better self-reliant, healthy country with more and more students acquiring tertiary education overseas”* (Inifiri, 2014).” Others viewed Ha’amori’s emphasis on tertiary education as unhealthy: in late 2013 an Education Provider representative commented to AusAID’s Stakeholder Analysis that the Minister [Ha’amori] was setting a *“bad direction”* and his preoccupation with tertiary scholarships was *“killing the whole system”* (DFAT, 2013c, p. 12). This view was shared by one SIG officer interviewed for this research who stated:

“It all started when one of the Ministers in Education started to do this. Everyone else knows in the Ministry. I’m not scared, it’s ok. Dick Ha’amori. Someone started it, then all the politicians didn’t hide” (SIGE-11).

This view suggests the role of Ha’amori among other specific Ministers in expanding political selection. Interviews with participants in this research identified shared views that politicians selecting their children for scholarships ahead of students with higher grades constituted corruption, including this civil society representative:

“Solomon Islanders care about nepotism: that MPs are awarding scholarships to their relatives is not ok, and lengthens periods of scholarship because students aren’t to required level” (SCS-1)

Politicised selection of scholarships significantly increased in this period. As AusAID’s analysis recognised, the conflict between explicit and personal views of corruption could be confusing as the same people (such as politicians or officials) who label something done by others as ‘corrupt’, nevertheless engaged in it themselves (DFAT, 2013c, p. 5). Responding to increasing demand pressure and expectations of voters, politicians increasingly adopted tertiary scholarships as one stakeholder described, *“as one of their vote-buying strategies”* (STP-1). Multiple participants reported politicians linking scholarships to votes (SIGE-2,-8, STP-1,-2,-3,SDP-2). This linkage made such transfers a form of political patronage fitting the definition in Chapter 2, but not that of clientelism as it could be a one-off rather than iterative and may not have an immediate expectation of an exchange (such as a vote) from the student or parent benefiting. It was in the 2010-2014 period that while audit findings and policy measures were in place, politicised pressures on selection increased and were formalised in the category of Constituency Awards (sub-section 4.3.2).

4.2.3: 2014-2019: Policy responses, formalising politicised selection and launching reform

By 2014 and beyond, increasing selection pressures from parents and politicians, corrupt practices outside set processes, and officials' responses, appeared to become institutionalised in an adaptation of the traditional annual scholarships cycle. After sitting exams, students would be informed of their success through merit-based selection around November – as normal. Two education stakeholders described how removal and replacement of their names by personalised selections would trigger protests by students and parents to NTU staff and decision-makers (SESP-1, -2). From December to February, NTU staff and MEHRD senior managers would try to please everyone with larger student lists exceeding planned budget (SolStar, 2014a). Through the case study period, last-minute contestation meant that Solomon Islands and Vanuatu students often arrived at regional universities weeks after term started in February (Di'isango, 2015; RNZ, 2007; SolTimes, 2010). Higher costs were often met from other unspent Ministry of Education activities, causing them to be postponed until the following year, sometimes repeatedly, as identified in education costing analysis I worked on at the time (Levine & Close, 2016). Under significant demand pressure, an annual pattern of compromised scholarships selection impacted broader education budget and policy delivery.

Management problems persisted as a handful of staff dealt with excessive student numbers and personal, public, bureaucratic and political pressures on selection. Reflecting the suspicions of the AusAID analysis, a former education official noted a “creeping” practice of some officers “getting commission”, while others stood against bribery (STP-2). A MEHRD official in 2018 also recognised the motivation of money for people inside and outside MEHRD, and that even if policy and systems improved, nothing would change if those people remained (SIGE-8). Another MEHRD official described the lack of reporting of corrupt practices and slow and inadequate processes for reporting and penalties (SIGE-12). A political advisor shared this view about lack of consequences:

“Never came across any action yet... I came across officers who have been removed, but nobody serving behind bars yet. Just shifted them to other Ministries.... It's good that this anti-corruption bill came up, maybe that provides an avenue for that.” (SPA-2)

Sanctions were also politicised. In 2014 MEHRD leadership replaced NTU Director (Selu Maezama) amidst allegations of malpractice. One official defended Maezama:

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“Selu... He never bowed down to politicians, maybe that’s why they removed him from the NTC and removed our people from the NTC because they stood up to politicians”
(SIGO-8)

The incentives and accountabilities driving the development of a professional culture of expanded access to scholarships rather than management according to policy are explored in sub-section 4.4.1.

The pressures and resulting management problems impacted students, parents and MEHRD staff. Management issues with the scholarship program made it more susceptible to political pressure and corruption. A former MEHRD officer described continued information management challenges of keeping track of applications, student status and performance, including students due to return but being approved to extend by default (STP-3). One training provider recognised the huge pressures of work, coordination and proper management facing NTU officers (STP-2). An involved education official emphasised information management systems as the priority, and a way to make the right decisions over “favoritisms” (SIGE-8). By 2014, MEHRD not only faced pressure from two management audits, but also significant development partner and MoFT pressure arising from the national budget impacts of expenditure on tertiary scholarships, further discussed in section 4.4.3. Persistent systems and management gaps created conditions and demand for external technical assistance.

Australia was particularly engaged in Solomon Islands tertiary education policy from 2014, and motivated to advance tertiary education reforms to ensure success of its increased education and skills aid to Solomon Islands. Its aforementioned 2013 Stakeholder Analysis identified politicised scholarships selection as a concern, informing Australia’s approach and advocacy.

A ‘Tertiary Education Taskforce’ formed of MEHRD senior managers and development partners addressing policy issues. The taskforce identified reform priorities including change to overseas tertiary scholarships policy delivery, and prepared major system design, policy options and legislation to address the longstanding gap of tertiary education in the 1978 Education Act. An Australian funded technical advisor focused on tertiary scholarships policy and management (Peddle, 2014). His revised policy draft reinforced key principles of the 2010 statement, but added explicit arrangements for implementation, transparency and control of budget and selection decisions without undue interference, to meet audit requirements

(MEHRD, 2014b). Solomon Islands' Cabinet only approved the new policy in 2016, for implementation after new legislation in 2017 (WB, 2017a).

Guided by senior Solomon Islands educators including Permanent Secretary Rodie, vocational education consultants Andrea Bateman and Johnson Fangalasu'u drafted an Education White Paper to guide development of the new Education Act (Bateman & Fangalasu'u, 2015). Drawing on analyses including of TVET financing and delivery (Bateman et al., 2015; Bateman et al., 2014), the White Paper frankly described SIG scholarships as *"fraught with questionable funding practices"* and as having:

"compromised the Government's financial ability to support and develop tertiary infrastructure, engage in program and resource development, and provide training and professional development of teaching staff" (Bateman & Fangalasu'u, 2015, p. 57).

MEHRD and its consultants approached tertiary scholarships management reforms as essential to achieving Solomon Islands' tertiary education goals (Bateman & Fangalasu'u, 2015; MEHRD, 2014b). The new Education Act would incorporate a transparent and effective and scheme linked to performance and labour needs, *"free of external influences which undermine a merit based process"* (Bateman & Fangalasu'u, 2015, p. 57). Subsequent new legislation for a Solomon Islands Tertiary Education and Skills Authority (SITESA) advanced policy goals of quality, accountability, access, equity and employment orientation. Guiding SITESA to take over key NTU functions, the SITESA Act legislated key policies and compliance measures of the 2014 Tertiary Scholarships policy, including planning and controlling scholarship budget and numbers, managing application processes, and award funding and conditions (NPSI, 2017b).

The Education White Paper and SITESA reforms were steered by senior Solomon Islands education leaders, PS Rodie, and reappointed Education Minister Derek Sikua (Bateman & Fangalasu'u, 2015). Both were Education PhD holders from New Zealand's Waikato University with longstanding senior service in MEHRD and a record of leading education reforms. However, Sikua's resumed term as Minister ceased in October 2015 (Table 4.8), when he and six other Ministers resigned in protest at Prime Minister Sogavare's leadership (Palgrave & Macmillan, 2019). Sikua's replacement, John Moffat Fugui, was also an established senior statesman and academic, with three Master's degrees, and a key role negotiating Solomon Islands' relationship switch to the People's Republic of China (MFAET, 2023b). Like Ha'amori, Fugui had his own priorities for overseas tertiary scholarships. In two terms as

Minister for Education, he advocated for diversified overseas scholarship destinations (NPSI, 2015), developed tertiary scholarships with China (MFAET, 2023b), and increased the number of Constituency Awards offered (Gwamani, 2020). This volatile political leadership with differing strong views on overseas tertiary scholarships drove divergence between policy and delivery.

Beyond Ministers, MPs views and commitment to reform were mixed. Multiple MPs criticised the undermining of merit-based selection and the management of scholarships, and supported policy reform efforts (DFAT, 2013c) (SIGE-9). An example was MP Alex Lionel, who in parliament in 2015, called for selection criteria to be applied to control scholarship budgets and provide citizens *“a fair go... to benefit our country”*, pointing out wastage of taxpayers money on underperforming students. He called for close OAG scrutiny of the NTU to avoid further student protests (NPSI, 2015).

Despite significant reform work at the time and occasional political support, the multiple references cited in this chapter indicate that the problems of personalised and politicised scholarships selection remained prominent in media coverage, donor analyses and political debate throughout the case study period. A Solomon Islands Ombudsman investigation of scholarships management in 2016 responded to five complaints by students of unfair treatment by the NTU, and 89 local print media articles reporting public complaints about scholarships management by MEHRD and the NTU (SolStar, 2016b; TSI, 2016). Its results are further discussed in section 4.3.2. In 2017 Solomon Islands’ Treasurer Snyder Rini noted inflated allowances, duplicated students’ names and other abuses, likening the government’s tertiary education scheme to *“pouring money into what seems to be a black hole”*, with the scholarships awards policy *“heavily abused”* (Koli, 2017). Personalised and politicised selection pressures and corruption of overseas tertiary scholarships were identified as the most significant problem facing policy-makers by most Solomon Islands research participants in 2018, by responsible officials themselves and officials and other respondents outside MEHRD. One political advisor interviewed wanted politicians in particular to *“stop interfering and leave it to MEHRD”* (SPA-1). Another non-MEHRD official wanted *“fair selection done by the NTC, and non-interference to better meet the needs of the country”* (SIGO-3).

“The selection aspect, a lot of people are not happy with it as well. They would like to see the [NTU] people doing selection and not the MPs doing the selection.” (SCS-2)

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“They did an analysis on tertiary scholarships – they found most students who came back, who were terminated, had been politically selected. Already an indicator” – (SIGO-8)

“Those who get scholarships without merit their failure rate would be higher rather than those who deserve to get them. Some students given scholarship at MPs discretion even don’t meet those universities’ entry requirements. It is better a merit-based system is utilised and MPs please leave people who have been allocated to do that” (SITP-3)

A political advisor linked long-term problem of uncontrolled overseas tertiary scholarships budget expenditure to payment problems to USP and for student allowances which attracted significant attention:

“In the past SIG has arrears with the universities in Fiji. They said they couldn’t pay up because scholarships went up without considering the budget. So students overseas receive allowances late, and often complain in the newspaper” (SPA-3)

In 2018, several participants noted that the Prime Minister and Minister of Education sought change through more disciplined management of tertiary scholarships (SPA-1; SIGO-6; SDP-2,-4). One senior leader interviewed in 2018 set a positive forward direction of better management and demand-orientation of training:

“I am very optimistic that we will do a better job and better manage the processes and demand-driven approach to training needs. We need to make our people aware of the procedures that we use to select and determine the number of scholarships” – (SIGE-9)

Yet again in 2019, simultaneous to major MEHRD-led policy developments to address scholarship issues, MEHRD investigated another scholarships scandal involving the NTU. Allegations emerged of students paying NTU officials SBD5,000 for awards, resulting in PS Rodie’s reassignment of another NTU Director (Osifelo, 2019; Salini, 2019).

The management and implementation problems affecting delivery of tertiary scholarships policy had persisted through the case study period. Some audit recommendations from 2006 to strengthen management, processes and information systems had been implemented. However, efforts of senior bureaucrats and accountability institutions to strengthen policy and management processes continued to be complicated by mixed objectives and incentives, including to expand scholarships provision, as well as political pressures for decisions

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benefiting individuals, and corruption. The remainder of this chapter examines key factors in policy-makers' attempts to develop significant policy alternatives, and explains the political dynamics, including incentives and accountabilities, shaping policy-making and changes in institutions.

4.3: How key policy alternatives were developed

Section 4.2 above presented key tertiary scholarships policy measures and reforms led by MEHRD with support of development partners to respond to problems in tertiary scholarships. This section further describes three key MEHRD-led policy alternatives to address problems of tertiary scholarships. The 2010 Policy Statement provided for a student loans scheme and cost-sharing with students. Political pressure to select scholarship recipients drove development of a category of 'Constituency Awards'. The policy intention to expand domestic tertiary provision merged with political calls to establish a national university. All three yield different findings on the experience of policy-making and reform.

4.3.1: Cost sharing and student loans: too complex

To address the long-term tertiary education financing challenge, as recommended by Bugotu in 1974, MEHRD leaders attempted cost-sharing approaches, with Australian aid support. Delivering on a recommendation of the 2010 policy statement and with approval by MEHRD leadership, in 2012 an Australian-funded consultant undertook a feasibility study for a Student Loans Scheme linked to National Provident Fund (NPF) contributions. Discussions with senior MEHRD officials concluded that the policy and legislative changes required across agencies were too complex to be achievable (SDP-4). A formal category of 'co-funded' scholarships was introduced in 2014 (Table 4.1), but as one official commented, only a few parents could contribute costs, mostly for domestic study (SIGO-6). Under CEO and former MEHRD Under-Secretary Constance Nasi, the newly established SITESA again sought expert advice on a loans scheme in 2021 (Manebona, 2021). Growing personal finance options expanded student loan options for Solomon Islanders with access to the financial system (BSP, 2022; SFL, 2024). MEHRD's continued difficulty realising a policy goal originally set in 1974, and realised in other countries (see Chapter 5), speaks to the long term difficulties Solomon Islands' bureaucratic policy-makers had developing complex policy initiatives involving multiple stakeholders and legislative change.

4.3.2: Formalising politicised selection: Constituency Awards

A key policy development was Cabinet approval during 2014 and 2015 of a separate category of ‘Constituency Awards (or scholarships)’, allocating two scholarships per MP’s constituency. Responding to political pressure, this was MEHRD officials’ attempt to protect merit-based selection. However, it also institutionalised politicised tertiary scholarships selection.

Aid donor reporting on economic and fiscal reform in 2011 identified MPs using Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) for tertiary scholarships among other purposes (AusAID et al., 2012, p. 3). The report also identified a 2011 budget allocation of SBD10 million for tertiary scholarships allocated to MPs by constituency (AusAID et al., 2012, p. 24); a significant amount for a still- informal policy.

In 2014, as scholarships budget allocations gradually increased (Table 4.8) Constituency Awards became formalised as a scholarships category. Guided by the ‘Tertiary Education Taskforce’ approach discussed in section 4.2.2, an Australian-funded technical advisor to MEHRD drafted briefing notes for Cabinet decision, presenting the problem of tertiary scholarships expenditure, its impact on education policy goals, and MEHRD’s management strengthening efforts. Buying space for a more accountable system, the briefing proposed a ‘binding agreement’ with MPs of no further interference in MEHRD-mandated scholarships selection (overseas, domestic or public service), in exchange for a dedicated, funded category of ‘MPs Scholarship Award Grants’. Government allocated ‘Constituency Awards’ SBD10 million in 2014 and SBD15 million in 2015 to recognise MPs’ demands for discretion in scholarship processes. MEHRD would support Constituency Awards management by establishing selection criteria, and maintaining student award information and reporting (MEHRD, 2014a). As an agreed ‘deal’ between MEHRD and MPs, Constituency awards were formalised as an institution

The Constituency Awards approach responded to MPs’ concerns for geographic equity - that several provinces were under-represented in scholarships selection, including due to limited secondary education. Several participants noted that politicians also mistrusted the impartiality of NTU officials selection (SIGO-7; SDP-2; SIGE-8), including one political advisor:

“It’s fair [for my constituency] to have four there, if we channel it through the national system there will be a lot of problems - nepotism there, cronyism there, open to abuse - and a very small number of students from [my island] going up to university” – (SPA-2)

Recorded in Hansard, John Maneniaru, an MP for a remote constituency in Malaita, said:

“The contribution of 50 constituencies with four students from each constituency is a balanced education policy for all of us in terms of educating our human resources in our constituencies, and I support it” (NPSI, 2015)

This sentiment was echoed by Tautai Angikimua Kaitu’u from Rennell & Bellona:

“Unfortunately in Renbel we don’t have a form seven and that put us in disadvantage place and I am glad this MP’s scholarship scheme has come in. And this year I have already sent four students thankful to the DCC Government policy on education and they are studying at various universities abroad” (NPSI, 2015)

Also speaking in parliament in 2015, MP Derrick Manu’ari praised the Constituency Scholarship Grant for *“ensuring sustainable development”*, and called for each MP’s grant to double from SBD1 million (NPSI, 2015).

Constituency scholarships could be understood as a logical extension of the more widespread, and less-formalised practice of constituents petitioning MPs for school fees to access formal basic and secondary education. However, multiple policy stakeholders of different backgrounds interviewed in this research criticised it as corruption, undermining merit-based selection:

“The constituency scholarships was the first way. Before there was no other way the politicians could get involved in MEHRD. Even though there were CDFs at the same time. And they got involved and messed up everything.” (STP-2)

“When politics comes in... scholarships are not awarded naturally, but because of the political affiliation.” (SIGE-10)

“It’s full of corruption. Mostly people who benefit by knowing a member of parliament. We don’t need members of parliament... where do members come in? Some of them are not educated enough to decide.” (SPS-1)

Audit and management risks persisted for these new awards. In 2014, the OAG again identified the absence of guidelines for management of constituency scholarships among the major audit risks for MEHRD (OAG, 2014). In approving the new category, MEHRD had sought to codify roles, selection criteria and process (SIGE-9). This was not fully achieved, and policy stakeholders interviewed remained unclear on management arrangements for Constituency Scholarships (STP-2, SPA-2).

MEHRD's Constituency Awards deal with MPs helped temporarily balance expenditure, alongside donor budget support conditionality (see Table 4.7; and section 4.4). However, expenditure and political involvement further increased, as MPs still exceeded awards to constituents. Evidence from research participants and secondary material suggests MPs enjoyed wide political discretion when awarding the constituency scholarships. MPs selections included students with inadequate GPA scores and from outside their constituency (STP-2)(Usu, 2016); and supported study in non-priority subjects and in higher-cost destinations (SIGE-8)(Levine & Close, 2016). An education official noted that several MPs, particularly those perceived to have more power as 'Big Men', far exceeded the allocated scholarships (SIGE-12). Exceeded scholarships continued to pressure MEHRD's internal scholarship awards selection and budget allocation.

Overseas destinations for study by scholarship recipients was a repeated area of disagreement between policy actors. MP Moffat Fugui, later to be Education Minister, argued for diversifying scholarship destinations in parliament in 2015 (NPSI, 2015, 2017a). Minister Ha'amori decided to send 512 students to AMA university in the Philippines - this was later criticised by returning Education Minister Sikua as a *"money-making opportunity by someone in Solomon Islands' government"* (John, 2017). One MEHRD officer stated that to Ha'amori, *"the university's accreditation status didn't matter"* (SIGE-2). When in 2017 those students were reportedly *"barely surviving"* without receiving allowances (Filia, 2017), PS Rodie allocated SBD130 million for outstanding fees and discontinued AMA as a destination (John, 2017). The arrangement with AMA was seen by interviewed education officials (SIGE 1,-2,-3) as politicised diversion from the 2010 policy commitment to 'value for money' partnerships with international providers to strengthen Solomon Islands institutions (MEHRD, 2010).

Constituency Awards were significant to the Ombudsman's investigation of 2016. Among many media articles and public complaints driving the investigation, one student complained that multiple eligible students had been rejected in favour of people who voted for that MP (Toito'ona, 2015). While OAG reports may have been constrained from political findings, the Ombudsman's report attributed management concerns to weak Constituency Awards management and politicised involvement, recommending Constituency Grant criteria and guidelines, and management by the NTU (Ombudsman, 2017, p. 71).

Regardless of the Ombudsman's recommendations, politicians' involvement in selection continued beyond the case study period (Gwamani, 2020; Wasuka, 2020). A development partner official interviewed in 2018 described *"enormous pressure on MPs for tertiary*

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scholarships... MPs literally go in and yell at people” (SDP-2). A training provider described the continuing political pressures:

“The NTU Director was visited this year [2018] by several Ministers of the Crown with their lists... is that how low these guys go, just to follow up 1 or 2 or 3 or even 10 scholarships. People are coercing – putting officers under duress. “If you don’t do this you might not get the job next time.” (STP-3)

MEHRD senior officials had attempted to manage the impacts of the clientelist pressures of MPs interference in student selection through introducing a formal but limited scholarships category of Constituency Awards. This was a policy ‘deal’ with politicians intended to separate and protect merit-based selection practices. It made politicised selection of students a formal institution in Solomon Islands education. The pressures and accountability arrangements in Solomon Islands’ dynamic of political patronage meant this ‘deal’ was exceeded, continuing to compromise scholarships selection and sustaining mistrust between localised political interests over access to higher education. This continued politicisation of tertiary selection indicates that higher education access in Solomon Islands will likely continue to be subject to political contestation compromising long-term and objective policy-making.

4.3.3 A local solution: A national university

Expanding domestic tertiary provision was one major policy response to the problem of overseas tertiary scholarships spending. The policy sub-case of the formation of the Solomon Islands National University (SINU) further illustrates the factors in complex policy development in Solomon Islands, including the effects of diverse objectives, unresolved financing and demand challenges and problematic sequencing of management reforms.

Local aspirations to establish a national university were longstanding, but contested. The government asserted its interest in converting SICHE into a national university in the early 1990s. This was motivated to reduce reliance on overseas universities and better support national development ambitions. A 1993 World Bank report advised against it on the basis of cost and capacity burden, advising instead better resourcing of secondary schools and use of regional institutions (WB, 1993a).

Rapidly increasing student numbers supported policy-makers’ case for expanded local tertiary provision. Solomon Islands’ leading post-secondary institution, the Honiara Technical Institute (685 students in 1973)(BSIP, 1973, p. 67) had become SICHE in 1984, growing to 1,285

students in 1991 (Crocombe & Crocombe, 1994, p. 79), and after the Tensions to 1,756 in 2005 and 2,708 in 2009 (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 32-33) (Table 4.8). How their studies would be funded was a policy problem.

Integrating senior educators' and donor views, MEHRD's 2010 Tertiary Education Policy and Guidelines set a policy direction for increased capacity for national delivery of high quality tertiary education. Gradually decreasing the number of students abroad would reduce tertiary education costs while access and community relevance increased. The policy aimed for the greater majority of Solomon Islands students to receive their education and training domestically within ten years, with SIG-funded awardees administered by NTU to be required in principle to undertake their study at a new national university, SINU (MEHRD, 2010, pp. 16-17). The 2010 policy statement also carefully identified key policy considerations: that any decision about starting a national university be based on objective assessment of learning needs, estimated enrolment, cost calculations, available resources, feasibility and sustainability, with national and international stakeholders to meet to plan structure and courses (MEHRD, 2010, p. 14).

Political support to establish a national university linked it to the response to high expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships, including in a comment to parliament by one MP in 2011:

"I want to ... suggest [MEHRD] looks into the idea of establishing our own university.... It is very costly to send our students overseas to attend tertiary education." MP John Maneniaru (NPSI, 2011)

Delivering on the NCRA coalition government's 2012 policy priority, Minister Ha'amori oversaw the formal inception of SICHE as SINU in 2013 (Barbara & Walsh, 2018; NPSI, 2012a). External development partners remained sceptical, as did some internal critics (Nanau, 2014). In 2013, one MP criticised the decision to establish SINU, for which Solomon Islands was 'not ready' given the low quality of basic education (DFAT, 2013c). Even in 2016, leading lawyer (and later SINU Vice-Chancellor) Dr Transform Aqorau and former Choiseul premier Kengava proposed merging of SINU with USP's local campus, on the grounds of the high cost of tertiary education to national budget (Lesley Sanga, 2016).

Expectations of SINU were ambitious and broader than replacing overseas scholarships alone. SINU was established with a role to meet national human resource and workforce skills needs, improving higher education access and academic and trade education standards, and supporting community education, to meet community needs (NPSI, 2012b; SINU, 2015). Politicians' aims

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in establishing SINU were broader, including to “*respond to the needs of Solomon Islanders*”, (NPSI, 2012b) state building (Barbara & Walsh, 2018) and general national improvement (NPSI, 2012b).

Despite these ambitions and despite implementation planning, senior policy actors did not support the transition by making the difficult policy decisions needed to implement the 2010 policy and ensure the new university’s viability. Implementation planning for the transition to SINU had targeted key challenges including academic programmes, governance and resource requirements, comparing costs favourably with overseas training (SINU, 2012). However, objective assessment of conditions for the new university, and fundamental financing, management and teacher and course quality problems experienced by SINU had not been addressed in the transition.

The tertiary education financing problem was significant and unresolved in the transition to SINU. Over ten years, elite leadership commitment to establishing SINU, partly as an alternative to overseas tertiary scholarships, had not followed through with resourcing required to build a national university. The cost-sharing, student loans and block grants prescribed in the 2010 Tertiary Education policy statement had not been successfully delivered. A 2013 pledge to allocate SBD100 million annually from recurrent budget to SINU fell short at SBD22 million per year, plus SBD30 million a year in subsequent years for infrastructure development (Aatai, 2017; MoFT, 2006-2023). With insufficient budget, SINU struggled to handle very rapid growth in student numbers. SINU experienced poor learning quality of secondary graduates, weak internal management, uncertain and inadequate financing and quality of delivery, inadequate physical facilities, overloaded or under-qualified teaching staff, and tension between SINU’s vocational or academic focus (Barbara & Walsh, 2018)(STP-1). SINU’s development struggled without adequate government funding or comprehensive donor support, institutional linkages, or private sector partnerships.

Unresolved financing led to MPs, students, MEHRD and SINU contesting who would pay for student costs. With student and boarding fees well above average incomes, MEHRD and SINU’s attempted transition from public funding to charging student fees, and failure to pay allowances, were among multiple causes for repeated student protests (L. Sanga, 2016) (Ragaruma, 2018b) (SolStar, 2013). Acting Prime Minister Maelanga responded to protests in 2013 by reversing the decision to charge student fees in 2013 and 2014 (SolTimes, 2013). MPs expected to send students to SINU for free, resulting in SBD14 million in fees owed by MPs within total fees owed to SINU of SBD40.8 million, causing the university financial difficulties

(SINU, 2018). SINU management also struggled with a range of corruption issues, including fake scholarship letters, staff payroll and procurement fraud (Iroga, 2020).

Importantly for this research, there is no evidence that establishing SINU reduced demand or allocations of overseas tertiary scholarships. Instead of replacing overseas scholarships, SINU's establishment actually increased them, contributing to higher scholarships expenditure after SINU's inception (as seen in Table 4.7). This was partly because in 2013, in order to upgrade the qualifications of SINU's teaching workforce, Minister Ha'amori decided to add SIG scholarships at postgraduate level, including universities outside the region (STP-1). This was a workforce planning problem identified in the 2010 policy but not resolved prior to SINU's establishment.

Solomon Islands' context for policy-making shaped adverse conditions for establishing SINU as a policy alternative to overseas tertiary scholarships. Diverse and ambiguous objectives and unresolved tertiary financing were critical constraints. Bureaucratic and political leadership commitment were sufficient to launch SINU, and bureaucratic capacity sufficient for implementation planning. In Solomon Islands' challenging political and institutional context, political and bureaucratic actors did not have the collective platforms or convening power to mobilise action and resources across stakeholders to advance the complex and programmatic financing and management reforms the new university needed to overcome management and financing problems as a viable early alternative to overseas tertiary scholarships. However, as sub-section 4.4.3 explains, local tertiary provision through SINU and the expanded USP was a major source of change in tertiary scholarships policy beyond the case study period.

4.4: Political influence and change

Solomon Islands' tertiary scholarships policy-makers balanced deliberate education and development policy goals, and short-term and personalised political and public demand pressures. Reflecting Solomon Islands' broader post-Tensions political context for policy-making, these pressures and elite capture of the policy area drove the difference between stated policies and implementation.

4.4.1: Accountabilities, incentives and elites

In Solomon Islands, incentives and accountability relationships, including in financing, are critical to explaining policy-making and change in overseas tertiary scholarships. Accountabilities, information, educational attainment and voice were shaped by the distribution of power.

As introduced at 3.4.4 and 4.1, Solomon Islands' overseas tertiary scholarships had high status, and were linked to national power-holders. Various participants described the importance of tertiary scholarships to joining Solomon Islands' national political and bureaucratic class, drawing on the networks formed at USP in Fiji in particular (SESP-2, SIGE-2, SDP-2). Jourdan described Solomon Islands' post-independence education system's elite and academic nature (Jourdan, 1995). This included a pathway to publicly funded overseas tertiary scholarships, which marked an individual's elite membership. Overseas tertiary scholarships as such constituted a tradition of elite formation. Upper secondary completion, previously rare, increased significantly after the Tensions, expanding the number of students eligible for overseas tertiary scholarships. This drove demand pressure for this state-funded pathway to national elite employment to strengthen as a political force.

Section 4.1.1 introduced the "high regard" (SESP-2) that Solomon Islanders held for tertiary education, and the higher status accorded to tertiary scholarships rather than, say, training groups of illiterate women (SIGE-1). As well as higher status, political incentives and policy-making were shaped by the distribution of accountabilities for education services. MPs directing student selection, and the parents and students who benefited, faced more specific and pressing short-term political and personal interests than opaque and indirect budget trade-offs for other education services. In 2018, a year of record-high scholarships budget allocation, one training provider interviewed described politicians' sense of their role focused on scholarships:

"there were media complaints that scholarships were not enough, some Form 7 students with very high marks did not get a scholarship. At the political level they decided to increase from 300 scholarships to 700. They said – "we just increase it. We'll look for the money, that's why we are here" ". (STP-1)

AusAID's Stakeholder Analysis contrasted politicians' dominant priority to overseas tertiary scholarships with their more ambiguous commitment to fee-free basic education, a clear development priority of MEHRD and donors (DFAT, 2013c) with strong public political commitment (Kuve, 2009; SolTimes, 2009a) and strong media profile (Ragaruma, 2018c; RNZ, 2009; Rodie, 2008). Fee-free basic education was also subject to frequent parliamentary discussion (NPSI, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2015). Despite this development priority and public attention, the greater specificity of political pressures for scholarships meant that politicians effectively expected MEHRD to prioritise tertiary scholarships instead.

This was partly because MEHRD's accountabilities were more direct for tertiary scholarships than for other education priorities. One political advisor even commented that *"MEHRD is the Ministry for Tertiary Scholarships... it's the core responsibility. The bigger proportion of budget is expected to be on tertiary scholarships"* (SPA-1). A development partner described MPs *"under pressure for tertiary scholarships in a way that they're not on any other education sector"* (SDP-4). These perceptions help explain budget allocations (Tables 4.3-4.5 and 4.7) overwhelmingly favouring tertiary education expenditure.

Other education sub-sectors faced a norm of under-funding. Providers serving the majority of students, including church- or provincial- Education Authorities outside MEHRD, had become used to inadequate funding for basic services (STP-3)(Close, 2012; DFAT, 2013c). According to two education officials, more diffused accountabilities for other education sub-sectors meant that it was not clear who beneficiaries should blame for missing services; and while school fees could be met from different sources, costlier overseas tertiary scholarships could only be met by MEHRD or donors (SIGE-2,-10).

Solomon Islands' short-term, transactional political economy dynamic pressured politicians for constituent's ad hoc needs more than for longer-term decisions or performance (DFAT, 2013c). Audit reports presented in section 4.2 pressured bureaucrats, but did not change incentives for politicians' priorities (DFAT, 2013c). Accountability institutions clearly had a role in examining management problems in policy delivery. However audit reports were depoliticised. The focus on management gaps and not critical political influences undermined the meant the audit recommendations only partially equipped MEHRD officials to deliver scholarships policy amidst constrained choices and resources, and strong political and public incentives. A SIG officer suggested politicians and communities' high individual incentives for adding scholarships, but diffuse public costs:

"It's to do with competition between politicians and how we perceive benefits from government. Scholarships program... everyone is trying to get a share. That's where the politics comes in. That may be perception of the politicians, they want to help the people also to do with their popularity. It's 'tragedy of the commons' – if you don't get it, somebody else is going to benefit." – (SIGE-9)

This officials' comment reflects problems of coordination and mistrust among Solomon Islanders within the country's political economy dynamic, impacting policy delivery.

While politicians were particularly criticised, so too were officials. In the context of a system with weak performance management (section 3.2), participants shared perceptions of few consequences for nepotism or personalised benefits from scholarships (SPA-4; SESP-2; SPA-2). This perceived lack of sanctions was key to accountabilities.

Even when scholarships were allocated to merit-based students, major equity issues were apparent, but unaddressed. While scholarships were intended to support national development, control and distribution of benefits indicates elite capture of this policy. Solomon Islands' national political and bureaucratic elite had better access to scholarships for their children. University-educated waged employees in urban areas were better able to access and pay for secondary schooling, and assure their children the English language skills needed to succeed. Two research participants in this category recognised these advantages (SESP-1,-2), as reflected in comments at 4.1.1. Indeed, most political public service and civil society representatives interviewed could be considered as members of the 'policy elite', who often both supported reform, and had either benefited from overseas tertiary scholarships themselves, or their children had. This reflects the implication of Solomon Islands' small middle class in the country's political economy: criticising corrupt practices, supporting reform, but also advocating for scholarships for family members, and accepting short-term political compromises resulting in larger allocations and overspent budgets (Sahin & Shahin, 2019). As one development partner described, at selection time, good intentions were undermined by the personal and political pressures to add names to scholarship lists (SDP-2). A scholarships recipient's parent commented:

“There are moral issues of going around the due process. It's clear, black and white except when it's me. Everybody is against corruption but everybody, when it comes to it, if they need help from the member...” – (SESP-4)

However, compromised selection appeared to be changing the distribution of elite benefits. One education official reflected views of several participants that benefits were shifting from “high achievers” to those selected through “nepotism” and politics (SIGE-8).

Tertiary students themselves were organised in Student Associations and protest actions, and vocal about implementation problems, particularly reforms to pay fees, including in the media (SolStar, 2013, 2014b; SolTimes, 2009b; USPSA, 2011; Wasuka, 2019). This advocacy was at time effective in securing MEHRD action and policy changes. Overall, the most educated,

English-proficient and media-exposed Solomon Islanders were most likely to advocate for tertiary scholarships.

Outside the ‘policy elite’, those with less power in this policy area included stakeholders in other education sub-sectors such as schools and church- or provincial- Education Authorities; and the majority of Solomon Island citizens who left school early, and were outside the mostly urban educated elite. As Jourdan had recognised, Solomon Islands’ education system kept producing a majority of school leavers who became economically and politically disenfranchised citizens (Jourdan, 2013). This research found no indications of collective action on overseas tertiary scholarships by the excluded majority of school leavers. Information imbalances with this excluded majority were consistent with other policy areas in Solomon Islands. Nationally, low functional literacy and limited media reach limited potential for broader public awareness of budget decisions and trade-offs (SDP-7)(AidStream, 2022; UNDP, 2020). Echoing AusAID’s stakeholder consultations, one education official in 2018 commented that in Solomon Islands disagreement with practices of politicians was isolated or quietly and temporarily expressed (SIGE-5)(DFAT, 2013c). In contrast with a culturalist view attributing to ‘Big Man’ culture, this behaviour may reflect a rational assessment of the costs of speaking out against the likelihood of change (DFAT, 2013c; Wood, 2016).

Absent collective public opposition could have partly been because overseas tertiary scholarships were given high status and were widely valued, even by those who didn’t get to go. A relative going on a high-status scholarship became *“the pride of the whole tribe”*, as described by two MEHRD officers (SIGE-2, SIGE-11). Civil society organisations who might have represented the majority without educational advantage included the Coalition for Education in Solomon Islands (COESI), who had researched low literacy in Solomon Islands population (ASPBAE & COESI, 2010), and anti-corruption organisation Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI). TSI advocated against politicised selection but also for more funding for tertiary scholarships, for *“deserving”* students who had *“studied hard”* (SCS-3)(TSI, 2014). One experienced civil society advocate commented:

“I think civil society is weak. Should be civil society organisations who take lead in these issues. If they are silent – it’s because everyone thinks things are ok.” – (SCS-1)

Themselves embedded in Solomon Islands’ political economy and policy elite, many civil society representatives and/or their children were scholarship recipients (SCS-2). Civil society stakeholders were also constrained by capacity and by the range of development and political

economy issues to advocate for across multiple sectors (SCS-1). International organisations led some advocacy on educational exclusion (International, 2019).

The agency and views of education officials were varied. A wide number of education officials who participated in this research were well-educated, were overseas tertiary scholarship graduates themselves, were well aware of the policy and management issues and political pressures around overseas tertiary scholarships, and actively contributed to measures to reform policy in the area. Research participants were generous in sharing their time, commentary and information. However, only former and not current NTU officials agreed to participate in the research. MEHRD's NTU also did not share individual and historic tertiary scholarships data for this research. This likely reflects the personal sensitivity of this data, as well as the pressures and sensitivity of the NTU area, as the continued target of allegations of personalised selection.

Agency for change emerged from senior MEHRD and even some political leaders, as presented in the policy responses and reform efforts in sections 4.2 and 4.3 above. Policy and reform efforts were led by senior Education bureaucrats, particularly long-serving Permanent Secretaries Kuve and Rodie (Table 4.8). The above sections also detail important accountability initiatives by central agencies including budget measures and audit and Ombudsman's investigations.

Commitment to reforms by Education Ministers varied more widely. Individual Ministers had different positions. Ministers' higher turnover, short-term and transactional priorities, and lack of accountability to oversight mechanisms, reflected Solomon Islands' broader political context (DFAT, 2013c). MPs were caught between long-term national goals, the genuine need for expanded higher education, and immediate pressures from constituents and networks, variably opposing scholarship tightening or supporting policies and reforms (MEHRD, 2014a)(SDP-2,-4,-6)(TSI, 2014). The variability of the policy elite's commitment to reform undermined the likelihood and progress of reform initiatives.

Distribution of accountabilities - direct for tertiary scholarships, indirect for other education priorities - was critical in shaping education policy-making priority on tertiary scholarships. Bureaucratic policy responses focused on fixing management problems could not satisfactorily contain the impact on policy and resourcing of strong political and public incentives for access to scholarships in Solomon Islands political dynamic. The politics of this policy area was also shaped by sustained distribution of societal power between elites and those seeking to join the elite, ahead of broader education benefits for the non-elite majority of the population.

4.4.2: Development partners' influence: Management, policy and advocacy

External donors, particularly Australia and New Zealand, were highly active in reform efforts. Their significant influence in MEHRD led some Solomon Islands stakeholders to see greater MEHRD accountability to donors than any other stakeholder (DFAT, 2013c).

Donors were driven by different incentives. Taiwan's scholarships were perceived by Solomon Islands participants as aimed at securing politicians' support (STP-1, SPS-2). Australia, New Zealand and the World Bank were committed to global education development agendas including expanding quality basic education and learning, including the poorest (Hobbs, 2004; Smith & McMullan, 2010; WB, 2009). In Solomon Islands they delivered generally depoliticised 'managerial' and knowledge support working with senior bureaucrats. These three partners focused on scholarships policy reform because their own analysis indicated its importance to enabling broader education goals (Bateman et al., 2014; Close, 2012; Levine & Close, 2016; OAG, 2006, p. 16). New Zealand led donor support to MEHRD until 2014, from when Australia led reforms. Both applied three key modes of agency on overseas tertiary scholarships policy: management strengthening, co-drafted policy, and advocacy and conditionality.

(1) Management strengthening

Development partners considered that sharing of management processes and advice from donor-funded and -managed scholarship programs had helped influence and support SIG's own scholarships management (SDP-2). Separately, Australian funded technical advice helped strengthen MEHRD management of scholarship schemes, particularly towards the end of the case study period. This included scholarships costing advice, a management action plan, and strengthening of information systems to manage student data and performance (SDP-4)(Peddle, 2014). For unclear reasons, some NTU officials resisted external involvement until instructed to cooperate by MEHRD Senior Management (SDP-4).

(2) Co-drafted policy

In the case study period, the majority of the comprehensive education policies which MEHRD developed at strategic and operational levels were authored or co-authored by foreign technical advisors engaged by Australia, New Zealand and the World Bank. Based on consultation of domestic stakeholders and foreign agencies, they added to the evidence base for policy, and were modified and approved by MEHRD management. Co-drafted policy documents included cabinet briefing, education and tertiary education policy and legislation discussed above.

Australian-funded reforms from 2014 were intended to meet labour demand with balanced post-secondary academic and technical skills training, in line with Australia's skills development focus.

Despite deep donor engagement in MEHRD policy processes, one study by New Zealand academics with education experience of other Pacific states recorded strong local ownership of policy and strengthening efforts by MEHRD (Coxon & Tolley, 2011). This is partly thanks to the capability and continuity of MEHRD Permanent and Under-Secretaries (Table 4.8-a). MEHRD officers interviewed in this research generally supported, and indicated Ministry ownership of, co-drafted MEHRD policies and reforms (SIGE-2,-9,-10,-12).

Co-drafted policy was not uncontested by bureaucratic or political stakeholders, who varied in their agreement and reaction to development partners views (SIGE-2,-9,-10,-12). One MEHRD officer commented, *"Foreigners see us as crazy about tertiary scholarships... put a lot of money there and forget about basic education"* (SIGE-2). SIG's continued expenditure decisions to prioritise scholarships over other education goals motivated additional donor action.

(3) Advocacy and conditionality

Donors also employed higher-level engagement with politicians and central Ministries, and aid conditionality and sanctions to incentivise 'reformist' policy decisions and budget allocations in this policy area. This was conducted by Australian and New Zealand High Commission staff at all levels (SDP-2,-4,-9), in parallel to aforementioned cabinet briefing by MEHRD senior managers, drafted by donor technical advisors (MEHRD, 2014a). One official also recognised Australian withdrawal of management collaboration with its own scholarships scheme as a sanction responding to compromised NTU scholarships management (SIGO-6).

The AusAID Stakeholder PEA proposed *"performance-linked development assistance that is genuinely withdrawn or withheld if commitments are not met"* (DFAT, 2013c, p. 30). Australia's and New Zealand's education sector support included allocations linked to conditions, including that 22% of overall government budget be spent on education, with a target for the proportion allocated to basic education; with the intention to reduce scholarships spending (SDP-2). Despite donors' large budgets and powerful role in policy-making, results of this aid conditionality were mixed. Total education budget remained high, successfully achieving one condition (Dornan, 2017)(SDP-2). However, high tertiary scholarships expenditure was one reason MEHRD regularly failed the basic education funding condition

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and missed out on 20 per cent of possible education budget support. One development partner recognised that this effectively denied donor funds to already under-funded education sub-sectors, without changing incentives for those benefiting from high and politicised tertiary scholarships expenditure, or affecting elite commitment to scholarships reform (SDP-4).

High scholarships expenditure became a policy advocacy focus of core Ministries and multilateral development banks. Their significant budget impacts, and the need for reform measures, appeared regularly in IMF consultations and analysis of Solomon Islands from 2013 to 2019 (IMF, 2014, 2015a, 2016, 2018, 2020; MoFT, 2015). During the case period, economic and financial reform priorities for multi-donor budget support were negotiated by the Core Economic Working Group (CEWG) of MoFT and major donors, established in 2009, in which the Multilateral Development Banks were particularly active (ADB, 2015; AusAID et al., 2012). Focused on core public financial management (PFM), MoFT resisted any CEWG focus on sectoral policy conditions to avoid ‘treading on toes’ of other Ministries and risking funds disbursement (Dornan, 2017, p. 55). Nevertheless, high tertiary scholarships expenditure was raised in the CEWG in 2014, 2015 and 2018 (SDP-6).

Resulting from donor advocacy, agreed policy actions for a USD5 million World Bank grant in 2014 included MEHRD implementing revised procedures for approving scholarships, and approval of a new, transparent scholarships policy. Both were recorded in 2017 as completed. A policy indicator for scholarships budget expenditure variance to decline from 101.8% in 2013 to <10% in 2015 was only achieved in one year, after which the previous pattern of over-expenditure resumed (MoFT, 2006-2023; WB, 2017a) (see Table 4.8).

Some SIG officials considered aid conditions “*the right thing to do*” to help change policy (SIGE-3,-4); control budget (SIGE-10); or to get high-level attention where citizens’ voices were not heard (SIGO-5). Dornan in 2017 noted officials who thought that policy conditions funded things SIG would do anyway, or that conditions should only cover technical actions as the political was beyond the control of bureaucrats. Political leaders reportedly resented donors interfering in programs considered ‘political’ such as CDFs and scholarships (Dornan, 2017, p. 56). A MoFT official involved in the CEWG described bureaucratic tactics under donor pressure:

“... it is obvious that donors are very demanding – that they want their way in everything. ‘we want this, we want that’. When that happens, we just stay silent. Our strategy is to delay”,¹⁰ cited in (Dornan, 2017, p. 57)

Through combined strategies of technocratic support, co-drafted policy, engagement, advocacy and conditionality, development partners supported increased bureaucratic and political elite commitment to reforms. Donors were powerful actors, shaping the selection and formation of policies. Yet their impact was focused on impartial bureaucrats, rather than engaging with politicians. Donors had greater difficulty influencing the strong political incentives and accountabilities shaping tertiary scholarships policy delivery.

4.4.3: Reform results and implications beyond 2019

Beyond the case study period, there was evidence of substantive progress and changes from MEHRD-led reforms to higher education. However, broader political dynamics constrained the progress of key reforms and legislation, sustained politicised selection pressures, and limited the ability to solve complex long-term policy problems.

Senior MEHRD officials advanced tertiary education reforms, including establishing SITESA in 2019. Meeting burgeoning demand for tertiary education despite a period of USP’s regional leadership uncertainty, a major ADB loan project funded a new USP campus in Honiara opened in October 2024, with capacity for 4,000 students (ADB, 2024; USP, 2024). SIG made significant investments in SINU (Chanwai-Earle, 2018; Wate, 2021). On the tenth anniversary of its founding in 2023, Prime Minister Sogavare recognised the challenges in its first decade but congratulated SINU for having “struggled on to meet its important objectives” (SIG, 2023a). Bold new leadership efforts in 2024 by Vice-Chancellor Dr Transform Aqorau set interconnected priorities of enhancing governance, seeking course accreditation and international rankings (Aqorau, 2024).

This mixed commitment to and delivery of reform was reflected in changing but persistently high tertiary scholarships expenditure after 2019, as partly presented in Table 4.8 (MoFT, 2006-2023). Transparency significantly improved with MEHRD’s publication of 2020 awards data. New scholarships remained high at 878, of which only 2.3 per cent were cost shared with students – reflecting limited progress of this reform - but two-thirds (586) were for domestic study, and 79 were TVET scholarships, reflecting progress in reforms for local provision and

¹⁰ Personal communication, SIG Official, January 2015

financing of vocational studies. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented travel overseas for study from 2020 until 2022. In December 2020, PS Rodie launched the online Scholarships Application process and Administrative System, and announced 1,000 tertiary scholarship places for 2021, fully for domestic study. This was partly due to COVID-19, but also to support local tertiary provision and to provide more scholarships, including for TVET, at lower cost (Manebona, 2020; SIG, 2021). The refocus on local study and the rebalancing of roles between NTU and SITESA brought some reduction to costs and budget allocation for scholarships (Follett, 2022). Despite this predominant focus on support for local study, disagreements over financing of SINU students continued, with non-payment of fees posing a major ongoing challenge for the university's financial viability (Eddie, 2022; Sasako, 2021; SINU, 2018). Termination and transition of staffing was also a source of management conflict in SINU (Osifelo, 2021).

Constituency scholarships continued, but subject to transparency and management. In 2020, one hundred constituency scholarships again represented two scholarships for each MP. For the first time, a MEHRD information note publicly delineated constituency scholarships rules (SITESA, 2020). Increasing transparency included publication of constituency scholarship recipients alongside broader scholarship recipients (Iroga, 2025). However, demand pressures to increase scholarships persisted. SITESA CEO Constance Nasi confirmed to a public accounts hearing in November 2024 that tertiary scholarships provided would increase from 1,000 in 2024 to 1,038 in 2025, the number of scholarships allocated to each constituency remaining at four (Gagahe, 2024).

By 2026, tertiary scholarships were numerous, localised, inclusive of vocational opportunities, and through Constituency Awards, continued to be formally politicised. Of the even larger 1,445 scholarships announced for 2026, 88 per cent were for local study, with the remaining 12 per cent for study in specialised fields requiring overseas study (Kole, 2025). In the long term, it was apparent that the Tertiary Scholarships Policy of 2014 was more successfully delivered than the 2010 Policy Statement. This was partly as a result of strong development partner support and conditions but also sustained senior MEHRD leadership, while facing more challenges from political leaders.

Constraints and resistance to reform were also evident. As presented in section 3.2, systemic political and parliamentary issues impeded legislation and policy reforms across policy areas in Solomon Islands. These also effected key higher education reforms. Delays or reversals of education reform decisions under political pressure, such as reversal of fee expectations of

SINU in 2013, illustrate the short-term nature of leaders' commitment to these reforms (Dornan, 2017; Sahin & Shahin, 2019). Potential latent resistance included postponed delivery through long delays in parliamentary tabling and gazetting of legislation (Sahin & Shahin, 2019). The SITESA establishing Act was passed in March 2017 (NPSI, 2017b)(SDP-4); but was only gazetted in 2019. The Education Act, planned in the 2015 White Paper, was only enacted in 2024 (MEHRD, 2024). Delays to key education policies and legislation could represent weakness of parliamentary systems, MPs with genuine concern but mixed or alternative priorities, or potentially latent resistance to the costs of proposed reforms. Short-term commitment falling short of longer and harder reforms mirrors a global pattern in developing countries under aid conditionality identified by Andrews (Andrews, 2013). Sahin and Shahin further found that with Solomon Islands' diplomatic switch to China, donors own geo-strategic interests compromised their influence in backing bold education sectoral reforms or higher level enforcement of aid conditionality including on scholarships spending (Sahin & Shahin, 2019).

Beyond the case study period, reforms led by senior education officials and supported by development partners had made the most significant change to education in post-independence Solomon Islands. MEHRD and development partners' efforts in tertiary education governance and investments made great strides in making tertiary education better led, more locally provided and employment-oriented, more transparent and more accessible to more Solomon Islanders. At the same time, continued elite priority on scholarships, pressures for scholarship selection and the state's broader short-term and transactional political environment, made it difficult to see through reforms in the policy area, or solve long-term problems like contested tertiary education financing. Commitment to tertiary education reform was therefore evident in results realised after the case study period, but so too was compromised political commitment.

Conclusion

This chapter's analysis of the political economy of this prioritised, high profile and contested policy area of overseas tertiary scholarships presents new and deeper understandings of the politics of employment in Solomon Islands. Over the period of 2006 to 2019, management of this policy area by Solomon Islands' education line ministry grappled with increased demand, political pressures and scrutiny, by accountability institutions, aid donors, political actors, higher education stakeholders and parents and students. Interference in merit-based selection was the prominent issue identified by participants. Ministry officials attempted policy reform

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and policy alternatives, seeking to address management problems and protect merit-based selection from political and personal influence, strengthen formal institutions and shift to local and vocational delivery of training meeting local employment needs.

This case study has identified several factors influencing Solomon Islands policy-making on overseas tertiary scholarships as a policy response to employment:

1. Key structures and resourcing were important. Student demand pressure and structural resource constraints were significant factors and difficult to respond to. As eligible students increased beyond budget resources available, officials and Ministers expended large budgets at the cost of other education goals. The long-term tertiary education financing challenge was difficult for officials to address in Solomon Islands' political context for policy-making.
2. In Solomon Islands' political dynamic, student demand and political and personalised selection pressures compromised formal scholarship processes, undermining policy objectives. Participants interviewed suggested that compromised and politicised selection increased as corruption increased after the 'Tensions'. As demand pressure and compromised selection further increased, policy officials responded with the tactic of formalising politicised selection as 'Constituency Awards'.
3. The distribution of accountabilities, incentives and information in Solomon Islanders' engagement in education shaped policy-making. SIG-funded overseas tertiary scholarships attracted elite capture in Solomon Islands political context. MEHRD had stronger, direct political accountability for delivering overseas tertiary scholarships benefiting a smaller number of Solomon Islanders with greater voice, while there was weak political accountability to, or collective action by, the mostly rural majority of Solomon Islands students excluded from higher education.
4. Representing unique sectoral and institutional dynamics, a cohort of long-serving and highly educated MEHRD officials responsible for credible formal institutions led management improvement, policy reform attempts and attempted policy alternatives between 2006 and 2019. This responded to pressure from audits and from external aid donors who closely supported reforms.
5. The ability of Solomon Islands' bureaucratic and political elite to negotiate, commit to and follow through on policy reforms was key. Within Solomon Islands' political context, commitment to policy and reform was variable, short-term and transactional,

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and coordination between formal institutions limited. Members of this elite at once criticised, sought to overcome, contributed to and personally benefited from compromise of the formal institution of merit-based scholarship selection. Their commitment to policies and reform was sufficient to motivate and launch policies and approve budgets, but insufficient to harness collective action across multiple policy stakeholders to resolve complex long-term policy problems or achieve programmatic reforms bearing short-term costs. This explained the difficulty resolving sustainable financing for loans or SINU. Technocratic efforts to improve management systems addressed implementation problems, but failed to change political incentives. Compromised senior bureaucratic and political commitment to delivering reforms was evident in delays to key legislation.

6. Donors applied significant influence to shape overseas tertiary scholarships policy, exerted through policy advocacy and co-drafting, technocratic support and conditionality. Donors were motivated to achieve pro-poor and broad education access, undermined by high and compromised expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships. Sectoral aid conditionality to influence controlled scholarships expenditures had mixed results, reducing funding for basic education but not impacting politicians making scholarships selection and budgeting decisions, and eventually compromised by higher-level geostrategic considerations.

These factors reflected distinct political dynamics operating at broad and sector levels. Sectoral dynamics included acute demand pressures, a distinct distribution of accountabilities for different education policies, and elite capture of scholarships policy implementation. Despite a broader context of weak and compromised formal institutions, formal institutions in education in Solomon Islands were long-standing and had credibility as national institutions with nationwide reach. Broader political dynamics of localised, personalised and transactional politics constrained political and bureaucratic elite commitment to policy reform or willingness to accept costs of policy change. By 2019 MEHRD officials had delivered some reforms including managed budgets, local and TVET scholarships and improved management systems and transparency. This suggests that with bureaucratic leadership, sufficiently credible co-drafted policy and credible national formal institutions in education, changed accountabilities and programmatic policy reforms could be achieved, even in an adverse political context for policy-making.

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In Solomon Islands' broader political dynamic, the divergence between intended policy and delivery in this policy area was driven by the bureaucratic and political elite's compromised commitment to policy reforms and the diversity and confusion of objectives on overseas tertiary scholarships. This resulted in what was intended as impartial, evidence based and programmatic policy being compromised by informal clientelist pressures. As part of senior bureaucrats' leadership of policy reform, their 'deal' with politicians to protect merit-based selection resulted in the formation of a category of Constituency Awards which saw political clientelism become a formal institution of service delivery.

This policy case reveals further implications of Solomon Islands' broader political dynamic and this policy area's distribution of power and resources. The country's broader political dynamic impeded collective action and mutual trust needed for effective policy-making. Complex, multi-agency reforms across agencies that changed costs, like tertiary loans or demand-led training, were difficult. Solomon Islands' lack of shared trust and coordination in national resource distribution was reflected in the distribution of accountabilities and resources in this policy area, which presented elite policy capture. There was disproportionate influence and voice by those in Solomon Islands' education elite, and those seeking to join it through limited tertiary scholarships. Those excluded from higher education and formal employment lacked collective platforms to advocate for resourcing, or strong civil society organisations advocating against elite capture. Instead individual pressure was focused on politicians to access "a piece of the cake". This view of national resources as a "cake" rather than a common effort with trade-offs for long-term outcomes also reflects a common issue in Solomon Islands' broader political dynamic affecting policy-making.

This case study also presents implications for the political effects of education in Solomon Islands. Tertiary education holds powerful potential for individual and national economic, social and political participation and change. However, in Solomon Islands' political economy, elite capture reinforced overseas tertiary scholarships as a tool of elite replication. There was political contestation in the policy area between elite students chosen by academic merit, and those chosen by political connection – potentially replacing elite pathways. This unequal distribution of resources and power over access to education has political implications for Solomon Islands – further fuelling the inequities, disagreements and mistrust in Solomon Islands' political dynamic which undermine the ability to resolve long-term resourcing problems.

Specific education sectoral dynamics were also evident in this case study which enabled policy and institutional change. Even with significant donor influence, the legitimacy of public investments in education and credible and highly qualified bureaucratic leadership of education reform, indicate formal education institutions which are nationally-owned and credible. These factors enabled some launch and delivery of successful bureaucratic-led reforms including for expanded local and vocational provision. Increased accountability and transparency of scholarships information may change institutional incentives and behaviours. One of the most significant changes achieved in the policy area is that of expanded local provision. Gradually increasing legitimacy of domestic tertiary provision, delivering benefits for the broader community, is likely to change the pressured expectation of scholarships leading overseas. Along with government and donor investments in increased local tertiary capacity, the increasing numbers of Solomon Islanders accessing higher education has potential to influence change in Solomon Islands' political system. Synthesis, analysis, findings and multiple practical implications of this research for policy stakeholders in Solomon Islands and beyond are captured in Chapters 8 and 9.

5: Sharing the cake: Vanuatu's Government-Funded Scholarships

Introduction

This chapter investigates policy-making on Vanuatu's Government-Funded Scholarships (VGFS) spanning 1997 to 2019. Youthful and rapidly urbanising post-independence Vanuatu had limited higher education attainment or formal employment opportunities (Cox et al., 2007). The few senior secondary completers relied on donor funded scholarships to access higher education provided overseas. This case study begins with the VGFS programme's establishment in 1997 with Australian aid project support to the Ministry of Education (MoE). For two decades VGFS was a consistent budget and policy priority for Vanuatu, presenting GoV policy-makers with multiple challenges. Rapidly increased student numbers resulted in high budget expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships, at the cost of other education policy goals. This motivated policy and reform responses and alternatives.

Within Vanuatu's broader political context for policy-making, important sectoral dynamics shaped policy-making in this area. Weak management and information systems, high student numbers, political instability and personalised selection pressures on merit-based selection processes all placed pressure on responsible officials in the Tertiary Scholarships Coordination unit (TSCU). Donor funded budget analysis presenting expenditure misaligned with priorities, donor advocacy for change, media and civil society attention and public complaints, together influenced policy change.

Legislative and education strategy reforms and specific scholarships policy and management changes from 2014 resulted in greater compliance with scholarships policy, and controls on budget and personalised selection practices. Supported by a change in accountabilities (who was held responsible for which education service), these reforms shifted policy and budget focus towards support to basic education, local tertiary study and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Vanuatu policy-makers launched major policy alternatives to overseas tertiary scholarships spending included a student loans scheme and expanded domestic provision through establishment of the National University of Vanuatu (NUV). The case study presents important broader and sectoral dynamics shaping this policy-making experience differently.

5.1: Overseas tertiary scholarships: Prominence and rapid growth

Scholarships for overseas university study have been important to Vanuatu's national development, and a significant employment policy response as a major investment to meet employer needs. Since independence in 1980, Vanuatu's leaders faced the challenge of building administrative capabilities with few local staff trained to higher levels (Cox et al., 2007, pp. 35-37). Local higher education training facilities were insufficient, requiring overseas training to meet skills gaps. Tertiary training costs were out of reach of most parents and students, requiring donor and public funding.

5.1.1: VGFS policy and management from 1997

From independence, overseas tertiary scholarships were provided by external donors. In 1997, most studied nearby: 68 per cent in Pacific institutions, half of these in Fiji, notably USP (GoV, 1997, pp. 3-4). Delivering some subjects locally, USP sited its law school at the Emalus campus in 1996 (Leckie, 2018). Australia, New Zealand, and France provided 87 per cent of scholarships, in increasing numbers (Table 5.1); Australian scholarships more than doubling. This growth was eclipsed by the very large growth in Vanuatu funded scholarships, from 10 in 1999 to 141 offered in 2013 –discussed further at 5.1.2.

Table 5.1: Scholarships available for ni-Vanuatu for overseas study in 1999 and 2015

Sponsor	Approximate Number of New Awards Available 1999	Number of New Awards 2013	Country of Study	
			Pacific Region Institutions	Sponsor country
Australia	30	73	Y	Y
France	40	49	Y	Y
New Zealand	30	42	Y	Y
Vanuatu	10	141	Y	
Brunei	1	N/A		Y
Canada	2	N/A		Y
China	1	5		Y
Commonwealth	1-2	N/A	Y	
Japan	1-2	N/A		Y
UK (Commonwealth)	1	N/A		Y
US (Hawaii)	1-2	N/A		Y

Table 5.1 Sources: (GoV, 1998b; MoET, 2001-2023)

Australian and New Zealand aid scholarships goals and operations in Vanuatu reflected approaches in other Pacific countries (see 3.4.3) (DFAT, 2016b; MFAT, 2019). A key difference in Vanuatu was the prominence of French scholarships: provided through l'Agence Universitaire Francaise (AUF) for local study of economic and social studies bachelors (AUF, 2014), as well as scholarships to New Caledonia and France (AUF, 2014; GNC, 2019; GoF, 2018). Ni-Vanuatu rarely took up available Chinese scholarships in the 1990s, potentially due to the prominence of established training pathways and foreign languages. In 2006 the Chinese government announced training for 2,000 Pacific officials and technical personnel over three years (Crocombe, 2007); and in 2014, 7,000 Pacific scholarships and training opportunities

(Meick et al., 2018). China's annual scholarship numbers to Vanuatu have since grown from 9 in 2009 to 23 in 2018 (Zhang & Marinaccio, 2019).

Scholarship donors' involvement with Vanuatu Government processes varied over time. From the 1980s a Scholarships Board including representatives from across government met to select donor-funded awards (AusAID & GoV, 1997). This later became the National Scholarships & Training Board (NSTB). Vanuatu's Training and Scholarships Coordination Unit (TSCU) was established in 1988 and became responsible for advice and secretarial support to the Board, and processing donor-funded scholarships. An Australian aid project from 1997 sought to strengthen the TSCU, partly to improve the administration of Australian-funded scholarships (AusAID & GoV, 1997). One education official involved in 1998 described Australia and New Zealand as *"very active players in scholarships"* (VGE-1).

There was significant policy and systems development in 1997. Presented by Minister of Education Joe Natuman and acting Principal Scholarships Officer Amos T Sheyrild the TSCU's 1997 Annual Report identified strengths, implementation challenges and priorities to be addressed, and revised and clearer objectives. The TSCU had coordinated over 1000 scholarships since its establishment in 1988, worth 365 million Vatu annually. The report noted concern that too many students each year had their awards terminated because of poor academic progress or other reasons. The TSCU's institutional constraints included two vacancies of eight staff positions, inadequate office space, computer equipment and vehicle access, lack of a scholarships database, and *"disturbance from political instability"* (GoV, 1997, p. iv). Because of staff shortages, *"not all tasks were being carried out"* (AusAID & GoV, 1997, p. 2). The report noted that since its establishment in 1988, the TSCU's missions, aims and objectives had become *"vague and disorderly"* (GoV, 1997, p. 2). One of its first activities under the AusAID strengthening project was to clarify the TSCU's mission, which was to *"increase the number of appropriately qualified and skilled ni-Vanuatu by coordinating the overseas and in-country training provided through scholarships"* (GoV, 1997, p. 2). The unit would achieve this through increasing scholarship numbers, increasing quality and effectiveness by *"recommending for selection the most academically able ni-Vanuatu applying for scholarships"*, and strengthening administrative capacity to meet clients' needs (GoV, 1997, p. 2).

Among measures to achieve these aims with AusAID support, the TSCU established the Vanuatu Government Funded Scholarships (VGFS) in 1997 to provide scholarships for the growing number of secondary school graduates (GoV, 1997). All eleven 1997 VGFS awardees

studied overseas (GoV, 1997). The TSCU was responsible for paying for institution fees, allowances to students and travel arrangements, and informing students of award conditions. Three-year (1997-2000) Australian project support to policy, legislation and institutional development introduced key scholarship policies, including terms of reference for the Scholarships Board and scholarships selection criteria. Scholarship award management processes, responsibilities and resources were thoroughly detailed with VGFS establishment (AusAID & GoV, 1997; GoV, 1997).

The national scholarship process and management structure was updated in 1997, and is presented at Figure 5.1. The TSCU was at the centre of management, although still only donors had a relationship with overseas educational institutions. There was coordination with donors at all stages of scholarship selection and management. Scholarships Board members consulted donor sponsors on selections, AusAID and NZAID forms were used, and donors arranged placements, making use of their diplomatic networks, while Vanuatu's were more limited (VGE-1).

Figure 5.1: Management structure of national scholarship process

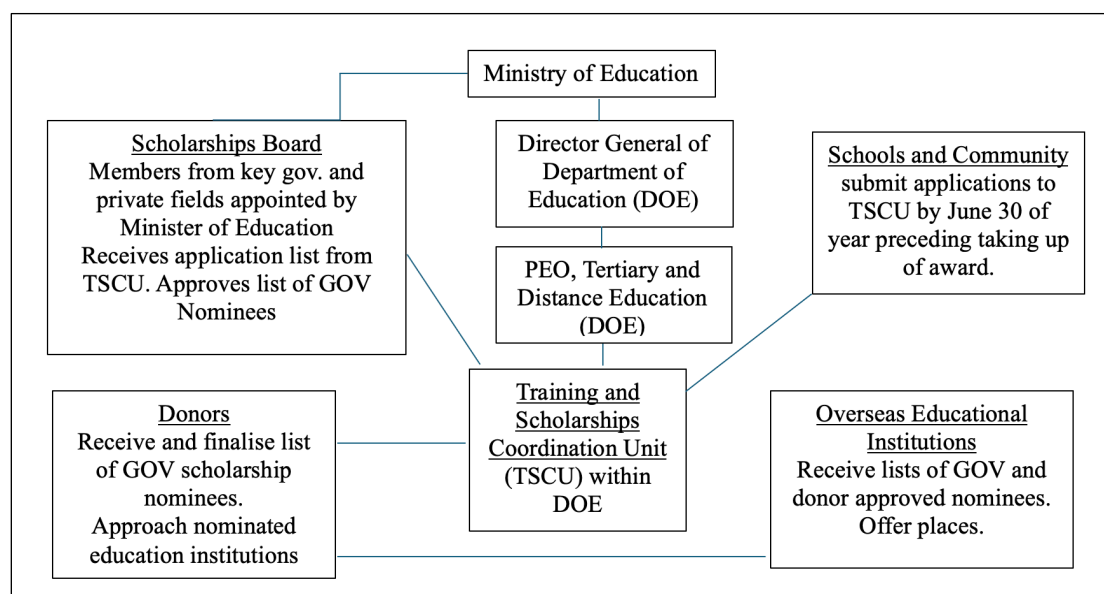


Figure 5.1 Source: (AusAID & GoV, 1997, p. 2)

The Australian project assisted with co-drafting relevant policies and procedures, and administrative strengthening including purchasing computers, establishing a student records system, supporting student counselling, and improving transparency in publication of awardees (GoV, 1997, p. 20). Australian advisers revised Scholarship Board terms of reference. Policy and procedure guidance developed in 1992 was found inadequate to deal with the volatility in

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Board decision-making resulting from frequently changing Ministers each nominating their own preferred Board representatives to decide on awards (GoV, 1997, p. 10). In changing this, the TSCU set out Departmental heads, TSCU officials and school and training provider representatives to make up the Board, approved by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport's decision in 1998 (GoV, 1998b). Scholarships Selection Policy in 1997 included that the Scholarships Board would fairly prioritise applicants without favouritism or bias, based on the overriding criterion of applicants' personal and academic quality (GoV, 1998a).

Policies on scholarships were then included in legislation (NPV, 2001). Vanuatu's first Education Act of 2001 legislated National Education Commission (NEC) responsibility for developing and implementing policies supporting the post-secondary education and training (PSET) scholarships program, to develop qualified and skilled ni-Vanuatu to further national development (NPV, 2001, p. 37). The NEC was to advise the Minister of Education and Director-General and advise, advocate for and oversee the TSCU (NPV, 2001). The TSCU had responsibility to support the NEC to identify government priorities, advise on scholarships administration, seek additional funding for scholarships, determine appeals relating to awards, and prepare annual reports to the Director General. The Act provided for the fair, transparent and merit-based selection of candidates for awards, with criteria and terms determined annually. The NEC's eleven members were appointed by the Minister of Education under guidance from the Director-General. Members were required to have skills and oversight responsibility spanning curriculum, examinations and scholarships (NPV, 2001, pp. 35-37).

The TSCU had been thoroughly reoriented, strengthened and equipped with comprehensive AusAID project focus and involvement. This support enabled the establishment of Vanuatu's own government-funded scholarships scheme, and the development of comprehensive policies and legislation for tertiary scholarships.

5.1.2: Escalating student demand and scholarships

From a strong start, the TSCU faced serious difficulties in the 2000s, including scholarships administration and demand. With few students completing the required Year 13 of secondary education in the 1990s, a former official noted that it was initially challenging to find enough candidates for scholarships (VGE-1). This helps explain the small number of scholarships offered by donors (Table 5.1). Following completion of Australian project support in 2000, budget and student data from the early 2000's period was absent, as noted in later TSCU reporting (GoV, 2010). This suggests that after AusAID support ended, there appeared to be a

rapid deterioration in core scholarships management, just as student numbers were about to increase.

Over the case study period, booming numbers of eligible secondary graduates in Vanuatu increased demand for tertiary education, pressuring MoE to provide scholarships. Table 5.2 presents this growth in student numbers at primary and secondary levels. Senior secondary student numbers almost quadrupled between 2001 and 2015. This significant growth likely arose from implementation of GoV goals to increase primary and secondary education access (GoV, 1999), supported by donor-funded Primary and Secondary education programs in the 1990s (Mather, 1997) and 2000s (Week et al., 2009), as one MoE official pointed out in this research:

“Then in 2010 that’s when we started seeing increase in number of scholarships – and I remember it went from 249 million vatus in 2012 to almost 600 million vatu. The factors that caused the decision were because we had a lot of eligible students. We expanded the secondary sector from 2003 to 2006/7/8, we expanded the senior secondary, and junior secondary – instead of a few schools offering year 13, which is the pre-foundation we had more schools offering pre-foundation – we had secondary school extension project funded by AusAID at the time”. The Minister who was Deputy PM asked to release the backlog of students doing pre-university studies at USP through funding of scholarships.” (VGE-3)

The official also noted that demand pressure was difficult for Vanuatu policy-makers and TSCU officials to meet with available government resources:

“There was a direct impact – more money was allocated to scholarships and we didn’t have enough money allocated to other programs, such as teachers. So we had to forego recruitment of teachers for scholarship funding” (VGE-3)

As Table 5.2 also presents, while primary student numbers increased by 160 per cent from 1999 to 2019, secondary numbers increased 237 per cent, and secondary completers 290 per cent. This was likely why VGFS tertiary scholarship student numbers increased rapidly over the case period, from 11 in 1997 to 613 in 2015.

Table 5.2 Vanuatu student numbers 1997 – 2020: Primary, secondary and VGFS

Note: Includes continuing and new students at each level of education

Year	1. Primary		2. Secondary		3. Senior secondary only		3. VGFS sponsored Tertiary students	
	- Source		- Source		- Source		- Source	
1997	31,747	1	6,000 (approx)	2	N/A	-	11	3
1998	34,366	1	N/A	-	N/A	-	21	3
1999	34,333	1	8,989	1	1,603	1	28	3
2000	35,674	1	10,446	1	2,401	1	N/A	-
2001	36,482	4	8,746	4	1,421	4	N/A	-
2002	37,470	4	9,610	4	1,411	4	N/A	-
2003	N/A	-	10,362	4	1,622	4	N/A	-
2004	38,960	4	10,591	4	1,634	4	44	4
2005	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-	44	4
2006	N/A	-	N/A	-	N/A	-	103	4
2007	37,667	4	15,257	4	3,428	4	105	4
2008	38,658	4	16,734	4	3,833	4	120	4
2009	38,672	4	17,877	4	4,441	4	107	4
2010	41,783	4	18,298	4	4,461	4	172	4
2011	42,352	4	18,064	4	4,286	4	326	4
2012	43,901	4	18,239	4	3,795	4	401	4
2013	47,544	4	18,843	4	3,946	4	470	4
2014	49,141	4	16,530	4	4,885	4	590	4
2015	45,931	4	20,568	4	5,336	4	613	4
2016	44,965	4	18,408	4	N/A	4	498	4
2017	49,005	4	19,231	4	N/A	4	570	4
2018	52,789	4	19,983	4	4,235	4	986	4
2019	54,820	4	21,379	4	4,662	4	1,257	4
2020	56,633	4	23,943	4	5,455	4	875	4

Notes:

- (1) UIS data (1997-2000) are likely over-estimates; UIS numbers are higher than MoET data in MoET Education Statistical Digest years (2001-2020)
- (2) Estimate from GoV Education Master Plan 1999
- (3) Senior Secondary figures excluded Y10 from 2018 onwards and excluded 14 in 2018 only; explaining the lower figures than 2015

Table 5.2 Sources:

1: (UIS, 2025); 2: (GoV, 1999, p. 66); 3: (GoV, 1998b, p. 1); 4: (MoET, 2001-2023)

While student numbers significantly increased, proportional access to tertiary education remained limited because the population grew rapidly. By 2013, only around one in 14 ni-Vanuatu had attained any post-secondary education (GoV, 2013), and by 2019, less than one in 20 a tertiary education (GoV, 2019d). In post-independence Vanuatu, limited budget, infrastructure and qualified trainers constrained local tertiary education, even as student numbers increased. This inequality was structural. As part of the ‘Re-thinking Pacific Education’ dialogue in 2004, ni-Vanuatu educationalist John Niroa described Vanuatu’s ‘pyramidal’ education structure: broad primary school access narrowing to limited higher education access. Few students could hope to climb what he labelled the ‘Mountain of Opportunity and Hope’, with most pushed out earlier (Niroa, 2004, pp. 32-39). Intense competition to reach the top drove political attention and pressure over tertiary education access.

As student numbers started to escalate in the 2000s, priorities for the VGFS were also shared in the ‘Re-thinking Pacific Education’ dialogue of Pacific regional educators. Vanuatu educator Thyna raised concern about national identity and foreign dependence; and that returning graduates be cautious about the changes they bring in order to retain Vanuatu’s values. He identified key issues in Vanuatu’s scholarships program, of (1) gender inclusion, (2) lack of national human resource planning to guide priorities, (3) importance of increased Vanuatu Government funding rather than donor reliance, (4) a need for post-graduate scholarships; and (5) government budget favouring Anglophone over Francophone institutions. Thyna also called for more scholarships for the increasing numbers of suitable candidates (Thyna, 2004, pp. 189-193). Responding to demand pressure, TSCU Principal Scholarships Officer Amos Tatangis also publicly called for more scholarships to be awarded (RNZ, 2006a).

These calls were mismatched with Vanuatu’s formal and donor-supported education strategies. Donors contributed significant aid to Vanuatu education, and jointly with MoE prioritised basic education policies and planning, in Vanuatu’s *Priorities and Action Agenda* (PAA)(GoV, 2006c). Vanuatu’s Education Road Map (VERM) of 2009 included targets of achieving a net primary enrolment rate of 100 per cent by 2015 (the MDG Education For All target), strengthening financial management and accountability, and enrolling more technical and

vocational trainees for skill development (GoV, 2009b). Partnership funding and agreements with donors did not prioritise spending available budget on increased university scholarships.

Tertiary scholarship numbers escalated rapidly in divergence from stated education policy goals, and drawing funding from achieving those goals. This responded to demand: applications for all scholarships grew from 397 in 1997, of which 11 were awarded (GoV, 1997, p. 11) to 678 in 2010, of which 174 were awarded (GoV, 2010, p. 9). MoE's expenditure on VGFS rapidly increased from 5 million Vatu in 1997 (GoV, 2010, p. 4) to 250 million in 2010 (MFEM, 2011-2023). Spending on tertiary scholarships increased annually from 2006: 2014 expenditure was 26 times that of 2007 (Table 5.4-c). All post-secondary education expenditure accounted for less than five per cent of MoE budget in 2008 (Table 5.3-a), but higher education accounted for 53 per cent of total education budget in 2014 (Table 5.3-b). A civil society representative described 2012 and 2013 as an acute period of scholarships spending and politicised selection (VCS-2)(MFEM, 2011-2023). The growth in student numbers presented in Table 5.2 and 5.4-a was matched by growth in budgeted and actual expenditure on scholarships (Table 5.3-b). This table also presents high rates of overspending on scholarships budget – including by 135 per cent in 2013 (MFEM, 2011-2023).

Table 5.3-a Vanuatu education budget: sub-sector shares of actual expenditure 2008-2011 (%)

Source: (GoV, 2012c, p. 26)

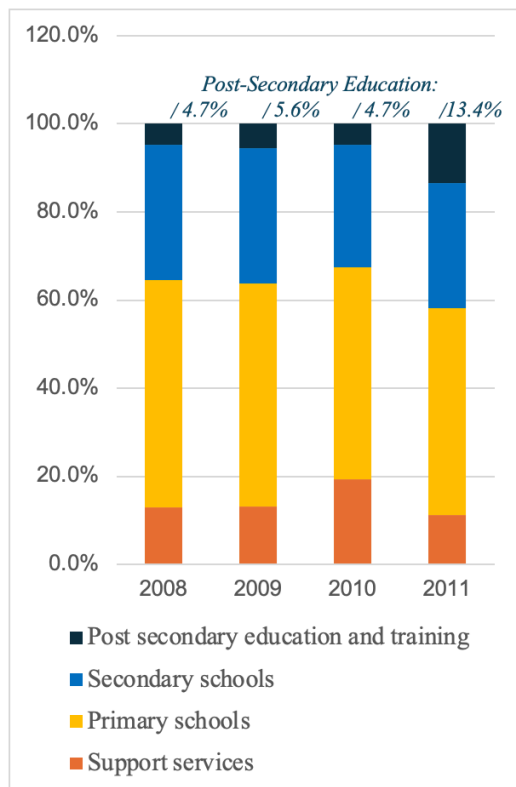


Table 5.3-b Vanuatu education sub-sector costs, 2013-2017

Source: (UNICEF & MoET, 2018, pp. 40-41)

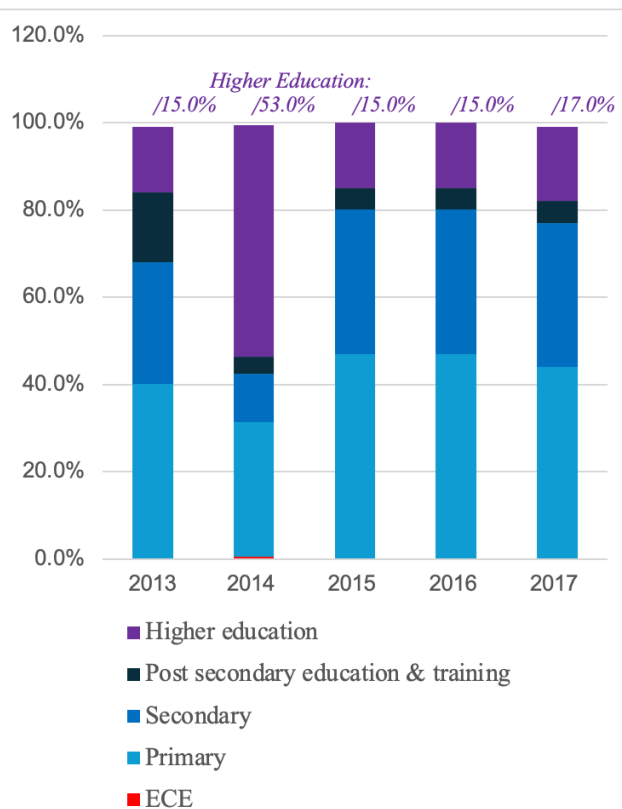


Table 5.4-a Vanuatu Government sponsored students, 1997 - 2020

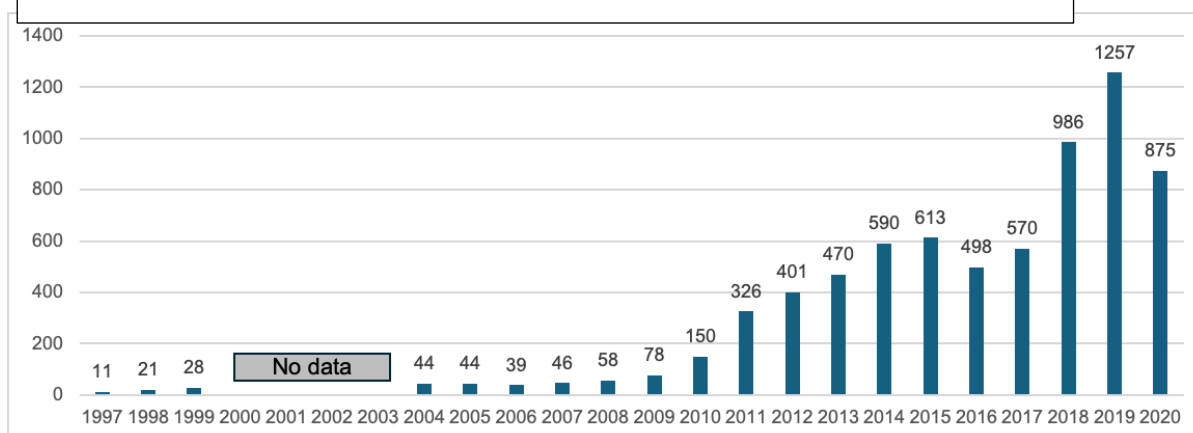
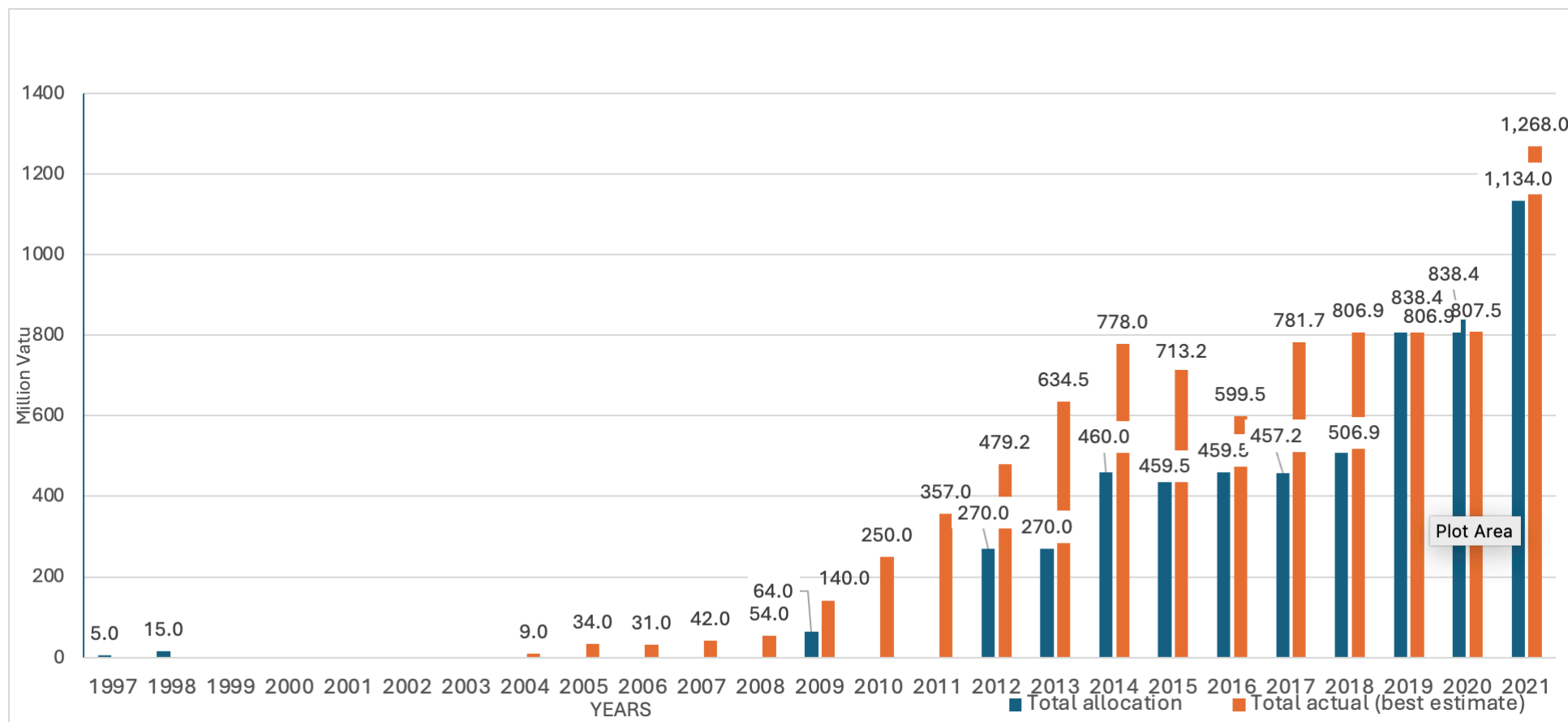


Table 5.4-a Sources: (GoV, 1998b, p. 1; MoET, 2001-2023)

Table 5.4-b Vanuatu Government Funded Scholarships expenditure: Budget vs actual, 1997 – 2021 (VUV, millions)



.Table 5.4-b Sources: (GoV, 1998b, p. 4; MFEM, 2011-2023)

The small size of Vanuatu's overall budget meant that such over-spending was funded by reducing already low spending on essential education operations (VCS-2)(GoV, 2012c). Spending on primary schools consistently made up roughly 50% of total expenditure, but this was almost all on teacher salaries, leaving very little to meet other costs for quality learning (Cox et al., 2007; GoV, 2012c). A development partner noted that expenditure on scholarships and teachers left as little as two per cent of education budget for operational expenses (VDP-4). This left classrooms unstaffed and unsupplied, and sparked internal government dispute about budget priorities at the time (VDP-4).

5.1.3: Timeline: Tracing leadership, policy events and budget

The Timeline at Table 5.4 presents national and education sector leaders, key policy events, and expenditure on overseas tertiary scholarships over the 22-year case study period, to trace policy decision-making and important trends in evolving policy.

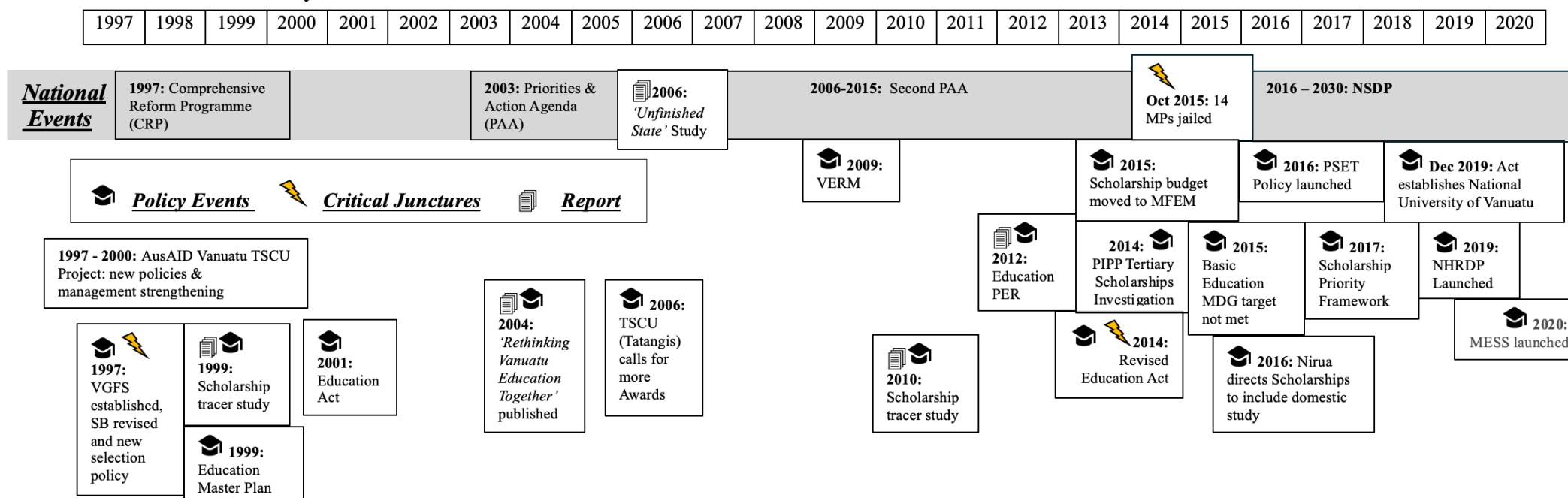
The first component at Table 5.4-a, 'Leadership', records Prime Ministers, Ministers of Education and MoE DGs over the case study period. Political volatility was significant – with at least 13 Ministerial and 21 Prime Ministerial changes. Exceptions were Prime Ministers Lini (2004-2008) and Salwai (2016-2020). There was also volatility in the DG position in the early years, but this solidified significantly with only two DGs in the last eight years to 2019. Incomplete records mean that brief periods of appointment may have been missed, meaning that actual volatility at all three levels may have been even greater, particularly in earlier years. In this case study political volatility appeared to significantly impact scholarships selection and numbers, management function and policy development, because of the short term time horizons and political pressures of those appointed. The most significant change was during the Nirua Government of 2016-2020, when stable leadership at all three levels may have provided enabling conditions for more deliberate and consistent policy decisions.

Table 5.5-a: Leadership

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<i>From available records: incomplete</i>				5th, 6th, 7th Parliaments: 1995-2004				8th Parliament: 2004-08			9th Parliament: 2008-12				10th Parliament: 2012-15				11th Parliament: 2016-20				
Prime Ministers	Vohor (‘95-‘96; ‘96-‘98, ‘04); Korman (1996); Carlot (1997); Kalpokas (‘98-‘99); Sope (‘99-‘01); Natapei (‘01-‘04)							Ham Lini (‘04-‘08)			Natapei (‘08; ‘09; ‘10; ‘11); Vohor (‘09; ‘11); Kilman (‘10; ‘11-‘13)				Kilman (‘11-13; ‘15-‘16); Kalosil (2013-14); Natuman (‘14-‘15)				Salwai, (2016 – 20)				
Ministers of Education	Kalpokas (‘96, ‘03, ‘04), Natuman (‘98), J. Sese (‘02-‘03); Brown (‘03-‘04)							Natuman (‘04-‘06) Tasso (‘07) Leinavao (‘07-‘08)			Salwai (‘08-‘10, ‘11) Simon (2010-‘11) Pipite (‘11-12)				Kalsakau (‘12-‘13), Loughman (‘13-‘15); Carlot (‘15); Daniel (‘15-‘16)				Nirua (‘16-‘20)				
Directors- General	Sese (‘97), Andrews (‘98-99), (1999 – 2000 N/A), Kalo (‘01), Vuti (‘02), Nako (‘02-‘05)							Nako (‘02-‘05), Andrew (‘05’)			Lamoureux (‘06-‘08), Vuti (‘09)				Dick (‘11-‘17)				Bergmans (‘18-)				

The second component (Table 5.5-b), 'Policy events' records major policy events and initiatives including key pieces of advice to Government, Ombudsman reports, policy decisions and legislative changes. Responding to concerns about scholarships and donor pressure, in 2014 the intensity of policy events by government and donors increased in 2014, including the revised Education Act and external pressure about high scholarships expenditure. This also aligned with timing of greater stability among politicians and senior bureaucrats. As further explored in section 5.3.4, the jailing of 14 MPs in 2015 was a national critical juncture, after which a new generation of politicians was elected who went on to lead reforms. Within the policy area, two prominent critical junctures emerge: the establishment of VGFS in 1997 (section 5.1.1), and the revision of the Education Act in 2014 to introduce sanctions for interference in scholarships selection, in 2014 (section 5.3.2). Major policy reforms and policy alternatives to overseas tertiary scholarships emerged later in the case study period.

Table 5.5-b: Policy events



Sources: Policy events presented above are illustrative of sources presented in this chapter text.

Tables 5.5-a and 5.5-b are combined with the table of budget expenditure at Table 5.4-b into a Table 5.5-c: 'Leadership, policy events and expenditure', comparing who made policy decisions, and their spending impacts. Continued leadership volatility in Vanuatu's 9th and 10th parliaments (2008 – 2012) coincided with a rapid increase in scholarships expenditure - a link supported by donor comments (VDP-2)(sub-section 5.1.4). Following public expenditure review and donor and civil society advocacy, key reforms and budget controls affecting scholarships resulted from decisions under a period of greater leadership stability under Education Ministers Loughman (2013-15) and Nirua (2016-2020). These controls and policy changes, further discussed in this chapter, stabilised scholarship expenditure but at high levels, before increasing again to a new high of VUV1.3 billion after the case study period.

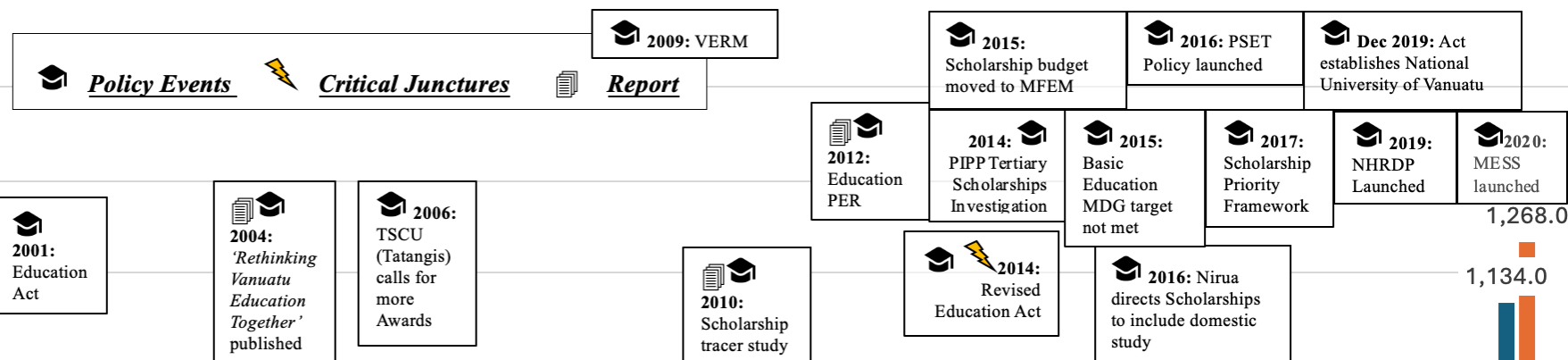
Table 5.5-c: Vanuatu overseas tertiary scholarships timeline: (1) Leadership; (2) Policy events; and (3) Budget expenditure

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
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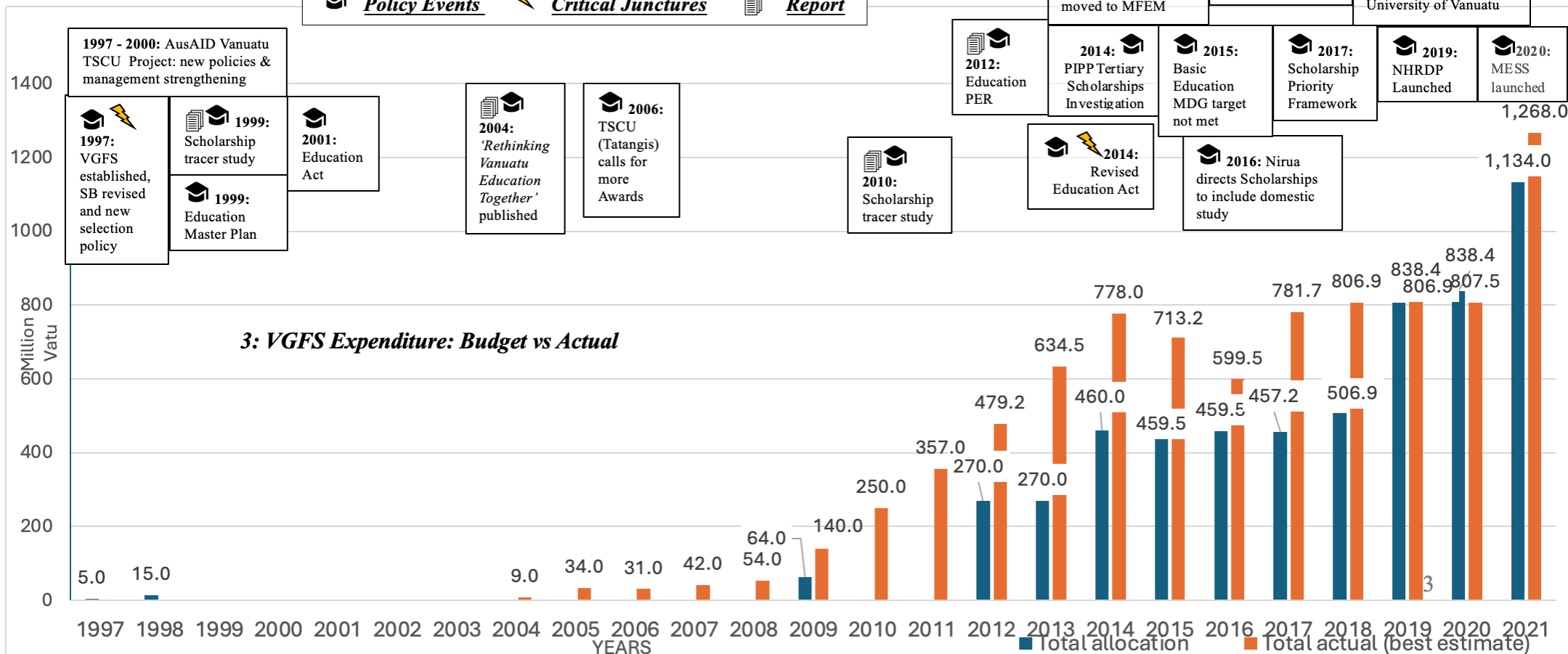
<i>From available records: incomplete</i>		5 th , 6 th , 7 th Parliaments: 1995-2004	8 th Parliament: 2004-08	9 th Parliament: 2008-12	10 th Parliament: 2012-15	11 th Parliament: 2016-20
Prime Ministers	Vohor ('95-'96; '96-'98, '04); Korman (1996); Carlot (1997); Kalpokas ('98-'99); Sope ('99-'01); Natapei ('01-'04)	Ham Lini ('04-'08)	Natapei ('08; '09; '10; '11); Vohor ('09; '11); Kilman ('10; '11-'13)	Kilman ('11-13; '15-'16); Kalosil (2013-14); Natuman ('14-'15)	Salwai, (2016 – 20)	
Ministers of Education	Kalpokas ('96, '03, '04), Natuman ('98), J. Sese ('02-'03); Brown ('03-'04)	Natuman ('04-'06) Tasso ('07) Leinavao ('07-'08)	Salwai ('08-'10, '11) Simon (2010-'11) Pipite ('11-12)	Kalsakau ('12-'13), Loughman ('13-'15); Carlot ('15); Daniel ('15-'16)	Nirua ('16-'20)	
Directors-General	Sese ('97), Andrews ('98-99), (1999 – 2000 N/A), Kalo ('01), Vuti ('02), Nako ('02-'05)	Nako ('02-'05), Andrew ('05')	Lamoureux ('06-'08), Vuti ('09)	Dick ('11-'17)	Bergmans ('18-)	

<i>National Events</i>	1997: Comprehensive Reform Programme (CRP)		2003: Priorities & Action Agenda (PAA)	2006: 'Unfinished State' Study	2006-2015: Second PAA	Oct 2015: 14 MPs jailed	2016 – 2030: NSDP
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2: Policy Events



3: VGFS Expenditure: Budget vs Actual



5.1.4: Political volatility and recognition of budget and management problems

Interviews with research participants reflected their shared concerns about incentives, merit-based selection and budget impacts. Table 5.6 presents the number of times participant comments referred to ideas codes (see 1.2.2 and Appendix 3). Several significant themes could be linked to the semi-structured interview questions I asked – such as ‘change’, ‘chronology’, and ‘strengths and weaknesses’. Other themes reflect specific issues that were significant to participants. ‘Merit-based selection’ was the most frequently raised theme, followed by ‘incentives, accountability and transparency’.¹¹

Table 5.6: Vanuatu Government Funded Scholarships: Top participant comments

Rank	Categories	Number of mentions	% of total comment code data
1	Merit-based selection	79	5.5%
2	Incentives, accountability & transparency	67	4.6%
3	Change	63	4.4%
4	Ministers and their influence	48	3.3%
5	Budget: Tertiary scholarships	46	3.2%
6	Development partner role	44	3.1%
7	Chronology of tertiary scholarships	41	2.8%
8	Skills mismatch and graduate unemployment	38	2.6%
9	Leadership	37	2.6%
10	Local tertiary delivery	37	2.6%
11	Strengths & weaknesses in tertiary scholarships program	36	2.5%

Education officials recognised political volatility as a challenge affecting scholarships management and selection even in 1997 (GoV, 1997, pp. 10, 23)(VGE-1). As presented in table 5.5-b, a high turnover of leaders between 2008 and 2015 coincided with rapidly increased scholarships spending. The connection of high leadership turnover, decisions and spending was described by one development partner involved at the time:

“Between Pipite and Loughman, a succession of Ministers... one was there for a week. Pretty much everyone was coming in with a new idea on scholarships – and increasing

¹¹ ‘Budget for tertiary scholarships’ was the fifth most frequently raised issue. The actors with agency most commonly raised were ‘Ministers and their influence’ at fourth highest, ‘development partner role’ at sixth, and leadership at ninth. Other key issues raised in the policy area included skills mismatch and graduate unemployment, and local tertiary delivery.

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the number of scholarships - not even looking at the cycle, just creating new scholarships. It had a huge impact on the government budget and it was not sustainable, costing too much money to the government... over 80% was going to salaries and after scholarships, like 2% for activities. When Bob Loughman came in he did a bit of cleaning of what was happening” (VDP-4).

The development partner comment indicates short-term decisions on scholarships increasing student numbers and budget costs, until more stability in Minister Loughman’s term enabled control over scholarship decisions and practices. This chapter presents the education policy and legislation decisions of Ministers Loughman (2013-15) and Jean-Pierre Nirua (2016-2020) as particularly significant for policy development in the case area. Factors in this change included external evidence and advocacy.

As scholarship numbers and expenditure grew significantly, donors funded consultant advice on student numbers, budget and management processes. A donor-funded Public Expenditure Review (PER) of the education sector in 2012 identified a peaking scholarships expenditure problem and conflict behind it:

“The GoV funding requirement for scholarships is currently in dispute. Reflecting continuing awards of overseas scholarships without regard to the funding provisions for scholarships set by MoE’s annual budgets the funding requirement in 2012 as estimated by MoE is some VT507.5 million as against an original 2012 budget provision of VT 270 million” (GoV, 2012c, p. 65).

The report identified that high and exceeded scholarships spending had diverted required funds from activities to achieve education goals, contributing to a decline in key education indicators including primary enrolment (GoV, 2012c, pp. 1-2). While post-secondary scholarships spending had dramatically increased, GoV funding of primary and secondary spending declined, leaving primary education development priorities almost exclusively addressed by development partners. The report described a critical disconnect between policy and decisions:

“Despite the best endeavours of MoE senior management it appears that decisions and instructions from a political level pay scant regard to either stated policy priorities or funding availability” (GoV, 2012c, p. 73).

In order to bring excessive tertiary scholarship spending under control, restore budget predictability and ensure sufficient funding to meet primary education goals, the report recommended:

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“Steadily reducing GoV net funding of scholarships to no more than VT250 million by 2017 and beyond – the budgeted amount for 2010 – by either cutting the future number of scholarship awards and/or introducing substantial co-payments (possibly via loans by scholarship recipients)” (GoV, 2012c, p. 6)

In 2009 the Australia- Vanuatu Partnership for Development had committed both governments to delivering on VERM education targets, including a GoV funding commitment to primary school grants. A 2014 Australian aid report assessed progress on VERM commitments as *“disappointing overall”* (DFAT, 2014a). This added to PER findings and UNESCO reporting that Vanuatu was unlikely to meet the 2015 MDG target for universal basic education (UNESCO, 2015). Donors used this evidence to raise concern with senior education officials about budget decisions.

Other external actors added to evidence and advocacy. After the PER, anti-corruption organisation Transparency Vanuatu criticised the government’s failure to deliver the VERM policy commitment to fee-free basic education (TV, 2013b). Analysis by the Pacific Institute of Public Policy (PIPP), an independent think tank based in Port Vila, questioned whether the rapid scholarships expenditure increase was a solid policy to invest in youth leaders and future workforce, as it aspired to be, or was politically driven. PIPP calculated that addressing challenges of basic education required an additional VUV510 million – the same amount added to the scholarships budget (PIPP, 2014b). In 2015, IMF’s Article IV staff consultation report identified that controlling spending growth in areas including tertiary scholarships, a driver of frequent supplementary budgets, would provide the budget room needed for priority development and social expenditures (IMF, 2015b, p. 13).

Given their important role funding basic education needs, Australian and New Zealand aid officials both supported and used this evidence base to advocate for policy change (VDP-4). PER and PIPP reports both recognised the difficulty in changing political will on scholarship spending (GoV, 2012c; PIPP, 2014b). A senior official noted that high expenditure on tertiary scholarships was also recognised as a problem by senior bureaucrats, including in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) (VGO-1). Evidence, development partner advocacy and senior officials’ concerns influenced policy change by Education Minister Loughman and senior MoE officials (section 5.3).

Donor-supported evidence also assessed the quality, outcomes and management of VGFS. Following up a similar 1999 study, a tracer study of scholarship students in 2010 informed

human resource development planning in Vanuatu (Nako & Nako, 2010). It found that the scholarship program was received positively by students, had assisted them to gain employment, and was building public service capacity. The study also identified gaps in course selection and data systems (Nako & Nako, 2010).

Further evidence collected at the time and in this research indicated key problems that had developed in VGFS' first 15 years. These included high- and volatile expenditure diverted from other priorities, TSCU management and resourcing constraints to manage larger student numbers, inconsistent payment of student allowances and inequity of access and pathways to scholarships (GoV, 2010, 2012c; PIPP, 2014b). The quality of training received (VCS-2, VDP-2), the relevance of chosen subjects to Vanuatu's needs (VGE-1, VPA-4) and graduates' difficulties finding employment (VDP-2) were also policy challenges raised by research participants, including at high levels of the public service (VGO-1).

Rapid scholarship numbers growth increased pressure on the TSCU. One involved education official described these pressures from the start in the late 1990s:

"It was a really small piece of cake – now bigger. When I started I saw so many challenges - we have so many parents coming in, people disappointed and frustrated because they didn't get a scholarship. Ten people in the family can't share one small cake with all of them... we can just say "sorry, we couldn't get everybody on board".
(VGE-1)

An internal briefing document from 2010 identified management and budget problems. The pressure of responding to parents and students combined with stakeholders' misunderstanding of the unit's heavy workload impeded the unit from organising NEC meetings, and meant there was no time or resources for student support or tutorials. The student record system failed to provide data, and the TSCU had no control of scholarship budget, which made planning difficult, and payments and financial reporting indirect and unclear. The document called for these issues to be addressed with increased resources and personnel to manage the rapidly increased number of scholarships (GoV, 2010). Beyond resourcing and administrative capability, public and political pressures were significant.

Rapidly increasing secondary completion increased the number of eligible post-secondary students, while rapid political turnover appeared to increase politicised and personalised decisions driving greater VGFS student numbers. These decisions created expenditure pressures which worsened management problems for education officials and raised donor

concerns over compromised education goals. These drove donor and public advocacy and pressures for government policy action. The next section explores further the politicised compromise of merit-based selection.

5.2: Politics shaping VGFS selection

From available documentary evidence and multiple participant interviews presented in this section, high demand and selection procedures compromised by politicised and personalised selections were primary factors driving significantly increased spending on scholarships, implementation problems, and departure from policy commitments and management procedures.

5.2.1: Merit-based selection compromised by politicised and personalised selection

The PER linked high scholarships expenditure to personalised and politicised selection of scholarships. To address this selection problem, the PER report recommended to:

“Strictly apply merit-based principles for the award of GoV-funded scholarships, recall scholarship recipients failing intermediate stages in their progress to an award and provide for representation of the PMO and MFEM on the National Education Commission.” (GoV, 2012c, p. 4)

Compromised selection of tertiary scholarships attracted wider media and civil society attention from 2013 (TV, 2013a; Willie, 2014b). PIPP identified that ministerial discretion over scholarships caused students to be accepted who fell short of required academic standards, while basic education problems persisted (PIPP, 2014b). Scholarships selection was also raised as a concern by Transparency Vanuatu:

“...74 new scholarships being recalled due to abuse of established selection procedures, the scholarships having been granted to wantoks and family members and not on merit, calling into question the integrity of the National Education Commission (NEC).” (TV, 2013a)

A training provider representative linked increased student demand over time to compromise of merit-based selection, comparing the late 1990s and later pressures past 2010:

“It was more merit-based, there were more scholarships available and not enough students. But now there are more students and not enough scholarships. Because of

population growth, more students coming from high schools now, not enough to cater for everybody.” (VTP-3)

While clearly established in policies, processes and legislation in 1997 (5.1.1), merit-based selection was subverted by personalised and politicised selection through personal requests and directions of individuals in authority, particular Ministers of Education. These requests resulted in either replacement of merit-based awardees, or longer lists exceeding budgeted numbers. Research participants from several stakeholder groups, as well as media and civil society articles, linked compromised selection processes to under-qualified students failing early (VGE-1)(VTP-2), or taking too long to complete degrees (VDP-2)(VGE-3), as well as exceeded budgets (PIPP, 2014b; Willie, 2014c). When numbers were exceeded, costs which couldn't be met included tuition fees (VDP-4), student allowances (VDP-4) and support for post-graduation transition to employment (VTP-1). Delays and failures to pay tuition fees and allowances frequently attracted media attention during and beyond the case study period (NPV, 2019; RNZ, 2013a; Roberts, 2021a, 2021b; VBTC, 2022; Willie, 2021).

In 2013, opposition leader Edward Natapei complained to media about a Cabinet Minister who sent two children to university study in Fiji among scholarships that had been awarded *"in favour of students with lower marks but because they are children from some of the political leaders, government ministers, and leaders in the country. They have been given the scholarship in the place of those who deserved it"* (RNZ, 2013b).

Personalised selection was a deep-rooted problem. Three participants described long-term pressures on NSTB members and TSCU officers (VGE-1,6; VTP-3). Education officials were aware of the practice *"right from the beginning"* of the VGFS, *"in fact... carried out by the Minister"*, and even earlier through donor-funded scholarships (VGE-6). Nimbtik, in his 2016 thesis discussing corruption in Vanuatu, identified personalised scholarships selection during his time working in the TSCU as formative in his understanding of clientelism by Vanuatu politicians:

"My career in the public sector began at the Ministry of Education as a Scholarship Officer in 1998, and it was from there that I first discovered how politicians, both elected and appointed, misuse their public position and authority to influence the sharing of scholarships to their immediate families and close political allies... I encountered conflict between Francophone versus Anglophone persons on the allocation of the scholarship awards. I witnessed politicians and State Ministers who

worked through the Minister of Education to influence the process and policies of the scholarships in favour of their relatives and immediate families. We received calls and letters from State Ministers and appointed politicians pressuring us to grant scholarships in favour of their children and close relatives... Each year the scholarship office received four to five hundred applicants, and our task was to select the best out of the best to be awarded the scholarship. The job was challenging because of the increased political interference in the process of allocation and administration of the scholarships. The end result was that the sons and daughters of political leaders and supporters were awarded scholarships irrespective of their merits, at the broader expense of the other students who deserved the scholarship award but did not have political connections.” (Nimbtik, 2016b, pp. ix-x).

The corruption described by Nimbtik fits global definitions introduced at 2.3.1. PIPP found that scholarships had increasingly become “*a tool of patronage for Ministers and MPs*”, in both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, to secure coalitions and make up government numbers (PIPP, 2014b). Similarly, Nimbtik, from personal experience, placed personalised scholarships selection firmly within his thesis of patron-client relations in Vanuatu, presented at 3.3. Sharing similar recollections from that period, one education official involved at the time described politicians’ behaviour, linking personalised and politicised selection to political patronage in Vanuatu’s closely networked context:

“They would give a list – sometimes they hadn’t been accepted to courses. Hadn’t finished Year 14. Before it was just one at a time... It changed in 2000, it became obvious... politicians got involved. They wanted to please their people, their voters. Vanuatu is very small. People voted you – they’ll come and say “what can you do for me?”, and what can you do as a politician” (VGE-1)

One development partner described compromised selection getting worse from 2000 to 2010, particularly when there was rapid turnover of Ministers over 2004-2006, and then when Marcellino Pipite was Minister (2012) (VDP-4). Table 5.5-c presents significant scholarships budget growth in both these periods. Two training providers reported that at Ministerial direction, combined awards lists would include merit-based, Minister’s, Prime Minister’s, and ‘social inclusion’ lists (VTP-1,-3). ‘Social inclusion’ was a category to include students who were disadvantaged, including by geography (Willie, 2021). Two education officials described that multiple MPs would personally add to award lists, and Ministers within the ruling coalition would go to the Minister of Education to ask for a scholarship for an individual (VGE-1,6).

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During frequent Cabinet turnover, personalised addition to awards list would worsen as multiple Ministers tried to secure benefits for their networks during their short term. The Minister of Education position became associated with personalised selection of scholarships. One education official described that *“Every Minister that comes into the MoE wants their family and people from the communities to go in... through the back door.”* (VGE-6)

While politicians’ involvement was more widely known, participants also cited senior officials using their positions to gain selection advantage (VGE-1). One political advisor described senior public servants using their positions to get their children into good high schools, even without the required marks (VPA-4). Several participants provided examples where students selected based on academic merit were subsequently excluded in favour of personally selected students, with claims the TSCU lied to students and parents about the GPA score of students selected ahead of them (VTP-3). A private sector participant said that *“the scholarship I was supposed to be given got given to a Minister’s daughter, to fund schooling in Fiji – that person lasted about a year and lost their scholarship”* (VPS-1).

Education officials explained that TSCU staff were a small and poorly resourced team pressured by powerful individuals (VGE-1,-2,-6). They would try to resist personalised selection in various ways, as described by former and current education officials interviewed:

“For example a Minister of Finance says – my son is in NZ and he wants a scholarship – we would try our very best to say “we are not entertaining political interest”... We had a policy there we worked with... at the end, we would get a different list from politicians... We have door criteria, and then people who come through the window. It’s like corruption to me.” (VGE-1)

Initially, TSCU staff would refuse to add awardees who had not applied, as most personalised selections had not, and insist on a signature by the Director General or Scholarships Board (VGE-6). While this worked for a time, those in power would threaten staff, and provide their own list (VGE-1). Officials would at times ask for help from Australian and New Zealand High Commission (AHC/ NZHC) staff to uphold merit-based selection. This is described by this Education official, who also identified compromised selection as a reason that both donors reduced collaboration with the TSCU on scholarship processes:

“If we couldn’t say no, we talked to AusAID and NZAID about these influences. They did raise this issue... [but] that is why they removed their scholarships and no longer managed by TSCU, but by their own Embassies” (VGE-1)

NSTB decision-making processes were a target of compromised selection. Ministers HAD discretion over Board membership since the 1980's (5.1.1)(AusAID & GoV, 1997). Participants inside and outside government explained how Ministerial discretion over the Board undermined merit-based selection through replaced lists and overruled Board award decisions, a problem exacerbated by frequent Cabinet turnover (VGE-1, VTP-3, VDP-4). One former education official recalled the Board responding to pressure from the Minister of Education for personalised selection by listing what the Board could and couldn't approve (VGE-3). A training provider described individual requests to Board members even for students failing Year 13 (VTP-3). Board members also responded to public criticism of personalised selection by claiming they were only following orders (VCS-2). One Board member explained that members took their responsibility for awarding scholarships seriously, including ensuring awards were aligned to NSDP and policy priorities and within budget limits, and verifying the quality of destination universities (VGE-4). One training provider reported being vocal in the Board, *"always complaining"* about selection problems, but being ignored, and eventually being *"replaced by the DG's own people"* (VTP-3). A civil society representative interviewed also knew about these problems, and their impacts:

"Scholarships Board decisions were politicised – some decisions overruled by the Minister. Really high performing students are being denied their right to learn... it's just not good for Vanuatu. In terms of education you're just wasting government money, losing the investment.... It's very, very bad." (VCS-6)

Personalised and politicised selection pressures had multiple impacts and were identified by research participants as a primary problem in the policy area. The scale and prominence of these personalised selection pressures attracted national attention and criticism.

5.2.2: Clientelism of national significance – and elite capture

Nimbtik's experience, the significance of sums budgeted (Tables 5.2 and 5.4), and widespread public and media attention, indicate that personalised and politicised selection of tertiary scholarships in Vanuatu constituted clientelism of national significance. The public perceived corruption in Vanuatu's education sector as widespread: in Transparency International surveying, 41 per cent of respondents considered Vanuatu's education system "corrupt" (Bryard, 2013). One training provider linked this primarily to patronage through scholarships selection:

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“That Ministry is one of the worst corrupt Ministries... because of the issue of scholarships. There is so much going on in there, it’s the biggest ministry in terms of employees and budget. Biggest interest is in scholarships, because that’s where you build your political allies. Because you put my kids through scholarships I’ll be supporting you, working with my family to influence your support”. (VTP-1)

Personalised selection discouraged applicants. Two participants outside government noted they or their children didn’t bother to apply for scholarships, even if they were qualified:

“For the Vanuatu scholarship – I’m politically not the right family. So I went outside, direct to institutions.” (VTP-2).

“Kids don’t see the point of an application they won’t get.” (VCS-6)

Although personalised selection resulted in under-qualified and under-performing students, a training provider noted that receiving universities, in need of tuition fees, did not have the incentive to reject them (VTP-3). According to one blog and one participant, disagreement over selection decisions caused tensions between USP Fiji and Vanuatu campuses (Lae, 2017)(VTP-3).

Politicians were under significant pressure to intervene in scholarship processes to support constituents. One official noted that parents placing pressure on politicians and TSCU staff felt their children were entitled to scholarships upon completion of Year 13 regardless of academic performance (VGE-6). PIPP speculated that public perception of benefiting Vanuatu’s children may have meant that scholarships corruption did *“not muster the same level as anger as siphoning of funds, for example, to the supporters of political parties”* (PIPP, 2014b). Research participants generally considered personalised and politicised selection corrupt, and were increasingly aware and concerned about it, as described by one training provider:

“In the past people weren’t aware that these acts are corrupt so they live with it.... Now you have people more aware of what corruption is, people are talking about it, but for me corruption has always been there.” (VTP-3)

In Vanuatu’s political economy (3.3), politicians were motivated to ensure their constituents had fair access, while perceiving others to have unfair access. Based on MoET’s ‘Social Inclusion’ policy, a ‘social inclusion’ list was formalised as a scholarships category targeting students from outer islands, to increase geographic equity in access (Willie, 2021). This would appear to align with prominent inclusion objectives of western aid donors. However, one training provider commented that recipients often had remote island ancestry but were actually

long-term Port Vila residents (VTP-3). Another education official commented that the ‘social inclusion’ list was often used by politicians to add students, sometimes without justification (VGE-3). These comments suggest ‘social inclusion’ was another way political actors or officials could represent local island interests and secure policy rents from national programs.

The disproportionate budget spent on scholarships, benefiting a limited and educationally advantaged group of students, indicates elite capture of this policy. As discussed in Chapter 3, a relative elite in Vanuatu can be defined by access to education, waged employment and urban residence. It overlaps with Vanuatu’s ‘emergent middle class’ (Barbara et al., 2015), and constituted the majority of policy stakeholders interviewed for this research. Those disadvantaged by trade-offs of high scholarships expenditure were not apparent to many participants interviewed.

Those benefiting from personalised selection appeared, at least initially, to have impunity. Two research participants indicated that people in positions of advantage “got away with” personalised benefits in scholarships because of rural ni-Vanuatu people’s limited access to information, policy-making voice and benefits from education investments (VGE-1, VDP-6). Two participants noted information gaps, and even negative consequences for those who did complain:

“Ni-Vanuatu people don’t react because they don’t know how budget money is spent, especially in remote areas. Vanuatu people are not going to speak up because of culture – people have respect for politicians, families – everyone knows everything. People are afraid to speak up, nobody has the guts.” (VGE-1)

“A student in Fiji posted on Facebook about things that weren’t right... he lost his scholarship. They don’t allow them to criticise. A lot of students are unhappy but they don’t say anything.” (VTP-3)

Such fear of consequences for speaking up about corruption, in local contexts of dense social networks, echo findings from several Pacific studies, including in Vanuatu (Corbett, 2015b; Larmour, 2012). PIPP and Transparency Vanuatu demonstrated some civil society role in evidence and advocacy on scholarship issues from 2013 (5.1.2). External support may have meant these NGOs could more freely criticise. Participants noted broader constraints on civil society capacity to advocate for accountability and fair processes. There was no active education accountability NGO. One political adviser interviewed in 2019 expressed frustration

with the state and incapacity of Vanuatu CSOs generally, noting the advantages in voice and funding of expatriate NGOs:

“Civil society used to be engaged. Right now there is no civil society organisations to speak of...VANGO non-existent. A lot of the NGOs are whitewashed international NGOs... there are no longer local NGOs, because a lot of the funding goes to INGOs.”
(VPA-4)

However, pressure for scholarships transparency, accountability for decisions, and alignment to merit-based policy, was generated by some media and civil society scrutiny and advocacy, and individual complaints by policy stakeholders, parents and students. One key figure, Dan McGarry, was both Vanuatu Daily Post editor and PIPP co-founder (Chamas, 2019; PIPP, 2014a); both organisations sustained attention on tertiary scholarships (Natonga, 2021; PIPP, 2011, 2014b; Roberts, 2019a; Willie, 2014b, 2014c). One civil society representative’s comment indicates emergent middle class agency:

“It was mostly the students becoming aware of what they were entitled to. The whole issue of merit-based- scholarships became a real rallying cry for parents trying to break into the so-called middle class – so parents who would struggle really hard to get their children in would be turned away, they were angry. They spontaneously went to the media, and on social media.” (VCS-2)

As the commenter indicated, complaints on social media continued to add public pressure on scholarships policy-makers (YumiToktokStret, 2013, 2015, 2016).

Clientelism in scholarships selection was a nationally significant policy issue. It reflected how clientelist pressures compromised equitable social policy delivery in Vanuatu with variable opposition; disagreement over equity; distinct societal benefits, interests and power balances in Vanuatu society; and civil society activism.

5.3: Policy responses & change: post-secondary priorities, changed accountabilities and incentives

By 2015, multiple factors pressured government to address the issue of scholarships expenditure and politicisation. These included public concern over scholarship politicisation, and public and donor pressure to invest more resources into basic education. These pressures influenced political and bureaucratic leadership of policy responses to problems facing

VGFS. A stronger strategic direction to meet broader education goals, priorities of demand-led and locally-delivered post-secondary education, and stronger budget control and accountabilities limiting interference in scholarship selection, all influenced change in the policy area, and policy-making on key policy alternatives.

5.3.1: New post-secondary strategic direction

Vanuatu's leadership prioritised broader education goals and sound management, that were undermined by scholarships problems. Education was one of three pillars of Vanuatu's 2030 Plan, launched in 2016 (GoV, 2016b). This plan focused senior officials' attention on basic education from 2014, just when scholarships expenditure peaked (VCS-2)(Table 5.4-b). Charlot Salwai became Prime Minister in 2016. Previously Minister for Education (2008-2010), fee-free basic education was a political priority for him. One development partner worked with him:

“Charlot Salwai was Minister of Education at the time, and he wanted free education, and we worked really hard to put that in place” (VDP-4)

Coinciding with external pressure from donors and civil society, Bob Loughman's term as Education Minister (2013 until June 2015) was a turning point of policy-making and reform in education and training, with focus by senior officials, supported by development partners, on addressing scholarship programme issues through legislative and policy reform (Table 5.5-b).

In 2013, Minister Loughman introduced reforms to the Education Act of 2014 to make scholarships selection and management more transparent, impartial and merit-based. Act revisions specified NSTB membership to include Director-Generals of Education, Finance, Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Prime Minister, Education Department senior officials, and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Vanuatu Finance Centre, civil society, tertiary education institutions, Department of Labour and the new Vanuatu Qualifications Authority (NPV, 2014, pp. 46-47). MPs and officers of political parties were explicitly excluded. This deliberately shifted tertiary scholarships decision-making from political actors, to a broader cohort of technocratic, cross-Ministry, employer and non-government representatives, supporting a more transparent, inclusive, and demand-led approach to scholarships selection.

Reforms also specified Board member responsibilities. This included determining scholarship priorities, award criteria and awarding or termination; ensuring fair, transparent and merit-

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based selection of awards; advising the TSCU on scholarships administration; and briefing the Department and Minister. Revisions to the Education Act prohibited and sanctioned influence on Board decisions as follows:

“66. Seeking to influence decisions

(1) A person including the Minister, other members of Parliament, political advisors and those holding positions of authority in political parties must not seek to influence the Board in relation to decisions under this Act either directly or through another person.

(2) A person referred to in subsection (1) who fails to comply with subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding VT 1,000,000.”

(NPV, 2014, p. 48)

There was also a significant policy shift to support demand-led, employer-responsive and locally-delivered post-secondary education. Education Minister Jean-Pierre Nirua introduced a PSET (Post-Secondary Education and Training) Policy for 2016 to 2020 (GoV, 2016c).” A key strategic direction of the policy was a *“New, more strategically focused scholarship policy including Government funded scholarships to registered public and private PSET institutions”*. Scholarships were to be oriented to development goals, merit-based, inclusive, and equitably distributed across provinces and educational levels (GoV, 2016c, pp. 5-9).

The policy direction was supported by Australian-funded technical assistance, and by key structural changes to better link scholarships to strategic human resource needs. The MoE took responsibility over PSET, adding ‘Training’ to become the MoET (DFAT, 2014b). Within MoET, a Tertiary Education Directorate became responsible for oversight of scholarships, TVET, higher education and teacher education. These changes integrated scholarships management within an overall structure of policies and service delivery aligned to national human resource development needs.

These strategic policies had major implications for policy on VGFS. To operationalise the PSET Policy and aligned with Vanuatu’s National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), the National Human Resource Development Plan 2020-2030 (NHRDP) was to guide PSET investments to ensure efficient and effective use of resources, meeting public expectations for better use of resources. This included reform of VGFS to *“redress the inefficiencies of the supply driven system”* (GoV, 2019b, p. 18). Expenditure on scholarships was to be proportional in budget to policy priorities. Overcoming the historic focus on overseas study, scholarships

would be provided for domestic study through local PSET providers at certificate and diploma level. This would improve cost efficiency and increase revenue for national training providers to fund quality improvement, as well as better meet public and private sector skills demand. Budget was planned to steadily decline for overseas scholarships from over 40% of PSET budget in 2018 to a steady 30% share from 2022 onwards to meet ongoing need for professionally qualified graduates including managers and health staff (GoV, 2019d)(VDP-2). The scholarships program would also be evaluated for impact every three years (GoV, 2019d, p. 20). These changes pushed VGFS to be more tightly managed, more closely aligned to strategic goals and employment demand, and support more locally provided training.

These changes were led from high levels. Ministers and Senior officials valued the NHRDP as a strategic human resourcing approach for Vanuatu, and actively contributed to its reforms. Minister Nirua himself directed that all first year scholarship courses to USP must be delivered on the Emalus campus, reducing time and cost of overseas study (GoV, 2019d, p. 19). The Ministry of the Prime Minister's (MPM) Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination (SPPAC) was closely engaged in NHRDP preparation. SPPAC was the technical office responsible for developing, delivering and monitoring government strategy and providing leadership for policies and programs across sectors (GoV, 2023)(VDP-2, VGO-1). MPM's Director-General was Gregoire Nimbtik, whose time as scholarships officer and experience of corruption in scholarships was formative in his career and research, underpinning his strong understanding and buy-in to these policy changes (VGE-1)(section 5.2.1). Reforms to demand-relevance and balanced spending on scholarships were priorities shared by senior officials interviewed (VGO-1, VGE-4). This bureaucratic commitment had been supported by development partners' advocacy for policy change, which had presented the NHRDP as a solution to the problem of untargeted tertiary scholarships which Vanuatu could not afford (VDP-4). This senior support was important to launching and implementing these strategic reforms.

Delivering on changes in education legislation and policy, from 2016, the NSTB and the TSCU implemented PER and policy recommendations to better manage scholarships and target needs (VDP-2, VGE-4). The Government had already taken specific actions to more closely control scholarship awards. As noted in 5.2.1, in 2013, 74 new scholarship awardees had been recalled because of abuse of selection procedures (TV, 2013a). In 2015, the MoE terminated 15 scholarships and suspended 36 for poor academic performance (Ligo, 2015). Education Services Director Roy Obed commented that students who *"failed to take their studies*

seriously” had wasted over USD470,000 in scholarship funds over the previous year (RNZ, 2015a).

Aligned with broader PSET reforms, donors supported institutional strengthening of the TSCU to deliver VGFS management improvements. Australian and New Zealand aid-funded technical assistance supported strengthening of TSCU scholarship policy and management processes (DFAT, 2016a)(VDP-6). A Scholarship Priority Framework introduced in 2017 identified 13 priority study areas contributing to national development, to which applicants had to align their choice of course (MoET, 2017). Responding to issues the TSCU had identified in 2010 (GoV, 2010), the management information system was improved, and an online application process introduced (VDP-6, VTP-3). Publication of scholarships information online improved transparency and access to scholarships (MoET, 2018).

An education official described management and selection process strengthening efforts since 2015:

“We have our own problems... before 2015 the scholarship office had no transparency and accountability. We had to fix the selection process to be more robust and have a more transparent and accountable system.... now we are trying to partner with outside organisations helping to manage our scholarships and identify the training they want... so when we select and sponsor someone, it will have a benefit when they get back.” (VGE-2)

An involved development partner described MoET and PMO having *“done a lot of work in strengthening the selection process for the scholarships”*, with a clear rating process and criteria for students (VDP-4).

System improvements were not entirely supported, nor successful. Three participants commented that Principal Scholarships Officer John Kaltau had tried to use the opportunity of donor-supported management information system strengthening to ensure greater transparency and protection from political intervention in selection. However, he experienced pushback, and political intervention occurred again (VDP-1,-6, VTP-3). Management strengthening was reducing politicised and personalised interference, but it appeared not possible to eliminate these pressures in Vanuatu’s personalised and networked institutional environment.

5.3.2: Policy compliance: Budget controls and strengthened accountabilities

By 2019, two significant factors had likely reduced politicised and personalised interference in Scholarship Board award decisions: the compliance and sanctions measures in the 2014 Education Act; and budget constraints. One involved education official explained:

“The Education Act has a provision that decisions made by the Board should not be influenced by the politicians... I think that provision has been followed. Before, after Scholarships Board approved awardees, you can see 2-3 lists coming. Now it’s very limited. People can see that the Act is not friendly to them so they take extra precaution... the issue is finance. From thousands of applicants, maybe 300-500 students are eligible but due to funding availability we give only 100 or 200 awards.”
(VGE-4)

This change in selection issues may also have been reflected in changed media attention from 2016. Media articles, many by the Vanuatu Daily Post, addressed multiple scholarships implementation problems and queries, but fewer focused on interference in selection (Roberts, 2016, 2017, 2019a, 2019c).

Demonstrating high level concern at the national budget impact of scholarships expenditure, MFEM took over control of scholarships budget from 2016, capping awards (GoV, 2018b)(VGE-3). Until 2019, as one development partner pointed out, *“Every year they have to ask for supplementary budget, and they still do”* (VDP-4). In 2019, one political advisor described stronger central controls:

“Right now we’ve got a very strong DG of Finance. When a supplementary budget for scholarships is presented he’s like “uh-uh: I’m not entertaining that”. We’ve got a decision-making body, the Development Committee of Officials, where all DGs and political advisors sit – where policy decisions are scrutinised before they go to the Council of Ministers, where frustrations are registered – “you’ve given me scholarships budget that’s blown – what did you do with it?” (VPA-4)

As a result, actual scholarships spending was controlled within budgeted allocation for the first time in 2019, and again in 2020; although budget was at record highs at over VUV806 million (Table 5.4-b). An education official confirmed that Ministry failures to pay student allowances continued in 2019 (VGE-6). Vanuatu’s Government had therefore managed to control scholarships expenditure within very high budgeted amounts, but with some continuing payment problems.

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Vanuatu's public accountability institutions also shaped scholarships policy compliance. Complaints from policy stakeholders led to investigations of scholarships by the Vanuatu Office of the Ombudsman.

In 2016 the Vanuatu Office of the Ombudsman investigated personalised interference by a Minister of Education in merit-based selection processes, although for domestic study. The event investigated letters sent by MP Bob Loughman, Minister of Education at the time, instructing the Principal of the Vanuatu Institute for Teacher Education (VITE) to enrol 19 trainee students for VITE's 2015-2017 teacher trainee intake, 17 of whom on grounds of community disadvantage and island geography (Ombudsman, 2016, pp. 11-12, 15). VITE had already concluded the student selection process and published this list in the media, following process per policy direction issued by Minister for Education Loughman himself in October 2013 (Ombudsman, 2016). The investigation found that Loughman had breached the VITE Act by directing VITE to accept the students. He had also not acted in accordance with the Leadership Code Act (LCA), and Article 66 of the Constitution, breaching requirements of leaders to comply with the law and "*not influence or exert pressure on or threaten or abuse persons carrying out lawful duty*", and exercise public duties fairly (GoV, 2006a; Ombudsman, 2016, pp. 11-12, 15). The Ombudsman's report recommended Loughman's prosecution for these breaches (Ombudsman, 2016). It is characteristic of the complexities of leadership and policy-making in Melanesia, that Loughman as Minister had both signed off on legislation to align VGFS policy and implementation; and was found to have contravened that legislation through personalised selection influence.

Lending support to Nimbtik's view of different perceptions of corruption, Loughman's self-defence in the investigation drew on apparently legitimate policy intentions of "social inclusion" (sub-section 5.2.2) for geographically equitable access, the need to train more teachers to address shortages, and increased funding for VITE (Ombudsman, 2016, pp. 30-31). Continuing a long pattern of results from Ombudsman's recommendations, Loughman was not prosecuted (TV, 2013b). Reflecting cycles of resilience of Vanuatu political actors, Loughman went on to become opposition leader in 2018 and Prime Minister in 2020 (Newton Cain, 2020; RNZ, 2018a).

In a further investigation in 2019, according to two officials interviewed, the Ombudsman investigated complaints of personalised selection and favouring of secondary school completers but disadvantaging USP students. This investigation identified interference in

student lists in 2018, and recommended a further change to remove Ministerial power over NSTB member selection (VGO-4,5).

The 2014 Education Act had set clear provisions and sanctions against interference in selection processes. However, subsequent breaches were not prosecuted. One training provider still noted their hope for the Ombudsman's role based on the Leadership Code, or for the Council of Ministers to take on the issue (VTP-3). By 2019, changed scholarships legislation and policy; strengthened, more transparent, and better-communicated management processes and decisions; and Ombudsman investigations and public awareness and protest; had combined to change accountability incentives and shape corrupt behaviour. At least overt interference in selection processes had been discouraged, even if it may have continued in more covert and limited forms. This illustrates the influence, the activity, but also the enforcement constraints of Vanuatu accountability institutions in influencing clientelist practices in policy delivery in Vanuatu.

5.3.3: Donor influence on policy reform

Given the importance of donor support for education, aid donors were able to exercise significant influence on policy-making on overseas tertiary scholarships from 1997 (5.1.1) and through the case study period. Australia, as leading donor to Vanuatu, had particularly strong influence. In 2018 Australian provided 72 per cent of aid budget support to education, and ten per cent of total education budget (DFAT, 2019a; Pryke & Dayant, 2020).

Australia and New Zealand focused on advocating for Vanuatu's achievement of pro-poor, inclusive and quality formal basic education, and merit-based post-secondary education oriented to employment demand and development goals (MoET, 2015). These two donors' agendas blended bilateral political priorities, metropolitan education and skills development priorities and approaches, global education policy agendas such as the MDGs, and performance-based management linking funding to results. Good governance and anti-corruption agendas also influenced their strong policy positions against corrupt practices (APH, 2020).

Australia exercised influence through its access to policy-makers and through funding important evidence for policy advocacy (5.1.4) and significant co-drafting of major policy reform documents (5.3.1). Australia "*always had a place at the table*" for policy discussions (VDP-4). Australian and New Zealand officials and their advisers consistently advocated in favour of merit-based, evidence-based and employment demand-oriented tertiary scholarship

policies, balanced with investment in other levels of education and training benefiting disadvantaged groups (VDP-4,-6). Guided by PER findings, Australian officials were concerned their aid funding effectively subsidised Vanuatu's budget choices favouring overseas tertiary scholarships (VDP-4). AHC staff had "tough conversations" with Ministry officials, applying long-term relationships and credibility as a major donor. Development partners contrasted the Ministry's policy commitments and resourcing challenges in primary education with the high cost and uncertain returns of three-year scholarships to Fiji (VDP-4).

Australian and New Zealand policy engagement included conditionality and sanctions. When VGFS selection processes were compromised in the 2000s, both donors responded by withdrawing management cooperation with the TSCU, as related by one development partner and one education official interviewed (VDP-4, VGE-1). Australia and New Zealand aid conditionality made education funding contingent on sufficient domestic education budget for primary education (AusAID, 2010; GoV, 2009a)

Donors' combined efforts in funding, technical support, analysis, advocacy and aid conditionality influenced Vanuatu policy-makers. Responding to this influence and to PM Salwai's priority to deliver fee free education (see quote in 5.3.1), stronger commitment by Ministers Loughman and Nirua and by senior bureaucrats resulted in full domestic funding of school grants for 400 schools, ahead of schedule (DFAT, 2018b). An education official and donor official described this as a source of pride for GoV and Australia as a donor (VDP-4, VGE-5). It reflected a strengthened relationship, with policy co-drafting, and policy and budget management to ensure overseas tertiary scholarships spending aligned with broader, donor-supported education policy goals. In addition, as presented at 5.4.2, sustained Australian support to the VSP fostered the emergence of local policy leadership which shifted shared values towards longer-term, evidence-based and developmental policy goals of broadly accessible, demand-linked training (Barbara, 2019b). This also supported policy elite commitment to successful policy change on overseas tertiary scholarships.

5.3.4: Political incentives for reform

Several key changes in public and political incentives are likely to have supported efforts to deliver reform of education and training policy including for overseas scholarships.

Public pressure on politicians may have been greater on other education priorities. Simultaneous to media pressure on scholarships practices, there was ongoing civil society and media attention to the incomplete delivery of Vanuatu's fee-free basic education policy (Bryard,

2013; Roberts, 2018; Selmen, 2014). One senior official saw primary and secondary school fee subsidies as a more potent incentive for ni-Vanuatu voters (VGO-1). A development partner noted politicians prioritising this - *“Every time, it’s on the election platform”* (VDP-4). While the same participant questioned how it would be funded, one education official confirmed the Government’s commitment to free education to Year 10:

“Vanuatu is meeting the funding commitment for basic and secondary education. It is necessary and the obligation of government and government is committed to do it, it’s one of the only means of achieving access. Everything is budgeted” (VGE-5).

While the 2012 PER had identified little money in the system for school management costs (section 5.1.4), the Education Act of 2014 made it illegal for schools to charge extra fees. Political and bureaucratic commitment to tuition-fee-free education, and the clarity of budget trade-offs, made basic education funding a clear priority. According to one interviewee, the catastrophic impact of Cyclone Pam in March 2015 also changed incentives, placing MPs under greater pressure from their constituencies to support school rebuilding and reopening:

“Cyclone Pam was another competing factor that was quite pressing. Every MP was telling them [MoET] which schools had to be rebuilt. You can’t go back to your constituency or the village if kids aren’t in school.” (VCS-2).

As this participant comment indicates, delivery of essential education and supplies in affected areas became a clear priority for the Government of Vanuatu and its development partners including Australia and the World Bank, as set out in aid program documentation (DFAT, 2016a; WB, 2016).

As well as the exceptional stability of his period in office, Minister Jean-Pierre Nirua’s leadership role from 2016 reflected the different reform appetites and policy orientations of Vanuatu’s Anglophone/ Francophone political divide. This colonial legacy had long divided the education system and politicised tertiary education policy choices (Mather, 1997). Perceived disadvantage of Francophone students including in higher education had motivated investment in French language learning in Vanuatu (Willans, 2013). An education official involved at the time confirmed that Francophone students had initially not even been included in VGFS, as scholarships to study at USP were in English, and Francophone education instead used more remote learning or French-funded scholarships (VGE-1). Participants, including officials, commented on VGFS privileging Anglophone students (VGE-5, VGO-4), and that Nirua’s Francophone identity factored in his development of policy alternatives to overseas

tertiary scholarships (VCS-2, VDP-6). One training provider commented that, consistent with the issue of Ministerial power over Board membership, Francophone Ministers would place more Francophone officials on the NSTB (VTP-3). The same participant noted that across government generally, there were longer waits for scholarship graduates of one language group to gain employment when the Minister for Education was of the opposite language group.

“Political interference now is less at the personal level – but more at group level. The Minister and DG are francophone and there are more francophone scholarships in the past few years” (VDP-4).

Educational nationalism through language group identity therefore adds to factors driving policy and reform priorities, but also some degree of continued political interference.

Participant comments also indicated fundamental shifts in Vanuatu’s broader policy-making context following the jailing of 14 MPs in 2015. This was introduced at section 3.3 as likely to have changed incentives and accountability for politicians as well as bringing generational change among political actors. Participants commented on increasing qualifications of MPs, with more graduates and former public servants in the 11th parliament than any previous one (VPA-4), including *“three or four ex-DGs as MPs”* (VGO-3). Wood described the emergence of *“bona fide reformers”* in Vanuatu (Terence Wood, 2021). Participants commented that these newly elected politicians were more capable of engaging with development policy agendas, of shifting to locally- provided demand-led skills development, and of complex policy changes across stakeholders (VDP-4, VCS-2).

One civil society and one development partner participant included Nirua and Prime Minister Salwai among these technocratic leaders (VCS-2, VDP-2). Nirua’s background as an education professional informed his vision of education, shaping scholarships policy (VCS-2), and appearing to change clientelistic incentives shaping policy-making.

A political advisor explained the qualifications of the new generation of politicians, their attempts under Prime Minister Salwai to legislate to remove politicians from statutory bodies and state-owned enterprises to minimise personalised influences on decisions and services, but also the limits of anti-corruption measures in the Vanuatu context:

“This legislature has had more graduates, more former public servants, than any other parliament... For a very small country with very strong relationships – you can never be rid – and as much as you want to regulate corruption, politicking, you can’t really get away from it – I am related to, went to school with, he’s married to, went to

church with, everybody, so I'm vulnerable to pressure at any time. The training would be how to protect myself with processes put in place. This government has tried to change legislation to get rid of politicians sitting in a lot of bodies, a lot of SOEs, statutory bodies, decision-making bodies, unnecessary for political influence – changed legislation to ensure we've removed as much of that as possible and try to minimise that effect.” (VPA-4)

In the view of this advisor, under the Salwai government MPs and bureaucrats were prioritising formal, impartial bureaucratic institutions and decision-making over short-term political interference.

Similarly, in the area of scholarships, at the end of the study period in 2019, it was likely that a range of changed incentives and sanctions had diminished opportunities for politicians' involvement in personalised scholarships selection, making any such practice more covert and limited. Stronger, centralised budget control, stronger accountability incentives, pressure for basic education commitments and significant policy and management strengthening actions appeared to have changed incentives for personalised scholarships selection.

5.4: Policy alternatives: 2019 and beyond

At the end of the case study period, major management strengthening, policy reforms and policy alternatives contributed significant change to VGFS policy and delivery. The final section of this chapter will present three significant policy alternatives to VGFS, the policy-making experience of which reflects characteristics of employment policy development and change in Vanuatu's political context. All three policy alternatives were undertaken with parallel attempts Solomon Islands which reflected significant differences in policy pathways. These policy alternatives were significant in where the policy pathway in this case area had reached by the end of the case study period in 2019 and beyond.

5.4.1: Cost Sharing

Like Solomon Islands, cost-sharing emerged as a priority policy alternative to meet tertiary education demand from more eligible students, from within limited available budget. It remained a difficult option because of the high cost of tertiary education and low incomes in Vanuatu. One former education official saw limited prospects for cost-sharing, commenting that: *“we talked about it but never got it off the ground. It won't work. The mentality of the people is that government should provide that.”* (VGE-6). One participant commented that

parents were reluctant to meet the cost of university study because of poor teacher delivery and attendance at USP (VCS-6).

At the same time (April 2019), another education official was themselves involved in establishing a MoET loans scheme, learning from Fiji:

“We’re trying to open a loans scheme, working on it and trying to build it... we visited Fiji and saw how they run theirs. But there’s some complications in doing ours. We’re trying to borrow from VNPF. They are wanting a funding guarantee from government, we still have to write a paper to convince government that we need this money to fund students. It’s more politically driven, it needs some political will and we’re seeing how we can do it.” (VGE-2)

In 2020 the VNPF launched its Members Education Support Scheme (MESS). VNPF provided VTU500 million under a MoU to the MoET for parents who were VNPF members to guarantee loans to students for tertiary and vocational study. Loans were repayable upon employment. Minister Nirua approached it as a way to meet youth demand for scholarships exceeding budget caps, and for parents to take responsibility and save up for higher education (Roberts, 2020).

Delivery of the MESS encountered a number of implementation difficulties, including students complaining at being transferred to a loan arrangement without consultation. Ombudsman investigation in 2021 criticised the Minister for this lack of consultation, failure to comply with the law or seek Council of Ministers approval in establishing the scheme. The VNPF then took over the scheme independent of MoET, while GoV refused to pay student allowances (Tarianga, 2022). Despite these difficulties, the scheme supported over 1,000 students from 2020 to 2021, and continued into 2024. It met employment demand by supporting training for teachers (the largest group), pilots, engineers and nurses studying across regional universities (Roberts, 2021c, 2024).

MoET officials drew a policy idea from a Pacific state, and cooperated with another organisation to develop and launch it as a policy alternative to government-funded overseas scholarships. A gap in policy-making capacities, including a lack of consultation and due Ministerial process, resulted in serious legal and implementation problems and disagreement over funding and distribution, criticised by a bureaucratic accountability mechanism. However, beyond the case period it has been sustained as a financing alternative and higher education pathway for ni-Vanuatuan students.

Delivery of the policy alternative of cost-sharing means that Vanuatu is able to offer more access to tertiary education without cutting other education services – supporting more equitable education access for Vanuatu people.

5.4.2: A policy platform for skills development change: the Vanuatu Skills Partnership

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) provides an example of different aid donor tactics enabling local developmental leadership, driving skills policy change which affected scholarships and employment policies (Barbara, 2019b). Aid evaluations found the Australian-supported but locally-led program successful in improving livelihoods and economic development (Schofield et al., 2015), delivering employment and widening local participation in skills and employment policy discussions (Gibert, 2013).

Change over time was key in the VSP experience. Originally an external technical advisory project in vocational training working with weak national institutions, it shifted to a provincial employment-linked skills training delivery approach. Barbara found that Australia had provided VSP enough longevity and flexibility to change focus, and to develop local leadership of reforms (Barbara, 2019b). The VSP's local leadership team built a political community in an emerging sector, drawing together fragmented stakeholders to create collective action for change (Barbara, 2019b, pp. 37-39). Two VSP Team Leaders wrote that the program changed root causes of dysfunction in Vanuatu education and training: a *“complex intersection of resource distribution, corruption, normalised behaviours, and relationships and allegiances”* (Yanhambath & Gibert, 2023, pp. 1-2). This approach changed political incentives in support of senior bureaucratic and political leadership commitment and delivery of Vanuatu's NHRDP, overcoming costs of reform and changing scholarships policy implementation. The approach was significant in providing a collective policy platform and local leadership of skills policy in Vanuatu. A former scholarships officer interviewed by the research exemplified the change in understanding that the VSP effected among Vanuatu policy stakeholders:

“Now I see that skills are so important for everyone. For 70% of people within rural areas they don't have privilege of scholarships. NHRDP is saying that scholarship allocations should be redirected to institutions in Vanuatu.” (VGE-1)

This change in collective policy advocacy linked to a skills development intervention was unique to Vanuatu, and contrasted significantly with Australia's attempt to replicate this model in Solomon Islands (sub-section 8.3.5).

5.4.3: Local tertiary provision: A national university and VGFS beyond the case study period

Sub-section 5.3.1 noted the major 2016 PSET reform focus of shifting training investments to expand local tertiary provision, an important alternative to costly overseas tertiary scholarships funded by government. Stakeholders interviewed supported this shift. One former education official commented: *“things will only change if we have institutions here in Vanuatu”* (VGE-1). A local training provider described Minister Nirua directing the VGFS to include national scholarships from 2016 to keep money in Vanuatu (VTP-2). For the cost of one overseas scholarship, one education official described being able to sponsor five students for local studies (VGE-2). Another also compared reduced cost and expanded access:

“It will work... student population is increasing so it has to! They tried that so they can sponsor more students. One of the differences now is that USP is delivering a lot of courses in Vanuatu – and on the Francophone side there is AUF. And that means people don’t need to go overseas, which will bring costs down.”(VGE-6)

To replace expensive overseas scholarships with support to national PSET institutions for training delivery, the NHRDP envisaged PSET institutional amalgamations while training capacity was built to respond to employment demand at progressively higher skills levels (GoV, 2019d). By 2019 VGFS was funding a higher proportion of domestic tertiary scholarships (VGE-6).

NHRDP delivery and the shift from overseas tertiary scholarships to local provision reflected Vanuatu language politics and individual leadership and ambition. The government established a national university earlier than the NHRDP intended. During Prime Minister Salwai’s term, Minister Nirua personally led development of a national university, influenced by their shared Francophone policy orientation (VTP-2). Supported by international consultants, Nirua led rapid preparation of the Act to establish a National University of Vanuatu (NUV) unanimously adopted by parliament on 17th December 2019 (NUV, 2020a, 2020b). NUV was formed by amalgamation of the government- funded AUF with six training colleges (VDP-2). One political actor interviewed in 2019 labelled it *“the Minister’s personal agenda”* (VPA-3). Minister Nirua’s leadership in establishing the national university was so significant that he was later appointed NUV’s first Vice- Chancellor (NUV, 2020a; RNZ, 2020).

There was some controversy over Nirua’s rapid establishment of NUV. Three development partner representatives interviewed shared concerns about Vanuatu’s readiness for a national

university (VDP-2,-4,-6). One senior government official's criticism was guided by the NHRDP's reform priorities:

“MoE, they also have their plans. One contentious issue is they wanted to create a university – we thought ‘no’, based on evidence of NHRDP – because there are a lot of fundamental issues we’d like to address in how we support PSET to grow” (VGO-1).

One senior official's criticism was guided by NHRDP evidence of available human resources and funding priorities to meet employment needs (VGO-1). Some sector stakeholders interviewed shared concern that AUF's French curriculum of economics and social studies was supply-driven rather than oriented to labour market demand in Vanuatu, conflicting with NHRDP PSET objectives (VDP-2, VTP-1)¹².

NUV's establishment changed regional and international tertiary linkages. The new NUV had strong international linkages, including with four French, one New Zealand and one Malaysian higher education institutions (NUV, 2023). However, expanded local provision and NUV's establishment sparked tensions with USP in Fiji, the largest destination for overseas tertiary scholarships. At the time Emalus was USP's second largest regional campus (GNC, 2023). Emalus' expansion was a parallel priority for Nirua (VGE-4). One training provider explained that to provide more scholarships at lower cost, MoET encouraged USP Emalus students to study more of their degrees locally before completing in Fiji, also to better support their transition from school to university responsibilities (VTP-2). An education official noted that Minister Nirua had pressed on the USP Council in 2018 for full-time lecturers to expand local USP provision (VGE-4). While external donors were also an important funding source (VGE-4), the government's own funding commitments to Emalus, supported by the Minister and other politicians, strengthened Vanuatu Ministerial advocacy on the USP council. One training provider provided detailed comment on USP's funding decisions between Fiji and Vanuatu campuses, preferencing students in Fiji other facilities and courses in Vanuatu:

“I think that USP has not been very supportive – I think what they're trying to do is, they want all the students to go to Fiji because that will make money for them. So the government is trying to keep the students here so we can get USP to build some facilities here. The majority of facilities here are bilateral aid to GoV. USP has done very little to build here – every time we ask them to build here, they say “we don't have enough

¹² The French national heading the AUF in Vanuatu in April 2019 declined the researcher's invitation (in French) to participate in this research.

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money, the budget is short.” Every time they get money in the name of regionalism – the university keeps building Laucala campus, the money goes to Laucala campus. At Laucala campus you walk on pavement all the way around” (VTP-3)

These comments timed with a significant management crisis for USP, as Vice-Chancellor Ahluwalia was suspended by the university’s Fijian Government- aligned senior leadership, amidst claims and counter-claims of mismanagement and corruption (Pryke, 2020). USP’s internal conflict and management problems further justified expanded local tertiary provision.

At the end of the case study period, a change in accountability conditions, and major policy reforms and alternatives, had significantly changed VGFS policy delivery. Amidst key changes, some persistent issues beyond the case study period emerge as durable political characteristics of the policy area.

With an increasing proportion of domestic scholarships, expanded local tertiary provision proved a successful policy alternative to overseas tertiary scholarships, resulting in more ni-Vanuatu youth accessing higher education. The policy-making case of establishing a national university reflects the impact of individual agency by Vanuatu’s leaders, able to accelerate and deliver on policy initiatives across multiple stakeholders. It reflects nationalism and language delineation driving education policy priorities and policy development, as well as broad bureaucratic and political buy-in to demand-responsive, locally-provided training. Finally, amidst regional tension over the region’s shared tertiary institution, political space emerged for more clearly articulated, programmatic and long-term policy priorities, which proved possible within Vanuatu’s policy-making context.

While management and selection processes had strengthened, Vanuatu’s closely networked environment meant some uncertainty about selection processes remained. In 2019, personalised selection was still current for non-government participants, while currently employed education officials interviewed disagreed that it still occurred (VGE-2,-5). One training provider considered that the VGFS’ increasing shift to scholarships for domestic study made it easier to hide continued but covert personalised selections (VTP-3). In 2019 one development partner commented that there was yet again a difference between the NSTB’s list and the final list of students selected (VDP-1). One civil society participant commented that personalised selection continued, but in smaller and more ‘tolerable’ numbers, as ‘queue-hopping’ (VCS-2). One education official commented that while systems were in place to reduce it, interference couldn’t be ruled out (VGE-3). For one development partner too, opaque

decision-making and uncertainty persisted, reflecting a seasonal cycle of pressures and interference in merit-based selection:

“You never know what’s going to happen between December and January when scholarships come around. You don’t know who is responsible” (VDP-4)

Beyond the case study period, the pressure of student numbers and tertiary education budget grew, however without the same degree of controversy. There was contestation by students over major changes such as the MESS reform and its impact on allowances (VBTC_News, 2021). Continued, record- high budget expenditure on Vanuatu government-funded scholarships expenditure reflected the continued budget and policy elite priority on scholarships. Scholarships expenditure increased again to a record high levels in 2021 (Table 5.4-b) and 2026. World Bank expenditure review in 2020 identified scholarships spending as a large item in overall education expenditure, but this time not a dominating issue relative to basic education quality and teacher payroll (Smets et al., 2021, p. 104). COVID-19 had a negative impact on access to education and formal employment for Pacific Island populations, but encouraged a focus on support for local tertiary provision. Vanuatu’s economy recovered slowly from COVID-19 and faced shocks including the devastating December 2024 earthquake. However, windfall gains from its citizenship scheme (Joshua, 2026) again enabled budget space for supplementary spending on tertiary scholarships and Vanuatu’s new university. MFEM continued to control scholarships budget with ceilings at VT800 million to 2024 and VT900 million by 2026. However, the government considered neither of these ceilings sufficient to fund tertiary study for growing numbers of eligible students. Feeling the “strain” of this demand pressure, in 2026, Education Minister Simil Johnson announced that 1,368 students would be supported for a mix of full- and partial- and local- and overseas-scholarships (Toara, 2026), as Vanuatu’s government provided VT383 million in supplementary budget for scholarships (Roberts, 2026). Significant investment in local tertiary provision was also a major priority, as the government also announced VT230 million in investment in NUV to recruit professionals to upgrade training (Koanapo, 2025). Basic education accessible by the majority of the population continued to face fundamental teaching and learning challenges, and schools continued to charge fees in contrast to the government’s intent of fee-free education (Smets et al., 2021). The continued priority on tertiary scholarships and education in budget indicated the long-term priority on university education for an increasing but still small group of higher-performing students. With geographic equity considerations in mind, ‘social inclusion’ was one of six pillars in Vanuatu’s scholarship

priority framework (GOV, 2022), but was not formalised as a separate scheme in the same way as Solomon Islands' Constituency Awards. Despite reforms, this budget priority and inequity of tertiary scholarships continued as a durable feature of the politics of this employment policy response in Vanuatu.

Conclusion

This case study analysed the Vanuatu Government's policy-making on its VGFS programme from 1997 to 2019. In this period, a new scheme established with significant Australian aid support and influence was subject to increased demand and political pressures and compromised selection, as well as scrutiny by accountability institutions, aid donors, civil society and the public. In a changing political context, senior Ministry officials led key management and policy changes and launched policy alternatives. These policy efforts resulted in significant change to post-secondary education in Vanuatu, locally delivered and oriented to employment. Several factors influenced policy-making and -change in the area:

1. Key structures and resourcing were important to challenges to delivering intended policy. Given resource constraints, increasingly significant student demand pressure difficult to respond to. The number of eligible students was low in 1997 but increased rapidly in the late 2000s, driven by increased secondary completion by students, who could not afford tertiary education. At a high cost per scholarship, officials and Ministers prioritised large budgets on scholarships over other education services benefiting larger numbers of students at lower levels of Vanuatu's education 'pyramid'.
2. Vanuatu's broader political dynamic of volatility and clientelist pressures shaped delivery in the policy area. Political and personalised selection pressures compromised formal scholarship processes, adding to selection lists and driving high budgets. Personalised selection had occurred for a long time, but within limited student numbers. However, surging demand combined with Vanuatu's volatile political dynamic of rapid turnover of Ministers, each seeking to allocate scholarships personally, worsened compromised selection and budget spending to the point that it was a significant national issue.
3. The distribution of accountabilities, incentives and benefits shaped the policy area. While the high expenditure and narrow benefits of VGFS indicated elite capture, geographic equity remained a pressure on politicians, becoming the rationale for a

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‘social inclusion’ category benefiting MP’s constituents. Members of the public perceived favouritism to those connected to senior officials and politicians. Changed education sector priorities, accountabilities and incentives, including pressure to deliver missed basic education commitments and Francophone education priorities, influenced policy change. MoET’s more direct accountabilities for basic education delivery, including when schools were destroyed by Cyclone Pam in 2015, meant stronger pressure to control high tertiary scholarships expenditures when these came at the cost of other education goals.

4. There was coherent domestic agency for change from outside government benefiting from collective policy platforms. Public, media and civil society advocacy raised concern at corrupt selection practices and high expenditure diverted from achievement of basic education policy goals. With sustained advocacy, close engagement and policy co-drafting by development partners, an active policy community of ni-Vanuatu and foreigners influenced key policy changes. With Australian support, development of the Vanuatu-led VSP provided a domestic policy platform and constituency for change towards locally-relevant and employer demand-oriented skills training as a policy and program implementation focus.
5. Broader political change in Vanuatu influenced the political environment for policy reforms, and changed accountabilities. The arrest of 15 MPs in 2015 saw a generational change in Vanuatu’s political leadership, and likely changed expectations of sanctions for corrupt practices, along with multiple Ombudsman’s investigations focused on scholarships. Broader political change provided the opportunity for programmatic reforms to education and skills, led by political and bureaucratic leaders with technical and policy experience.
6. Vanuatu’s political and bureaucratic leaders were able to see through policy alternatives to overseas scholarships. Significant management improvements and legislation and policy reforms were launched by Ministry officials, and supported by external aid donors, from 2014. These policy changes included revised legislation with scholarships policy and sanctions for personalised selection, more stringent scholarships processes and management and education and skills strategy guiding a shift of expenditure. Seeing through these policy reforms and alternatives required them to coordinate across multiple stakeholders, supported by policy networks, which proved possible in Vanuatu’s context.

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7. External donors applied significant influence to shape government funded scholarships policy and management. Australia as a donor was motivated to support Vanuatu to achieve policy goals of basic education access and quality and demand-led skills development. This external advocacy included an effective combination of high-level advocacy, financing with aid conditionality, and support to domestic policy advocacy in the VSP. In tertiary education, a different agenda of French assistance supported Francophone leaders with different policy priorities, including for Vanuatu's new university redirecting students locally.

Delivery of key reforms changed how Vanuatu 'shared the cake' of post-secondary education opportunities. With broader political change, but also increased budget revenues, tertiary expenditure remained high, while policy change and alternatives led by Vanuatu's senior bureaucrats and political actors achieved a shift to demand-led skills development and local tertiary provision. Pressure for policy change reflected the influence of public and external advocacy, while the ability to see through strengthening and enforcement of management and policies reflected the strength of bureaucratic leadership and of Vanuatu's accountability institutions. However, in Vanuatu's closely networked institutional environment there are continuing perceptions of covert personalised influences. In this policy area, formal institutions and informal practices appear to have reached a new balance. The interests and opportunities of parallel anglophone and francophone education systems also appear to have reached a new balance. Both these balances are likely to remain open to renegotiation in Vanuatu.

The VGFS policy case illustrates key characteristics of Vanuatu's broader political dynamic shaping policy making on employment. Vanuatu's alternating political volatility and stability has different effects on clientelist pressures with narrow and short-term benefits, and on the ability to launch and deliver programmatic reforms relevant to broader employment needs. A further key dynamic is a mixed external donor, expatriate and local civil society policy community influencing key policy changes. Different orientations within Vanuatu's government also mattered to shaping policy change. This included the generational change to more technocratic senior bureaucrats and politicians, and Vanuatu's administrative and educational system language divide. At the same time as these divisions, Vanuatu's closely networked environment meant coordination was possible to see through complex multi-stakeholder changes including the NHRDP and a loan scheme.

Specific political dynamics of Vanuatu's education and skills sector shaping employment policy-making also emerge from this case study. In Vanuatu's 'pyramid' of education access,

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inequitable distribution of benefits and resources fuelled political contestation and change in this policy area. Government funded scholarships were subject to elite capture, making scholarships a tool of elite replication in Vanuatu. There was political contestation between students chosen by merit and those by chosen by political connection, but also between those managing and participating in English or French education pathways. This contestation is likely a factor in policy contest and change in this key social sector policy area in Vanuatu, and is likely to continue. Broader post-secondary access, more established local tertiary provision, and skills training pathways to more levels of employment, are all changes likely to further change Vanuatu's political dynamic including with more informed and highly educated political and civil society advocates and technocrats, including unique collective policy advocacy and coordination. Synthesis, analysis, findings and multiple practical implications of this research for policy stakeholders in Vanuatu and beyond are captured in Chapters 8 and 9. Further changes in Vanuatu's political economy are evident in an employment policy area that has demonstrated greater and broader relevance to the majority of Vanuatu's population, with well-studied impacts: overseas labour mobility.

6: Starting slow: Solomon Islands labour mobility

Introduction

Participation in regional labour mobility schemes is an important policy initiative for Solomon Islands to respond to its employment needs. Solomon Islands has a large, rural and youthful population and limited higher education and formal job opportunities. Its leaders, officials and development partners agreed on the economic and employment benefits and policy priority of greater overseas labour mobility.¹³ Officials described Solomon Islanders' demand for work overseas as "huge" (Murray, 2022)(SIGO-2). Yet in a key paradox, in the case period (2007 – 2019) fewer Solomon Islanders participated in the schemes than several smaller Pacific countries including Vanuatu.

This case study supplements the substantial body of research on Pacific labour mobility with critical analysis of domestic policy-making on labour mobility as a major but unfulfilled employment opportunity within the case period. This chapter traces policy development from 2007, before Solomon Islands joined New Zealand's RSE scheme, to 2019, when Solomon Islands' formal Labour Mobility Policy Framework was launched. The three Australian and New Zealand schemes accessed by Solomon Islands during this period were the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, and Australia's Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP), and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS). Solomon Islands struggled to fully participate in these schemes, particularly in the SWP.

Solomon Islands started from behind in policy-making on labour mobility because of adverse contextual factors and dominant external policy settings, as well as local political and institutional dynamics. Under limited leadership, officials managed surging demand and pressures for distribution of scheme access, and threats of non-compliance with Australian and New Zealand rules, by "preventing politicization" (SIGO-1) of the schemes. This impacted political commitment and resourcing. Regional trade policy work, emerging national political leadership and active donor engagement and resourcing through multiple modes, created significant change in policy leadership by the end of the case study period, leading to a formal national policy framework, and, with intensive Australian aid support, rapidly increasing

¹³ Participants who shared these views included SDP-5,-8,9; SPA-2; and SLMS-1.

worker numbers. The experience of policy-making in this area reflects critical factors in Solomon Islands' broader political and institutional environment which shape employment policy, indicates how officials managed surging demand and political pressures in this context, and indicates who led and influenced policy change, including with unintended consequences. Discussion of developments after the case period further reveal alignment and contrast of employment policy-making in the context of prominent geostrategic pressures on Solomon Islands politics.

6.1: Context: Starting from behind

6.1.1: Solomon Islands' paradox of participation

A key paradox affects Solomon Islands labour mobility. There is widespread agreement across researchers, aid agencies, public officials and political leaders of the overall economic importance of participation in regional employment schemes for Solomon Islands' economy and its jobseekers (Bateman et al., 2014, pp. 4, 16; Close, 2012; Curtain et al., 2016; NPSI, 2008; SIG, 2015a, 2018d; WB, 2010b). This agreement on the value and benefits of overseas labour mobility was reflected in the comment of a senior political advisor interviewed:

“There’s no disagreement that I know of. Everyone is in support of overseas labour mobility, all the stakeholders like it.” (SPA-1)

As well as shared support of policy stakeholders, there was strong demand from Solomon Islands jobseekers. Growing recruitment by the end of the case study period and beyond further demonstrated high levels of demand for overseas labour mobility opportunities from Solomon Islands citizens themselves (SDP-2, SPA-2)(SIG, 2017a). In August 2021 alone there were 8,250 applicants for labour mobility programs, adding to 3,000 over 2017 to 2020 (Salato, 2022). By October 2023, SIG counted “at least 15,000 people in the queue” for overseas labour mobility opportunities (SIG, 2023b). But for the first decade after the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme started in 2007, despite its larger population, Solomon Islands sent fewer workers to participate in these schemes than Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa. This is shown in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. Table 6.1 presents the market share of different Pacific states in each of the two schemes up to 2018/19, illustrating Vanuatu and Tonga's dominance.

Table 6.1: RSE & SWP per cent market shares from commencement to 2018/19

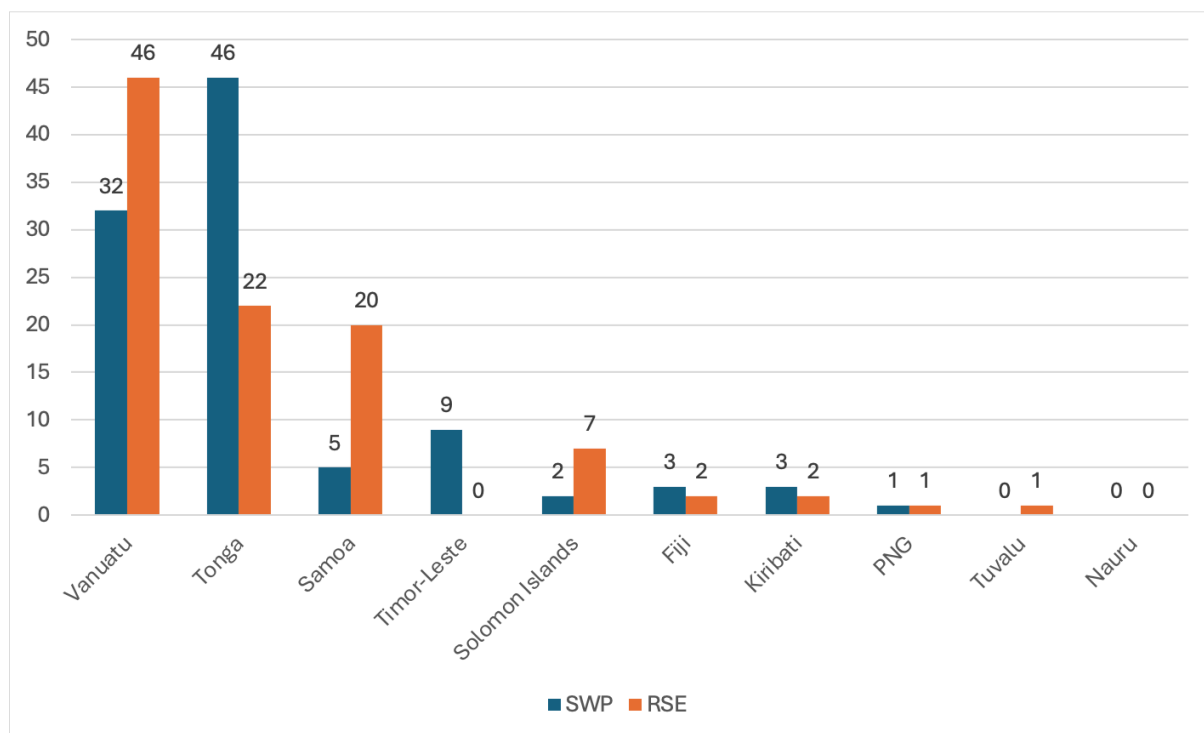


Table 6.1 Source: (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 24)

Table 6.2 compares Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, showing Solomon Islands' far smaller numbers than Vanuatu until shooting up in 2018/19, for reasons presented in this chapter. Solomon Islands' modest figures for RSE participation were far higher than the number of workers participating in the SWP through the case study period, factors in which are presented in section 6.1.3.

Table 6.2: Solomon Islands vs Vanuatu: RSE & SWP participants – 2008 – 2019

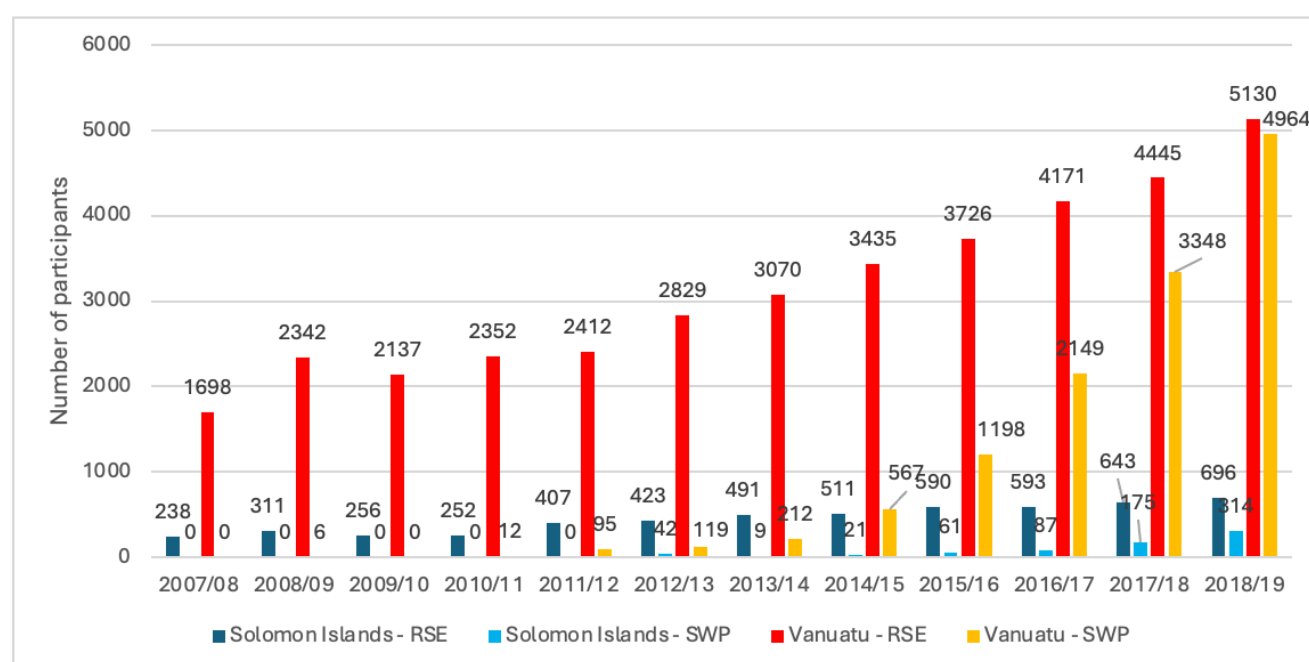


Table 6.2 Source: (Connell & Petrou, 2019, p. 15; Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 34; DFAT, 2019b, pp. 1-2; Howes, 2018; NZG, 2023d; Underhill-Sem & Marsters, 2017, p. 12)

Section 3.4 introduced Solomon Islands' employment needs and the very relevant economic and employment benefits offered by labour mobility. The development case for Solomon Islands' participation in overseas labour mobility schemes was clear. Solomon Islands' leaders' initial advocacy for scheme participation was also clear. Yet overseas labour mobility was a new policy area for government involvement. Since independence, labour mobility opportunities for Solomon Islanders had been limited, apart from phosphate mining work on Nauru, noted by two officials and in Hansard (SIGO-3,-4) (NPSI, 2008). In the early 2000s, the social unrest of the Tensions had drawn attention to the impacts and costs of under-educated, unemployed youth arising from the state's failure to effectively manage economic opportunities and generate domestic employment (Bennett, 2002). While prioritizing immediate post-conflict recovery, Solomon Islands' leaders joined multilateral advocacy, and sought bilateral opportunities with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Taiwan. In the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) meeting in Port Moresby in 2005, Solomon Islands' leaders joined regional advocacy for Australia and New Zealand to expand labour mobility opportunities (PIFS, 2005). However, Solomon Islands' officials faced multiple challenges securing and expanding access to labour mobility opportunities, which limited early results. Solomon Islands first sent workers to New Zealand in 2005, but being excluded from the 'kick-start' states of

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the scheme, only joined the RSE formally in 2008, one year after other Pacific countries (NZG, 2008). Solomon Islands was also added to Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) after its neighbours (AHC, 2011).

Solomon Islands' labour mobility participation paradox was one of wide agreement about the need and benefits, strong demand from the third largest Pacific country population, and available jobs in Australia and New Zealand; but nevertheless, lower worker numbers than other Pacific countries. As this chapter will explore, Solomon Islands' unequal participation in the two schemes was shaped by a combination of structural adversity, differences of scheme design, and political and institutional factors in Solomon Islands' governance and policy-making context.

6.1.2: Contextual adversity: External factors

Setting Solomon Islands back from the start, employer-led recruitment in the schemes preferred three countries with a 'first mover advantage' (Curtain & Howes, 2020). Samoa and Tonga benefited from large existing diaspora communities in New Zealand. Vanuatu was deliberately selected by the World Bank and New Zealand growers to pilot a seasonal work scheme as a Pacific pilot country without a large existing diaspora (see Chapter 7)(Curtain & Howes, 2020; Gibson & Bailey, 2021). Through well-managed initial selection, worker productivity and reliability, and re-hiring by employers, these countries continued to dominate scheme participation.

Solomon Islands' exceptionally limited emigration and overseas diaspora was a critical contextual factor affecting Solomon Islands' policy development on labour mobility. From an economic perspective, with a large and growing number of jobseekers and low incomes, Solomon Islands could be expected to have high rates of migration for work to nearby higher-income states. However, at 0.62 per cent in 2020, Solomon Islands' proportion of its citizens overseas was the second lowest in the Pacific (UNDESA, 2023). Its remittances as a proportion of GDP were the third-lowest (WB, 2020). Due to preferential migration access through New Zealand, people of Tongan and Samoan origin far outnumber nationals of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu origin residing in Australia (Pryke, 2014) (Howes & Liu, 2022; NZG, 2018b, 2023a, 2023b). This is a legacy of historically higher migration barriers faced by nationals of Melanesian countries in Australia and New Zealand, than some Polynesian countries to New Zealand and Micronesian countries to the United States (Gibson, 2015; Stahl & Appleyard, 2007).

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Craig and Bedford argued that while Solomon Islands workers used their agency to access labour mobility opportunities when they were available, labour receiving countries' policies, barriers and labour demand shaped Solomon Islands labour mobility, historically and presently. Large numbers of Solomon Islanders and ni-Vanuatu travelled overseas during the nineteenth century labour trade, particularly to Queensland (Corris, 1970, pp. 334-337; Craig et al., 2014). In 1900, a political movement in Australia against foreign labour motivated new legislation restricting immigration (Corris, 1972, p. 237; Moore et al., 1990). This abruptly ended labour mobility, forced repatriation of most Solomon Islands workers and cut links with the remaining diaspora in Australia. It was followed by a Solomon Islands colonial administration policy shift to restrict labour movement overseas, to preserve local labour supply (Craig et al., 2014).

Solomon Islands, PNG and Vanuatu lacked the large diasporas and existing migration pathways which assisted labour mobility in several Polynesian countries. Solomon Islands' structural context of low emigration rates, external migration barriers and human and financial capital limitations, constrained pathways and participation (Craig et al., 2014, p. 17; Poros, 2011, p. 17). Low emigration limited the development of supporting institutions, practices and knowledge that would help people identify or prepare for overseas work opportunities, or support them once overseas (Poros, 2011). Unlike Polynesian migration to New Zealand, Solomon Islands had not grown a 'culture of migration' overseas (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 59). This set an adverse context for public participation in emerging opportunities, and for national policy-making on labour mobility.

6.1.3: Australian and New Zealand policy settings: key differences

New Zealand and Australian scheme agreements and implementing arrangements were dominant in shaping Solomon Islands domestic policy arrangements for participation in labour mobility schemes. Differences between the two also had important consequences for Solomon Islands' participation in them.

Individual employers were important to initiating and growing Solomon Islands' participation in the RSE. Solomon Islands sent workers to New Zealand earlier, from 2005 under the New Zealand Government's "Approval-in-Principle". A Solomon Islander with New Zealand residency, Catherine Sheardown, was central to recruiting a large group of Solomon Islanders in the Hawkes Bay area (Bedford, Bedford, et al., 2020; Curtain, 2015; WB, 2010a). Two hundred workers travelled in 2005-06, without official SIG involvement (WB, 2010a). Announced in October 2006 by the New Zealand's Minister for Immigration, the RSE

temporary seasonal work policy required employers to be recognised, have an Agreement to Recruit, and have demonstrated that New Zealand workers were not available. Total foreign workers were capped at 5,000 per year (INZ, 2007). Prevention of overstaying was a major scheme priority (Bailey, 2009). While not among the initial five Pacific ‘kick start’ countries of Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Samoa (replacing Fiji), Solomon Islands joined in 2008 with 157 workers (NPSI, 2008).

Solomon Islands’ RSE participation was only formalized in April 2010, when MFAET’s LMU signed an Interagency Understanding (IAU) Agreement with the New Zealand Government (DOL, 2010; SolStar & GCU, 2017). The IAU with New Zealand provided for achieving RSE policy objectives (such as employment and sector development); avoiding overstaying and exploitation of workers; contributing to Solomon Islands’ economic development including through worker savings and experience; and effective cooperation with New Zealand to ensure scheme integrity (DOL, 2010). Solomon Islands went on to achieve moderate success in RSE participation (SIGO-2)(WB, 2010a, 2012a). Solomon Islands RSE worker numbers grew steadily, to surpass 500 annually in 2014, when Solomon Islands and New Zealand governments jointly announced a cap increase to 594 (see Tables 6.2, 6.4).

Australian policy settings on the SWP impacted negatively on Solomon Islands’ effective participation in that scheme. Australia in particular had great potential as a destination for Solomon Islands workers, with a large labour market, demand for workers, and direct flights. However, Australian Governments’ long-term opposition to labour mobility from the Pacific up to 2007 (presented at 3.4.4) blocked this opportunity. MP Dick Ha’amori later commented to Parliament that Solomon Islands’ politicians strong interest for labour market access for workers had not been reciprocated by the Australian Government after 2006 (NPSI, 2010). After political change in Australia, countries already participating in the RSE scheme and selected on the basis of one per sub-region of the Pacific - PNG, Vanuatu, Tonga and Kiribati – were welcomed into the pilot SWP scheme (PSWPS) in 2008, but not Solomon Islands (DFAT, 2008; Smith, 2008). Solomon Islands’ Prime Minister’s office engaged a former Australian Labour Party Parliamentary Secretary to help advocate for Solomon Islands’ inclusion (NPSI, 2008). This was initially unsuccessful. Opposition leader Sogavare labelled Australia’s decision *“a slap on our genuine efforts to restore... a deteriorating relationship”* (SMH, 2008). Prime Minister Rudd stated that Solomon Islands had been excluded because Australia’s scheme was being developed gradually from a small scale, and because Solomon Islands had not yet gained experience from participating in the RSE scheme and developing

necessary Government mechanisms (SolTimes, 2008c) In subsequent relationship repair under Prime Ministers Sikua and Rudd, visa restrictions were lifted for Solomon Islands members of parliament (SolTimes, 2008a). The Australian Government assured Sikua of Solomon Islands' entry to the PSWSP after 12 or 18 months, although at a smaller scale than the RSE (NPSI, 2008). After a joint MOU was signed for SWP participation in December 2011 (during the SWP pilot phase), the first Solomon Islands employees under the SWP were recruited in late 2012 (AHC, 2011; Curtain, 2015). However, partly due to its late start, Solomon Islands' SWP participation was to remain low for several years, lagging neighbours including Vanuatu (Tables 6.2, 6.4).

Similar to New Zealand's IAU, the SWP MoU and Implementation Arrangements set key scheme policies and implementing arrangements, including the sending country's close supervision and adequate resourcing of labour mobility sending arrangements including information to candidates and support with necessary clearances, arrangements for recruitment, program and visa eligibility requirements for candidates. The arrangements required declaration of conflict of interest for recruiting and prohibiting agents from charging fees to workers (DFAT, 2018d). Participants in this research recognised that both arrangements prohibited inappropriate charges on workers inappropriately, and provided the basis for blacklisting of workers who breached rules of behaviour, including by absconding¹⁴ (SLMS-1, SDP-5). However, differences between the two schemes in policy settings and implementation arrangements shaped divergent policy and implementation.

Curtain examined reasons for low take-up of SWP in Solomon Islands in 2015 advice commissioned by the Australian High Commission in Honiara. He identified key differences. The RSE was driven primarily by employer needs, but these were secondary to development objectives in the SWP. In New Zealand there was stronger involvement of a single employer association, and contemporary experience of recruiting Pacific workers for agriculture which Australia did not have. Australia had greater rigidity over employers' payment of upfront costs and higher penalties for breach of conditions, but weaker compliance on other, illegal workers, meaning cheaper alternatives to SWP workers were available to farmers. Longer work periods in the RSE increased the value for employers. There were also key differences in recruitment,

¹⁴ Australian Government communications materials warned workers that if leaving their job without intending to return is "absconding" and a serious breach of visa conditions DFAT. (2021). Absconding: The Risks and Consequences. In P. L. Scheme & S. W. Programme (Eds.). Canberra, Australia: DFAT.

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including direct employer involvement and a key role of a recruitment agent with a strong base in both countries under RSE, absent under SWP (Curtain, 2015, pp. 26-27)

The SWP provided higher wages for workers, but higher cost and reduced flexibility discouraged Australian employers, many of whom preferred cheaper labour options like illegal workers and backpackers (Doyle & Howes, 2015; Gibson & Bailey, 2021). The recruitment model was one of the most significant differences, leading to Solomon Islands' very low SWP participation in its early years. This is further discussed at sub-section 6.2.3.

Structural factors, external pathway barriers and policy choices lay behind Solomon Islands' 'paradox' of high demand for labour mobility opportunities but limited worker numbers. External program decisions and settings beyond Solomon Islands' control shaped the country's ability to participate in the two regional seasonal employment schemes. Both program barriers and the context of Solomon Islands' lengthy period of limited outmigration meant that Solomon Islands started from behind when overseas opportunities were made available for Pacific countries.

6.2: Labour mobility policy-making: Starting slow

In addition to contextual adversity and external policy settings, Solomon Islands' slow start to labour mobility schemes was affected by important domestic political and institutional factors constraining policy implementation and worker participation. Solomon Islands' political dynamics and institutional context for policy-making constrained capacity, national leadership and coordination. This limited worker participation, particularly in the Australian SWP.

6.2.1: Early advocacy and policy-making challenges

In a relatively new policy area, Solomon Islands parliamentary debate in 2008 reflected the importance politicians placed on the opportunity of regional seasonal employment programs (NPSI, 2008). Adding to earlier calls through the PIF, Solomon Islands' politicians called on international partners, particularly Australia and New Zealand, to open up their labour markets (NPSI, 2009, 2010). Three participants noted Solomon Islands leaders' early concerns that young, rural and low-skilled job-seekers get the opportunity to travel overseas for work (SDP-2,-9, SIGO-2), also reflected in Prime Minister Sikua's comments in Parliament (NPSI, 2008).. Presenting CNURA government's policy priorities to Parliament in March 2008, Governor-General Waena highlighted demonstrated economic benefits available to Solomon Islands through remittances from participating in labour schemes (NPSI, 2008). Politicians noted their preference for worker incomes and remittances from labour mobility, instead of "aid

handouts”, in which as MP Allan Kemakeza described, “*they gave us \$10 (NPSI, 2008) but they took back from us \$9*” in payment of Australian personnel (NPSI, 2008, 2009). This comment reflected Solomon Islands’ perspectives among academic, activist and Pacific leaders’ criticism of Australian ‘Boomerang aid’ (Banham, 2006; Doraisami, 1994; RNZ, 2004); also criticised by Solomon Islands opposition leader Sogavare at the time (SolTimes, 2008b).

Across Pacific Island Countries, labour mobility policy-making presented new difficulties for officials which they had limited experience and resources to address. Australian and New Zealand scheme arrangements required governments to engage actively. It was a complex public policy area: successful interventions involved multiple governments, legal systems, and public and private sector stakeholders (Curtain & Howes, 2020). Pacific government officials were faced with different receiving country policy requirements in governance environments combining resource shortages and personalised selection pressures (Laking, 2010). These factors affected policy development and scheme management. Most countries, including Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, lacked formally developed national policy frameworks for labour mobility for the first decade of participation, and all except Vanuatu lacked dedicated legislation, relying primarily on rules in agreements set by labour receiving countries (Curtain & Howes, 2020). The SWP model required extensive administration and facilitation, particularly disadvantaging Pacific countries with weaker governance institutions like PNG and Solomon Islands (Howes, 2019); as presented in sections 6.2.3 and 6.2.4.

At the outset, in 2008 comments to parliament, Prime Minister Sikua had recognized the importance of a range of stakeholders to labour mobility participation, including labour and immigration units of MoCILI, the police and medical services, with traditional and church leaders needed for recruitment at village level (NPSI, 2008). Two ministries vied to host labour mobility policy and implementation. The Ministry of Labour, Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration (MoCILI) had previously managed labour mobility to Nauru (SIGO-3,-4), but mostly focused on domestic work practices and immigrant worker permits. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and External Trade (MFAET) led bilateral agreements and trade negotiations, integrating labour mobility in Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) negotiations. MFAET had led negotiation and signing of a bilateral agreement with New Zealand’s Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) for RSE participation. Cabinet approved MFAET’s policy and implementation lead (WB, 2010a). Within MFAET’s Department of External Trade (DET), trade official Barrett Salato established the Ministry’s

Labour Mobility Unit (LMU) in 2007. A Labour Mobility Oversight Committee (LMOC) was set up to provide broader oversight, comprising key stakeholder agencies including MoCILI, the Police and Attorney General’s office (SIGO-2). Questioned in Parliament about the institutional switch from MoCILI to MFAET, Prime Minister Sikua explained the importance of labour mobility to trade, and that MoCILI and other key stakeholders were fully included in New Zealand consultation (NPSI, 2008). The organisational structure across MFAET and MoCILI including the LMOC, as it was in 2008, is at Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Solomon Islands overseas labour mobility: Organisational structure (2008)

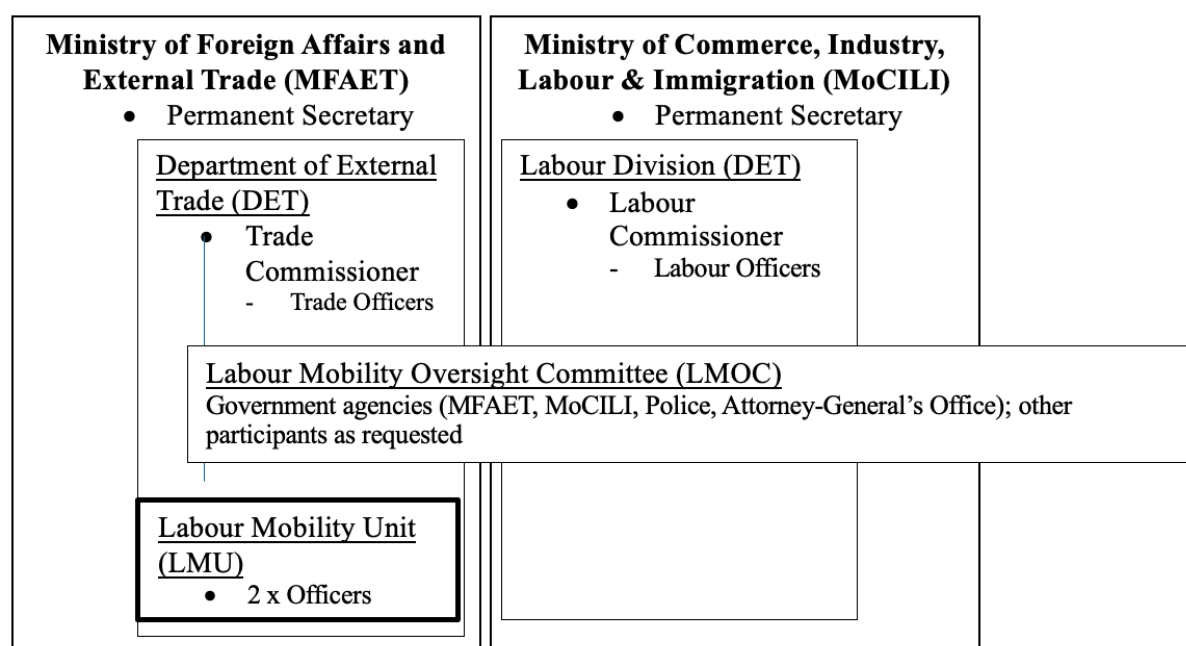


Table 6.3 Source: Researcher’s fieldwork in November 2018

Like other Pacific sending countries, Solomon Islands lacked a formal policy framework or legislation, leaving domestic policy arrangements for overseas labour mobility limited beyond requirements established by labour receiving countries. Asked in Parliament in 2008 about a policy framework, Prime Minister Sikua described efforts as being at a “very embryonic stage” (NPSI, 2008). MoCILI worked under Solomon Islands’ labour legislation, which was dated, with limited provisions for overseas work. The Labour Act promoted domestic employment of Solomon Islanders, requiring work permits for foreign workers (Bedford et al., 2014; IBP, 2018). Retaining significant detail on colonial- and independence-era priorities, it had last been amended in 1996 to institute a (very low) minimum wage (NPSI, 1996b). The Employment Act, also last amended in 1996, required contracts entered into locally for employment overseas to detail remuneration, working hours, holidays, termination notice period and employer

deposits for repatriation costs (NPSI, 1996a). Multiple stakeholders interviewed confirmed that there had not been a policy developed in the first ten years, beyond implementation arrangements aligned to Australian and New Zealand policies (SIGO-1,-2, SDP-1,-5, -8,-9). To 2025 there remains no specific Solomon Islands legislation regarding labour mobility overseas.

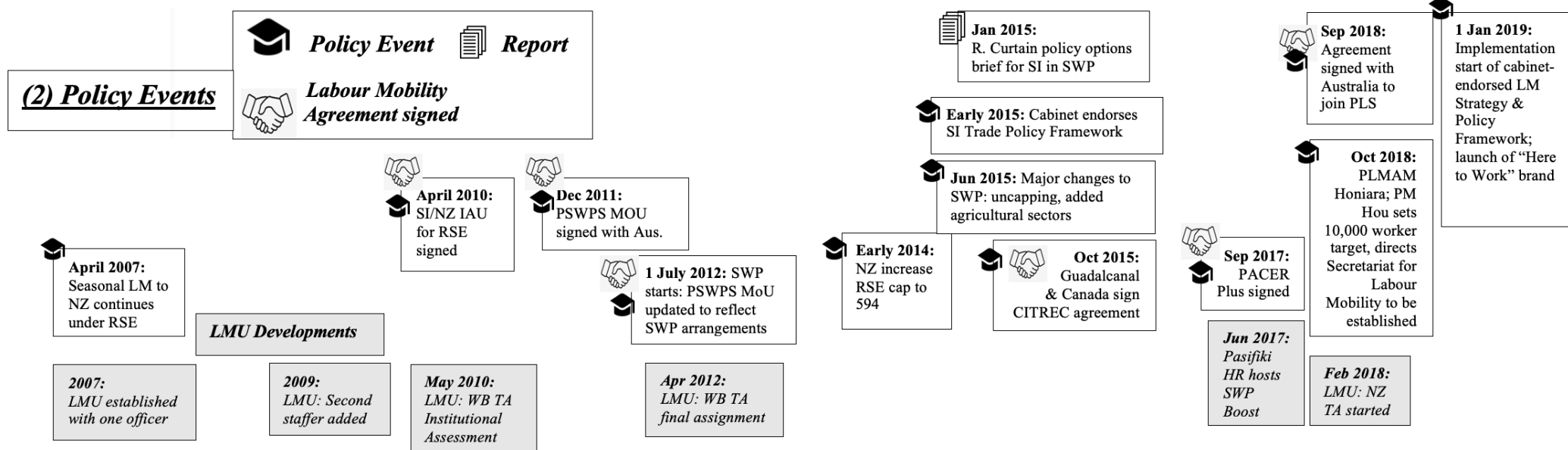
6.2.2 Timeline of leadership, policy events and worker participation and participant views

The timeline at Table 6.4 presents national and MFAET leaders, key policy events, and participating worker numbers over the 22-year case study period, to trace policy decision-making and important trends in evolving policy.

The first component at Table 6.4-a, ‘Leadership and Policy Events’, records Prime Ministers, Foreign Affairs and External Trade Ministers and Permanent Secretaries over the case study period, compared to major policy events, labour mobility agreements signed and key initiatives. While records are incomplete, MFAET leadership was stable relatively to previous case studies. The key change indicated in this table is the change in leadership from Prime Ministers Sogavare to Houenipwela (Hou’). In this period, as described in sub-section 6.4.2, Prime Minister Hou’s repeated advocacy for labour mobility, combined with factors including a new Trade Framework and advocacy by the Australian High Commission, enabled key steps forward in labour mobility including the launch of a comprehensive policy framework in 2019, budget commitments and substantially strengthened Australian support.

Table 6.4-a: Leadership and policy events

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
<i>(1) Leadership: From available records – incomplete</i>													
<i>(a) Prime Ministers</i>													
Sogavare (2006- '07)	Sikua ('07- '10)	Phillip ('10- '11)	Lilo ('11- '14)		Sogavare ('14- '17)					Houenipwela ('17- '19)		Sogavare ('19- '24)	
<i>(b) Ministers of Foreign Affairs & External Trade</i>													
Chan ('06- '07)	Haomae ('07 – '10)	Agovaka ('10 – '12)		Forau ('12– '14)		Tozaka ('14 – '19)							
<i>(c) Permanent Secretaries of MFAET (includes Acting)</i>													
Jeremeiah Manele (- '07)	'08 (N/A)	Senda Fifi ('09)	'10 (N/A)	Robert Sisilo ('11- '12)		N/A ('13)	Beraki Jino ('14- '15)		Joseph Ma'ahanua ('15- '16)	Peter Kenilorea ('17- '18)	Colin Beck ('18-)		
<i>(d) Governing Coalitions</i>													
Grand Coalition for Change ('06- '08)	Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement (CNURA), '08- '10		National Coalition for Reform and Advancement (NCRA), '10 – '14		Democratic Coalition for Change (DCC), '14- '19							Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DCGA), '19- '24	



Sources: Policy events presented above are illustrative of sources presented in this chapter text.

Table 6.4-b supplements leadership and policy events with worker participation numbers, which are more useful than (limited) government budgets to illustrate impacts of policy decisions and change in labour mobility case studies. This timeline illustrates that in the first four years of participation in the formal RSE alone, numbers remained stable and relatively low at around 200-300 each year. RSE numbers doubled in the following four years to 2014/2015, while worker participation in the PSWPS/ SWP remained in double figures, although dropping to only 9 in 2013/14. After New Zealand increased the RSE cap to 594 in 2014 (Bedford et al., 2014, p. 44), and major reforms to the SWP in 2015 (Gibson & Bailey, 2021), the final four-year stage saw increased worker numbers. SWP numbers grew particularly rapidly after the June 2017 launch of Australia's SWP Boost program supplementing the LMU's labour sending capacity (DFAT, 2017b).

Table 6.4-b: Solomon Islands labour mobility timeline: Leadership, policy events, worker participation

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
<i>(1) Leadership: From available records – incomplete</i>													
<i>(a) Prime Ministers</i>													
Sogavare ('06-'07)	Sikua ('07-'10)		Phillip ('10-'11)	Lilo ('11-'14)			Sogavare ('14-'17)			Houenipwela ('17-'19)		Sogavare ('19-'24)	
<i>(b) Ministers of Foreign Affairs & External Trade</i>													
Chan ('06-'07)	Haomae ('07 –'10)		Agovaka ('10 –'12)		Forau ('12–'14)		Tozaka ('14 –'19)						
<i>(c) Permanent Secretaries of MFAET (includes Acting)</i>													
Manele (-'07)	'08 (N/A)	Fifi ('09)	'10 (N/A)	Sisilo ('11-'12)		'13 (N/A)		Jino ('14-'15)		Ma'ahanua ('15-'16)		Kenilorea ('17-'18)	Beck ('18-)

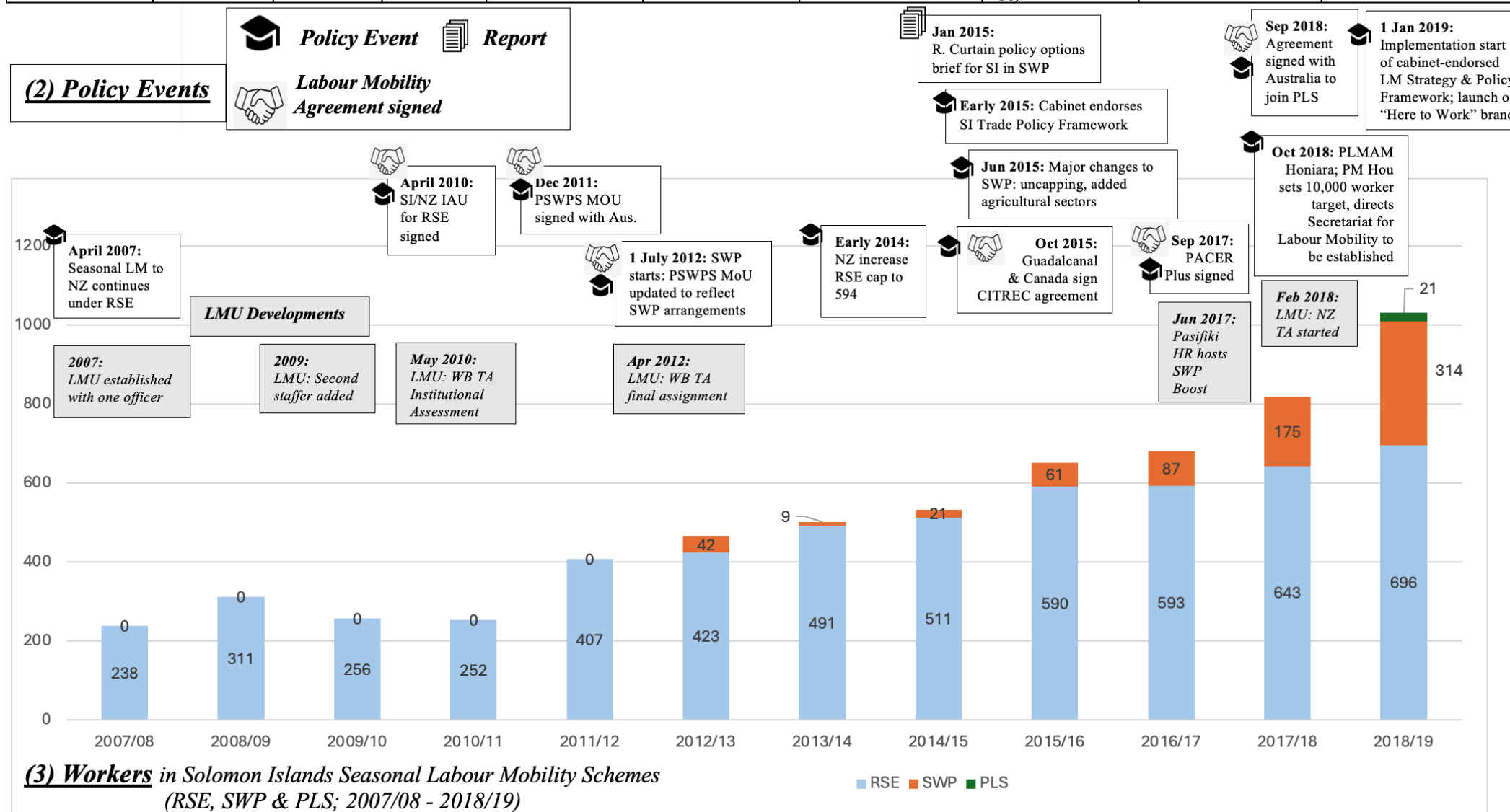


Table 6.4-b Sources: As for 6.4-a, with the addition of (Connell & Petrou, 2019, p. 15; DFAT, 2019b, pp. 1-2; Howes, 2018; NZG, 2023d; Underhill-Sem & Marsters, 2017, p. 12)

Participant views

‘Leadership in labour mobility’ was a dominant issue among Solomon Islands policy stakeholders interviewed, forming the largest share (14.5 per cent) of idea codes raised in any case study. The next most significant issues were ‘equity’ – for example, who “got to go” and accessed the scheme – and ‘development partner role’, a factor that became even more significant at the end of the policy case period, when participants were interviewed. The make-up of these idea codes suggested that how the policy area was led, and the equity and distribution of benefits, were significant issues for policy stakeholders in their perspectives on the delivery of Solomon Islands labour mobility policy.¹⁵

Table 6.5: Solomon Islands Labour Mobility: Top participant comments

Rank	Categories	Number of mentions	% of total comment code data
1	Leadership in labour mobility	55	14.7%
2	Equity	27	7.2%
3	Development partner role	24	6.4%
4	Cooperation, collaboration, collective action and coordination	18	4.8%
5	Geographic issues	18	4.8%
6	Lack of capacity and resources, weak public processes	18	4.8%
7	Who benefits and who doesn't benefit	17	4.6%
8	Chronology of labour mobility	15	4.0%
9	Labour mobility numbers	15	4.0%
10	How change might happen	14	3.8%
11	Change; technical and legislative change	13	3.5%

¹⁵ Coming equal at 4.8 per cent of mentions were ‘cooperation, collaboration, collective action and coordination’; ‘geographic issues’ (related to equity); and ‘lack of capacity and resources and weak public processes’. These were all significant factors in delivery of labour mobility policy in Solomon Islands. Ranking next, with one fewer mention, was ‘who benefits and who doesn’t benefit’ – again relating to equity. ‘Chronology’ of labour mobility, ‘what change happened’ and ‘might happen’ all related more closely to the semi-structured interview questions and made up the following most frequently mentioned ideas themes, as well as ‘labour mobility numbers’ – a key measure of delivery of the policy area as presented in this chapter - at 4 per cent of responses.

6.2.3: Limited government leadership, capacity and coordination

While local policy stakeholders including officials shared views of the value and benefits of overseas labour mobility, as indicated by the comment of SPA-1 in sub-section 6.1.1, the combination of leadership, capacity and domestic coordination required to deliver these benefits was lacking.

Multiple authors had recognized early that Pacific states required added resources and institutional capacity building to effectively manage scheme participation (Bedford, 2013, p. 190; Hugo, 2009; Newland et al., 2008). International donors and agencies including Australia, New Zealand, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization provided technical support to strengthen capabilities and processes in labour sending units in Pacific countries from the start of schemes (Bedford, 2013, p. 192). Evaluations of this assistance recommended continued support to sustain functional capacity (Bedford, 2013, p. 194; Raetz, 2013; WB, 2012a). New Zealand's Department of Labour (DoL) had built relationships and policies and processes in Pacific sending ministry counterparts from 2009 through the Strengthening Pacific Partnerships (SPP) programme (Bailey, 2019a; Bedford, 2013; MFAT, 2016). This was reportedly well-regarded by the officials concerned, including in Solomon Islands (Bailey, 2019a).

As in other Pacific countries, institutional capability limited Solomon Islands' participation in labour mobility schemes. The LMU had limited resourcing and management and operational capacity to manage a complex multi-stakeholder programme and increase worker numbers. Being managed within MFAET's DET, labour mobility was integrated in trade negotiations, but according to one involved official the LMU *"would sometimes end up with nothing"* from DET budget (SIGO-2). By 2010, there were two officers in the LMU, with one computer, shared printer access, no vehicle, and no budget for recruitment outside Honiara or liaison with workers overseas (NPSI, 2009; WB, 2010a). One development partner commented that multiple bids for increased LMU budget were unsuccessful (SDP-5). Despite high level commitment to labour mobility in principle, senior trade officials had limited time to allocate to it (WB, 2010a, p. 10). One involved official interviewed in 2018 reflected these resource and leadership constraints continuing to impede policy development:

"Needs some power, resources and capacity for implementation of labour mobility. It is very demanding and challenging – coordinating, selecting and managing workers, it's a tough task for the Ministry. Superiors don't engage with the LMU on priorities and

capacity required for successful program implementation. At the moment too many priorities with trade – a lot of negotiation and trade agreements, so the sequence of priorities sometimes leaves labour mobility at the bottom. The LMU is still struggling with a lack of policy to guide implementation of the program. It’s a huge challenge to try and convince policy-makers that this is a national priority in Solomon Islands.” (SIGO-2)

The World Bank also identified a lack of leadership of labour mobility among senior officials as a constraint (WB, 2010a). World Bank technical support to develop systems to manage the schemes, delivered in 33 days across 2010 to 2012, only partially achieved its aims (WB, 2012a, 2013a). The World Bank assessed that progress had stalled due to disinterested and changing Ministry leadership, describing MFAET as *“relatively passive in promoting and advancing SI participation in RSE and ill-prepared to enter the Australia SWP”* (WB, 2012a; 2013a, pp. 1-3). Funding donor AusAID evaluated the World Bank’s labour sending capacity building activities across the Pacific as *“marginally effective”*, both donors recognising the limitations of short timeframes to build sustainable capacity (Raetz, 2013, p. 22). Citing uncertain leadership commitment, the World Bank discontinued LMU support, assessing that Solomon Islands had missed the opportunity to prepare for successful SWP participation (WB, 2013a, pp. 1-3).

Distinct from Sikua’s 2008 priority on multiple agencies’ involvement, poor bureaucratic coordination and institutional weakness of other key government agencies also undermined programme implementation. One development partner considered government departments *“disconnected”* (SDP-8). The LMOC met, but focused on pressing operational requirements, rather than strategy or monitoring of workers (WB, 2012a). World Bank technical support canvassed coordination options in a discussion paper (WB, 2013a, pp. 1-3). These coordination options appeared to not be pursued, as MFAET and MOCILI disagreement persisted, and working relations broke down. By 2018 labour officials ceased to join meetings, a labour official commenting: *“We used to be in the LMOC. Usually LMU people invited us to meetings and trainings ... not now”* (SIGO-3). One development partner noted the Labour Division’s obviously low profile, when in other countries it would lead on labour mobility (SDP-5). The Labour Division also claimed a lack of skilled personnel and resources, fragmented policies and responsibilities across Ministries, and the lack of an information system (Parairae, 2017, pp. 61-62). Stakeholders interviewed in 2018 considered the LMU *“insular”*, not wanting Labour involved (SPD-8), narrowly managing policies themselves (SPD-5), and a gatekeeper for labour mobility, limiting other agencies’ involvement (SPA-1, SLMS-2). Research

participants complained that LMU officials lacked proactivity (SIGO-1), were not adequately promoting Solomon Islands labour mobility (SLMS-2), and had missed opportunities in marketing, coordination, travel costs, and preparation for emerging employment opportunities, that could have boosted worker participation (SDP-8). While the LMU struggled with basic management and coordination, development partners felt that they had to drive any discussions of strategy or monitoring (SDP-5,-8).

These issues impacted worker participation. Poor management and coordination undermined marketing, agent capacity-building and agent-employer coordination, all necessary for growing scheme participation (WB, 2010a). It impeded implementation improvements to streamline access; such as to passports (SDP-8). One development partner contrasted Solomon Islands workers' good performance with LMU bureaucratic coordination delays discouraging employers:

“The issue is absolutely not with workers - the issue is the bureaucracy. When the employer says “you’re great, can I get 20 more of you?”, comes over here, selects the workers and says “here is who I want”, but there’s a role for LMU to play in terms of facilitating things, delays in terms of visas, approval, all of that. When a farmer’s still waiting 3- 4 weeks into the season, they say “well, we’re just not recruiting from here again”. (SDP-9)

Management issues and impacts differed between the two schemes, because of mixed strengths in handling different scheme rules and requirements. LMU oversight, coordination, licensing, data management and pre-departure training supported growing RSE scheme participation. This was helped by effective employer-driven recruitment, and continuity of key MFAET staff including trade commissioner Barrett Salato and LMU official Jack O’oi, as well as Ruth Kwalemanu at the NZ High Commission (SIGO-2)(WB, 2010a, 2012a). In a study commissioned by the Australian High Commission (6.1.3), Richard Curtain identified the SWP’s scheme requirements challenging LMU’s weak capacity to deliver SWP functions and contributing to lower SWP worker numbers. Curtain reported the LMU’s lack of incentives, policy mandate or resources to increase SWP take-up, as Australian employers looked elsewhere (Curtain, 2015).

Overall, limited government capacity, coordination, proactivity and official leadership, reflecting both broader institutional weakness in Solomon Islands public services and specific

adversity to coordination in this policy area, undermined labour mobility policy delivery and scheme participation in these early years.

6.2.4: Recruitment model problems

Labour migration agents had a critical role in recruiting and preparing workers for seasonal work participation overseas, and were subject to regulation and management to ensure they met scheme requirements. Their limited capacity in Solomon Islands also constrained worker numbers. Across the programmes, World Bank consultants assessed limited capacities and viability of around twelve agents, sufficient for at most 500-600 workers. Two agents administered the majority of RSE workers (WB, 2010a, 2013a), keeping recruitment options narrower than other states.

Between RSE and SWP, Curtain identified specific scheme design differences in recruitment approach which resulted in different outcomes (Curtain, 2015). Of three worker recruitment models available in the Pacific, New Zealand growers appreciated Solomon Islands' approach of direct recruitment, and returning 'worker/ agents' embedded in communities (Curtain & Howes, 2020; Gibson & Bailey, 2021). Workers built a positive reputation, leading to moderate RSE success in Solomon Islands (WB, 2012a, p. 13). Curtain identified the most obvious reason for the failure of the SWP in Solomon Islands as being sole reliance on under-resourced agents in Honiara for multiple functions including marketing, recruitment, pre-departure briefing and worker support; often government responsibilities in other Pacific countries. These agents were only allowed one revenue source of charging Australian employers, with whom agents lacked substantial links or a value add to offer (Curtain, 2015). The SWP agent model also did not foster close relationships with workers and communities, resulting in quality problems in worker selection and oversight. This discouraged Australian employers, who recruited from elsewhere (DFAT, 2016c)(Interview with Richard Curtain, 4 March 2019).

Australian officials were concerned about corruption issues arising from the recruitment model used in the SWP scheme in Solomon Islands (SDP-5). Acting on Curtain's findings, Australian officials requested the Solomon Islands switch from the 'agent' model to the 'work-ready pool' (WRP) model (pooling eligible workers for labour mobility recruitment) from 2015, to lift worker numbers and improve the integrity of the selection process (SDP-5). According to two development partners, this change was resisted by some Solomon Islands officials and agents who benefited from the agent model (SDP-1,-5). This resulted in further constrained SWP numbers in 2015-16 (Curtain & Howes, 2020).

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Design issues, LMU management capacity and poor coordination practices, a lack of champions, and recruitment model problems, undermined Solomon Islands' labour mobility scheme policy-making, implementation and participation in the early years. The result of this was that up to 2017, Solomon Islands, like Papua New Guinea, were assessed as struggling to facilitate labour mobility opportunities due to "poor bureaucratic processes" and "lack of strong networks" to support labour mobility (Sherrell, 2017). Managing equitable access to the schemes, and political and personal selection pressures, while complying with Australian and New Zealand scheme requirements, presented further challenges for Solomon Islands policy-makers.

6.3: Managing Selection Pressures

Through the case study period, LMU officials with limited resources were unable to meet huge demand for labour mobility opportunities. Pressured officials felt that it was unfair to raise people's expectations when job-seeker demand was so much larger than numbers recruited (SIGO-2). Exploitation and corruption entangled and challenged Solomon Islands officials. Frustrated jobseekers sought alternative opportunities to migrate for work.

6.3.1: Exploitation and corruption

Chapter 3 presented Solomon Islands' wider context of institutional corruption. Within this context, labour mobility and immigration actors experienced allegations and perceptions of unscrupulous practices. As in other Pacific countries, early and ongoing challenges in Solomon Islands included fake labour agents and unreliable Australian contacts, who collected money from prospective workers and coordinators, and failed to deliver promised employment opportunities (SIGO-2, SPA-2). In 2016, local media reports claimed that labour mobility selection had been "hijacked" by politicians seeking to make their own appointments. These claims were refuted by MFAET's LMU, which issued a statement that it was "*working closely with DFAT (Australia High Commission) to develop a more robust and effective selection mechanism for the work ready pool*", and was "unaware" of any Cabinet paper deviating from set criteria and modalities (SIG, 2016b).

Participants in this research had a different view from the LMU. Three political advisors separately complained that the LMU only selected their own Wantoks, and that some workers participated too much (SPA-1,-2,-4). In 2018, one development partner commented: "*we know there's corruption... kickbacks – to government officials or government officials potentially*

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being involved in the selection process after a recruitment has already been undertaken by employers” (SDP-9). In 2021, the Solomon Times reported that government officers were exploiting desperate overseas work applicants by demanding upfront payments for required clearances and documents, an act described by one applicant as “evil and heartless” (Nolan, 2021). An applicant complained, “I was asked to pay money everywhere I go, people who want their things done fast but have to pay” (Ibid). An official replied:

““It is possible that some officers are asking for money, but most of us try our best to help without demanding money, so do not just cover all of us as corrupt”. The officer blamed those wanting clearances faster as possibly offering money” (Nolan, 2021).

MoCILI was also targeted by allegations of corruption over Labour and Immigration functions. The Ministry reported to Parliament in 2018 that despite issuing up to 5,000 work permits annually in recent years, it did not *“have the manpower to monitor all applications”* (NPSI, 2018, p. 64). In 2019, a former Immigration official told the *Solomon Star* newspaper about junior officers being powerless as senior officers received gifts and favours including cars, in exchange for visas, licenses, lenience on visa overstaying and work permits, particularly in logging (Babasiana, 2019).

Such mutual suspicions of corruption and nepotism between policy stakeholders essential to labour mobility, including politicians, agents and key Ministries, likely diminished the mutual trust needed for effective policy-making and scheme participation. This integrity environment was also a risk for Australian and New Zealand officials and labour mobility employers. A major RSE recruiter and New Zealander of Solomon Islands heritage, Anthony Rarere of Pick Hawke’s Bay, told Radio New Zealand in 2018 that while workers were diligent, Solomon Islands had *“a high level of corruption”* and was *“not an easy place to recruit out of”*. He related that in one incident 1,000 people turned up for recruitment, and when most of them couldn’t be recruited, they got violent and abusive. Rarere had not experienced such intimidation elsewhere in the Pacific, and consequently reduced Solomon Islands recruitment from 2018 (Chanwai-Earle, 2018). Rarere’s experience reflected both widespread actual or perceived corruption in Solomon Islands, and the social pressure from strong, unmet demand for labour opportunities. Rarere himself also faced allegations of threats and intimidation against Solomon Islands workers in Hawke’s Bay (Fonseka, 2020).

With participation constrained by institutional weakness, poor coordination and mutual perceptions of corruption, desperate Solomon Islands jobseekers sought alternative pathways

to jobs overseas. ‘Irregular’ workers were vulnerable to exploitation. Some travelled to Australia outside the schemes on visitor visas, worked, and overstayed. Irregular migration is, by its illicit nature, difficult to measure (Larsen, 2010). It was also not publicised by either government, but noted in interviews by one private sector participant, one development partner and one political advisor (SPS-2, SDP-5, SPA-1), and reflected in one Australian media report (AAP, 2017). Solomon Islanders were known to go on three month holiday visas and work, repeatedly, some ending up blacklisted for visas (SPS-2). While one development partner considered the scale of Solomon Islanders working illegally in Australia to be significant (SDP-5), available estimates indicated that total numbers of ‘irregular’ Solomon Islands migrants in Australia were likely to still be much lower than those from Pacific countries with larger diasporas, including Fiji and Tonga (DHA, 2019; Larsen, 2010).

Broader issues of exploitation affected Pacific workers across both schemes, as identified in multiple reports (APH, 2016; APHEDA, 2016; Cheffers, 2017; Doherty, 2017; Fonseka, 2020, 2022; ILO, 2019; Stringer, 2017). Some workers returned with no savings due to wage deductions and insufficient work hours, and lacked awareness of conditions, and lacked support and pastoral care services. In environments of limited mass media and reach of government information and services, getting information on the programmes was difficult (Maclellan, 2008; Petrou & Connell, 2023). Several participants mentioned that instances of exploitation raised Solomon Islanders’ doubts about the schemes (SLMS-1, SIGO-2, SPA-2, -4). One development partner described those seeking work as more likely to be “*rural, uneducated, unskilled, powerless and desperate people*” (SDP-2). As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, people with these characteristics lacked a coordinated, powerful political platform in Solomon Islands’ political economy dynamic.

Sub-section 6.1.2 introduced Solomon Islanders’ lack of existing social institutions, knowledge and resources supporting overseas labour mobility. As well as inadequate existing migration structures and experience or bureaucratic leadership and administrative capacity, mutual allegations of corruption undermined the trust needed for the coordination that was essential for effective labour mobility sending. The need to respond to high, unmet demand from workers, and address integrity and worker exploitation risks, remained. It was to inform new leadership and policy-making by Solomon Islanders and partners in later years (section 6.4).

6.3.2: Equity and Politicisation

Participation numbers illustrate inequity faced by Pacific women in labour mobility schemes, only partially improved through the expansion of sectors under the PLS (Hill et al., 2018; PALM, 2023). Women's participation rates were actually higher in Solomon Islands than in larger sending countries in the RSE scheme. From 2007 to 2022, 28.2 per cent of Solomon Islands RSE workers were women, two to three times the rates in Vanuatu and Tonga (Bedford & Bedford, 2023).

Solomon Islanders interviewed were not focused on women's participation, but raised the need to spread labour mobility opportunities more widely (SCS-1, SLMS-1, SPA-1, -2). In 2018, two political advisors shared concerns about equity in participation. They commented that those who were fortunate with information and connections – if they knew people - got to go:

“With local recruiters, there are charges of abuse... – “there’s this family, they have a son who joined the recruitment, now they have a daughter also going, a mother also going...”
” (SPA-2)

“It’s not really fair – it’s who you know, what connections you have. The decision to go for overseas labour mobility, it’s mostly people who have access and connections to people in authority who go, not necessarily the best. Awareness of labour mobility has to be done to properly screen who goes.” (SPA-1)

In a context of mutual distrust, officials, politicians and political advisors actively disputed how to ensure participation in labour mobility opportunities included rural Solomon Islanders, equitably. From early stages, Solomon Islands politicians advocated for recruitment for seasonal employment schemes to be extended beyond Honiara to the provinces so that remittances could have impact at village level (NPSI, 2010). Rural people without cash income faced financial barriers to going to Honiara for a passport, medical test and police check (SDP-5)(SIGO-2,-3). As with other needs, rural constituents' demands for help to access labour mobility were directed to local members of parliament. There were *“continuous mounting pressure to constituency officers to assist them with passports and advice”*, along with complaints about recruiter scams, bribes and exploitation (SPA-2).

Responding to voter pressure and seeking local development benefits, politicians and their advisors explored opportunities to distribute labour mobility access to their constituents, similarly to tertiary scholarships, and as an alternative to perceived corruption. This thinking was reflected by one political advisor:

“MPs would like to be more involved in labour mobility – and could make it geographically more dispersed/ fairer – sharing, to have six from a constituency - or 4, or 10. Like what they did on scholarships. Then we’d see benefit going down to the local people. But if they say no you have to go to recruiters, its survival of the fittest. Or it comes down to money: “\$500 if you push my daughter in”. Then some wait longer and some benefit more because they have money.” (SPA-2)

A labour mobility stakeholder also reported understanding of the demand from MPs:

“One MP said to an LMU staff member just give us ten spots per MP - 500 people, 50 MPs. The officer said that’s how we could do it... a work-ready pool.” (SLMS-2)

A substantive and public example of some politicians’ attempt to open labour mobility opportunities for their rural constituents was the “Solomon Islands & Toowoomba Australia Support Network” (SITASN), an initiative to secure employment and development benefits in the Toowoomba area for Solomon Islands workers (SITASN, 2015). MPs Freda Tuki (of Temotu, Minister for Rural Development until August 2015); Derrick Manuari (of West Makira) and Jimmy Lusibaea (North Malaita) were executive members. SITASN charged SBD1,000 membership fees to meet costs, claiming to have recruited 80 members. MPs were prepared to pay airfare costs to Australia from Constituency Funds. In a meeting in 2015, MFAET LMU officials advised SITASN executives that the model was outside Australia’s permitted seasonal labour policies because agents were not permitted to charge workers for costs, and because an Australian Approved Employers Certificate had not been obtained (SPA-2).¹⁶ The following day the MFAET LMU released a statement to media warning again about fake agents taking payment, and that taking payment for administrative expenses was illegal under both schemes (RNZ, 2015b). Members of the public were encouraged to verify the identify and licenses of agents. However, at the time (September 2015), there were no longer any approved recruiting agents for the SWP (Sanga, 2015); a problem resulting from the agent constraints discussed at 6.2.3. The result was very low SWP participation.

Participants interviewed reported that from the start, development partners and senior officials had deliberately designed labour mobility recruitment to prevent personal involvement by MPs (SDP-5, SIGO-2). The importance of ‘protecting’ the policy area from corrupt practices and “political interference” was reiterated by senior officials and stakeholders in the discussions with donors and in this research (SDP-5, SLMS-1, SIGO-1,-2). Development partners warned

¹⁶ Meeting attended by S Close in Honiara, 2015, while employed in the World Bank.

that political involvement and corruption was a risk to scheme viability (SDP-5). In 2012, the World Bank warned that any politicization of recruitment by interventions of national or provincial politicians “*would be resented by PSWP and RSE employers who would not entertain politicians having a say in whom they can or can’t employ*”. Bank consultants recommended development of a labour mobility policy framework that better supported provincial recruitment as a way to avoid conflict between employer demand and domestic pressures to politicise labour mobility (WB, 2012a, pp. 14-15). Curtain noted the choice of agent model as deliberate to avoid politicians selecting workers, recognising Wood’s research on the pressure voters placed on politicians to deliver benefits. In his 2015 policy brief Curtain recognised that “*developing political support requires ensuring that people in rural areas have access to labour mobility opportunities*” (Curtain, 2015), best achieved through direct recruitment to the SWP.

Focusing on the needs of employers, development partners continued to prioritise selection process integrity (SDP-5). This concern was reasonable, as Curtain had identified that poor quality worker supply had undermined Solomon Islands’ SWP participation to date (Curtain, 2015). One official commented that “*labour mobility wants to stand as an institution independent of any political interference and politics*” (SIGO-2). Another official justified prevention of political involvement as “*corrupt practices could see Australian interest move to other countries*” (SIGO-1). This same official recognised this protection from interference could limit leaders’ commitment and resourcing support for labour mobility (SIGO-1). A political stakeholder shared their view that prevention of political interference was intended to closely limit labour mobility benefits to a small group of LMU officials (SPA-2). As discussed in sub-section 6.3.1 above, MFAET refuted claims of “political hijack” of labour mobility, explaining its responsibility over the two schemes (SIG, 2016b). LMU officials were caught between enforcing compliance of scheme rules and integrity, and perceptions of gatekeeping local entrepreneurs, and not wanting to coordinate with other agencies (SPA-1, SLMS-2).

Provincial politicians also confronted high, unmet demand for, and inequity in, labour mobility opportunities. This led to their entry into a scheme independent of the LMU (SPA-4). Guadalcanal Provincial Government (GPG) leaders, including Premier Stephen Panga, were concerned at unemployed Guadalcanalese youth crowding into Honiara, their need for education, jobs and engagement, and that they “*were always left out – only people from other provinces who knew people get opportunities because of Wantok system*” (SPA-4). To access labour mobility opportunities, GPG leaders signed an agreement with a Canadian training

organization, CITREC, for jobs in specific sectors in Saskatchewan province (SIBC, 2015b) (SIG, 2018a; SolStar, 2016c). Under the scheme, Guadalcanal province paid fees to CITREC, before recouping funds from workers' wages earned in Canada (SPA-4)(Kekea, 2018a; SolStar, 2017). The agreement was mediated by the Canadian Consul-General to Solomon Islands (SIG, 2017a). Ambassador Robert Sisilo and Prime Minister Rick Hou supplemented provincial advocacy in meetings with Canadian counterparts in 2017 and 2018 (SIG, 2017a) (SolStar 2018). Malaita and Makira-Ulawa provinces joined the scheme in 2018, which was rolled out nationwide in 2019 (SolStar 2018)(RNZ, 2019). By early 2019, 50 Solomon Islanders were working in Canada; fourteen achieved permanent residency in 2022 (Iroga, 2023).

Key differences of CITREC from the seasonal labour schemes included a pathway to permanent migration, but for fewer total workers, and with high upfront training investment costs by Guadalcanal province. Provincial opposition MPs criticized high expenditure on the scheme for limited returns (SolStar, 2017), while Guadalcanal faced chronic gaps in essential service delivery including schools and health clinics (Kekea, 2018a). The scheme required temporary suspension in 2022 because these high costs exceeded GPG's debt servicing limits, having cost SBD9 million over six years to train 200 students (Podokolo, 2022; SundayIsles, 2022). This expensive investment, at the cost of other services, reflected provincial frustrations with Honiara-focused development, and in particular provincial politicians' frustrations, and motivation to respond to jobseekers demand. Policy-making factors shared across all schemes included the dominance of receiving country policy settings shaping local policy choices; contestation among politicians about who benefited; and the implementation impact of individual leadership. Politicians' attempts at labour mobility policy alternatives responded to weak service delivery, concern about geographic equity, and mutual suspicions of corruption and nepotistic distribution of labour mobility opportunities.

While MFAET officials and development partners deliberately prevented politicians' involvement in selection, this undermined their accountability to constituents for labour mobility. Responding to voter pressure and seeking local development benefits, politicians and their advisors explored opportunities to distribute labour mobility access to their constituents. Attempting alternatives, provincial politicians like Guadalcanal's Stephen Panga were directly linked to the CITREC, and accountable to constituents for it. However, its high cost and narrow scale limited its relevance as an employment policy response reaching the majority of Solomon Islands workers.

6.4: Change: National leadership and donor influence

Change came about from 2015, from a combination of regional trade advocacy and national trade policy work, individual political and bureaucratic leadership, and increased advocacy by influential donors. This changed leadership, resourcing and external support led to launch of a comprehensive national policy framework and rapidly increased participation at the end of the case study period.

6.4.1: Trade priority

The biggest change in domestic policy-making on labour mobility during the case study period was stronger national leadership on the issue from 2016. Stronger political commitment led to the development of new policy frameworks and resource commitments by national leaders which facilitated significant increases in participation in both SWP and RSE.

Regional trade negotiations was one key source of change. Labour mobility was already included in MFAET-led trade negotiations (NPSI, 2008, 2009; SIG, 2015b). Labour mobility was a relevant objective for Pacific countries' trade negotiations as it represented one of few relevant trade advantages for Pacific states (Kautoke-Holani, 2017). Advances in labour mobility were considered essential to achieve any meaningful economic impact for Pacific countries of increased trade through PACER Plus (Kautoke-Holani, 2018). Comments in parliament in December 2013 by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Clay Forau reflected his support for this trade negotiation priority. Noting that existing MoUs were not legally binding and could be terminated at any time, he sought separate but legally binding commitments by Australia and New Zealand, to be included in PACER Plus agreements, supported by development funding (NPSI, 2013).

Australia and New Zealand were reluctant to expand their respective labour mobility programs beyond narrower skilled labour movement. They were concerned about setting precedent for other significant free trade agreements (DFAT, 2017a; Kautoke-Holani, 2017). The outcome of negotiations produced little change and disappointed many. Nine PIF member states signed the PACER Plus agreement in 2017, a non-binding side-arrangement including provisions for low-skilled and semi-skilled labour mobility (Kautoke-Holani, 2018). PNG and Fiji refused to sign (Gay, 2017). The Arrangement on Labour Mobility signed by Australian and New Zealand governments with Pacific state counterparts committed to create more temporary employment opportunities and build Pacific state capacity to participate (DFAT, 2017a; MFAT, 2017). This

outcome again showed that dominating developed labour receiving countries had decided the labour mobility gains of Pacific states. However, intra-regional labour mobility also emerged as a priority opportunity in negotiations for the Melanesian Spearhead Group Trade Agreement (MSGTA) (Kautoke-Holani, 2017). Labour movement between Pacific states grew in subsequent years but remained limited relative to opportunities (ILO, 2019, pp. 19-20).

The importance of labour mobility in shared regional trade advocacy is likely to have raised the policy priority of labour mobility within MFAET and SIG leadership. The process of joint trade advocacy alerted leaders and senior officials to the economic opportunity Pacific neighbours were benefiting from, that Solomon Islands was missing out (SIG, 2015b)(SDP-9). Solomon Islands' Trade Policy Framework (TPF) set key principles to guide trade policy over coming years, integrating trade aspects of existing policies and support by policy-makers to enhance the role of trade in Solomon Islands' economy and development (SIG, 2015b, p. 6). It was written over 2013-2015 by an international consultant team working to MFAET officials, and supported by donors and the PIF Secretariat. The framework presented the evidence of labour mobility benefits and Vanuatu's policy experience. It recognised labour mobility as critical to deriving any benefits from PACER Plus. The framework set ten policies and actions to strengthen Solomon Islands' labour mobility policy and implementation:

- 1) Labour mobility forming a key pillar of Solomon Islands' macroeconomic strategy
- 2) Preparing a National Labour Mobility Strategy
- 3) Prioritization as a key offensive interest in PACER Plus negotiations
- 4) Advocacy in bilateral discussions
- 5) A marketing and promotion strategy
- 6) LMU strengthening
- 7) Building long term scheme administration and coordination capacity, learning from Vanuatu
- 8) Reducing remittance costs
- 9) Linking labour mobility to broader development and skills strategy; and
- 10) Equalising opportunities for Solomon Islanders with other nationals (SIG, 2015b, p. 72).

This evidence-based agenda raised awareness among trade and labour mobility officials and engaged donors and consultants, providing a stronger economic agenda for Solomon Islands leaders to take action on the policy. Several actions were delivered in subsequent years, as discussed in remaining sub-sections.

6.4.2 New national leadership

Launching the Trade Framework in March 2015, Foreign Minister Tozaka emphasised labour mobility's potential economic, youth employment and remittances benefits to Solomon Islands, matching Pacific neighbours (SolStar, 2015). Labour Mobility formed a key pillar of Solomon Islands' macroeconomic development strategy under the Democratic Coalition for Change (DCC) Government (see Table 6.4), which committed SBD10.3 million to expanded participation in seasonal worker schemes (SolomonTimes, 2015). Supported by donor advocacy (sub-section 6.4.3), the DCC's Policy Strategy and Translation included labour mobility as a priority within the updated Core Economic Working Group (CEWG) economic reform agenda of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Australia and New Zealand as donors and the multilateral development banks. This priority included plans for improved pre-departure and post-return support, new liaison officers in Australia and New Zealand, review of labour legislation, and a labour market database (SIG, 2015a, p. 15; 2016a, p. 160).

Prime Minister Rick Hou (2017 - 2019) (see Table 6.4), whose development approach was profiled in Chapter 3, was mentioned by several participants as the first to strongly advocate for labour mobility (SIGO-1, SDP-1,-5,-9, SLMS-1). On visiting farmers and Solomon Islands workers in Australia, and in his speech at Solomon Islands' fortieth independence anniversary celebrations in July 2018, Hou expressed the national development priority of expanded labour mobility opportunities, and the need to *"agree on a long term strategic approach to link increasing labour demand to labour supply"* (Poloso, 2018; SolStar, 2018). His commitment to labour mobility was presented on a regional platform with Solomon Islands' hosting of the second Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) in October 2018 (SDP-5). This was significant as the first time Solomon Islands had hosted, marking a turning point from Solomon Islands' 'slow start' to labour mobility. The meeting concluded new agreements including for intra-regional labour mobility (PLMAM, 2018)(Table 6.4). Hou reflected on Solomon Islands' lower participation in seasonal worker programmes compared to regional neighbours, saying that Solomon Islands had been "disorganized", lacking a human resource information database. He announced a key target: within five years, he wanted Solomon Islands to send 10,000 young people annually, supported by liaison officers in Australia and New Zealand, and a new data management system (Kekea, 2018b). Hou's leadership represented a key change in high level political leadership on labour mobility in Solomon Islands.

Stronger leadership emerged also at senior officials level. In 2015, Curtain identified the need for better understanding among Solomon Islands officials of labour mobility's development

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benefits (Curtain, 2015). Dr Jimmie Rodgers, Director-General of the South Pacific Community (SPC) from 2006 to 2014 (GoF, 2014) and Special Secretary to the Prime Minister in 2018 recognised the need for a cohesive labour mobility strategy and policy framework (SDP-9). Solomon Islands' first female High Commissioner, Joy Kere served in Wellington from 2014 to 2020 (SIG, 2020a). She was later recognised publicly by the government for achieving progress in the bilateral relationship, including in labour mobility, with ongoing efforts in 2023 to open a Trade Mission in New Zealand for Solomon Islands trade interests, and to increased semi-skilled labour mobility particularly in fisheries (MFAET, 2023a). Interviewed in 2018, one development partner identified Kere as critical in supporting Solomon Islands' RSE participation, and urging the Foreign Minister to draft a Labour Mobility policy with technical assistance, to address critical constraints to Solomon Islands' successful scheme participation (SDP-9). Recognising management problems, Kere commented to media that development of the policy framework would take two years to *"iron out corruption issues"* and *"put our house in order"* (Chanwai-Earle, 2018).

By 2018, sector stakeholders interviewed experienced notable change in priority and focus on overseas labour mobility by Solomon Islands policy-makers. The Government more clearly recognised the national economic priority of labour mobility, and the multiple stakeholders needed to contribute to labour mobility's success (SLMS-1).

"Before there was no mandate for labour mobility. Now government recognizes sending workers offshore, and being globally connected, is an important national priority." (SIGO-2)

The priority was there, but not quite yet with new resourcing, as indicated by one government official:

"Our previous government didn't see labour mobility as a priority – there was very little to no support. Current one – policy is there, in last year, talk about it, but not actual support..." (SIGO-1)

In 2018 Prime Minister Hou directed the establishment of a dedicated Secretariat for Labour Mobility to connect required Ministries (SPA-1). Recognising the likelihood of a change of government, the DCC government in late 2018 saw themselves laying labour mobility policy foundations and systems to continue under a new government (SPA-1).

With the April 2019 election of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DGCA) with Sogavare as Prime Minister (his fourth time), prime ministerial leadership of

labour mobility softened. Sogavare's 41st anniversary celebrations speech prescribed a development strategy of building *"a country with a strong economy, good infrastructure and a robust service delivery system"* (Sogavare, 2019a). Domestic growth priorities replaced an emphasis on overseas labour mobility (Hawksley & Gheorgheou, 2019).

However, continuity among senior officials maintained the policy and resourcing priority of labour mobility. The DCGA's policy platform recommitted to LMU resources and capacity, and a Labour Mobility Strategy to address unemployment and increase growth (SIG, 2019a). The 2020 Budget allocated funds to the new labour mobility strategy, equipping staff with IT and establishing liaison officers in Australia and New Zealand (SIG, 2019b). DET salary budget increased by a third between 2019 and 2020 budgets to SBD1.35 million, enabling increased staffing (SIG, 2018e, 2020c). In practice, the Secretariat for Labour Mobility planned by Hou consisted of the continuing, but slightly better resourced, LMU. This changed policy and institutional approach, including directly supplemented sending capability helping deliver Hou's vision, was also being significantly influenced by aid donors.

6.4.3: Donor control and support, 2015 - 2019

As labour receiving countries and aid donors, Australia and New Zealand exerted notable control over labour mobility policy through their respective schemes, but varied greatly in their engagement and support over the first ten years. There was a significant lift in their engagement on this issue from their Honiara High Commissions from around 2015. Australian and New Zealand representatives had recognized gaps in bilateral support to labour mobility, one describing their engagement as *"fairly hands off for a long time"* (SDP-5). One senior Solomon Islands public servant considered that development partners had *"not been playing a good supporting role"* (SPA-1).

Australian and New Zealand engagement appeared partly shaped by different departmental agendas, initially outside aid programs. While New Zealand's support to the LMU under the SPP had been well-regarded (section 6.2.2), as an initiative of New Zealand's Department of Labour responding to employer needs, labour mobility had not been a top priority for New Zealand MFAT's aid programme (SDP-9). With its late entry to the SWP, Solomon Islands was also not prioritized for Australian aid capacity building for labour sending units from 2009 to 2012 (Raetz, 2013, pp. 17-18). Even in countries which had been prioritised for SWP support, including Tonga and Vanuatu, SWP support had not been prioritized in Australia's broader bilateral aid partnership principles developed in 2012 (Dornan, 2017, pp. 17-18; Raetz,

2013). These approaches were shaped by donors' commitments to global Millenium Development Goals, whose targets did not include labour mobility. Australia's 'Partnerships for Development' approach had a long list of other mutual obligations and performance targets across key economic and social sectors (Bazeley et al., 2013). Facing this long list of targets, it would have been difficult for leadership of the capacity-constrained SIG to prioritise labour mobility as well. These unfavourable aid incentives likely undermined labour mobility policy and implementation.

Australia and New Zealand changed approach from 2015, responding to regional developments and recognising Solomon Islands' low worker numbers. Regional PACER Plus negotiations and PIF advocacy pressured Australia and New Zealand to review and expand labour mobility arrangements, including increased or removed worker caps (GoA, 2015b; Loyens, 2019; PIFS, 2015). By 2014/15 Solomon Islands had 532 participating workers, of which only 21 were in the SWP; far behind Vanuatu's 4002 (Table 6.2). Development partners interviewed recognised that lifting worker numbers, particularly for SWP, required technical capacity support to Solomon Islands that went beyond regional approaches (SDP-5,-8,-9). Curtin's assessment of the barriers to SWP participation, commissioned by the AHC, provided Australian officials with evidence and an agenda for action (SDP-5). From 2015 on, the AHC Honiara increased advocacy including by the High Commissioner, and initiated catalytic bilateral aid support to labour mobility, beyond that for neighbouring states (SDP-5). Australia's contracted Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP) aimed to 'kick start' Solomon Islands' participation, increase SWP numbers and build the country's reputation for productive and reliable workers (DFAT, 2016c). Priorities included outsourcing functions of selection and preparation of workers from the WRP, and building sustainable LMU capacity to manage central SWP processes (DFAT, 2016c).

Over 2016-2019, emerging geo-strategic competition with China also raised the priority for Australia and New Zealand to make labour mobility work for Pacific countries. This was particularly so in Solomon Islands in 2019 when the PM Sogavare's DGCA government decided to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China (Sogavare, 2019b). Australia and New Zealand prioritized labour mobility in strengthened regional strategies. This high level attention translated to several new bilateral agreements. Australia's 'foreign policy step-up' of Pacific engagement in 2016 made labour mobility support central to Australian Government commitments in the Pacific (DFAT, 2022b; Lilford, 2019). In February 2018, New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs Peters announced New Zealand's 'Pacific Reset',

increasing aid and engagement on labour mobility, including with recruitment agents (NZG, 2018a; NZP, 2019; Osifelo, 2018). Minister Tozaka signed a new SWP MoU with Australia in February 2016, and Australia announced SWP sectoral expansion to include livestock, cane, cotton, aquaculture and accommodation (SolStar, 2016a). Section 6.4.1 noted the Arrangement on Labour mobility signed by Australian and New Zealand governments as part of PACER Plus negotiations. At the September 2018 PIF meeting, Solomon Islands and Australia signed an agreement on the PLS, enabling Solomon Islands workers access to a broader range of employment sectors, with greater opportunities for women's participation (DFAT, 2018c; Lilford, 2019; Ragaruma, 2018a; SIG, 2018c) (Table 6.4). In 2019 Solomon Islands gained access to new industry sectors under the PLS including meatworks, aged care, tourism and fisheries (Marau, 2025).

Adding significant resourcing to develop policy and manage schemes, Australia and New Zealand officials interviewed both saw their strong role as “critical” in getting more Solomon Islanders on labour mobility programmes (SDP-8, -9). Increased AHC advocacy was seen by one official (SIGO-1) and one development partner (SDP-9) interviewed as instrumental in increasing domestic leadership commitment to the issue in 2017 and 2018, and in doubling SWP worker numbers in one year to 175 in 2018 (Table 6.4) (DFAT, 2018a). AHC staff were recognized by participants as particularly active in driving the agenda and arrangements for Solomon Islands' hosting of the 2018 PLMAM meeting (SDP-5). By enabling deliberate targeting and inclusion of multiple provinces and recruitment sources – rather than rely on established agents and employers alone - the Australian-led shift to the WRP as a recruitment model increased geographic reach through recruitment from Australian aid-supported Rural Training Centres (RTCs) and inclusion of women and people with disabilities (DFAT, 2019b, p. 10). Local company Pasifiki HR Services delivered Australia's SWP Boost (or ‘Support Services’) Programme from June 2017 (SDP-8)(DFAT, 2017b; SIG, 2015-2023). A new Australia-based Labour Mobility Coordinator engaged in January 2018 undertook a series of actions including farm and diaspora visits and employer due diligence checks, which improved labour supply quality and relations with Australian employers (Weaving, 2018). A donor's comment that this liaison role started to make a difference for Solomon Islands participation in the scheme in 2018 was reflected in further significant increase in SWP numbers (Table 6.2). DFAT's Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) established a recruitment database in 2019, delivering a key Solomon Islands policy goal (SIG, 2020b). These key developments are presented in relation to increasing SWP worker numbers, in Table 6.4.

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Development partner participants interviewed in late 2018 recognised increased national leadership, but were yet to see its impact, or a clear champion at senior officials level to deliver it. One development partner therefore saw a continued strong role for donors in shaping labour mobility policy and implementation, but also recognised that this created tension with SIG over who was in control of labour mobility policy (SDP-9).

Significantly increased donor support brought challenges and change for the LMU. One development partner identified that achieving SIG's ambitious 10,000 worker target faced two obstacles: SIG working practices, and budget resourcing, change to both of which required a change to bureaucratic incentives (SDP-5). The experience of initially poor SWP worker recruitment, and then donor capacity substitution, encouraged the LMU's shift from operations to a policy and regulatory role, supported by New Zealand technical advice (SDP-8). In this policy co-drafting mode, donors increased control over policy and implementation – across scheme design, high level advocacy and agreements, operational details and policy development.

6.4.4: New policy and rapidly increasing participation: Beyond the case study period

New policy and implementation arrangements with significant donor support brought major change in labour mobility policy delivery from the end of the policy case period. Solomon Islands rapidly increased worker participation, becoming by 2024-2025 the second biggest Pacific sending country across RSE and PALM schemes sending 6,342 workers in that year (Howes & Mako, 2026). The bulk of these workers (5,165) participated in the PALM scheme to Australia (DEWR, 2026), although Solomon Islands workers participating in the RSE had also increased significantly to around 1,180 arrivals in that year (NZG, 2025).

Prominent in this significantly changed policy approach by the end of the case study period was the development and launch of a comprehensive policy framework with considerable donor support. Responding to SIG's request and supported by LMU discussions with the New Zealand High Commission in Honiara (SDP-8), a New Zealand technical advisor working in the LMU led consultation and drafting of a Labour Mobility Strategy and Policy for SIG for implementation from 1st January 2019 (SIG, 2018b, 2018d). The policy and strategy framework proposed governance, coordination and operational arrangements to expand labour mobility, achieving its economic potential, while protecting workers. Solomon Islands' long-term vision for labour mobility was presented as *“an internationally recognised labour force, contributing to improving social and economic livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders”* (SIG,

2018b, p. 7). A new brand, “Here to Work”, marketed Solomon Islands worker attributes to Australian and New Zealand employers, reinforced by labour supply processes and interactions (SIG, 2018b, p. 7). Australian scheme stakeholders shared concerns about the policy draft’s RSE bias (SDP-8, SLMS-2). Nevertheless, the strategy set targets for expanding labour mobility to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, as well as Japan, Taiwan, and Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) countries. Aiming to exceed 5,000 mobilisations by 2023, remittances of SBD200 million were projected, equating to over 2 per cent of GDP (SIG, 2018d, p. 8). The policy provided for the LMU to manage stronger quality assurance, communication and coordination, connecting workers, labour market information, tertiary institutions and industry, and adding a Director and four staff. However, the strategy forecast that achieving Hou’s 10,000 worker target would require institutional responsibility for labour mobility to move from MFAET’s LMU to a statutory body within five to ten years.

Beyond the comprehensive policy framework and resourcing, important factors in this significant increase in participation included stronger leadership by individual Cabinet Ministers in 2016-2018, strengthened senior government commitment to expanding labour mobility with increased LMU resourcing, and continued strong worker demand. Also important was significant and sustained external donor capacity substitution, resourcing and advocacy by Australia and New Zealand. There were also new pathways: new industry sectors meant that by 2025 there were more Solomon Islands PALM workers in meatworks industries (51 per cent) than in agriculture (48 per cent). While COVID-19 disrupted labour mobility flows, as a Pacific sending country without domestic transmission, Solomon Islands was able to send meatworkers to Australia during the pandemic, sustaining participation (Marau, 2025).

With multiple donor support measures at sending and receiving stages implemented simultaneously, it is not possible to measure the specific difference in worker participation made by the existence of the comprehensive 2019 policy framework and strategy. Specific measures including the added due diligence checks of employers and pastoral care overseas suggest MFAET managers’ desire for a deliberate and cautious approach to labour mobility, learning from earlier problems (Weaving, 2018). There were also reforms to support worker protections (ACTU, 2023). The policy framework may have fulfilled the World Bank’s 2012 recommendation for deliberate policy which kept political intervention out of institutional arrangements, to protect employer demand and worker quality (WB, 2012a, pp. 14-15). However, the strategy and policy framework, being drafted with donor support, may have served mainly as a signal back to donors to commit funding and support measures.

Beyond the case study period, the years 2019- 2026 saw alignment and divergence between broader bilateral and geostrategic relationship issues and increasing labour mobility participation. Geostrategic issues dominated Solomon Islands' bilateral relationships with Australia and New Zealand, with high stakes. The opposition Australian Labor Party labelled Solomon Islands' impending security pact with China "*the worst Australian foreign policy failure since 1945*" (Hurst & Butler, 2022). In Solomon Islands, China relationship tensions between Sogavare's central government and Suidani's Malaitan provincial government triggered the Honiara riots of 2021. As with previous civil unrest, this violence were fuelled by frustrated young men in Honiara (Terrence Wood, 2021), the same that motivated leaders to find solutions in overseas labour mobility.

Contrasting with Prime Minister Sogavare's strategic friction and nationalist distrust of Australian interference in Solomon Islands' domestic affairs (Schiefelbein, 2022), labour mobility to Australia increased. In the years from 2019, as the largest destination for workers, Australia's strong implementation support and policy changes in support of Solomon Islands worker access made labour mobility a strong economic bridge with Solomon Islands. Australian leadership change also positively impacted Solomon Islands labour mobility. In April 2022, the Australian government launched the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, which merged and replaced the former Seasonal Worker Programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme. Taking power in May 2022, the Labor Albanese government prioritised Ministerial-level engagement to repair bilateral ties, and introduced reforms in 2023 benefiting Solomon Islands workers including the ability to transfer employers, and superannuation and worker protection better aligning to Australian workplace standards (ACTU, 2023; DEWR, 2023). Solomon Islands and Australian academics acknowledged "*some wins for workers*" (Foley & Strating, 2022) but continued to criticise Australian labour mobility schemes for Solomon Islanders for unaddressed worker exploitation issues. Criticism also targeted continued visa access barriers and a lack of acknowledgement of historic colonial exploitation (Foley & Strating, 2022; Wickham et al., 2022). Other Solomon Islanders, writing from an economic perspective, recognised the significant success of labour mobility. At the end of 2023, Solomon Islands Central Bank Governor Luke Forau described labour mobility as a "*vital driver for the country's economic progress*", helping place Solomon Islands at a "crossroads" of economic performance (Baragama, 2024). PhD student Louisa Baragama wrote: "*The success of labour mobility schemes in the Solomon Islands exemplifies the transformative potential of targeted economic reforms*" (Baragama, 2024).

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Solomon Islands leadership change was also significant. Sogavare was succeeded as Prime Minister by Jeremiah Manele on 2 May 2024, soon demonstrating stronger support for labour mobility. In a May 2024 meeting with Australian Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele highlighted the value of Australia's labour mobility scheme as an important source of revenue for Solomon Islands. He cited the 22,000 to 24,000 young people joining the job market each year in Solomon Islands competing for 3,000 to 4,000 local jobs, with the rest remaining unemployed. Manele himself was familiar with these issues as the former Permanent Secretary of Solomon Islands' Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination (MDPAC), the Ministry responsible for Solomon Islands' development strategic planning, and had himself hosted the launch of the NHRDTP in 2014 with this author (SolTimes, 2014). While other Pacific states like Vanuatu and Samoa had raised concerns with the costs and 'brain drain' impacts of high and increasing worker numbers, Manele set a distinctly positive position by Solomon Islands:

"Unlike other Pacific countries with the exception of PNG and Fiji, Solomon Islands does not have a problem with the number of young people going for short-term employment in Australia through the scheme. "Currently it can accommodate up to 10,000 new recruits per year without problems in our own domestic labour market supply," Manele said (SIG, 2024c).

Solomon Islands leadership commitment on labour mobility went from strength to strength. In July 2024, Manele announced a target of 16,000 workers participating across both schemes to be achieved by 2028 (SIG, 2024b). Under Manele's leadership, Solomon Islands again hosted the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) in 2025, under the theme '*Sustainable Reintegration Begins with Fair and Effective Recruitment*'. Key outcomes of the meeting included to review bilateral MoUs with Australia and New Zealand for labour mobility schemes, strengthen a regional coordinated approach to labour mobility, and strengthen the role and resourcing of the PACER Plus Labour Mobility Secretariat (PACERPlus, 2025). In February 2026, Manele hailed a record SBD507 million in labour mobility remittances in 2025, labelling labour mobility a "*cornerstone of the bilateral relationship between Solomon Islands and Australia*" (SIG, 2026). Succession of Manele by Matthew Wale in 2026 saw even stronger commitments both of geostrategic partnership with Australia, and of labour mobility expansion. Initial media misreporting that Wale sought to shut down labour mobility to Australia and New Zealand in favour of domestic employment was promptly clarified in a statement by MFAET (SBMOnline, 2026).

Senior leadership commitment, donor advocacy and reforms and significant donor capacity supplementation were key factors in Solomon Islands entirely turning around initial poor participation in labour mobility schemes to become a major Pacific sending country with significant employment and income benefits for workers. Contestation over labour mobility continues nonetheless in Solomon Islands. This includes calls to better decentralise labour mobility recruitment to provinces such as Western (Gina, 2025). Solomon islands' significant success in worker sending rests on an outsourced labour mobility sending modality which remains relatively unique among Pacific countries. By 2025 Australia's Solomon Islands Support Services for labour mobility constituted 10 staff with an additional 6 staff under the Pacific Labour Mobility Support Program (PLSMP) (Marau, 2025). A key question remains whether, beyond sustained domestic institutional capacity for delivering policy ambitions for labour sending, this outsourced and donor-supported capability is a risk for the sustainability of this major source of employment for Solomon Islanders – or a lesson for what it takes to deliver employment policies reaching meaningful numbers of Solomon Islands workers.

Conclusion

This case study analysed Solomon Islands Government's first twelve years of policy-making on participation in labour mobility through overseas seasonal employment schemes. In this period, Solomon Islands faced similar external challenges to its neighbours, strong relevance of labour mobility benefits with shared policy stakeholder support, and strong jobseeker demand - but a paradox of weak policy-making, policy implementation and worker participation. Helping to explain this paradox, several factors influenced policy-making and -change in the area during the case study period:

1. Long-term labour receiving country policy settings and migration barriers were dominant factors shaping Solomon Islands structural context, policy making and lower participation in labour mobility. While recovering from conflict and with very little existing outmigration for work, Solomon Islands lacked structures supporting labour movement, and joined schemes later than neighbouring countries like Vanuatu, missing a crucial first-mover advantage.
2. Local institutional capacity and scheme design issues affected policy delivery. Design and requirements of Australia's SWP was particularly problematic for Solomon Islands. For both schemes, in an environment of widespread institutional capacity

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constraints, a handful of public servants and under-resourced private sector agents attempted a daunting externally-directed work agenda on a complex policy issue with limited resources.

3. Solomon Islands' political economy dynamics contributed several key factors to policy-making on labour mobility. Lack of budget and senior bureaucratic and political leadership undermined implementation. Bureaucratic disincentives to coordinate were important, as essential actors lacked trust in one another amidst mutual perceptions and allegations of corruption. The few responsible officials struggled to manage high, unmet demand from Solomon Islands jobseekers or engage with communities and required stakeholders to support participation. Critically, there was no coordinated domestic policy agenda or local advocates with power to effect change and launch labour mobility. There was no updated legislation or policy platforms or networks across government, private and community sectors to launch and deliver this complex policy change. No civil society actors advocated for rural workers seeking to participate in overseas work opportunities, or for government accountability for labour mobility policy delivery. In this context, high, unmet jobseeker demand and lack of opportunities to access schemes fuelled dispute over scheme management and access, allegations of corruption, alternative and irregular movement, and constituent pressure on politicians.
4. As a rational response to Solomon Islands' clientelistic political economy pressures, donors and officials' decision to prevent political interference may have protected programme integrity. However, such bounding of this policy area from politicians likely resulted in unintended consequences of diverting political commitment and interest. Makira's SITASN politicians were discouraged, and provincial politicians supported the CITREC scheme to access benefits not delivered through national government.

There were two key sources of change which turned Solomon Islands' labour mobility policy weaknesses into labour mobility participation success after the case study period, with the second highest worker numbers in the Pacific.

Firstly, strengthened national leadership did emerge, from the priority of labour mobility in regional trade negotiations and Solomon Islands' Trade Policy Framework, as well as individual leadership of worker targets, resourcing decisions and commitments by Prime Ministers who favoured labour mobility: Hou, Manele and Wale, and sustained leadership by

senior officials. Hou's goals and resourcing decisions were individual rather than a broader political agenda.

Secondly, donor advocacy, resourcing and policy reforms were significant in changing the resourcing for labour sending, and the pathways and opportunities for Solomon Islands workers. Multiple modes of donor advocacy, resourcing, policy-drafting and implementation arrangements meant significant control by Australia and New Zealand as labour receiving countries and aid donors. External consultants drafted and closely shaped domestic policies and implementation arrangements, and substituted key programme implementation arrangements. This risked long-term sustainability and local ownership. Donor control likely substituted for and undermined local policy-making and accountability for labour mobility. Labour receiving countries' changed policy settings and aid continued as dominant factors in Solomon Islands' labour mobility policy-making and -implementation.

In the context of multiple donor resourcing, advocacy and policy measures at labour sending and -receiving ends, it is unclear whether the comprehensive labour mobility policy framework drafted with significant donor consultant input in 2019 factored in Solomon Islands' dramatic turnaround in labour mobility participation, or represented a signal to sustain donor support for increased participation.

The policy case presents findings on how employment policy is developed and launched within Solomon Islands' broader political economy dynamic, which shaped the trajectory of labour mobility policy development and implementation. The policy case illustrates the significant difficulties launching and delivering complex multi-stakeholder policies, such as those for broad employment outcomes, in Solomon Islands' political and institutional context. The coordination, collective action, mutual trust and policy commitment problems undermining labour mobility policy delivery reflected problems in interaction of formal and informal institutions in Solomon Islands' policy-making context. As a seemingly rational bureaucratic response against informal clientelist interests, the 'gatekeeping'/ 'protection from political interference' likely prevented the kind of rapid clientelist institutionalization witnessed in CDFs and constituency scholarships, presented in Chapters 3 and 4, but also undermined effective coordination and political commitment. Available political and senior bureaucratic leadership was insufficient to overcome policy coordination problems. More broadly, it is unclear that Solomon Islands' elites – as presented in Chapter 4, focused on tertiary scholarships and public sector employment - were sufficiently motivated to ensure labour mobility access for rural jobseekers, to overcome multiple policy coordination challenges to

ensure resourcing and success of the labour mobility measures. In policy coordination and implementation, Solomon Islands labour mobility policy stakeholders were not able to agree a balance of informal pressures and formal scheme rules which enabled wider participation. This case study therefore illustrates that both clientelism itself – and efforts to protect from clientelism – both have a key role in impeding the delivery of employment policy, even when demand is widespread and potential benefits significant.

Hampering effective locally led employment policy and coordination solutions, Solomon Islands' broader political economy dynamic also shaped the continued dominant role of external donors. The discouragement of political commitment and resourcing by 'gate-keeping' likely diverted commitment and resourcing to other areas, leaving labour mobility resourcing to donors and sustained external dependence. By 2019, a donor-funded approach substituting implementation capacity became key to rapidly increasing worker participation. While Solomon Islands' labour mobility sending model was supported by increasing agreement with Solomon Islands' leaders and senior officials, Solomon Islands ownership and sustainability of these program measures remains a key question.

However, current widespread labour mobility participation, is building experience among participants and sending systems. This brings a new likelihood of change in political dynamics from more Solomon Islands workers with higher incomes, and also the likelihood of influence and engagement by politicians within Solomon Islands' political economy environment.

Synthesis, analysis, findings and multiple practical implications of this research for policy stakeholders in Solomon Islands and beyond are captured in Chapters 8 and 9. Stronger demonstrations of sustained national policy leadership and political contestation, and the different 'problems of success' that came with early and broad labour mobility participation, were evident in Vanuatu.

7: Labour mobility in Vanuatu: The politics of success

Introduction

This chapter analyses factors in Vanuatu's policy-making on labour mobility from access to New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme in 2007 to the 2019 launch of Vanuatu's formal labour mobility policy framework. During this period, Vanuatu's participation in regional seasonal labour schemes grew rapidly to form a major national source of remittances and employment. Vanuatu became recognised at home and overseas for the success of this widespread participation and economic gains. This wide-scale participation also brought significant contestation over the policy area.

A number of factors contributed to Vanuatu's success. Reflecting political commitment, early policy leadership and advocacy helped overcome external labour mobility barriers and contributed to Vanuatu's selection as a pilot country for regional labour schemes. Curtain and Howes noted Vanuatu's "government-light" approach when identifying the importance of variations in sending country governance to successful scheme participation (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 26). Vanuatu established a unique legislative framework in 2007. This framework, and privatised, "government-light" approach, shaped policy implementation, government resourcing and capability. While meeting external requirements, the policy approach balanced formal and informal institutions to achieve wide scale across Vanuatu communities, and programme sustainability. Vanuatu's recruitment model enabled ongoing effective recruitment of workers meeting employers' needs, supporting wide and sustained participation.

Nevertheless, Vanuatu faced a number of policy challenges in its wide-scale participation in labour mobility. Labour sending country policies still dominated, providing major policy parameters within which Vanuatu was required to operate. Despite Vanuatu's privatised approach being deliberately "protected from politics" (VGL-1)(sub-section 2.4.1), there was political dispute over recruitment agent roles, and multiple corrupt practices emerged. How to achieve policy-makers' long-term goal of equitable access to labour mobility was also politically disputed. The process of developing a 'formal' and comprehensive national Labour Mobility policy framework stretched over several years to 2019. The framework addressed

‘problems of success’ with key reforms, but was significantly shaped by donor influence, and significantly contested.

Economic and social impacts of labour mobility in Vanuatu have been widely researched. This chapter contributes to the understanding of little-understood national political dynamics of a “successful” area of employment policy in Melanesia, and its implications for understanding employment policy-making and Vanuatu’s contemporary political economy dynamic.

7.1: Starting strong: Factors in policy success

7.1.1: Policy success

Multiple policy stakeholders have described Vanuatu’s participation in labour mobility programs as successful. Vanuatu’s Labour Commissioner Murielle Meltenoven described expansion of the schemes as “remarkable”, with the number of ni-Vanuatu in Australia and New Zealand in 2023 equivalent to 12 per cent of Vanuatu’s labour force (Meltenoven, 2024). Dornan recognised Vanuatu’s success in having the largest number of workers participating in the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, despite Vanuatu lacking a diaspora population (Dornan, 2018). Vanuatu’s participation in the Australia’s Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) has been described as “extraordinarily successful” (Wade, 2020b). One Vanuatu media article described that labour mobility programs had “contributed significantly to economic growth and addressed the unemployment issues amongst the workforce of this country” (VDP, 2023).

Worker numbers and economic impacts illustrate this success. Table 6.1 illustrated that over the case study period to 2018/19, ni-Vanuatu workers made up 46 per cent of all RSE worker arrivals, and 32 per cent of all SWP arrivals (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 24). After the case study period, in 2022, Vanuatu had the greatest share of workers across the PLS, SWP and RSE, numbering 11,118 (Howes et al., 2022). Worker numbers in 2022 exceeded the number in government, the largest domestic employer (Howes et al., 2022). Remittance earnings from SWP alone were AUD150 million in 2022 (FMO, 2022), contributing to total remittance earnings forming 15 per cent of Vanuatu’s GDP that year (FMO, 2022; WB, 2023). Vanuatu’s early and wide-scale participation has made it a focus of considerable research on the impacts of labour mobility participation, including the benefits to individuals and households presented at sub-section 3.4.4. Research by Gibson and McKenzie found the significant net income gains from Vanuatu workers’ participation in seasonal labour schemes to be “massive” compared to

other development interventions (Gibson & McKenzie, 2010, p. 9). Multiple studies have recorded the personal, community and development benefits of overseas seasonal work earnings demonstrated in Vanuatu. This has included income levels nine to ten times higher than those at home (Doan, Dornan, et al., 2023, p. 40), benefits in education through funding school fees (Bailey, 2014, p. 208), funding community development projects (Bailey, 2014, p. 215), building better housing (Smith, 2016), and starting small businesses (Bailey, 2019b). This range of benefits has contributed to wide perceptions of the success of this policy in Vanuatu.

Successful labour mobility is often seen as a ‘triple win’. Underhill-Sem and Marsters described economic, demographic, political and development imperatives applying to a “Triple-Win Framework” including countries of origin; countries of destination; and workers themselves (Underhill-Sem & Marsters, 2017). Positive views of the ‘triple-win’ of labour mobility programmes were widespread among ni-Vanuatu policy stakeholders interviewed in this research, including government officials, political advisors and civil society actors (VGL-2; VPA-1,-2; VCS-3,6). Others qualify the ‘triple-win’, noting the structural precarity and inequities of cross-border employment schemes (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 415). Underhill-Sem and Marsters also identified costs of labour mobility including social costs, uncertainties of participation, societal exclusion, the hazardous nature of agricultural work, and impact on agricultural labour at home (Underhill-Sem & Marsters, 2017). The ‘triple win’ is widely recognised but not uncontested. However, the views of ni-Vanuatu people themselves are important to capture. A rare survey of attitudes of Vanuatu people on a range of political and social issues found that 85 per cent of respondents considered labour mobility a net positive for the nation, 9 per cent had themselves recently participated and 49 per cent knew someone who had been on the scheme, while respondents also recognised negative impacts including worsening family relations and changing social and cultural values (Mudaliar et al., 2024, pp. 34-36).

Vanuatu’s success in labour mobility participation came despite significant contextual adversity and a ‘government-light’ approach to policy and management (Curtain & Howes, 2020) (*see section 7.2.1*). Curtain and Howes identified the importance of variations in sending country governance to countries’ successful scheme participation (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 26). This chapter explores the factors in both significant success and contestation over Vanuatu’s policy-making on labour mobility over the case study period 2007 to 2019.

7.1.2: Contextual adversity & external factors

Vanuatu faced several contextual and external challenges to labour mobility. Prominent among these were external migration barriers and limited overseas employment opportunities (Bedford et al., 2014). Even today Vanuatu's emigration is low, and its diaspora in Australia and New Zealand small (Gibson & Bailey, 2021; WB, 2017b).

Labour and migration policies of major developed countries shaped Vanuatu's historical context and labour practices. Like Solomon Islands (section 6.1.2), large-scale participation in the labour trade to Australia in the 19th century was abruptly ended and replaced with migration barriers (Craig et al., 2014). An exception to these barriers was Vanuatu's long-term labour movement to New Caledonia (Bedford & Hugo, 2012; Derruelle & Sodter, 1997). This movement continues to the present day, and ni-Vanuatu in New Caledonia make up the majority of Vanuatu's small overseas diaspora (UNDESA, 2013). Before and after independence in 1980, ni-Vanuatu workers primarily travelled to nickel mining in New Caledonia, and Taiwanese fishing boats in the 1970s and 1980s, as related by two political advisors interviewed (VPA-1,-4). Cruise ship employment started in 2002 (Slatter, 2006, p. 12), and continues to provide direct employment and wider business benefits in Vanuatu (IFC et al., 2014). According to two political actors interviewed, the government had minimal policy and management role in these opportunities (VPA-4), however local business people were involved (VPA-2).

Both historical context and attitudes of policy-makers in Vanuatu and Australia presented adversities for labour mobility policy-making. Views on labour mobility diverged even before independence. In 1972, one author noted the attraction to workers of higher wages in New Caledonia, but concern by leaders and employers at the "*severe drain on the limited labour available for the development of the New Hebrides themselves*" (Brookfield, 1972, p. 121). One political actor interviewed in this research noted that at independence, labour mobility was "*taboo*" for Vanuatu's leaders: "*a reminder of the blackbirding days*" (VPA-2). 'Blackbirding' history was also among multiple arguments used by Australian politicians, including Foreign Minister Downer in 2005, to reject proposed guestworker schemes (Maclellan & Mares, 2006). While the opportunities and benefits were promising, the politics of labour mobility was never straightforward.

7.1.3: Early advocacy and first-mover advantage

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By the 1990s, local conditions for labour mobility ideas changed. Vanuatu policy-makers became increasingly concerned about problems of poor living standards, rapid urbanization, youth unemployment, and civil unrest (Cox et al., 2007).

Responding to these priorities, a connected group of independence-era leaders and professionals from Pentecost Island and the Vanua'aku Party applied their political, business and trade negotiation skills to develop and advocate for an Australian guest worker scheme. This group included former Prime Minister and independence leader Father Walter Lini, his cousin USP Law Lecturer Marilyn Temakon, and William Edgell, early negotiator for independence, local entrepreneur and former Minister of Lands (Hakwa, 2021; Morgan, 1998; Willie, 2014a). Personally affected by the VNPF riots of 1998, Temakon applied her experience with trade negotiations, and knowledge of the limited opportunities available to Vanuatu, to the problem of what to do about unemployed youth. Temakon told a journalist in 2021 that she preferred labour mobility as a direct income source for unskilled workers, over “*boomerang*” foreign aid spending on technical advisers, with “*conditions and strings attached*” (Hakwa, 2021). Edgell, having already helped initiate cruise ship employment, intended his company to be the first seasonal work recruiting agency. Their initial 2003 advocacy to Australian Foreign Minister Downer was rejected (Hakwa, 2021). As evidence supporting their case, in late 2005, the group submitted a petition with 9,363 signatures from interested jobseekers across three provinces to an Australian Senate Committee. The submission proposed a concept for bilateral labour mobility scheme including adherence to Australian rules and conditions to ensure worker discipline and prevent overstaying, pre-departure training of workers, and support to required institutional structures. The advocates presented reasons that Vanuatu should be the sole Pacific country for piloting, including fewer law and order problems than neighbouring countries, Vanuatu's poverty level, proximity to Australia, positive aid relationship with Australia and smaller population (Hakwa, 2021; Temakon, 2006).

Temakon's 2006 submission indicated several early strengths of leadership of labour mobility advocacy and policy in Vanuatu. Motivated by domestic economic and social conditions and connected with ideas and experience of overseas opportunities, a group of educated leaders and business people had planned scheme requirements and a sequence of steps to develop a domestic policy meeting bilateral requirements. They had also mobilized a large number of potential scheme participants. The eventual schemes retained key elements of the group's earlier concept including adherence to Australian and New Zealand rules, prevention of

overstaying, and pre-departure training of workers. However, Temakon's own contract as seasonal employment agent was terminated by Labour Commissioner Kaluat (VPA-2)(Hakwa, 2021). Temakon's experience indicates both the strength and the well-connected but individual nature of local leadership on labour mobility in Vanuatu – and its politics and volatility. This local leadership was a critical factor in early success

Expatriate farmers and business people, and external evidence and advocacy for labour mobility were also crucial. The World Bank was interested in Pacific labour mobility as a solution to economic and employment limitations experienced by Pacific island countries, advocating for a pilot scheme to open and learn from labour mobility (Luthria, 2006). World Bank Senior Economist Dr. Manjula Luthria and New Zealand employers, including the late Basil Goodman from the company Seasonal Solutions Cooperative Ltd, deliberately recommended piloting in Vanuatu as a Pacific Island state with limited existing migration or diaspora (Curtain, 2018a)(VPS-1, VGL-1). This was supported by actions of ni-Vanuatu officials advocating for labour mobility, New Zealand employers, and expatriate farmers in Vanuatu, with the first cohort of workers arriving in New Zealand in January 2007 (Bailey, 2019a, p. 17).¹⁷ The success of this first cohort in Central Otago was followed by a rapid increase in worker numbers in 2008 (Maclellan, 2008, p. 12). Vanuatu sustained and expanded participation, as workers built their reputation and were keen to return (VGL-1)(Jacob, 2021). This early start constituted what some have called Vanuatu's "first mover advantage" (ADB & ILO, 2017, p. 93). The foundation of Vanuatu's successful participation in labour mobility schemes therefore arose from a combination of local policy advocacy and coordination, and expatriate and external links, advocacy and support, coordinated by key individuals at the right time.

7.1.4: Timeline, policy leadership for scheme success, and participant views

Vanuatu's Labour Commissioner from 2003 to 2017, Lionel Kaluat, led and shaped Vanuatu's participation in labour mobility schemes. Dornan described Kaluat being "*widely seen as being instrumental in Vanuatu's early labour mobility success*" (Dornan & Kaluat, 2018). Kaluat

¹⁷ Having negotiated arrangements with Labour Commissioner Kaluat in 2005, the World Bank supported the initial pilot of 45 seasonal workers hired by the company Seasonal Solutions under interim RSE arrangements. Local expatriate farmer Richard Eade and New Zealand community development NGO 'Big Toe' recruited workers for New Zealand employers Bailey, R.-L. (2019a). *New Zealand's Recognised Employer Scheme (RSE) – 10 Year Longitudinal Case Study*. Australian National University Department of Pacific Affairs. Canberra, Australia. ANU. <https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/node/6946>. Through Eade, John Salong, who had led a symposium at USP Emalus on labour mobility schemes in February 2006, was able to secure places for 15 workers from North Ambrym, while remaining workers came from Tanna.

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drew on existing local ideas for labour mobility and implemented them through bureaucratic action and engagement (VPA-2). Government officials and political advisors interviewed described Kaluat leading bilateral negotiations and policy development for government, promoting Vanuatu as a pilot country, promoting ni-Vanuatu employment in overseas horticulture schemes and soliciting the required buy-in of Vanuatu agencies and Ministers (VPA-4,-5, VGL-1). Setting key parameters for scheme operation in Vanuatu for years to come, Kaluat facilitated development of domestic legislation, the Seasonal Employment Act 23 of 2007 (VGL-1). According to one interviewee involved at the time, Kaluat's leadership overcame lack of "political will" by government Ministers, with the exception of support by Minister of Internal Affairs Patrick Crowby Manarewo (2008-10, and 2011), and Prime Minister Ham Lini accompanying the first pilot group of workers to New Zealand (VGL-1). Kaluat was supported by his personal connections, and the two staff in the Employment Services Unit (ESU), established in 2006, which put other employment activities on hold while focusing efforts on starting and sustaining RSE program engagement (VGL-1).

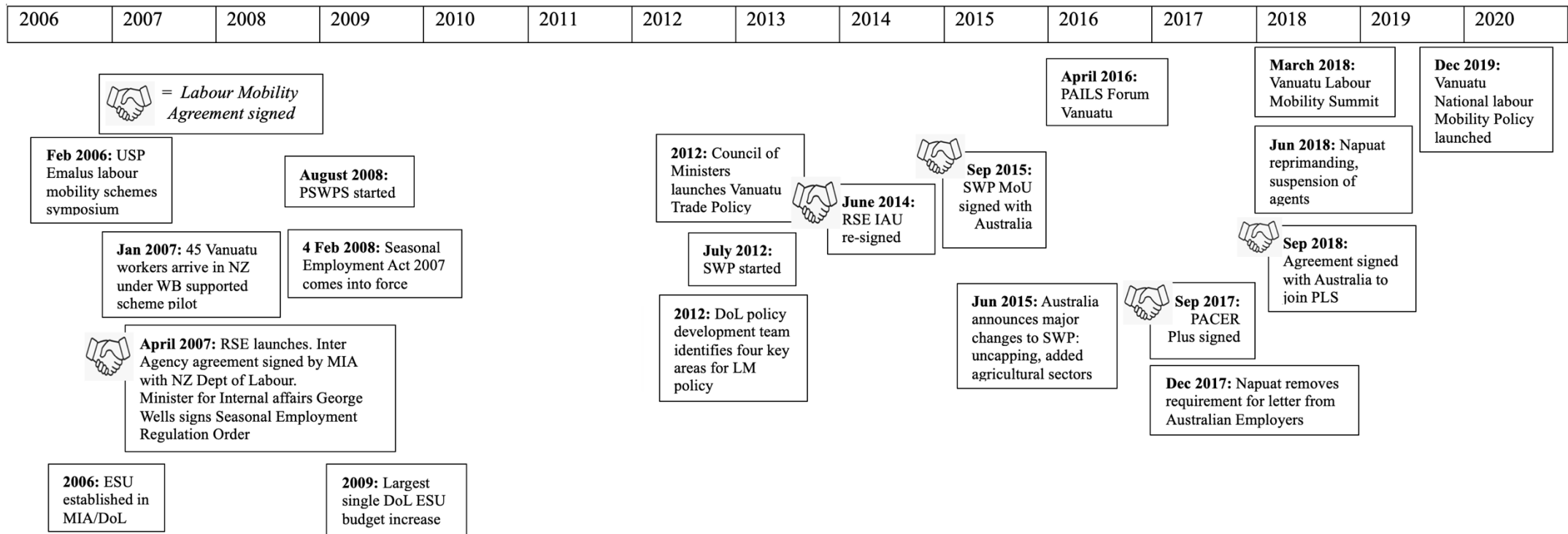
Vanuatu's strong start and growth of labour mobility schemes is illustrated in the timeline at Table 7.1. Table 7.1-a, 'Leadership', records key levels of leadership over the period. Political-level leadership was volatile including high turnover of Prime Ministers and Cabinet Ministers between 2008 and 2015. This contrasted with a long period of stability of Kaluat as Labour Commissioner. The election of the Salwai government in 2016 marked a clear turning point in political stability, soon into which in 2017, Kaluat ended his term as labour commissioner.

Table 7.1-a: Leadership

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
8 th Parliament: 2004-08			9 th Parliament: 2008-12			10 th Parliament: 2012-15			11 th Parliament: 2016-20					
Prime Ministers	Ham Lini (2004-‘08)	Natapei (2008; ‘09; ‘10; ‘11); Vohor (‘09; ‘11); Kilman (‘10; ‘11-‘13)			Kilman (2011-13; ‘15-‘16); Kalosil (‘13-‘14); Natuman (‘14-‘15)			Salwai, (2016-‘20)						
Foreign Ministers	Kilman (2004-07); Wells (‘07-‘08)	Kaltongga (2008-‘09); Natuman (‘09-10; ‘11); G. Wells (‘10-‘11); Carlot (‘11-‘13)			Carlot (2011-‘13); Natapei (‘13-‘14); Kilman (‘14-15); Moli (‘15); Vohor (‘15); Molisale (‘15-‘16, acting)			Leingkone (2016-‘17) Regenvanu (‘17-‘19)						
Ministers of Internal Affairs	Natuman (2004 – 08)	Manarewo (2008-10; ‘11); Kalosil (‘10); Hillston (‘10-‘11); Wells (‘11)			Kalo (2012-‘13); Manarewo (‘13); Emmellee (‘14); Telukluk (‘14); Salwai (‘14-‘15); Nevu (‘15)			Maoh (2016-‘17, Napuat (2017-‘20)						
Labour Commissioner	Kaluat (2003-‘17)										Tasso (Acting) (Jun 2017 – Feb ‘19)		Meltenoven (Feb 2019 -)	

Table 7.1-b, 'Policy Events' presents key policy events in the policy area. After legislation was introduced and RSE and PSWPS participation began in the early years of the case study period, Vanuatu steadily concluded new labour mobility agreements. The pace of change increased from around 2015, as Australian schemes underwent key changes, Kaluat stepped down as Labour Commissioner, and key contestation, reforms and policy development took place in Vanuatu, culminating in the launch of the Vanuatu National Labour Mobility Policy in December 2019.

Table 7.1-b: Policy events



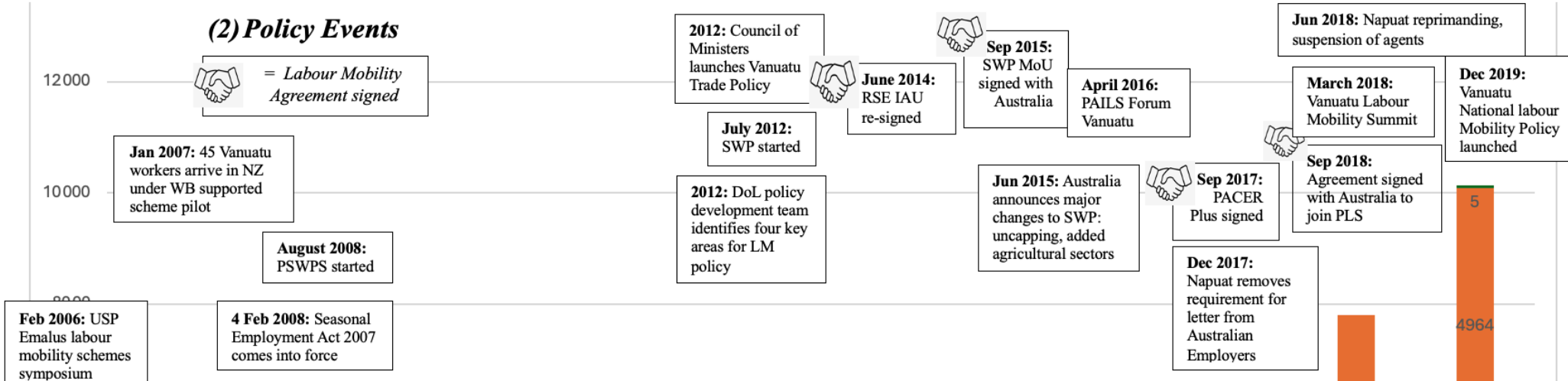
Sources: Policy events presented above are illustrative of sources presented in this chapter text.

(1) Leadership

Table 7.1-c: Vanuatu labour mobility timeline: Leadership, policy events, worker participation

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	8th Parliament: 2004-08			9th Parliament: 2008-12			10th Parliament: 2012-15			11th Parliament: 2016-20				
Prime Ministers	Ham Lini (2004-‘08)		Natapei (2008; ‘09; ‘10; ‘11); Vohor (‘09; ‘11); Kilman (‘10; ‘11-‘13)				Kilman (2011-13; ‘15-‘16); Kalosil (‘13-‘14); Natuman (‘14-‘15)			Salwai, (2016-‘20)				
Foreign Ministers	Kilman (2004-07); Wells (‘07-‘08)		Kaltongga (2008-‘09); Natuman (‘09-10; ‘11); G. Wells (‘10-‘11); Carlot (‘11-‘13)				Carlot (2011-‘13); Natapei (‘13-‘14); Kilman (‘14-15); Moli (‘15); Vohor (‘15); Molisale (‘15-‘16, acting)			Leingkone (2016-‘17) Regenvanu (‘17-‘19)				
Ministers of Internal Affairs	Natuman (2004 – 08)		Manarewo (2008-10; ‘11); Kalosil (‘10); Hillston (‘10-‘11); Wells (‘11)				Kalo (2012-‘13); Manarewo (‘13); Emmellee (‘14); Telukluk (‘14); Salwai (‘14-‘15); Nevu (‘15)			Maoh (2016-’17, Napuat (2017-‘20)				
Labour Commissioner	Kaluat (2003-‘17)										Tasso (Acting) (Jun 2017 – Feb ‘19)		Meltenoven (Feb 2019 -)	

(2) Policy Events



(3) Vanuatu Workers

participating in RSE, SWP & PLS; 2007/08 - 2018/19

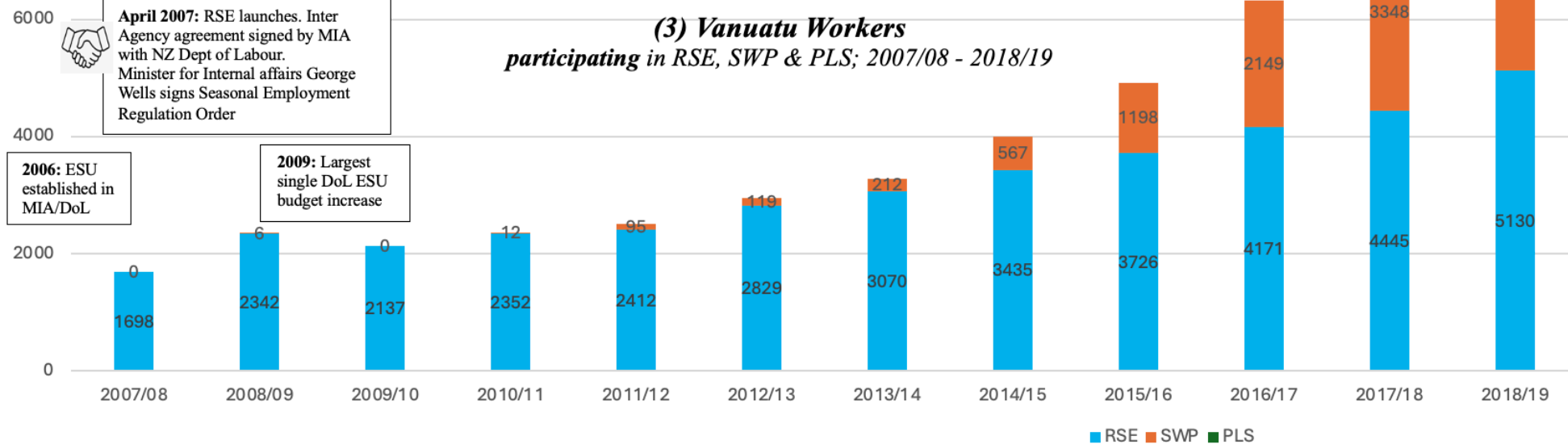


Table 7.1-c sources: As above, with the addition of: (Connell & Petrou, 2019, p. 15; Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 34; Howes, 2018; NZG, 2023d; Underhill-Sem & Marsters, 2017, p. 12)

Table 7.1-c, 'Timeline' combines leadership, policy events and Vanuatu seasonal worker scheme participation numbers during the case study period. Vanuatu worker participation in the RSE scheme started strongly and continued to grow throughout the case study period. Vanuatu's SWP take-up in the early years was slow, as it was in other Pacific countries, due to broader scheme issues (Doyle & Howes, 2015). Key SWP policy changes in 2015 (as introduced at 6.4.3) marked the point at which worker numbers started to significantly increase, also supported by Australian support to the ESU (section 7.2.3). Australia's PLS only started towards the end of the case study period. Internal policy events including changes of Labour Commissioner (section 7.3.1) do not appear to have affected worker participation; while the effect of fluctuating agent numbers is unclear (section 7.3.2). It was only at the end of the case study period that Vanuatu's National Labour Mobility Policy was finally launched in December 2019 (section 7.4.2).

Early policy leadership and active implementation of the schemes by Vanuatu government officials contributed to the rapid increase in worker numbers illustrated in Table 7.1-c. World Bank institutional assessment characterised Vanuatu's "*entrepreneurial spirit*" in the 'kick-start' years of RSE of 2007 to 2009, and gradually strengthening institutional systems from 2010 to 2013 (WB, 2013b, p. 5). Early success in RSE participation built Vanuatu agencies' capability and experience in meeting labour sending requirements, which assisted Vanuatu's entry into the SWP (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 140). Before the PSWPS had started, the ambitious Kaluat sought to send 5,000 workers to Australia (VGL-1). As indicated above, this took some years, but was close to met by 2018/19 (Curtain & Howes, 2020). By 2016, when Vanuatu hosted the Pacific Islands Labour Sending (PAILS) Forum, Vanuatu had achieved a strong reputation in Pacific seasonal labour programmes, as the largest provider to the RSE and second largest to SWP.

A combination of initial leadership, external support and a policy and institutional approach aligned to external labour receiving country requirements contributed to Vanuatu's early and sustained labour mobility policy success. As a key policymaker on the scheme, in Kaluat's view, Vanuatu's RSE success came "*because of the structure that we had right in the beginning which complemented New Zealand government policy*" (Dornan & Kaluat, 2018). Vanuatu's privatised agent model became a significant factor in its labour mobility policy success, (Howes & Curtain, 2020). This approach relied on recruitment by private agents rather than

government, intended by Kaluat to minimise political interference (Dornan & Kaluat, 2018). This model enabled expanded and sustained scheme participation by providing workers who met the needs of employers, supported by strong relationships between bilateral governments, and between employers, employer representatives, licensed agents and communities (Curtain, 2018a; DFAT, 2016c; Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 142). New Zealand employers recruited from Vanuatu through direct recruitment by representatives in Vanuatu and through licensed agents. Arising from this deliberate privatised design, Vanuatu was the only SWP participating country to rely mostly on licensed agents for recruitment, as other Pacific countries centred the role in government (Wade, 2020b)(VPA-5).

Policy success: participant views

As well as leadership and the right model, government officials interviewed also identified the motivation and hard work of workers themselves as key to Vanuatu's success (VGL-1,-2,-3). Ni-Vanuatu workers demonstrated themselves as *"a quality product"*, developing a reputation as *"good, loyal and hard workers"* (VGL-2). This was later promoted in the Labour Department's marketing campaign, *"Work Ready Vanuatu – Happy to Work Hard for you"* (Bailey, 2014, p. 77).

'Strengths and weaknesses of labour mobility' was the most frequently raised idea code among Vanuatu labour mobility policy stakeholders interviewed, followed at second by 'leadership in labour mobility'.¹⁸

¹⁸ 'Strengths and weaknesses of labour mobility' was a generic category reflecting the semi-structured interview questions, as was the fifth-ranked, 'chronology', tenth-, 'change', and eleventh-, 'Solomon Islands and Vanuatu comparison'. The second most frequently raised idea code was 'leadership in labour mobility', joined by 'individual leadership' at sixth: reflecting the importance of leadership in delivering policies and the consciousness of individual Vanuatu leaders in labour mobility. 'Development partner role' was closely followed by 'agents' as, respectively, third and fourth most frequently raised – reflecting the strong role and reflections on both in the policy area in Vanuatu. Seventh was 'economic impact' – which was more significant in Vanuatu than in Solomon Islands and other Pacific countries. 'Lack of capacity and resources and weak public processes' were equal with 'political interference in labour mobility' at eighth- and ninth-ranked, reflecting key issues affecting policy delivery and political contestation presented in this chapter. While external scheme settings provided significant policy parameters, they were not significantly discussed by participants in relation to domestic policy-making.

Table 7.2: Vanuatu Labour Mobility: Top participant comments

Rank	Categories	Number of mentions	% of total comment code data
1	Strengths & weaknesses in labour mobility program	77	9.3%
2	Leadership/ Leadership in labour mobility	59	7.1%
3	Development partner role	35	4.2%
4	Agents	34	4.1%
5	Chronology of labour mobility	33	4.0%
6	Individual leaders	32	3.9%
7	Economic impact	28	3.4%
8	Lack of capacity and resources, weak public processes	27	3.3%
9	Political interference in labour mobility	27	3.3%
10	Change	23	2.8%
11	Solomon Islands vs Vanuatu comparison of labour mobility	23	2.8%

Vanuatu policy stakeholders recognised the success of Vanuatu’s policy delivery for participation in regional seasonal worker schemes. Drawing on past experiences and overcoming contextual challenges with combined local and external policy advocacy, leadership and business connections, Vanuatu’s participation in the schemes grew strongly despite a context of political and policy volatility. Remaining sections explore the development and nature of policy frameworks behind this growth, and the political contestation and institutional negotiation around them.

7.2 Policy framework & capability

Vanuatu’s institutional settings for labour mobility were among factors in the country’s success in delivering on its policies for labour mobility participation. This relied on functioning relations between key agencies required for seasonal worker sending and management. However, there was still contestation and resourcing issues between these agencies, shaping Vanuatu’s politics of labour mobility participation.

7.2.1: Development of roles, policy and implementation

The Ministries of Internal Affairs (MIA) and of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade (MoFAICET) were the two key Ministries engaged in Vanuatu labour mobility policy. MIA’s Department of Labour (DoL) managed compliance with employment legislation, and government labour programming. MoFAICET also had a lead role in Vanuatu labour mobility policy, through its lead of international trade negotiations, including PACER Plus. Within the DoL, the Labour Commissioner gave ESU responsibility for “*creating and*

providing labour opportunities”, and managing labour mobility programs including the RSE, and later Australia’s SWP, PLS and PALM (GoV, 2016a). Although a new government function, a political advisor noted that the ESU’s proactive approach under Kaluat, including support to recruitment agents, was key to Vanuatu’s policy success (VPA-1).

External policies were dominant but also combined with local legislation. Australian and New Zealand’s implementation arrangements and employer needs were dominant in shaping Vanuatu’s scheme participation, as they were in Solomon Islands (sub-section 6.1.3). This included an April 2007 Inter-Agency Understanding (IAU) between DoL and New Zealand, and a MoU with Australia for the SWP in September 2015 (Willie, 2015). Also like Solomon Islands, key differences between the schemes shaped Vanuatu’s sending policies and arrangements, such as in recruitment and pre-departure preparation of workers. However, uniquely among PICs, Vanuatu enacted legislation governing scheme participation early on, driven by early leaders. The Seasonal Worker Act was signed by Minister for Internal Affairs Wells in April 2007 (Bedford et al., 2014) (GoV, 2007a, 2007b). Two labour officials identified this as a factor in Vanuatu’s success (VGL-1,-3). Established before Australian participation, the legislation was designed for RSE requirements, but was eventually applied to multiple schemes. The Act specified two recruitment methods: through ni-Vanuatu ‘Seasonal Employment Agents’ licensed separately to RSE and SWP schemes; and direct recruitment by non-Vanuatu employers or their representatives with a permit. Including requirements for licensees and permit holders, license and permit applications were to be submitted annually and assessed in the public interest by the Labour Commissioner, with sanctions for agents working unlicensed (GoV, 2007a, pp. 5-12). Recruits required medical and police clearance, written consent of a spouse if married, and a character reference from someone perceived to be of high standing in their community, church or employment (GoV, 2007a, pp. 13-15). The Act existed within broader, active employment legislation. Vanuatu’s Employment Act 1983 has been amended four times, and is accompanied by four regulatory orders and two statute laws (GoV, 2019a)

The Seasonal Worker Act had several implications for scheme governance in Vanuatu. The Act’s prohibition on agents raising fees raised future income and viability issues for agents (see section 7.4). However, the Act did not detail obligations or rights of seasonal workers and overseas employers, also raising issues for future policy development (see 7.4.1). While ‘privatising’ recruitment, the Act also centred significant power on the Labour Commissioner, who approved or suspended agents and recruiters, and who was an intermediary for employers,

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directing them to agents for worker recruitment (Curtain, 2023). While Ministers changed frequently in Vanuatu's volatile political context, Kaluat retained this significant power until 2017 (Table 7.1-a). This reflected stronger sustained bureaucratic control by one individual.

Labour mobility was also a trade priority for MoFAICET. A Trade Policy Framework approved by Vanuatu's Council of Ministers in 2012 included labour mobility as a significant source of national revenue. Vanuatu's Government and engaged consultants integrated new opportunities in labour mobility as priorities for Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), Pacific Island Trade Agreement (PICTA), and Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) negotiations (Prasad & Giacomelli, 2012).

However, despite both labour legislation and a Trade Policy Framework in place, there were key policy gaps, such as provisions for workers themselves. These gaps were the focus of policy development towards a more comprehensive national policy framework, discussed in section 7.4. To some extent gaps in policy and leadership reflected what Curtain & Howes described as Vanuatu's 'Government-Light' role (Curtain & Howes, 2020).

7.2.2: Vanuatu's 'Government-light' approach

A major factor shaping the direction of Vanuatu's labour mobility policy framework was its human and financial resource limitations. This encouraged policy makers involved in early policy development to pragmatically pursue a 'government-light' approach that made private sector agents responsible for program implementation.

Vanuatu's deliberately 'privatised' and 'government-light' approach, reliant on private sector recruitment, was seen as a factor in Vanuatu's labour mobility success. As well as matching resources, it fitted Vanuatu's volatile political context, as in the view of one participant, it didn't require much government intervention (VCS-2). Implications of the 'government-light' role included minimal or no support or budget to worker welfare, trouble-shooting and promotion (Curtain, 2018a). While rates of workers 'absconding' were low, this minimal support raised risks to worker protection and programme quality (VDP-1).

Within a constrained resourcing environment, the World Bank identified significant improvement in ESU capability from institutional capacity assessment in 2009 to later reporting in 2013. The reporting found that Vanuatu had set up effective, efficient and equitable labour supply management, enabled by strong leadership and direction, and that the World Bank, the Australian Government and Australian employers regarded ESU capacity "very highly" (Raetz, 2013, p. 26). Despite role and budget limitations, Vanuatu's ESU actively

monitored worker quality and preparation. Labour Commissioner Kaluat considered himself the ‘regulator’ of the scheme, and that Vanuatu had led legislation, ownership and administrative control with Bank assistance. ESU staff were described as “*very passionate*” and “*constantly improving worker sourcing techniques*” (Raetz, 2013, p. 29). While needing more office space, in 2013 the ESU had five staff: more than Tonga, Kiribati and Solomon Islands (Raetz, 2013).

However, the rapidly increasing scale of worker participation burdened limited government resources. This also affected provincial officials whose functions were needed to meet external scheme requirements. The large number of recruits from Tanna, many without birth certificates or passports, provided “*real challenges for the police, the hospital, immigration, all the government offices that have never been tested to do all the things required to send such a big group of people overseas to work*” (Hammond & Connell, 2009, p. 205). An involved development partner commented that large growth in worker numbers and in inexperienced agents in 2017 (section 7.3.2) resulted in excessive workload on the ESU (VDP-5). Many new agents were unable to deliver legislatively required functions. This left the limited staff of the ESU responsible for record-keeping, visa applications and pre-departure briefings, as well as recruitment in new schemes including Australia’s PLS (Curtain & Howes, 2020; DFAT, 2016c). An involved development partner commented that tasks that were clearly agent responsibilities, like passport processing and pre-departure briefing, had been shifted to overburdened ESU staff. The impact of this was to risk and compromise quality of worker supply, a key factor in Vanuatu’s scheme participation (VDP-5).

Limited resources caused other problems in managing a growing program. The lack of liaison officers disadvantaged Vanuatu’s worker support and monitoring compared to Tonga and Timor-Leste (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 36). Two sources reported that poor data management resulted in underestimated worker numbers, and blacklisted workers being cleared to participate (Bailey, 2018a; Curtain & Howes, 2020, pp. 38-39). The ESU’s visa processing backlog delayed workers and employers (VDP-5). ESU overload also left no capability for local labour services, limiting support to local employment (VDP-5, VGL-2). Government budget for the DoL as a whole, including the ESU, remained limited through the case study period. DoL administrative expenditure eventually more than doubled from USD285,000 in 2006 to USD663,000 only at the end of the case period, in 2019 (GoV, 2019-2021; MFEM, 2011-2023). While highly capable for a large growing public program, Vanuatu’s ESU was

strained. This impacted the quality of worker supply, delivery on overseas agreements, and worker information on rights and protections, contributing to public and media criticism

Further requests from the ESU to expand staff capacity in Vanuatu and overseas to better deliver functions were repeatedly declined in government budget. One official interviewed in 2019 described the significant workload pressures on the ESU which drove these requests, but also indications of stronger commitment by leadership:

“We’ve requested that. At the moment we’re 4-5 [people] dealing with overseas labour mobility for 6-8,000 each year. We’re asking if government can invest. Sometimes we’re working long hours and on the weekend – we do that because we love our job. When we’re exhausted and want a day off we can’t, because not enough resources... government has not really invested for 10 years already. But lately - I don’t know maybe if that’s a political thing - we’ve had a lot of interest in the labour mobility program” (VGL-2).

This new political support under Minister Napuat in the Salwai government (see Table 7.1-a) included the above increase in administrative funding, commitment to overseas liaison officer positions, and development of a formal policy framework (discussed in section 7.4) (VGL-2). This increased support came after key ministerial engagement and policy changes in 2017 (Table 7.1-c, sub-section 7.3.1). The new Labour Commissioner from February 2019, Murielle Meltenoven came from a previous role in Vanuatu’s Public Service Commission. She brought a focus on job descriptions and unit structure, instituting four new positions across provinces to better decentralise recruitment and support to agents and workers (VDP-5). A Vanuatu liaison officer in Australia was engaged in 2019 (AEA, 2019). These measures were important to deliver the system strengthening and worker protection and support prioritised in the new policy framework launched in 2019 (see section 7.4).

Sufficient coordination across government agencies, public and private stakeholders was essential to delivering the functions required for Vanuatu’s successful labour mobility participation at scale, meeting external scheme requirements. One official described this coordination as “extensive” and including central Ministries (VGL-3); while two non-government participants noted relevant Department officials absent from labour mobility steering committee meetings (VDP-1, VPS-2). One factor relevant to supporting Vanuatu labour mobility policy coordination was Vanuatu’s hosting of several international institutions strongly interested in legal and migration issues. This included USP’s Law school, PIPP, MSG

headquarters, and the Office of the Chief Trade Adviser to Pacific states for PICTA and Pacer Plus negotiation (Bedford et al., 2014). These institutions with regional perspectives provided Vanuatu with a policy community and international linkages relevant to discussion, contribution and contestation of policy ideas on labour mobility. They also provided direct, local technical support and advice on labour mobility policy and implementation arrangements, relevant to Vanuatu's trade priorities and legal implications.

Vanuatu's capability and coordination for labour mobility worker supply were both successful in delivering essential scheme functions and worker growth, and a mixed story, experiencing serious implementation problems. Behind this mixed story were political factors and decisions – despite a deliberate effort to protect labour mobility policy from politics, discussed more at section 7.2.4. Donor engagement in capacity and policy-making was also significant.

7.2.3: Development partners: Influential and variable

As in other Pacific Island states, labour receiving country policy settings and requirements dominated Vanuatu's policy and implementation of labour mobility participation. Inflexible, standardized bilateral implementation arrangements by Australia and New Zealand were one-sided: designed to meet employer needs, and prevent absconding and overstaying (VDP-1)(Bailey, 2014; Curtain, 2018a). World Bank, Australian and New Zealand officials also influenced Vanuatu's policy-making on labour mobility through technical advisor support to develop integrated participation systems, and close working relationships and interactions in high level meetings and labour mobility fora. Objectives for development benefits were included in Australian and New Zealand agreements (NZDoL, 2007; Raetz, 2013). However, such objectives, and whether seasonal work programmes were seen primarily as industry support, employment creation, or overseas aid, varied by stakeholder or audience (Dornan et al., 2018; Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 415).

Donor support was important to ESU systems development and scheme management. From the RSE's start, ESU officials had relationships with the World Bank, and with New Zealand through the support of the Strengthening Pacific Partnerships programme (SPP) (Bedford et al., 2014). Vanuatu was among four target countries (with Kiribati, Tonga and Samoa) of AusAID's Labour Mobility Initiative (LMI), delivered through the World Bank (Raetz, 2013). The LMI also supported financial literacy training, marketing strategies, planning and tools. A World Bank consultant provided technical assistance with development of Vanuatu's labour migration policies and institutions and increased worker competitiveness. New Zealand and

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Australian capacity building programmes also recognized the vital role of employment agents, and supported them with marketing, planning and communications (Bedford et al., 2014; DFAT, 2016c, p. 40). Donor support was therefore important to stronger scheme management and strengthening of formal institutions in the policy area.

However, donor support to management capability came with varying approaches and level of priority, and short time horizons. New Zealand's SPP evaluation found that it focused more on scheme implementation processes to meet MBIE requirements than broader Vanuatu governance, policy-making and developmental outcomes also relevant to policy-making (Pakula, 2016, p. 8). Australia switched from World Bank technical assistance to contractor approaches (DFAT, 2016c; Raetz, 2013), expanded in 2018 with an international advisor directly supplementing capacity in the ESU (VDP-5). However, such support constituted a relatively small part of Australia and New Zealand's extensive bilateral aid programs during the case study period. As in Solomon Islands (sub-section 6.4.3), labour mobility schemes were not included in bilateral aid priority frameworks around 2010-2012, such as Australia's Partnership for Development with Vanuatu (AusAID, 2010; Raetz, 2013). As in Solomon Islands, a long list of alternative aid conditions agreed with the Vanuatu Government could only risk diverting finite domestic policy attention and resources away to other competing priorities.

Later, increased donor funding may have displaced Vanuatu's resourcing, as Vanuatu delayed placement of overseas liaison officers, and an internal proposal for labour mobility policy development support was funded by Australia instead (Curtain, 2018a). With donor support and growing numbers, pressure on officials also grew. Vanuatu officials asked Australian officials for an equivalent to Solomon Islands SWP Boost (sub-section 6.4.3), but this was rejected on the basis of Vanuatu's significant worker numbers (VDP-1).

From 2016-2018, Australia's Pacific Step Up and New Zealand's Policy Reset increased aid focus on labour mobility, as both countries recognized its importance to national economies and populations as well as bilateral relationships. New Zealand's High Commissioner noted in 2018 that the RSE scheme was the major revenue source for Vanuatu and more importantly, *"the primary component of bilateral relations"* between the two countries (GoV, 2018a). Curtain estimated net income savings of ni-Vanuatu SWP workers totalling AUD37.3 million in 2017/18, equivalent to more than half Australia's ODA funding that year (AUD64.3 million) (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 6). Labour mobility remittances from Australia later grew to almost double the value of Australia's annual ODA (FMO, 2022). As geostrategic competition in the

Pacific with China intensified, Australia's schemes had increasingly become a source of regional soft power and a form of "creative aid" (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 430).

Increased donor aid and engagement included an active role in policy-making. Donors joined DoL's external advocacy for lower remittance costs (Pakula, 2016, p. 13). Donors also shaped Vanuatu's labour mobility policies according to their development policy priorities, including for small business support (Pakula, 2016, p. 14), and gender and disability inclusion (DFAT, 2016c). Australian consultants recommended policy and regulatory reforms, and consistently pushed for Vanuatu to shift to a 'work ready pool' (WRP) model for recruitment to improve transparency in recruitment, with implications for ESU workload (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 143). Such proactive policy engagement made Vanuatu labour mobility policy development significantly externally influenced, while also contested by Vanuatu's strong national policy leadership and policy networks presented in sections 7.1 and 7.2.

Vanuatu established essential legislation and institutional roles enabling successful delivery of labour mobility policy goals. With one of the more strongly-led and fully-staffed LMUs in the Pacific, participating worker numbers accelerated. With variable agent capability, rapidly increased worker numbers put strain on the ESU. Donors had mixed objectives and variable support – increasing by the end of the period in the context of geostrategic priorities. Overall, Vanuatu had key policy success factors of national policy leadership and delivery, but also key risks for fluctuation and vulnerability in scheme management. These vulnerabilities were exposed in the political contestation and corruption issues that emerged over the policy area.

7.3: Political dispute, corruption, and negotiated institutions

Despite deliberate efforts to 'protect it from politics', labour mobility policy-making was shaped by Vanuatu's volatile, personalised and localised politics. This section discusses such contestation over labour mobility policy and implementation emerging throughout the case study period, but particularly increasing after Kaluat stepped down as Labour Commissioner in 2017. As participation had expanded broadly, agent numbers grew, and political involvement increased, policy-makers engaged with questions of equitable participation and emergent forms of corruption. Negotiation of formal and informal institutions operated in grey areas, and may have been part of Vanuatu's widespread and successful scheme participation.

7.3.1: ‘Protection from politics’

Section 7.2 above described Vanuatu’s deliberate ‘protection of labour mobility from politics’ shaped in labour mobility legislation from 2007, led by Labour Commissioner Kaluat and supported by Minister of Internal Affairs Crowby (VGL-1). Considered by Kaluat to be part of Vanuatu’s success (Dornan & Kaluat, 2018), it was also described by one interviewee as a reaction to the experience of political interference damaging public service operations in the early 2000s (VGL-1). It may also resonate with views by many ni-Vanuatu people of ‘politik’ as ‘poison’ (Morgan, 2003), introduced at 2.4.

The ‘protection from politics’ approach was also disputed. Drawing a line between the programmes and politicians continued to present difficulties for DoL public servants (VGL-1). A private sector participant noted that this ‘protection’ approach also included not coordinating too widely with government actors (VPS-1). Three participants noted multiple senior politicians criticising the privatisation approach (VDP-1, VGL-1, VPA-4). The difference of opinion with politicians limited their interest or ‘voice’ on the scheme, and continually limited resource allocations for the ESU. DoL’s neglect of local labour issues in favour of overseas labour mobility was also a factor in ministerial pressure for labour mobility management change, as Vanuatu’s National Union of Workers increasingly bypassed DoL and came straight to Cabinet (VPA-4,-5). This key change occurred in 2017 (see Table 7.1: Timeline). One political advisor agreed that the Labour Commissioner’s ‘protection’ of the program from politicians had served to protect the integrity of the labour mobility programme, and Vanuatu’s development ambitions for it, from pressure from politicians (VPA-4). The new Labour Commissioner Meltenoven also prioritised protection from political interference in DoL’s work, out of concern at scheme viability with labour-receiving countries, to ensure the selection process remained transparent and fair, conscious also that “*Australia and NZ are watching us*” (Interview with Murielle Meltenoven, April 2019). This suggests a combination of bureaucratic principles of impartiality and merit basis, as well as responsiveness to donor pressure.

Key departments also disputed roles. Ambiguity between the roles of MIA and MoFAICET contributed to dispute between them according to one government official interviewed (VGL-3). In 2019, multiple participants reported contestation over leadership of labour mobility between their respective Ministers, Napuat and Regenvanu (VDP-1,-5, VPA-4, VGL-3). Under Prime Minister Salwai from 2016, both represented the Graun Mo Jastis (GMJ) party, whose policy agenda was to expand worker numbers (VPA-4). However, participants reported the two having divergent interests in labour mobility. Napuat, from Tanna, prioritised local jobs

for ni-Vanuatu over expatriates and expatriate employers (VDP-5). Regenvanu saw labour mobility functions as an external trade priority for MoFAICET to take over (VDP-1), leaving DoL's ESU to attend to neglected domestic employment services (VPA-4). There was to be no change to these roles presented at 7.2.1, but political dispute and volatility continued over policy on employment agents.

7.3.2: Vanuatu's contested recruitment model

As introduced in section 7.1.4, Vanuatu's model of recruitment directly by employers and by private licensed agents was a critical factor in Vanuatu's success (Wade, 2020b)(VPA-5). However, it also experienced multiple problems and was a highly contested area of policy.

Vanuatu's initial Work-Ready Pool (WRP) for recruitment was gradually disused from around 2010 with preference to direct recruitment and use of agents. One government official considered it "politicised" – subject to selection directed by politicians - and beyond the ESU's capacity to manage at the time (VGL-3).

One 2017 decision by Minister Napuat was a significant policy change (Table 7.1). Labour Commissioner Kaluat had tightly managed the number of agents, carefully aligned to employer demand (Dornan & Kaluat, 2018). With growing worker numbers particularly in the SWP, worker recruitment came to be seen as lucrative. In the view of three participants, by 2017 lobbying of politicians to increase the number of SWP licensed agents was a factor in Minister Napuat moving to replace Kaluat (VPA-1, VGL-3, VPS-1). After Kaluat stepped down, Napuat instructed that agents no longer required an Australian employer letter confirming need for workers. This removed the main cap on agents (Garae, 2017c)(VDP-1, VGL-1). Large numbers of agents then applied and were approved. Minister Napuat claimed this change was good for equity and could expand the SWP (Dornan, 2018). A private sector participant commented on the Minister's decision:

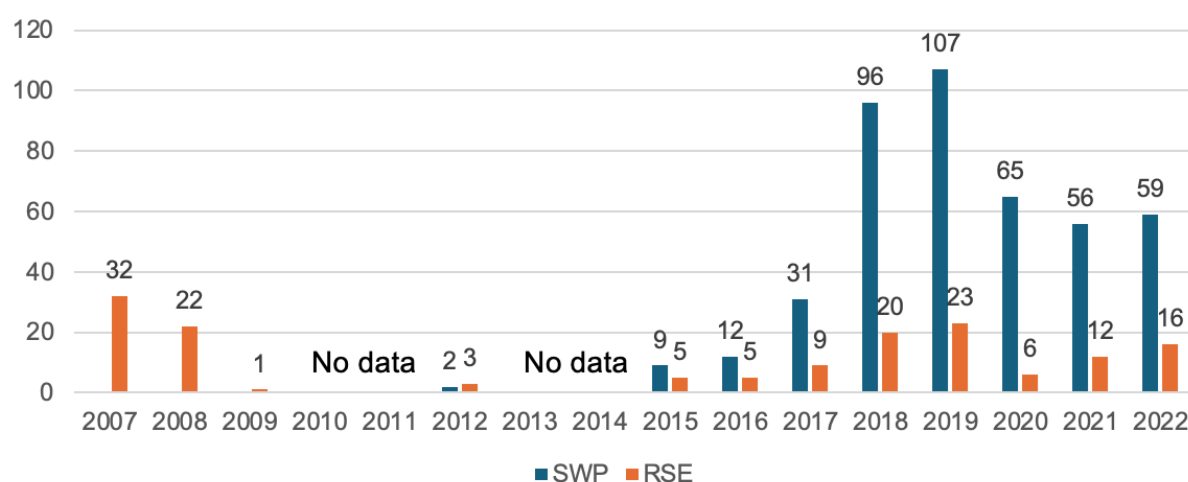
"Minister said he was tired of people harassing him. So he went ahead and grabbed at the license, with the thought that if you have the license to prove yourselves after 6 months they haven't proved themselves, they would lose the license. However that didn't work because they said "we're there, just give us six more months?" (VPS-1)

As a result of this change, the number of SWP agents increased from 17 in 2016 to 116 in 2018, and 130 in 2019. One development partner noted that two of the Minister's own advisors became agents in this expansion (VDP-1). One official saw the increased number of agents as aligned with political interests, noting that it was difficult for officials to resist because the

majority of political actors were in favour of it (VGL-3). By 2018, agents in Vanuatu had become a lobby group in policy-making on labour mobility. Major sending agents established the Vanuatu Agents Committee and Labour Mobility Association (VLM, 2025), with demonstrated political connections.

Table 7.2 illustrates the fluctuation in agent numbers over the case study period and afterwards (DoL, 2023). It reflects close controls in earlier years, the removal of government control and sharp increase in 2017 and then subsequent actions to reduce numbers beyond the case study period.

Table 7.3: Number of licensed seasonal employment agents, RSE & SWP, Vanuatu 2007-2022



Sources: (GoV, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c)(GOV DoL ESU).

Agent numbers had an unclear effect on worker numbers, but did effect worker quality. Expansion of the SWP, which relied more on agents, likely incentivised more agents to join, but most workers were recruited by a very few agents. Of the large total in 2019, only four or five SWP agents operated at a viable business scale covering business overheads (Wade, 2020b). Larger employers and agents dominated recruitment under both schemes, including due to repeat engagement, forming part of Vanuatu's success. One private sector participant distinguished the established and more successful agents, with capacity and familiarity with scheme rules, with many newer ones struggling (VPS-2). Agent compliance with policies and procedures was a continual problem, adding to ESU workload and worker quality problems as agents failed to perform their functions (see 7.2.2).

Increased agent numbers also impacted Australian stakeholders. By 2020, agents outnumbered Australian employers three to one, leaving many agents unviable (Wade, 2020b)(VDP-5).

Australian employers were significantly concerned by the increase (VDP-1), as they were “bombed” with emails and calls from agents, according to one official (VGL-1). Agent capability and compliance problems and employer needs influenced Australia’s requirement for use instead of a work-ready pool for recruitment for the PLS from 2018 (Curtain, 2018a). When surveyed, agents themselves called for non-working licensees to be culled (Curtain, 2020). In June 2018 Minister Napuat announced the reprimanding and suspension of agents for not adhering to SWP requirements and ESU instructions (Napwatt, 2018).

Recognising the risk these problems posed to successful labour sending, new Labour Commissioner Meltenoven in 2019 planned to further reduce agent numbers by enforcing compliance with legislation and changing criteria to make licenses less easy to obtain (VGL-, VPA-3). In November 2019, the Labour Commissioner denied license renewals to agents who had not recruited any workers in the previous year (Curtain & Howes, 2020, pp. 36-37). As presented in Table 7.2, the number of licensed SWP agents further reduced to 65 in 2020 and 56 in 2021, with 12 for the RSE (Table 7.2). In yet further policy fluctuation on the issue, Vanuatu’s Minister for Internal Affairs Kalsakau responded to agent problems with a 2020 proposal to abolish agents altogether (see section 7.4).

Impacting worker quality more than numbers participating, volatility on this policy question reflected the volatile domestic politics of labour sending arrangements in Vanuatu in a context of rapid expansion of participation. A further critical area of dispute over labour mobility policy and implementation, also affected by increased worker numbers and the lucrative nature of labour mobility participation, was over payments between workers, agents, officials and politicians, discussed in the following sub-section.

7.3.3: Corruption and other informal practices

In international recruitment, risks are high that intermediaries controlling access to higher-paid jobs can exploit low-skilled workers seeking employment (MADE, 2014). These risks were also high in Vanuatu. Low-skilled workers had limited information and literacy levels, recruitment agent resources were limited, and there was ambiguity over what was ‘kastom’ or ‘corrupt’.

Chapter three introduced the widespread corruption in Vanuatu’s institutional environment (Cox et al., 2007). Despite the deliberate ‘protection from politics’ and principles of merit and integrity in agreements, allegations and documented instances of corrupt practices emerged nevertheless. Policy review of Vanuatu’s labour mobility policy in 2023 (see 7.4.2) noted that

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“reports of worker applicants being exploited in terms of unpaid labour, illegal fees, political votes and gifts demanded to qualify for selection were confirmed by workers and communities throughout the review of the Policy” (Sackett, 2023, p. 6). In Vanuatu’s institutional context, bureaucratic control of sending large numbers of workers overseas to earn higher incomes was likened by one participant to *“sitting on top of a gold mine”* (VDP-1). Loosening of government controls in 2017 opened opportunities for actors in Vanuatu to access these lucrative opportunities, and corrupt practices appeared to increase.

Corrupt and personalised transfers sit amidst the ambiguity and hybridity of formal and informal institutions in Vanuatu. Drawing on comments in informant interviews in 2019 and to date limited documentation or research on these phenomena, this research identifies three types of either alleged or documented corrupt transfers in Vanuatu labour mobility programmes. These included (1) payments to agents and labour officials; (2) electoral patronage; and (3) nepotism. Policy-makers faced a challenge to respond to these corrupt practices, and to identify appropriate and effective roles for important influential institutions, such as chiefs and kastom in labour mobility policy and implementation.

(1) Payments to agents and officials

Illegal payments was one area of dispute over labour mobility policy among stakeholders. Most common were allegations of payments to agents, reported in two reviews of labour mobility implementation in Vanuatu (Martin, 2023, p. 19; Sackett, 2023, p. 6). Research participants mentioned allegations of various payments to officials and agents (VDP-1, VGL-2, VPS-1, VPS-2). Payment to agents were clearly prohibited and legally sanctioned by Vanuatu legislation, as well as New Zealand and Australian bilateral agreements (APH, 2015; Curtain & Howes, 2020; GoV, 2018a). In February 2019, Labour Commissioner Meltenoven assured the public that no corruption would be tolerated in her office, and that she would not hesitate to subject labour officers acting improperly to discipline under the Public Service Act (VDP, 2019). As related by a government official, a development partner, and Joanne Wade, a former agent, agents’ difficulties connecting to paying employers, delivering meeting legislated functions and earning income drove them to charge workers fees (VGL-3)(Wade, 2020b)(VDP-5). According to several participants, such practices significantly increased once the cap on agent numbers was removed, and the ESU struggled to manage compliance (VGL-3, VDP-1,-5, VPS-2).

At Vanuatu's first national labour mobility summit in March 2018 (section 7.4.1), agents lobbied for bilateral arrangements to be revised to allow them to charge fees (GoV, 2018a). The government considered options (VPA-3). However, Australian employers repeated concerns at widespread reports of agents charging workers fees (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 147). Australian and New Zealand officials met with Labour Commissioner Meltenoven to raise this concern, pushing the ESU to enforce scheme compliance, which they did (VDP-5). In February 2018 the DoL threatened agents charging fees with license suspension and cancellation (Garae, 2018).

In reality, payments by workers existed in a grey area between corruption and acceptable practice. Following traditional exchange practices, workers would sometimes provide money gifts to agents on their return (Bedford, Bedford, et al., 2020). While sometimes seen as *kastom* gifts, Curtain and Howes noted general acceptance that such fees were not permitted, constituting exploitation by intermediaries (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 37).

Even more prominent in debate over Vanuatu labour mobility were significant deductions from workers wages charged by employers in Australia and New Zealand (see section 7.4.2). Meanwhile, there was no tolerance for scams, fakes and theft. There were instances in which fake agents took money from workers for false promises of employment, and masqueraded as known agents. One civil society participant noted that fake agents who were identified faced community backlash and were widely published:

“There have been a few fly-by-night operators. Opprobrium of the community is not pleasant – becoming a pariah is not good. There have been 1 or 2 examples of fake agents – con artist – they tend to be advertised widely, the newspaper publishes them widely” (VCS-2)

Vanuatu's Government fined some (Radio New Zealand, 2019d). Despite regulation, limited monitoring of agents made scams easier to get away with (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 148).

(2) Electoral Patronage

Electoral patronage – vote-buying through the lure of labour mobility participation- appeared to expand at the end of the case study period. Before the 2020 election, Meltenoven told Australian radio she had seen video of an agent making an offer to a voter. Meltenoven shared her concern over this practice tarnishing Vanuatu's reputation with approved employers in Australia and New Zealand, and warned candidates not to use Australia's scheme to buy election votes (Srinivasan, 2020).

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Meltenoven provided assurance that only two agents were themselves candidates (Srinivasan, 2020), missing the broader problem of agents having political connections. Emergent electoral patronage was indicated in comments by two participants who identified politicians offering voters labour mobility opportunities through links with agents, and achieving electoral success as a result (VPS-1, VGL-1). However, corroborating evidence for these allegations is limited. In Vanuatu's institutional context, the informality of family, community and island networks could make the full extent of such linkages opaque.

(3) Nepotism and Kastom

Nepotism (described at 2.3.1) in recruitment is also harder to fully discern within Vanuatu's dense family, kinship and island networks. Australian and New Zealand scheme implementation arrangements included principles of equitable participation in schemes (NZDoL, 2007); and requirements to declare conflict of interest in recruitment of direct family members (DFAT, 2018d). Recruitment guidelines developed with donor technical support also directed ESU vigilance over *“recruiting agents favouring their own families, and wantok and nepotism, as they keep selecting workers from their own sources”* (DoL & WB, 2012, p. 10). However, these guidelines also included *“the desirability of enabling communities to form work groups with in-built leadership and character”* (DoL & WB, 2012, p. 8). Specific rules therefore sat amidst grey areas for nepotism. In practice, much was left to decisions by the Labour Commissioner, the ESU, and agents. After 2017, rapidly increased participation of workers and overload on the ESU likely increased opportunities for nepotism.

Nepotism in selection is both hard to detect, and likely a factor in Vanuatu's labour mobility policy success. It can be hard to differentiate nepotism from effective, trusted networking and relationship building in island communities. Vanuatu's success in recruitment relied on trusted and reliable employer-recruiter relationships, and employers' preference for returning workers. One development partner considered the agent system to be based on favouring wantoks (VDP-3). This was also recognised by researchers:

“Recruiters often have preferred places for recruiting workers which are linked to the locations where they have personal networks, including their extended family. This can produce systematic biases in the selection of places where recruits will be sought.”
(Bedford, Bedford, et al., 2020, p. 117)

Such “systematic biases” could represent both a strength and a risk of Vanuatu’s networked recruitment. One civil society participant described this link between personal networks and the strengths of recruitment in Vanuatu:

“The agents working now are people who are very very reputable and who have deep ties to the community. They tend to work through social networks. One prominent one is John Jalong. He hires almost exclusively from Ambrym community – and more widely from Malampa province, his home province. He sticks to his patch deliberately because he knows he can guarantee results” (VCS-2)

In this context, judgement on what was appropriate and fair appeared to rest with recruitment agents, employer representatives and ESU officials themselves. The subjectivity of these decisions is indicated by variable local acceptance or dispute of recruitment behaviour. In contrast, nepotism was not formally acceptable for Australian and New Zealand policy officials or employers, influencing their preference for a WRP over agent recruitment (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 143).

The role ascribed to village chiefs, pastors and community leaders in labour mobility recruitment aligned to kastom, helping to establish acceptance by rural communities. One civil society participant saw the chiefly system as a factor in Vanuatu’s labour mobility success (VCS-6). World Bank staff and New Zealand employers met with chiefs in 2006 to develop required community support (Curtain, 2018b). Formally, recruitment criteria required “*a character reference from someone who is perceived to be of high standing in his or her community, church or employment*” (GoV, 2007a, p. 14). Communities agreed their own approaches with recruiters. A private sector representative identified a prominent agent from a chiefly line who had been directed to take up the role for his community (VPS-1). In Epi, a village council screened and monitored migration, forcing or encouraging migrants to remit to a community fund, and limited workers to five seasons (Craven, 2013). There were similar requirements of workers in Tanna and Ambrym (Bailey, 2009; Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 117). Selection based on kinship networks created social and economic obligations on the workers selected (Bailey, 2009, pp. 157-158).¹⁹

¹⁹ On average, Vanuatu workers contributed AUD171 to community projects on return Doyle, J., & Sharma, M. (2017). *Maximizing the development impacts from temporary migration: Recommendations for Australia’s Seasonal Worker Programme*. World Bank. Washington, D.C. W. Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/607171528778308782/pdf/Maximizing-the-Development-Impacts-from-Temporary-Migration-Final-Report-P151959.pdf>. However, in the case of Ambrym, these contributions became more sporadic following allegations of misused funds Bailey, R.-I. (2014). *Working the*

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Ni-Vanuatu people have also expressed concern at widespread labour mobility participation undermining kastom, by diminishing respect for traditional authority structures of local governance (Craven, 2013; Petrou & Connell, 2023). One policy consultation paper sought to inform Vanuatu policy-makers on finding an appropriate role for chiefs and pastors, managing risks of senior leaders exploiting their positions, while not undermining local traditional local institutions (TSC et al., 2014, pp. 22-23). Diverse island contexts made this difficult. The ESU also had difficulty verifying community approvals required (TSC et al., 2014, pp. 22-23).

Policy approaches were flexible enough to fit with local, informal institutions to gain scale, support and sustainability. Such institutional hybridity enabled labour mobility at scale across communities, meeting the needs of thousands of job-seekers, bilateral governments and employers and forming part of Vanuatu's labour mobility policy success. As participation expanded and business opportunities arose, more intermediaries were incentivized to participate, and as this section has presented, varying forms of nepotism and clientelistic transfers emerged. This was recognised in later policy review in 2023, discussed at 7.4.2. A key factor in subjective acceptance or condemnation of these emergent practices was the perceived fairness with which opportunities were distributed.

7.3.4: Equity

Equitable distribution of benefits has continued to be a major issue in labour mobility policy-making and politics in Vanuatu, across ni-Vanuatu and foreign policy stakeholders. Participation by gender has remained highly inequitable in Vanuatu, sustained by cultural norms around work and migration, community roles, employer and agent preferences, and occupational segregation (Bailey, 2014; 2019a, p. 29; Chattier et al., 2017, p. 29). By 2018-19, one in five SWP workers were female (DFAT, 2019a), and fewer than one in 10 RSE workers (Bedford, Bedford, et al., 2020).

However, instead Vanuatu political advisors and officials interviewed – including women - were more concerned about geographic equity, and social impacts on communities (VGL-2,3, VPA-1, VGE-6). From the start, geographically equitable participation was a priority for Edgell, Temakon, and Kaluat, as well as World Bank staff in 2006 (Luthria, 2006, p. 131; Temakon, 2006)(VGL-1). Local leadership for overseas labour mobility was motivated in response to issues of deepening social inequalities and urban drift. While significant foreign

Vines: seasonal migration, money, and development in New Zealand and Ambrym, Vanuatu University of Otago]. Dunedin, New Zealand. <https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/handle/10523/5063>.

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aid benefited urban areas - and foreign consultants - labour mobility benefited rural jobseekers (Petrou & Connell, 2023, pp. 89-90). Kaluat intended rural equity through direct recruitment from the islands (PIR, 2007). Selection by village councils and leaders was to target the most “needy and deserving” (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 128). The ESU’s Labour Inspector monitored indicators, including worker recruitment from a spread of provinces (DoL & WB, 2012). However, the policy focus on equitable participation proved difficult to achieve under the ‘government-light’ model as participation broadened, employers favoured repeat workers from known communities, and agent numbers increased (Pakula, 2016, pp. 7-8; Petrou & Connell, 2023).

While participation expanded significantly, Bailey and Rereman noted widespread rumours in Vanuatu that scheme access was limited to friends and relatives of MPs, ESU staff and employment agents living in Port Vila (Bailey & Rereman, 2019). A major challenge for Vanuatu policy was how to limit participation of repeat workers, to better distribute participation. Opportunities for new workers were constrained by employers’ preference for returning workers, which was difficult to manage in employer-led schemes (Bedford, Nunns, et al., 2020).²⁰ Over time, a bias to urban recruitment developed as lucrative incomes attracted urban and already-employed ni-Vanuatu who had better access to agents and required pre-departure checks (Petrou & Connell, 2023, p. 173). Comparing geographic origin, Curtain’s analysis found over-representation of people with ‘usual residence’ in Port Vila (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 40). With agents focusing on larger, accessible islands, rural ni-Vanuatu experienced “extreme” barriers to participation (Bailey, 2019a, p. 29), felt the need to migrate internally for work (Chattier et al., 2017, p. 31), and on return used savings to move to urban areas (Petrou & Connell, 2023, pp. 57, 432)(VCS-3). This geographic inequity, perceived and actual, was particularly problematic in the segmented island polity of Vanuatu. It was among issues raised for attention through new policy development (section 7.4).

Rapidly increasing labour mobility participation in Vanuatu brought new problems and contestation. Incentives to profit motivated numerous licensed agents, becoming a political issue over program management which threatened worker quality. Original attempts to ‘protect’ the schemes from political interference were contested as politicians were incentivised to participate in labour mobility. Multiple forms of corrupt or nepotistic behaviour emerged, some in a grey area between strict rules and effective and locally adapted negotiation

²⁰ This concern was repeated by one political advisor interviewed (VPA-4).

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with informal institutions. As widespread participation grew, Vanuatu policy stakeholders appeared less concerned about sharing opportunities for women, than sharing opportunities equally across Vanuatu's dispersed archipelago. These 'problems of success' drove Vanuatu's leaders, donors and sector stakeholders to contribute to a comprehensive new policy framework only developed at the end of the case study period.

7.4: 'Problems of success': A new policy framework

The Vanuatu Government had developed key elements of a labour mobility policy framework from 2007. This included legislation, institutional responsibility and a model of recruitment and labour sending that worked to secure and expand scheme participation (Dornan & Kaluat, 2018). Nevertheless, several stakeholders interviewed including officials and development partners identified a need for a comprehensive policy framework addressing persistent and emerging problems in labour mobility sending, including 'problems of success' (Dornan, 2018). This section discusses the process of developing this policy framework by the end of the case study period.

7.4.1: Developing a new policy framework: 2012 - 2019

Development of a new policy framework began early. Though an ongoing interest of development partners advising DoL, it took a long time to eventuate. One development partner suggested that Labour Commissioner Kaluat had not wanted to address major outstanding policy issues because things worked well for him (VDP-1). A government official suggested the delay in policy framework formalization was due to lack of high-level political interest and resourcing (VGL-1).

Regional skills development and labour mobility expert Richard Curtain, who provided advice to Australia in Solomon Islands (6.1.3), participated from 2012 as part of the DoL's policy development team. By 2012, the team identified four key areas of policy issues: governance, worker protection, international promotion of access, and maximising development impacts (GoV, 2012b). The team identified an opportunity for the ESU to improve coordination with other Vanuatu agencies, supported by a new policy framework (GoV, 2012b). A new policy framework was needed to integrate efforts across organisations. Australian and World Bank assistance (sub-section 7.3.3) supported ESU institutional strengthening as well as policy consultation from 2012 to 2015 (WB, 2015). The Labour Commissioner led a policy working group which reported to a Steering Committee led by MIA's Director General, and later by MOFAICET (GoV, 2014)(VDP-1). Jointly developed by the DoL and MOFAICET, the draft

Labour Migration Policy Framework for Vanuatu was submitted to the Minister for Internal Affairs in 2014 (GoV, 2014; Roberts, 2019b). MoFAICET's increasing role leading policy development by 2017 reflected Minister Regenvanu's interest in leading labour mobility policy responsibility in dispute with Minister Napuat (sub-section 7.3.1).

A long list of policy drivers and priorities for government had emerged in significant public debate over labour mobility. Implementation problems had persisted, including of worker exploitation and welfare (Petrou & Connell, 2023). Rights and obligations of workers and employers were a gap in the original legislation (see sub-section 7.2.1). As worker and agent numbers expanded, required pre-departure training had not resolved problems of awareness of requirements and working and living conditions, including pay deductions (Petrou & Connell, 2023, pp. 130-133). Labour receiving country governments such as Australia's responded with legislative and operational efforts to strengthen temporary worker protections (DoHA, 2025).

Dornan identified 'problems of success' including political incentives to allow the entry of more agents (7.3.2); and inequities caused by long-term repeat employment of workers, rather than new workers (sub-section 7.3.4) (Dornan, 2018). The economic and social impacts of widespread labour mobility participation was a concern reflected by multiple policy stakeholders interviewed (VPA-1,-2, VGL-3, VGO-2). Individual and community benefits for returning workers had been discussed for a long time, and evidence in Vanuatu in particular provided in multiple academic studies (see sub-section 3.4.4), but this had not been translated into local policy action. Concerns were raised about the impact of seasonal labour programmes on kastom (sub-section 7.3.3) and also agricultural productivity at village level, as the most productive workers withdrew subsistence labour (Craven, 2013; Dornan, 2018). Beyond external research, local stakeholder consultations and ESU implementation challenges raised such issues for policy-makers' attention.

A number of these issues were addressed in the 2014 policy framework, through which Vanuatu officials wanted to balance costs and benefits of labour mobility and protect workers. Officials also wanted to review the private sector's role, coordinate better across agencies and stakeholders, expand labour mobility opportunities, and compete with regional neighbours (GoV, 2014). The formal policy framework would better integrate labour mobility in Vanuatu's strategic priorities across stakeholders and capture emerging opportunities overseas. The framework proposed a new senior-level position to drive labour migration policy and a Council of Ministers Labour Migration Sub-Committee, given the significance of labour mobility

issues, the coordinated approach needed, and the political nature of policy decisions on immigration (GoV, 2014).

After submission to Cabinet, it nevertheless took another five years from 2014 for Vanuatu's Labour Migration Policy Framework to be launched (Roberts, 2019b). One official noted that policy drafting stalled without 'political will' by Ministers (VGL-1). Nevertheless, the longer period of stability of Prime Minister Salwai and Ministers Napuat and Regenvanu, and the more technocratic profile of this cabinet, provided an opportunity for policy finalisation and delivery. Despite Kaluat having stepped down as Labour Commissioner, in 2017 he was invited by Minister Regenvanu to continue in the policy task force, his skills needed to help prepare practical policies; and he remained active in this role beyond the case period (VGL-1).

In this period policy-makers continued to develop various ideas responding to problems. The Vanuatu Government explored the potential of supporting workers through a trust fund, and investment in accommodation within Australia to support worker welfare and expand to new approved employers (DFAT, 2016c, p. 39). Original aims of Vanuatu policy-makers in the mid-2000s had included greater self-reliance and entrepreneurship by returning workers (VGL-1). GoV again explored options for returning workers to invest in communities on return, including an idea for returning workers to plant 500 kava plants (Dornan, 2018). More specific to implementation arrangements, the new policy framework was expected to address confusion over the role of unions in Vanuatu and labour receiving countries, agent licensing, and capacity in management and recruitment arrangements (Regenvanu, 2019). Caps were proposed on worker return visits, but these were difficult to prioritise over employer preferences for returning workers (Dornan, 2018). The policy taskforce addressed human resource issues including behavioural and working environment issues, labour protection and taxation (VPA-4). The DoL requested a worker database, a proper complaints mechanism, and return to a WRP to support program transparency (VGL-3). These policy priorities were represented in the formal policy framework which was eventually developed by Government.

7.4.2 National Labour Mobility Summit in 2018

A combination of external pressures from donor officials' advocacy (VCS-3) and Government awareness of significantly expanded labour mobility opportunities led the Vanuatu Government to host Vanuatu's first ever National Labour Mobility Summit in March 2018 (RNZ, 2018b). Political advisors interviewed noted the summit responded to public pressure for government decisions on labour mobility and employment opportunities, and pressure from

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the increased number of agents (VPA-4,-5). The summit intended to set a ‘way forward’ which ensured labour mobility sending and receiving benefits continued and were maximised (RNZ, 2018b).

Summit discussions reflected the importance of labour mobility benefits to Vanuatu by the end of the case study period. The summit also reflected the importance of Vanuatu labour mobility to Australia and New Zealand, who advanced bilateral negotiation priorities through the process (GoV, 2018a). Minister Regenvanu sought these donors’ advice on priorities for Vanuatu to improve quality of worker supply. Development partners presented priorities including strengthening of inclusion, equity, pre-departure briefing and agent management. A statement released at the summit by Prime Minister Salwai emphasised labour mobility as a PACER Plus trade priority with Australia and New Zealand.

Minister and officials’ positions in the summit also indicated a continued course of ‘protection from politics’ within supplementary resourcing. Salwai appeared to support ‘protection from politics’, committing that *“there is no political party manoeuvres with the processes to monopolise the labour mobility programs for short-term political gain”* (GoV, 2018a, pp. 13-14). The DoL also took the opportunity to publicly highlight its administrative resourcing case, contrasting the large volume of remittances to Vanuatu with *“little or no increase in financial support to the operations and the services”* of the ESU, along with staff shortages and insufficient pre-departure preparation (GoV, 2018a, pp. 3-4).

The summit strengthened calls for a national policy framework (GoV, 2018a). Over 100 participants included senior and broad Vanuatu policy actors in Vanuatu as well as Australian and New Zealand representatives, reflecting the wide policy networking of the issue, and widespread concerns about the policy’s implementation. Vanuatu agents organised and were particularly vocal, enquiring about rules, caps and flexibility on charging fees, and asking why Government had not initiated any programs for returning workers in ten years of participation (GoV, 2018a). One agent raised the issue of poor worker accommodation (Bailey, 2018b). This broad participation and debate contributed multiple policy framework priorities.

7.4.3: Vanuatu’s National Labour Mobility Policy of 2019 – and beyond

Vanuatu’s National Labour Mobility Policy was launched in December 2019 by Minister Regenvanu (Roberts, 2019b). Its aims included:

1. Increase labour mobility opportunities and make them available to a wider range of people

2. Enhance Vanuatu's skills base and better match skills development to Vanuatu's labour needs
3. Improve how labour mobility is governed and operated
4. Strengthen the social and economic benefits of labour mobility
5. Maintain Vanuatu's attractiveness and trust of the receiving country as a major source of workers for the international labour mobility market; and
6. Reduce costs for workers and ensure their well-being and protection (GoV, 2019c, p. 6).

The policy tightened coordination and institutional arrangements, establishing a Labour Mobility National Committee, making attendance by essential stakeholders compulsory within 'standard operating procedures'. The committee was mandated to implement the policy and supervise any changes to the Seasonal Employment Act. Scheme management would be tightened with signed employment agreements filed with the ESU and an official registry of village and community endorsement of workers. Funding for implementation became a Government responsibility. Resourcing needs were specified for ESU budget, the appointment of liaison officers in labour receiving countries, project funding for initiatives, information systems, worker training and research into impacts (GoV, 2019c, p. 22).

The policy framework addressed a number of scheme governance and implementation issues analysed and debated through the case study period with a focus for the technical requirements for Vanuatu's successful participation. However, beyond 2019, major implementation problems and criticism persisted, indicating gaps in the policy framework's delivery on key aims. The policy was found to be insufficient in ensuring worker protection and well-being, as complaints about worker exploitation continued from workers themselves (APH, 2022). Critics complained of an overfocus on compliance and 'shaming' – rather than supporting – workers. This included the harsh response by Vanuatu and Australian governments to SWP 'worker absconding' during the COVID-19 pandemic (Petrou & Connell, 2023). These complaints led to increased investigation by both governments of pay deductions, pastoral care and union access under the schemes (Jackson, 2022; Kelly, 2021; Sharman & Howes, 2022). The Australian Government responded with worker protection reforms as presented at 6.4.4.

Dispute over Vanuatu's labour mobility model continued, raising risks for labour sending. In 2020, Internal Affairs Minister Kalsakau announced the abolition of recruitment agents, replaced with recruitment at provincial level through area administrators, intended to improve geographic equity and increase government revenues (Howes & Curtain, 2020; Petrou &

Connell, 2023, p. 344). This major reform was unrelated to the just-launched policy framework, and represented a nationalisation of Vanuatu's 'privatized' recruitment model which risked Vanuatu's labour mobility 'success' (Fennell, 2020; Wade, 2020a). The change did not eventuate, but did reflect the volatility of Vanuatu decision-making on labour mobility and fragility of Ministerial commitment to the policy framework.

Managing the economic, worker and community costs of widespread labour mobility participation became a priority for Vanuatu leaders. Local employer groups and economic analysis has continued to raise the domestic labour impacts of this widespread labour mobility participation on sectors including the tourism industry (Rothwell, 2023). This includes widespread concern about brain drain – that rather than jobless rural workers, skilled urban workers were also participating widely in schemes and depleting local industries (Aru, 2019; VDP, 2023). Responding as opposition leader in 2022, Regenvanu urged revision of the agreements between the Vanuatu and Australian governments to protect Vanuatu citizens. Regenvanu noted that many scheme issues could have been addressed if the 2019 Labour Mobility Policy had been fully implemented by the Government (Regenvanu, 2022). Vanuatu, the increasing concerns raised by politicians about worker welfare and protection indicate the political salience of workers' rights with sustained and widespread labour mobility participation.

Debate within Vanuatu over the social costs of widespread participation in labour mobility schemes was reflected in overseas academic and expert debate drawing evidence from Vanuatu. Drawing on the major research of a Pacific Labour Mobility Survey, the World Bank and ANU addressed the question with qualitative evidence finding that temporary labour mobility delivers a net positive impact, considering real social costs of family separation but massive financial gains from income and remittance flows (Doan, Dornan, et al., 2023). Other researchers focused on worker welfare issues criticised the report for "dubious claims" based on addressing personal and subjective issues like family separation and worker welfare with simple qualitative surveying rather than deeper social research (Withers, 2023).

In Vanuatu, continued concerns and disputes, and increased worker numbers, motivated major policy review in May 2023, commissioned by MOFAICET's PACER Plus Implementation unit (Sackett, 2023, p. 6). From this review, revised policy shifted focus from worker compliance to support. The policy also shifted balance from Australian and New Zealand to Vanuatu-led priorities, matching a broader regional shift of power to Pacific sending states, and to reintegration of returning workers to meet domestic priorities (Sharman & Bedford,

2023). In addition to governance and facilitation of sustained labour mobility schemes benefiting Vanuatu, the Labour Mobility Policy and Action Plan 2024 – 2027 had an explicit focus on mitigating negative impacts of labour mobility participation, including child, family and community protections (GoV, 2024b). Program measures implemented with donor support to better address concerns about family and worker welfare included the ‘Famili I Redi’ program, contributing to behavioural changes benefiting family welfare (Avalon, 2023). The social costs and impacts of labour mobility continued to attract academic attention, investigation and programming responses in Vanuatu and the region (Thyna, 2026; UNICEF, 2024).

The Vanuatu Government responded to the local labour impacts of widespread labour mobility through other measures. In 2023 the government granted the Chamber of Commerce and Industry the power to bring in up to 1,500 workers under a new Emergency Employment Visa announced by Minister of Internal Affairs Christophe Emelee (Willie, 2023). In a key policy development, Vanuatu launched a National Employment Policy (NEP) in December 2025, developed by the Department of Labour and Employment Services with support of the ILO. Minister Napuat’s forward noted that the NEP provided a framework for “addressing critical challenges in our labour market”, complementing sectoral policies in labour mobility, education and other sectors (Kaltonga, 2025, p. 4). The launch of the policy indicated Vanuatu leaders’ efforts to balance widespread labour mobility participation with policy effort to address domestic employment challenges left unaddressed by widespread labour mobility participation.

Beyond the case study period, Vanuatu’s long-awaited comprehensive policy framework had not resolved key implementation issues, and Vanuatu’s widespread labour mobility participation and policy ‘success’ therefore remained accompanied by dispute and contestation. With the widest participation of the four case studies, Vanuatu labour mobility presented both unique ‘problems of success’ and unique indications of ‘policy feedback’. As well as the significant income and living standards changes through labour mobility participation, political dynamics may also be changing at national level as a result of this widespread participation. Two civil society participants in Vanuatu commented that workers returning from overseas labour mobility with savings and broader experience did not want election handouts of rice from MPs, but service delivery and sealed roads (VCS-2, -3). This suggests further change to Vanuatu’s political dynamic and clientelist pressures, and possibly Solomon Islands’. While

far less studied than the social and economic impacts of widespread labour mobility participation, these political dynamics are well worth further understanding (see 9.4).

Conclusion

This case study analysed the Vanuatu Government's policy-making on overseas labour mobility from 2006 to 2019. In this period, a combination of external linkages and advice and local leadership and entrepreneurship within developing legislation, policy settings and institutions developed a Vanuatu policy model of labour mobility coordination which achieved significant numbers of ni-Vanuatu workers travelling overseas for seasonal work. This employment policy area achieved the broadest employment and economic impact of the four employment policy case studies in this research. These results also brought political interest and contestation, through persistent and disputed 'problems of success', which were not fully resolved even when a comprehensive donor-supported policy framework was eventually launched at the end of the case period. Several factors influenced policy-making, -delivery and -change in the area:

1. While Vanuatu faced externally imposed and structural barriers, connected local policy leadership combined with economic links, experience with specific labour mobility opportunities and external selection by the World Bank and New Zealand, assisted Vanuatu's 'first mover advantage'. External donor actors remained influential in setting scheme parameters and priorities, and in major policy decisions and directions, affecting worker numbers, as well as technical support to labour sending. However, this policy case also indicated that connected local leaders with agency were able to contest this external influence throughout the case period.
2. A connected group of local leaders and entrepreneurs advocated for Vanuatu's access, mobilized essential stakeholders and communities, and managed the growing schemes. Labour Commissioner Lionel Kaluat was prominent and influential, but operated in coordination with a policy network of employers, local agents and policy stakeholders, including regional institutions based in Vanuatu. This network enabled policy-making in a complex policy area, despite Vanuatu's broader political dynamics of political instability, transactional politics, clientelist pressures undermining deliberate policy, and variable 'political will'.
3. Engaged policy actors developed a policy framework of legislation and a privatized 'government-light' model which worked, enabling broad participation in labour

mobility schemes. It was implemented by a stretched but motivated labour sending unit, the ESU, among the better resourced among Pacific countries, which coordinated across required stakeholders. As well as balancing a public/ private approach and coordination, this model included negotiation of formal and informal institutions. It was responsive enough to formal Australian and New Zealand scheme parameters and local legislation, but flexible enough to informal institutions and local needs to achieve scale and sustainability across Vanuatu's communities.

The twelve-year wait for Vanuatu to launch a comprehensive formal national labour mobility policy framework, and its uncertain implications for policy delivery after its launch could be attributed to four factors:

1. Policies including legislation and institutional arrangements were already in place and sufficient to guide implementation reaching large numbers of ni-Vanuatu people.
2. Political leadership of the policy area at times included short-term and politically- or clientelist-motivated decisions (such as the 2017 removal of constraints on agents, or Kalsakau's 2020 move to abolish agents). This personalised decision-making contrasted with more programmatic and consultative policy approaches, which proved more possible temporarily under the 2016-2020 government of Salwai, Regenvanu and Napuat.
3. The policy framework was intended to address implementation problems that were complex and actively disputed among stakeholders.
4. Strong donor interest in and resourcing of the formal policy framework possibly indicated that it served more as a signal for donors more than being widely owned by Vanuatu political actors. Once launched, framework delivery was not able to resolve persistent implementation issues; proved insufficient to addressing growing and persistent concerns and criticisms about worker and family welfare; and did not appear to be deeply owned across Vanuatu political stakeholders. Because of this, the framework was succeeded by further politicised decision-making, Government review and policy shifts including comprehensive review and the launch of a new policy framework in 2024 with a greater focus on worker and family protections.

The Vanuatu labour mobility policy case reflects an employment policy-making environment with strong local leadership and policy networking, but volatile and personalised politics. Within this context, labour mobility sending was protected, and the focus of the Employment

Services Unit and external donor support,, while broader domestic employment policy-making and -resourcing faced greater challenges. While the locally led policy and legislative approach sought to protect labour mobility sending from the ‘politik’ recognised as shaping and undermining institutions and policy across government in Vanuatu, this ‘protection’ was contested by political actors who sought growing control and involvement in labour mobility policy as participation, benefits and incentives increased. Widespread labour mobility participation and the political disputes arising from ‘problems of success’ illustrated more clearly the diverse political, stakeholder and societal interests among officials, politicians, agents, donors and workers themselves. These differences have at times been attributed to external influence – such as the Australian and New Zealand focus on worker ‘absconding’ and ‘compliance’ which was in fact also the priority of Vanuatu officials in better managing workers. As Vanuatu has increased agency over labour mobility with its more recent policy framework of 2024, these domestic political and societal differences of opinion may become more pronounced and visible, and less easy to direct to external actors.

Widespread and sustained labour mobility participation in Vanuatu has had economic, social and political impacts not seen in the other three case studies in this research, but which remain partially understood. After 2019, public, political and academic debate focused increasingly on worker welfare and social impacts. This resulted from sustained and widespread participation raising concerns across Vanuatu societal stakeholders about economic and social impacts, but likely also from the increased collective voice of workers themselves. This research has yielded initial indications of changed political incentives for politicians, agents, and workers as voters. Beyond existing research and debates, how widespread and sustained labour mobility participation is changing political power and dynamics in Vanuatu through policy feedback is worth significant further research. Synthesis, analysis, findings and multiple practical implications of this research for policy stakeholders in Vanuatu and beyond are further captured in Chapters 8 and 9.

8: Synthesis & analysis

Introduction

Chapter 8 will synthesise, critically analyse and compare the policy case studies to identify what factors influence policy responses to employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and how they exert this influence. These factors are presented across the political economy framework of this research: structures and resourcing, institutions, and how policy actors exercise agency over policy-making. They include:

1. Broader Political Dynamics
2. Formal institutions: capacity and resource constraints
3. Combination and contestation of formal and informal institutions
4. How policy actors responded to personalised and politicised pressures and corrupt practices
5. Who had power
6. Accountabilities and incentives; and
7. Development partner actions.

Both broader and sector-specific politics shaped employment policy-making. Broader political dynamics and constraints on formal institutions were two factors shaping policy-making more similarly across the case studies. Remaining factors shaping policy-making were more variable, explaining differences in policy-making pathways. These included the balance of formal and informal institutional arrangements; how policy actors responded to informal and corrupt pressures; who had power; accountabilities, incentives and commitment to policies; and development partner actions.

Comparison of factors in the policy case areas will examine why policy-making pathways diverged. These cases share remarkably similar structures, resourcing, policy problems and ideas. However, key differences in political dynamics, institutional arrangements, accountabilities and incentives led to very different policy delivery. Comparison of the cases indicates that the identified factors shape policy-making in ways that are either more likely, or less likely to support predictable, aligned, programmatic and inclusive policy-making and -implementation; and more or less likely to support policy reforms to achieve broadly shared goals.

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The chapter will also analyse more deeply six ways that the identified factors influenced employment policy responses:

1. How both broader or sectoral politics shaped policy-making on employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu;
2. How informal institutions and corruption are negotiated and shape employment policy-making;
3. The conditions under which bureaucratic and political leaders could commit to and deliver employment policy and reforms;
4. How different voter and societal interests shape employment policy-making;
5. How development partners actions shape employment policy-making; and
6. What the findings indicate about the patterns of employment policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu..

8.1: Factors in Policy Responses to Employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

The first two factors were more similar across the cases, although with important variations. Factor one was broader political economy dynamics. Chapter 3 presented the significant parallels in political economy contexts of the two countries. These parallels shaped similar structures and resources in the policy case areas. Both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu had youthful and rural populations dispersed over wide island chains. In these geographically segmented polities, politicians and bureaucrats balanced the responsibility for broad service delivery with pressures for distribution of personal and local benefits through kinship and island networks. Nevertheless, key differences in these political dynamics, including critical junctures in national politics discussed further at 8.3.1, were important in shaping policy-making. As well as broader political dynamics, distinct social sector dynamics also shaped policy-making in these social sector policy areas. These social sector dynamics emerge through the remaining factors listed below.

Factor two was the limitations of formal institutions, capacity and resources. These constraints were systemic and present across all four case study issues. Within challenging employment contexts, small size and under-resourcing of government units had multiple implications for policy-making. These included limitations of data collection, policy development, implementation of agreed policies, and capability to respond at scale to surging student and job-seeker demand for education and employment services. These limitations sustained the

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demand for external aid funding, drawing in influential external partners as major policy actors. Initially weak and inherited formal institutions strengthened over time, with policy, legislation, and increasing numbers of tertiary-trained local managers.

Remaining factors in policy-making on employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu were more variable, helping to explain policy-making differences. Factor three was how formal and informal institutional arrangements were combined and contested. Chapter 3 presented the pervasive nature of personalised and clientelistic incentives and practices shaping politics and policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Both countries had geographically segmented politics with weak but strengthening formal institutions compromised by influential informal institutions. This institutional hybridity shaped incentives and policy pathways in all four cases. Formal institutions of employment policy delivery were highly contested by personalised selection, including by people in positions of authority using their influence. There were important differences in specific informal institutions and practices, and how institutional arrangements were contested or negotiated, including formal institutions' enforcement and adaptation. These arrangements are discussed further in sub-section 8.3.2.

Factors four to seven relate to the dynamics of political agency, which also varied significantly across cases.

How policy actors engaged with informal and personalised pressures and corruption constituted the fourth factor. In all four policy areas, politicians, bureaucrats and other individuals were alleged or perceived to have engaged in personalised selection practices, consistent with the political dynamics of each state. Responses to these practices varied widely, from sanctions against politicised and personalised selection of tertiary scholarships in Vanuatu, to formalisation of politicised scholarships selection as a Constituency Awards category in Solomon Islands. Specific pressures, incentives and responses were particular to policy area and context, and varied over time and between functions, discussed in more detail in section 8.3.2.

The fifth factor was who had power and voice to shape policy-making. A policy elite consisted of senior bureaucrats, politicians and political advisors, and sector stakeholders such as training providers, labour migration agents, active civil society advocates or parents of scholarship students. Development partners were also present and active members of this policy elite. While popular perceptions remain widespread of corruption by Pacific politicians and senior officials (Larmour, 2012; Walton, 2022), existing literature records the importance of voters'

incentives to political actors. Chapter 3 presented that Solomon Islands and Vanuatu politicians act within broader dynamics of localised, personalised and transactional politics, driven by political pressures to meet the needs of family and enough local constituents to remain in power. Case study chapters illustrated voters' interests driving politicians to personally allocate scholarships (Chapters 4 and 5), seeking alternate labour mobility pathways for local jobseekers (Chapter 5), reopening disaster-affected schools in Vanuatu (6), and Vanuatu politicians seeking votes by partnering with labour mobility recruiters (7). In both countries a societal elite or emergent middle class were more likely to have access to information, policy networks and mechanisms for policy advocacy and complaint, and therefore voice in the policy areas. How different voter and societal interests shaped employment policy-making is further discussed at 8.3.3.

The sixth factor was accountabilities, incentives and commitment to policies, which could either enable change or cause resistance to change. Sub-section 2.3.1 introduced the importance of public service accountability for effective and inclusive policy delivery with broad benefits. Accountability relationships and accountability institutions were also important in delivery and contestation of private or public benefits in all four policy cases. The operation of accountability institutions including ombudsmans and audit offices was prominent in both tertiary scholarships case studies, and the accountability function of media articles and debate was prominent in all policy cases. Different incentives and accountabilities significantly shaped public and bureaucratic interest and behaviour, including policy commitment and engagement. A key example was public pressure to invest in tertiary scholarships or in basic education. Senior bureaucratic commitment to policy and implementation was sustained in three of the policy cases, but not initially in Solomon Islands labour mobility. In Solomon Islands' and Vanuatu's political contexts, political commitment could be short-term and changeable, making it possible to agree to policies and launch reforms, but more difficult to deliver policy and reforms, particularly where there were short-term political or financial costs. The conditions within which leaders could see through policy delivery and reforms are described at 8.3.4.

The seventh factor was aid donor actions. In all four policy case areas external development partners exerted significant influence on policy-making combining policy advocacy, financial resourcing and technical policy advice and inputs, with mixed results.

In all four cases, development partners, particularly Australia and New Zealand, were influential policy actors, playing critical roles in key policy reforms. A development partner in

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Vanuatu described that Australia “*always had a place at the table*” (VDP-2). Development partners expressed this significant influence through multiple modes. Key donor activities included policy advocacy and co-drafting, technical and managerial assistance, capacity-building and capacity substitution, financing of budgets and activities, and aid conditionality. Tactics and degree of donor engagement varied significantly, as did the consequences. How local policy actors and development partners negotiated this external influence is discussed further at 8.3.5.

8.2: Cross-case comparison

Comparison of the policy cases reflects similar contexts, policy problems and policy responses, but more divergence in negotiating institutional arrangements and exercising political agency.

8.2.1: Overseas tertiary scholarships: similar structures and policies; divergent accountabilities and policy advocacy

The two overseas tertiary scholarships cases presented remarkable similarities in structures and resourcing. In structurally similar states with similar constraints to accessing and financing education, overseas tertiary scholarships had high status, linked to independence leaders and senior public officials. While previously few students were eligible for tertiary education, this changed with increased secondary school completion. The resulting rapid growth in student demand from the early 2000s in both states, reliant on public funding for high cost tertiary education, pressured both governments. Participants in both countries described increased competition over scholarships using variations of “*wanting a piece of the cake*” (SIGE-8, SESP-3, VGE-1). Both governments allocated larger budgets to overseas tertiary scholarships, diverting funds from other education measures. This redistribution of benefits to fewer, more advantaged students could be considered ‘elite capture’ of the policy in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Ministers’ influence on personalised selection was consistent with the personalised pressures of both states’ political dynamics. The problem became more pronounced by 2010, coming to the attention of Education officials, aid donors, the media and the public in both countries.

Policy problems and constraints to delivery were remarkably similar. With weak formal institutions, capacity gaps and limited public resourcing, both NTU and TSCU had a small number of officials managing selection and implementation, directly pressured by politicians, senior officials and parents. In addition to compromised selection procedures, both countries

experienced related problems including weaknesses in scholarships management, scholarships misaligned with labour force needs, lack of student support, and problems paying allowances. Policy responses were also remarkably similar, including similar tertiary education and scholarship policies and reforms. With local bureaucratic leadership and aid donor support, formal institutions in the policy area were strengthened. By 2014, both countries reinforced policy requirements for scholarships selection to be merit-based, transparent and accountable (MEHRD, 2014b; NPV, 2014). Both countries' accountability institutions investigated allegations of mismanaged scholarships (OAG, 2006, 2014; Ombudsman, 2016, 2021). Both established national universities during the case period to deliver tertiary training locally, and both supported more vocational study. The remarkable policy parallels are likely to also be because of shared influential aid donors, Australia and New Zealand, who introduced similar policy ideas with similar tactics, discussed further in 8.3.5.

However, policy pathways in the two case study countries differed in important ways. After efforts to prevent personalised and politicised selection, a critical, different decision in Solomon Islands was the introduction of a category of 'Constituency Awards'. This transformed an informal practice of politicised selection into a formal institution, which did not occur in Vanuatu. Distribution of accountabilities and incentives was a key difference. In Solomon Islands, as presented in sub-section 4.4.1, politicians and other policy stakeholders expected MEHRD to prioritise tertiary scholarships, including because of pressure from public expectations. Broader education priorities disadvantaged by scholarships experienced more diffused accountabilities and a norm of under-funding. Accountability institution (OAG) reports into tertiary scholarships management placed pressure on bureaucrats to improve selection and management, but did not change incentives for politicians to stop intervening in selection (DFAT, 2013c). Lack of consequences for personalised selection by political actors or other policy stakeholders was critical to Solomon Islands' accountability settings in the policy area, and participants' limited optimism for change to personalised selection.

In contrast, key differences in Vanuatu's strengthened accountabilities, policies and structures through legislation, policy reform and changed accountabilities during the case period limited politicised personalised selection. While stakeholders felt a similar sense of advantaged people 'getting away with' personalised scholarship benefits, revised legislation including sanctions, donor and civil society pressure for change, more direct pressure on Vanuatu's leaders and education officials for basic education expenditure, as well as repeated Ombudsman investigations of scholarships management, added to a broader political and accountability

environment from 2016 which acted to limit personalised selection. Personalised and politicised selection is unlikely to disappear in either country, and remained subject of media attention in both countries through the case period, but was less prominent in later articles in Vanuatu (Roberts, 2016, 2017, 2019a, 2019c). This was a key difference in policy pathway, affected by differences in local political economy dynamics..

Different civil society advocacy was also important. While opposing politicised selection, Solomon Islands civil society organisations who might have represented the majority without educational advantage, did not advocate for more equitable funding for the majority of students pushed out, but even advocated for more funding for tertiary scholarships. Vanuatu presented both stronger civil society advocacy and stronger local and regional policy networks and advocacy for policy reform from outside the Department of Education. Unlike Solomon Islands, Vanuatu also benefited from the availability of a constituency for policy change in skills development developed through the locally-led Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) (Yanhambath & Gibert, 2023) (see sub-sections 5.4.2 and 8.3.5). These differences shaped the ability to launch and deliver major policy alternatives in Vanuatu, such as a student loans scheme, not achieved in Solomon Islands. Both countries established national universities as major policy alternatives, but with quite different experiences. Sogavare described SINU's "difficult journey" and "many challenges faced" on its tenth anniversary (SolTimes, 2023). Vanuatu's university developed with more substantive French donor and academic partnerships and higher level political leadership (GNC, 2023; NUV, 2021, 2022). These differences in conditions for policy leadership are further explored in section 8.3.4.

8.2.2 Overseas labour mobility: similar structures; divergent institutions, leadership and coordination

Solomon Islands and Vanuatu shared similar national and labour market structures, as presented in Chapter 3. These included largely rural and youthful populations with limited qualifications and opportunities, and limited overseas diasporas after a century of migration barriers to Australia and New Zealand. In both, labour mobility was an economic and political priority for employment.

There were similarities in institutions, resources and policies. Both states had labour sending units with limited staff and resources facing significant demand pressure from local job-seekers. Both countries had strong external policy parameters: agreements with Australia and New Zealand which set scheme requirements. Both states participated in overseas worker schemes for 12 or more years before comprehensive domestic policy frameworks were

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developed in 2019, significantly influenced and supported by donors. Weak national development of labour sending structures was an issue across Pacific states, as recognised in a 2012 World Bank report on labour mobility management system strengthening in Solomon Islands:

“The design of structures and functions for labour mobility in most Pacific Island countries generally has not been informed by coherent objectives, good practice or documented policies and systems. Such gaps and weaknesses in management systems capacity impact adversely on the ability of Pacific island countries to effectively govern labour mobility” (WB, 2012a, p. 3)

Even if, as the World Bank quote above suggests, policy coherence was commonly lacking, Curtain and Howes attributed Pacific countries’ divergence in labour mobility participation to variations in sending country governance (Curtain & Howes, 2020, p. 53).

This research has identified that critical differences in structures, opportunities and policy-making help explain the significant difference between Vanuatu and Solomon Islands policy-making and participation in labour mobility presented in Chapters 6 and 7. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 illustrated the much larger participating worker numbers in Vanuatu than in Solomon Islands across the three schemes. Chapter 6 presented Solomon Islands’ paradox of political support for overseas labour mobility, but limited participation, until rapid growth only late in the case study period. Post-conflict Solomon Islands missed Vanuatu’s ‘first-mover advantage’ and suffered poor initial implementation by not sending suitable workers early on (Curtain & Howes, 2020; Doan, Doyle, et al., 2023).

Important structural and economic differences applied. Vanuatu’s pre-existing labour mobility to New Caledonia, and cruise ship sector employment, was absent in Solomon Islands. Expatriate businesses were present and active in initial Vanuatu labour mobility connections, particularly with New Zealand, one direct flight away. Solomon Islands was instead one flight from Australia, which moved slower to join overseas work schemes. Solomon Islanders were actually issued more New Zealand work permits in total in 2005/06 (86) than Vanuatu (36) (Stahl & Appleyard, 2007). The important early difference was in much lower numbers participating in the RSE scheme in Solomon Islands than Vanuatu.

Vanuatu’s early domestic policy leadership and the presence of a coalition of informed policy actors with motivation and capability to effect change was a major difference. Both countries’ leaders advocated for labour mobility to Australia and New Zealand in regional fora (PIFS,

2005), and Solomon Islands politicians discussed labour mobility in parliament (NPSI, 2008). But only Vanuatu policy-makers had developed a clear policy agenda for overseas work schemes before participation, and subsequently, specific legislation. Marilyn Temakon's coalition with politicians and entrepreneurs had already connected the required domestic policy actors, mobilised prospective rural ni-Vanuatu participants in significant numbers, developed substantive policy options and advocated to Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs for Vanuatu's participation in a seasonal guest worker scheme. Connected policy advocacy and early participation meant, as one development partner described, more widespread understanding of labour mobility benefits in Vanuatu supporting further growth (VDP-3). Lacking this connected policy advocacy or early growth in participation, buy-in by Solomon Islands policy-makers was slower.

In both countries senior officials and development partners prioritised 'protection from politics' – the limitation of political interests and incentives from labour mobility decision-making. The important difference was how, and how successfully, this 'protection' was achieved. Solomon Islands' politicians were disincentivised, such as through the LMU's discouragement of the 'SITASN' scheme supported by several politicians (see sub-section 6.3.2). Solomon Islands' model of direct recruitment and a work-ready pool required significant responsibilities by a small and under-resourced LMU which struggled to deliver them (Curtain, 2015). In Vanuatu, Kaluat's strategy to protect labour mobility from 'political interference' was the 'privatised, government-light' approach (Curtain & Howes, 2020). This included a 'small LMU' model, but relatively successful reliance on labour mobility agents for day-to-day operations (SDP-8). Sub-section 7.3.3 introduced the increasing links between politicians and agents which suggested greater incentivisation of Vanuatu politicians.

There were key differences in leadership and coordination. Solomon Islands' political and bureaucratic leadership of labour mobility efforts was limited until Solomon Islands' Trade Policy Framework was developed in 2015 (SIG, 2015b) and labour mobility emphasis by Prime Minister Hou in 2018. Stretched Trade Officials managed labour mobility among trade priorities. Poor coordination with labour officials and other stakeholders reflected mutual mistrust. Vanuatu Labour Commissioners Kaluat and Metenoven focused heavily on labour mobility. They were supported by internal and external relationships with required stakeholders, including trade officials and private sector agents, and had greater autonomy from Ministerial decisions, preserved in legislation (GoV, 2007a; Malapa, 2019). Stronger domestic policy leadership also meant push back on donor influence, later evident in leaders criticising

the donor-supported National Labour Mobility Policy Framework (Kalsakau & Willie, 2020). In Solomon Islands, after the case study period, rapid growth in worker numbers was significantly reliant on Australian aid capacity supplementation, leading to a concerning lack of local ownership.

Critical conditions for effective labour mobility coordination were better in Vanuatu. Vanuatu's had stronger policy networks, including local coordination with engaged essential stakeholders, hosting of engaged regional institutions, and better external linkages with development partners and employers.

Differences in formal and informal institutional arrangements were also significant. In Vanuatu, the hybridity of formal scheme rules and agents' informal networks with communities was important to early and widespread take-up of opportunities. Solomon Islands' LMU was less successful in community engagement. Vanuatu landed hybrid institutional arrangements conducive to early widespread participation, while Solomon Islands did not. These key differences in institutional arrangements are discussed in section 8.3.2.

Vanuatu labour mobility is the only one of the policy cases that achieved widespread national participation with evident, nationwide impact on employment. Its very different 'problems of success' attracted public and policy-makers' attention (Dornan, 2018). These issues included emergent forms of personalised selection and corruption, political and agent interests, high profile debate about scheme arrangements, and widespread concerns at worker exploitation and the economic and social impacts of widespread labour mobility. Vanuatu's widespread participation also showed greater indication of policy feedback altering Vanuatu's broader political dynamic; a dynamic not yet in evidence in Solomon Islands.

8.2.3 Comparing the case studies: Factors in delivering programmatic and longer-term policy

Section 8.1 presented the key factors shaping policy-making across the four case areas. Comparison of the cases presents a key distinction. Overseas tertiary scholarships had high status, being linked to independence era leaders and senior officials. Participants emphasised the 'fair' allocation of scholarships to high-achieving students based on academic merit. Participation in overseas labour mobility did not carry the same status, and included lower-skilled, rural jobseekers. This allocation of government resources indicates elite capture of employment policy, undermining the ability to reach the widest number of workers.

Comparison of the cases also indicates that these seven factors shaped policy-making in ways that were either more likely, or less likely to support predictable, aligned, programmatic and inclusive policy-making, delivery and reform to achieve longer-term goals. Where they were less likely to support aligned, programmatic and inclusive policy-making, they could instead support policies with narrower and shorter-term benefits and clientelistic distribution.

Structural and institutional factors supporting greater policy alignment included more administrative capacity to deliver services, manage demand pressures and develop policy; credible and enforced formal institutions with broader reach to populations, in a working balance with informal institutions; and policy frameworks developed and approved early on, including effective legislation. Agency, incentives and ideas enabling greater policy alignment include shared objectives, coordination and the ability to mobilise stakeholders and policy networks, societal interests and civil society influencing change aligned to policy goals, sufficient accountability for rules to be enforced, and engagement and commitment by senior leadership and core ministries. Across cases, the greater indication of aligned and programmatic policy in Vanuatu than Solomon Islands suggests the importance of different broader political dynamics in shaping sectoral policy-making, explored in sub-section 8.3.1. The difference in conditions for developmental leadership and political and bureaucratic commitment to policies between the cases and states is presented in sub-section 8.3.4.

8.3 Analysing Influences on Employment Policy-making

This section will analyse in further detail six ways in which the factors identified across the case studies influenced employment policy responses in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. These include the balance between broader and sectoral politics of policy-making on employment in both countries; how informal institutions shaped policy-making and how actors engaged with personalised selection and corruption; societal influences on policy-making; when leaders were able to lead policy reforms; and the influence of development partners. The chapter completes with what the findings indicate about the patterns of employment policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

8.3.1 How both broader and sectoral politics shape policy-making on employment

As introduced in sub-section 8.1.1, despite striking parallels in the political dynamics shaping policy-making in the two countries, key differences, including critical junctures in national politics, were important in shaping policy-making differently.

Solomon Islands' Tensions were one such critical juncture, in which core government institutions and services broke down. In sub-section 4.2.1, Solomon Islands participants indicated the significance of the Tensions on overseas tertiary scholarships policy, as a point at which key scholarships management practices ceased, and conditions emerged for expanded practices of graft and personalised selection of scholarships, and increased competition and compromise of merit-based selection. The Tensions may have also undermined the trust required for policy coordination across Ministries and stakeholders, and for commitment to programmatic policy reforms, favouring instead short-term transactional pressures.

Participant comments in Vanuatu reflected different kinds of change in its broader political dynamic which appeared to affect policy decisions and commitments on Tertiary Scholarships. The leadership timeline and budget at Table 5.5-c indicates a significant change from rapid Ministerial turnover to more stable leadership under the Salwai government. The critical juncture in broader politics was the jailing of 14 MPs in 2015. Forsyth and Batley noted the broader significance of this event, demonstrating Vanuatu's system of checks and balances affecting corrupt behaviour by politicians (Forsyth & Batley, 2016). The scale of this change indicates it as a critical juncture potentially shaping incentives for clientelism, discussed in 8.3.2, and changing leadership of policy-making, discussed in 8.3.4.

Differences in economic, geographic and language politics shaped employment policy-making in both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Chapter 3 presented important differences in economic sectors shaping employment: Solomon Islands' natural resources, and Vanuatu's tourism and services. In the case comparison at 8.2.2, different economic links shaped Vanuatu labour mobility, and widespread participation resulted in different 'problems of success'. Economic structures shaped incentives for clientelism, as explained at 8.3.2. Equity across islands and provinces was also an important motivation for policy-makers, shaped by two nations with ethnically diverse, segmented polities. Case chapters presented geographic equity as an important rationale for Constituency Awards in Solomon Islands (Chapter 4), for Vanuatu MoET's Social Inclusion List prioritised by Education Minister Loughman (5), and for the distribution of labour mobility recruitment in Vanuatu (7). In Solomon Islands, frustration at the national reach of employment opportunities and mistrust of other islanders' interests appeared to motivate MPs' control of access to overseas tertiary scholarships (Chapter 4); and alternative labour mobility pathways like SITASN and CITREC (Chapter 5).

Vanuatu's distinct Anglophone/ Francophone language, political and bureaucratic divide was an added factor shaping tertiary scholarships policy priorities. In Chapter 5, Education Minister

Nirua was willing to limit Anglophone overseas tertiary scholarships in favour of establishing the more Francophone National University of Vanuatu (NUV), supported by four French tertiary institutions, with Nirua himself as its Vice-Chancellor. Vanuatu's linguistic divide may also have meant that leadership of policy reforms was subject to elite competition and change not present in Solomon Islands.

As well as broader dynamics, distinct sectoral politics also shaped policy-making differently. One such factor was large and surging demand, raising political and social pressures in both states. How governments responded to this surging demand with resourcing decisions varied across the four policy cases.

In both labour mobility case areas, government resourcing was very limited. In Vanuatu this characterised the 'government-light' privatised model which led to specific implementation problems including the initial lack of worker pastoral support in Australia and New Zealand. In Solomon Islands, limited labour mobility resourcing and private sector capabilities significantly constrained scheme growth, motivating job seekers and politicians to pursue alternative opportunities. Expanded resourcing relied significantly on donors' supplementation, contributing to greater donor control. The importance of labour mobility to a large number of workers, but limited government resourcing, suggests a disconnect between the value to voters and the status and value identified in government budget decisions.

In contrast, surging demand led to significant government resourcing on overseas tertiary scholarships to support expanded lists of students, to the point of distorting education and national budgets. This was not matched with resourcing for staff or flow-on costs such as allowances or student support, worsening scholarships implementation problems. This budget priority on scholarship awards, made through pressured and short-term budget decisions, reflected sectoral politics of the status of different policies and their relevance to difference groups. The lack of funding for associated costs suggests the degree to which this policy area was left as a management problem for Ministries of Education. Politicians' priority on high-status tertiary scholarships indicated elite capture, discussed at 8.3.3. Conditions for leadership in managing politicised pressures and reform is discussed at 8.3.4.

Distinctions in broader political and structural dynamics therefore shaped policy-making differences in both countries. However, so too did other key sectoral dynamics, including surging demand and resourcing decisions, as well as the institutional and political dynamics discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter.

8.3.2: How informal institutions and corruption shape employment policy-making

In two country contexts with significant institutional hybridity, the third factor identified by this research was how formal and informal institutions were combined and contested to shape policy-making in each of the employment policy cases. Understanding this more deeply requires identifying what these informal practices and institutions were. Informal practices were influential, but not always meeting the full definition of ‘informal institutions’ introduced at 2.2.2, as they were infrequently rule-bound, predictable or enforced with sanctions. In all four case studies, formal institutions including legislation and established policies and practices such as open and merit-based selection, were compromised or perceived to be compromised by informal practices of personalised and politicised selection. In all four cases, the conditions for this personalised selection were created by weakness of formal institutions, strong wantok networks and pressures, limited staffing and resources, transactional politics and high public demand. The specific combination of formal and informal institutional arrangements, and of personalised and politicised selection, differed in each case.

Although they were influential, there are challenges to defining informal practices and pressures. While ‘wantok’ pressures of island kinship networks were influential, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu’s significant cultural diversity make it difficult to identify or generalise at the national level. This research therefore did not identify specific informal cultural institutions shaping incentives and policy-making. As Haque (2012) and Wood (2016) identified, it is more likely that rather than ‘culture’, rational incentives applied to voters and policy actors acting within context. In the case studies, the incentives identified to “get a piece of the cake” appear rational within the context of national politics, compromise of formal institutions and competition for education and employment opportunities.

It is difficult to clearly apply theoretical categories to the range of informal practices apparent in the case studies, including personalised and politicised selection and corruption, given the highly contextual nature of practices. At 2.4.2, Nimbtik had described corruption in Vanuatu arising in the collision between western state institutions and traditional societal values (Nimbtik, 2016b). Personalised selection of scholarships by officials and politicians fits clearly within the generally accepted globalised (western) definition of corruption as the “*use of public office for private gain*” and the “*abuse of power*” (TI, 2024). In Chapter 4, sub-section 4.2.2 presented increasing perceptions of Solomon Islands politicians using tertiary scholarships to buy votes; a form of political patronage fitting Kingdon et al.’s definition (Kingdon et al., 2014). Personalised and politicised selection practices could be defined as ‘clientelist’, as contingent

exchange between patrons and clients, from which non-supporters could be excluded (Hicken, 2011). However, in variance from Hicken's definition, personalised selection in the four policy case areas was not always iterative – it could be one-off – and not always with an immediate expectation of an exchange (such as a vote) from the student, parent or worker benefiting.

While each policy case experienced personalised and politicised selection amounting to corruption, as discussed in Chapter 2, 'what is corruption' is subject to local perspectives. One Solomon Islands civil society participant shared a view that people cared about nepotism, and politicians' children allocated the place of students with higher grades constituted corruption (SCS-1). However, perspectives on corruption can be confusing as the same people (such as politicians or officials) who label something done by others as 'corrupt', nevertheless engaged in it themselves (DFAT, 2013c). Some participants interviewed both accused others of corrupt practices, and were subject to accusations themselves.²¹

Different clientelist practices in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands were shaped by different economic structures. Fraenkel linked clientelism to funds supply, identifying the availability of natural resource revenues as explaining the emergence of CDFs in Solomon Islands, but not Vanuatu (Fraenkel, 2011). However, Vanuatu's 'windfall revenue' from passport sales by the end of the case study period (Nesheim, 2021) did lead to record-high budget expenditure (McGarry, 2019b), but still did not foster Vanuatu equivalents of CDFs. This suggests factors beyond funds supply which influenced clientelist practices; such as voter incentives. Sub-section 7.4.3 further presented indications of changes to Vanuatu politics and clientelist incentives from ni-Vanuatu workers' widespread participation in labour mobility.

In each policy case, policy actors engaged with, resisted or mediated personalised and politicised selection pressures differently. This sub-section will present contrasting experiences of two of the policy case areas in which the combination of formal institutions and informal practices shaped policy delivery prominently, and differently.

Solomon Islands' MEHRD and Cabinet formalised politicised scholarships selection as 'Constituency Awards' in 2014. Officials intended this to protect merit-based scholarships selection, within Solomon Islands' context of pressures for clientelist practices. Constituency Awards paralleled existing Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), which were controlled by MPs and already a significant modality of providing goods and services in Solomon Islands' political dynamic, helping MPs secure voter support (Chapter 3).. CDFs and Constituency

²¹ Participant references withheld to protect anonymity.

Awards had some similar, and some different implications for policy-making in Solomon Islands. Both represented clientelistic exchange which enabled politicians to hold power, and attempt to bridge serious gaps in state service delivery to constituents. Both were subject to donor-supported bureaucratic efforts to increase transparency and accountability: reforms which attracted wavering domestic policy commitment (Sahin & Shahin, 2019). However, while CDFs undermined expectations of the state (Chapter 3), Constituency Awards still connected recipients to formal education as a legitimate national institution. Chapter 4 presented that bureaucrats maintained an intention to strengthen management and transparency of Constituency Awards by MPs. This may still be possible.

Solomon Islands' broader political dynamic shaped the decision to formalise politicised selection of scholarships, even at the same time that donors and audit accountability pressured education officials, who led reform and strengthened scholarship management. This difficult balance of formal policies and institutions and informal, personalised and politicised pressures continues to complicate Solomon Islands' officials' delivery on education sector goals and policies for broader education access.

Corrupt practices were also perceived and experienced in labour mobility, with different effects on policy pathways. In Solomon Islands the approach to 'protection from political interference', and mutual perceptions of corruption and personalised interests among critical labour mobility stakeholders, undermined the inter-agency coordination needed for policy goals to be achieved, and discouraged actors developing new initiatives (SITASN), or encouraged them to invest in alternate schemes (CITREC). Solomon Islands actors had not been able to find a workable balance of informal pressures and practices and formal scheme rules.

In contrast, as Chapter 7 presented, Vanuatu's broad participation in labour mobility may have been partly achieved because of institutional hybridity. Vanuatu policy-makers met formal domestic and external scheme requirements but adapted sufficiently to informal community institutions to secure nationwide access and support. Vanuatu labour mobility still experienced conflict between formal and traditional institutions. This included concerns that kastom and community values were being undermined. In Nimbtik's framing, it is possible that employment agents and even officials operated in ways considered moral and acceptable locally, but perceptible as 'corrupt' from a western perspective (Nimbtik, 2016b). Even within Vanuatu, varying acceptance or contestation over recruitment decisions indicated the subjectiveness of such decisions, as participation expanded, incentives to do business and

opportunities for rents increased, and multiple forms of nepotism and clientelistic transfers emerged, as presented at 7.3.3. Nevertheless, institutional hybridity enabling labour mobility at scale across Vanuatu communities potentially constituted an example of what Levy referred to as ‘working with the grain’ of local institutional change (Levy, 2014). Further directions on understanding the role of hybrid institutional arrangements in successful social sector policy are suggested in Section 9.4.

Chapter 3 presented the significant role of informal institutions and clientelism in shaping policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. This research found overall that different arrangements and contestation of formal and informal institutions, including actual and perceived clientelist and corrupt practices, in different cases complicated, undermined, and at times even supported employment policy commitment and delivery. These differences also depended significantly on the different agency of actors: explored in the following three sub-sections.

8.3.3 How different voter and societal interests shape employment policy-making

This research found that Solomon Islands and Vanuatu politicians and bureaucrats worked within social contexts in which their policy-making decisions and practices were shaped by voter and societal interests. These differed: all four cases show distinct societal interests shaping policy-making. While geographic distinctions were prominent in both states, the divergence of interests apparent in this research suggests a degree of social class politics in employment policy in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

This social class politics did not present prominent union advocacy in the policy case areas. Historically, international studies of labour have identified the significant role and potential of trade unions in the politics of labour (Taylor, 1989); including in the Pacific (Moore et al., 1990; Prasad & Hince, 2001); Solomon Islands (Frazer, 1992); and Vanuatu (Hince, 1996). The ILO continue to ascribe an important role of trade unions in effective and social dialogue, and in providing collective platforms and social protection for workers (ILO, 2022b). However in this research, the absence of trade unions in any of the four employment policy cases suggests their limited role in contemporary politics of employment in both states.

Rather than trade unions, distinct societal interests can be identified from the policy cases. Sub-section 2.4.3 identified that relative social elites could be discerned in both countries. Divergent societal interests were indicated in the pressures and ‘elite capture’ of overseas tertiary scholarships policy in both countries, prioritised in budget decisions over education of broader

benefit to rural and less educated students. Participant perspectives reflected that those most likely to benefit from overseas tertiary scholarships were the more educated students and their parents who were qualified to access scholarships, or who were related to politicians. University students may or may not be considered part of an elite. They formed a very small minority of total students of national education systems, with more advanced education and more opportunities for voice and employment. But their power to change policy varied. Groups with actual or potential access to tertiary scholarships had an incentive to resist reforms to control scholarships expenditure and redirect education funding. This was evident in Solomon Islands in advocacy for more tertiary scholarships by students (SIBC, 2015a) and by civil society (TSI, 2014). Until 2014, both countries, although particularly Solomon Islands, experienced clearer pressures on MPs and education officials for expenditure on scholarships than for alternative levels of education, even though both countries had introduced fee-free basic education policy commitments attracting public attention. However, in Vanuatu, public pressure on MoET for cyclone-affected schools to re-open in 2015 balanced scholarships pressures. This difference in voter incentives was significant in shaping more effective policy reforms to VGFS.

Across the policy areas, influence over policy-making by non-elite citizens was more limited, sometimes expressed public protests, and voters' pressure on politicians for distributed rents. Chapter 7 presented that distinct voices of different voter and societal groups were indicated most prominently in Vanuatu labour mobility, as it was the one country policy case with widest participation and which has been the most researched.. The different interests of officials, agents and workers were also based on their very different incentives in a context of surging worker demand exceeding available jobs, with workers' collective voices increasing with shared platforms on social media. Even if they continue to lack structural power to make changes to schemes, workers' interests may have been a key factor in the changed Vanuatu politicians' priority on worker rights and impacts in the years after 2019, affecting views of the Labour Mobility Policy Framework. These distinct voices are likely to increase with larger numbers of workers with overseas experience, and the potential for their contribution to political change in both Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, as proposed in sub-section 7.4.3. This indicates the possible political impact of successfully widespread participation in employment programs. Difference and rapid change in Pacific societal and voter interests emerges as a priority area for further research, proposed at section 9.4.

8.3.4: When leaders could deliver and commit to employment policy and reforms

The political economy dynamics of both states undermined the ability of leaders to commit to programmatic policies and mobilise and work across stakeholders to see through change. However, all four policy cases included political and bureaucratic leaders who committed to policies, policy delivery and reform. This section identifies when local leaders were able to launch and deliver policy reforms.

A wide range of factors across structures, institutions and agency enabled leadership and commitment to policies which were more programmatic. These include the specific distribution of accountabilities and incentives which motivated political and bureaucratic leaders to lead or resist change. Going further, Table 8.1 scans the four policy case areas for the three conditions identified by Hudson and McLoughlin as necessary for leadership which supports development, introduced in 2.2.3.

Table 8.1: Conditions for leadership for developmental change in policy cases

Case Chapters >	4. Solomon Islands Tertiary Scholarships	5. Vanuatu Government Funded Scholarships	6. Solomon Islands Labour Mobility	7. Vanuatu Labour Mobility
Conditions				
<i>1. Motivated and strategic individuals with incentives to push for change</i>	Yes – senior MEHRD officials, some political advisers and Education Ministers	Yes – senior MoET and other Ministry officials and Education Ministers	Limited Some political and bureaucratic individuals were key; but apart from PM Hou, some change was opportunistic rather than strategic	Yes – Labour Commissioner but also policy networks, labour migration agents and some politicians
<i>2. Individuals overcoming barriers to cooperation and forming sufficiently powerful coalitions</i>	No. Solomon Islands institutional dynamic including barriers to sustained coordination made this possible only opportunistically. Short-term protests but little sustained local advocacy for reform	Yes – smaller networks across agencies and institutions, stronger accountability mechanisms and policy networks including local policy advocates	No. Some individuals were motivated but barriers to cooperation were significant, including mutual perceptions of corruption. Multi-stakeholder coordination only with active donor role	Yes – motivated individuals overcame barriers to cooperation and utilised policy networks and contacts across stakeholders from pre-scheme advocacy to current; even with contestation
<i>3. Coalitions contest ideas to help reshape society's roles</i>	Limited Some advocacy contesting ideas in evidence, however significant donor advocacy and policy co-drafting role, limited contest of ideas across agencies	Yes. Significant donor advocacy and policy co-production but also locally led policy advocacy (VSP) to legitimise new ideas (i.e., skills training meeting demand), across stakeholders	Limited indication of significantly contested or changed ideas about labour mobility in political or public debate. Significant advocacy by donors	Yes – An early policy coalition (Temakon et al) networked across change-makers and enrolled large numbers of interested participants, in a national movement. Engaged policy networks continued to contest ideas through the case period

Source for Table 8.4: (Hudson et al., 2018)

Reviewing the case studies, all three conditions were met in some form in the two Vanuatu case studies. There were more barriers to such ‘developmental’ leadership in Solomon Islands. Motivated and strategic individuals with incentives to push for change included senior

Education officials in MEHRD, but were more limited in MFAET. In both, it was particularly difficult to overcome barriers to cooperation and form sufficiently powerful coalitions to effect programmatic policy change. There were also limited signs of coalitions contesting ideas to help reshape societal roles. Civil society advocacy on both policy areas was more evident in Vanuatu, including through a locally developed constituency for skills policy (see section 8.3.5).

Solomon Islands tertiary scholarships policy reforms had short-term commitment by senior officials and politicians, followed by policy reversals under political pressure. As presented in Chapter 4, Solomon Islands' leaders' and senior officials' variable commitment was shaped by Solomon Islands' short-term and transactional political environment, unwillingness by interested groups to accept the costs of reform, and 'scholarship selection season' pressures. In this dynamic, while often also keen to 'clean up' the "black hole" of scholarships (Koli, 2017), MPs exercised leadership to ensure their "piece of the cake" to benefit kin, supporters and constituents. Senior MEHRD officials balanced deliberate education policy with long-term goals, with a Constituency Scholarships 'deal' approved by Cabinet to manage political pressures (MEHRD, 2014a). The vulnerability of political commitment to policies reflects the difficulty seeing through reform in Solomon Islands' political context.

Solomon Islands political actors and senior bureaucrats seeking to lead programmatic policy reform faced multiple barriers including systemic capacity constraints, political instability making political commitment short-term, limited civil society advocacy or cooperation from policy stakeholders in other organisations, surging public demand to respond to, and political and personal pressure for preferential access to services. Solomon Islands reformers themselves have identified these barriers, including politicians (Hou, 2012), and senior bureaucrats (Devesi, 2018)(SIGE-9, SIGO-5, SPA-5). As Prime Minister, Hou himself later championed policy, systems and resourcing for expanded labour mobility, as did Guadalcanal Provincial leader Pa'anga in developing the CITREC scheme. Chapter 4 presented the leadership of Education Ministers and Permanent Secretaries of policy reform efforts to align education policy visions and financing reality, including in aligning overseas tertiary scholarships policy with delivery. These Solomon Islands reform leaders demonstrated that programmatic policy leadership did emerge, from specific individuals with experience, a policy vision, and political opportunity. All were supported by development partner advocacy and resourcing. All faced challenges fully delivering, resourcing and sustaining these policy reforms in Solomon Islands' context for policy reform.

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Vanuatu's volatile and clientelist politics also undermined programmatic policy and challenged policy reformers, particularly up to 2016. However, Vanuatu policy reformers were better able than those in Solomon Islands to convene required stakeholders across sectors to agree and deliver policy reforms. Labour Commissioner Kaluat had enough authority and connections with essential stakeholders to deliver policies and manage personalised pressures in labour mobility until his departure in 2017. Political volatility and personalised pressures drove personalised selection of tertiary scholarships until 2015. As described in 8.3.1, a key change in political conditions in Vanuatu created a changed political opportunity structure for evidence-based, programmatic and developmental policy choices by leaders, including political stability and the election of political leaders with reform orientation (Terence Wood, 2021) and technical experience (VPA-4, VDP-4). Participants commented that newly elected and more technically qualified politicians were more capable of engaging with development policy agendas for skills development and labour mobility (VDP-4, VCS-2). At the sectoral level, development partner and civil society advocacy, pressure from the media and public, and the emergence of local leadership and political constituency for skills policy change, created the sectoral agency and accountabilities enabling developmental policy reform. Sharper accountabilities for basic education, centralised MFEM control of the scholarships budget, and increased total budget revenues, relieved the pressure on budget trade-offs. These conditions enabled Vanuatu's politicians and senior officials to see through higher education policy reforms and alternatives at the same time that their Solomon Islands colleagues faced greater challenges with parallel approaches.

8.3.5: How development partners' actions shaped employment policy-making

In all four cases, development partners exerted significant influence on policy-making in multiple ways. Sub-section 2.4.3 introduced the significant scale of development partner engagement in co-drafting policy in Pacific countries contrasted with limited societal engagement; and Pacific authors' resulting concerns about local policy ownership. In the policy cases, development partners had financial and technical resources identified as needed by counterpart departments; platforms and opportunities for engagement with senior bureaucrats; information on policy issues and awareness of policy cycles. These factors help explain the greater voice of development partners than other policy actors. This greater voice was reflected through participant comments and policy documentation, and also reflected in the similarity of policy responses between both countries.

The depth of external engagements in domestic policy-making in each of these case areas reflect global patterns. These include Hameiri and Jones' view of global governance processes becoming increasingly involved in domestic policy-making (Hameiri & Jones, 2016). This was visible in education policy, in the incentives for recipient governments to align with global policy agendas, discourses and commitments such as Education For All (Coxon & Tolley, 2011). This depth was also reflected in donors' work to insulate the subject policy area (education budgets) from domestic 'rent seekers' in order to deliver reforms; and co-drafted policy supporting systemic inter-operability with external donor systems, including Australian-style National Qualifications Frameworks (APTC, 2019). These all further raise the question of ownership: "who is policy for?".

Extensive policy co-drafting by donor agencies and technical consultants in all the case study policy areas raises the possibility that policies were intended primarily to meet donor requirements rather than those of local policy actors. The two National Labour Mobility Policy Frameworks (8.1.4) were authored by foreign technical advisors (consulting local officials) over ten years after seasonal labour scheme participation began with questionable local ownership and policy commitment, particularly in Solomon Islands. The risk to local ownership and sustainability was recognised as a Pacific-wide issue for Australian labour mobility support. A 2020 review for DFAT found that plans to achieve sustainability of Australia's Pacific Labour Facility were "*developing too slowly, and without sufficient focus and discipline*" (Leon, 2020). A lack of robust local ownership risks schemes disproportionately integrating donor policy agendas and benefiting foreign employers, while failing to deliver on development and employment aspirations prioritised by Pacific islanders.

Amidst this significant external influence, local officials and political actors negotiated complex relationships with development partners. Development partner support was important to strengthening formal institutions in all four policy areas. Officials often turned to development partners when facing policy or resourcing problems or compromise by informal pressures. Donor advocacy, implementation requirements and aid conditionality could support formal rules and impartial, programmatic service delivery and participation. Such measures included ring-fencing the subject policy area from domestic political actors or 'rent seekers'. This at times (particularly in Solomon Islands labour mobility) led to unintended consequences, including politicians redirecting resources and policy effort to other areas in which they had greater autonomy to respond to pressure from voters and community members.

Aid objectives and conditionality could be compromised by both local and donor factors. In Solomon Islands overseas tertiary scholarships, donor advocacy and aid conditionality secured short-term policy commitments to controlling overseas tertiary scholarships expenditures, which were soon reversed under domestic political pressures. This reflected global patterns identified by Andrews of aid recipient country officials' commitment to short-term reforms, incentivised by aid disbursements, but delaying or cancelling longer and harder reforms (Andrews, 2013). In the case of Solomon Islands scholarships policy, Sahin and Shahin found that donors themselves undermined commitment to reform or follow-through on conditionality due to competing geo-strategic interests trumping education sector priorities as Australia did in response to China (Sahin & Shahin, 2019, pp. 379-380). This indicates the effect of mixed and contradictory development partner objectives. So too does the exclusion of labour mobility from extensive 'Partnership Principles' agreements in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in 2012, before labour mobility was recognised by Australia and New Zealand as a development priority.

Both politicians and development partners were affected by short-term pressures and time horizons. Australian and New Zealand development partner agency representatives interviewed were often not aware of policy decisions or sector analyses conducted before their three-year posting. Many donor-funded sector analyses were 'point in time' studies, not compared with previous or subsequent data. Short-term, intense aid resourcing had clear impacts on policy delivery, as experienced in the rapid decline in Vanuatu scholarships management systems and reporting in the period after the VGFS project completed in 2000.

Donor differences could also be important factors in policy pathway differences. A distinction between development partner engagement on scholarships and on labour mobility could be understood through difference in donor-side accountabilities. Nationally-funded scholarships were not a donor responsibility, however Australian and New Zealand aid officials were actively interested in the trade-offs of scholarships spending and management problems on other national education goals, and varied widely in their cooperation with national scholarships management. Labour mobility was a policy area touching on multiple Australian and New Zealand agencies and stakeholders, contributing to rigid scheme rules shaping access, but recognised only in later years as a development aid priority. Remarkable similarity in policy prescriptions applied, including qualifications frameworks and NHRDPs, reflected common donor ideas. However, differences between donors present in each country, and even between

Australian and New Zealand High Commission staff in Honiara and Port Vila, further contributed to different advocacy, policy networks and pressures at critical points.

Understanding the factors in place when development partner influence supported locally led and sustained policy-making, and contributed to political change, may offer practical guidance for development partner advocacy. The Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) (5.4.2) provides an example of different aid donor tactics enabling local developmental leadership. As well as the local training and employment benefits of its program delivery, Australian support and local leadership in a fragmented sector changed political and bureaucratic incentives in support of senior leadership commitment and delivery of Vanuatu's NHRDP which overcame costs of reform, and changed scholarships policy implementation.

In contrast, such a donor-supported, locally-led collective platform on skills policy was not available in Solomon Islands for delivery of the NHRDP or scholarships reforms. DFAT attempted to replicate aspects of the VSP model through the Solomon Islands Skills for Economic Growth (S4EG) program. In a four year project timeframe with heavy Australian advisor reliance, this replication was ultimately not achieved. "Localising support" was left as an incomplete priority of S4EG (DFAT, 2019c, pp. 7-8, 27). This outcome again indicates the importance of differences in local political and leadership conditions, and sustained development partner approaches to effectively support locally-led policy delivery.

Across the case studies, variability and changes in donor approaches and compromise of aid objectives undermined the ability for development partner agency to support locally led employment policy delivery and reform. More intense donor engagement, policy co-drafting and aid conditionality could lead to problems of ownership, and unintended consequences shaped by broader political dynamics. The availability of positive examples of donor supported and locally led policy development is important to guide development partner actions to more effectively shape sustained and locally led employment policy.

8.3.6: What findings indicate about the pattern of employment policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

Despite striking similarities between structures, employment issues, policies and donor influence in the two states, the research revealed two distinct patterns of employment policy-making in the two states.

In Solomon Islands, the durable political dynamic of short-term, transactional and localised politics undermined collaboration across stakeholders and delivery of programmatic

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employment policies. Donor support and advocacy for policy delivery and reforms was particularly strong in both policy cases, with particular donor dependence and absence of sustained local leadership of labour mobility efforts. Specific reforms within relevant Ministries, particularly MEHRD, were led by senior officials and sometimes supported by Ministers, but struggled to gain traction with other Ministries and institutions. Solomon Islands' lack of platforms for collective action and limited policy infrastructure (Barbara & Haley, 2014, pp. 24-26) presented particular problems for delivery of employment policy, which requires coordination across multiple sectors and stakeholders. Much as Evans had found for the prospects for youth policies in Solomon Islands (3.4.2), and despite the national employment policy potential of externally supported initiatives including the NHRDTP (SIG, 2011), National Youth Policy (SIG, 2017b) and a future National Employment Policy (2023-2027) (ILO, 2022c), Solomon Islands presents limited prospects for effective reforms and delivery of integrated employment policies. The overall political dynamic of Solomon Islands makes local policy-making and -delivery, and political commitment, on such a complex multi-stakeholder area, difficult.

In contrast, employment policies and reforms involving multiple stakeholders were launched and delivered in both Vanuatu cases. However, previous case studies indicate shared characteristics of employment policy-making in Vanuatu. Studies by Jowitt and Aiafi found Vanuatu's Employment Law reforms of 2008 to be externally influenced, developed without bureaucratic analysis, and decided by Ministerial directive. They considered the reforms ideologically-driven, targeting the interests of a small subset of voters (Aiafi, 2016; Jowitt, 2015). After significant employer backlash, GoV moderated them in subsequent legislation. Similar volatility arose over policy-making in the case of Vanuatu's Labour (Work Permits) Amendment Bill of 2018, which sought to enforce localization of positions and stop Ministers taking bribes to overturn work permit decisions (VCS-2) (NPV, 2018). The amendments were passed without stakeholder consultation and gazetted early in 2019. Businesses warned of an 'investor exodus', and failure of essential businesses including Air Vanuatu (McGarry, 2019a)(VCS-2). Reporting on the amendment and on Chinese political influence in Vanuatu, local expatriate journalist Dan McGarry was temporarily barred from Vanuatu (Chamas, 2019; IslandTimes, 2019). With subsequent political change in Vanuatu the eventual implementation status of this amendment was left unclear.

Supplemented by the labour mobility policy case of this research, a picture emerges of the patterns in employment policy-making environment in Vanuatu. Policy networks and

platforms enable coordination and collective action, but the policy-making environment is volatile, and highly personalized, with political support based on personal ties and ideas rather than party policies. Individual politicians and senior bureaucrats exercise leadership. External development partners exercise strong influence, but increasingly contested by local leadership and debate (Jackson, 2022; Regenvanu, 2019; Sackett, 2023). Bureaucratic institutions have weak processes for internal policy development, contestation, interpretation and delivery. The expatriate business community in Vanuatu is more vocal and connected to policy decision-makers than low-skilled rural jobseekers. In overseas labour schemes, surging worker demand and increasing benefits and rents have attracted the participation of intermediaries and politicians, fuelling political contestation of the policy space. Informal distribution of benefits is subject to the strength of formal institutions and enforcement of compliance, including through legislation, accountability institutions, aid donor accountability, and employer relationships.

Broader access to tertiary scholarships and to overseas labour mobility is also likely to affect the pattern of employment policy-making in both states, most likely in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands labour mobility, given its broad population reach and transformative impact on employment at scale. Change may occur as workers increasingly access education and urban lifestyles, and make use of collective platforms and voice. These directions beyond the case study period merit further research, as proposed in Section 9.4.

9: Conclusion

Concluding this thesis, Chapter 9 will present the key findings of this research, identifying factors influencing policy responses to employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, as evidenced in two prominent and contested employment policy responses over the selected case study period. These findings illuminate two different patterns of employment policy-making in both states. The chapter will go on to present the theoretical contribution, but more significant empirical contribution of this research, in three key areas. The concluding sections of this chapter will present practical implications of this research, and proposed priorities for further research.

9.1: Key findings

This research fills a gap in knowledge on policy-making on employment in Pacific Island states by identifying factors influencing employment policy development, delivery and change in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, two structurally similar contexts, focused on two high priority employment policies. The thesis concludes with key findings and empirical contributions, explaining what these policy making experiences and political factors can tell us about the politics of employment and policy-making in these two Pacific countries.

This thesis identified seven key factors shape policy-making in these cases. Chapter 8 presented the first two, very similar factors of broader structures and political dynamics, and formal institutions and resourcing. There were important differences in the remaining five factors: formal and informal institutional arrangements; personalised and politicised selection pressures and corruption; who had power; distribution of accountabilities and incentives; and development partner actions.

These factors shaped policy-making in ways that enabled either greater or lesser alignment of policy intent and delivery, and commitment to programmatic policies of broader and longer-term benefit, including reform initiatives. These were more likely in the Vanuatu cases, particularly in the context of broader political change from 2016. Lesser alignment and more short-term and transactional decisions were more likely in Solomon Islands cases. Analysis at 8.3 presented six key ways that these factors influenced employment policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Differences in the broader political dynamic of both states significantly shaped differences in policy-making, particularly critical junctures of The Tensions in Solomon Islands, and

Vanuatu's jailing of 14 MPs. Approaches to equity, different economic structures and language politics shaped policy pathways differently. Specific sectoral dynamics also shaped actors' incentives and behaviour in employment policy-making, particularly surging public demand with limited government resourcing to respond, as competition for opportunities increased politicised and personalised selection pressures. These pressures were pervasive in both contexts, but managed in different ways, with different balances of formal institutions and informal practices shaping each policy case differently. In all four policy cases, officials attempted to 'protect' formal practices from 'politics', but with varied approaches and results. In Solomon Islands, officials led policy reforms and strengthened scholarship management and transparency, but also formalised politicised selection through a category of 'Constituency Awards'. The difficult balance of formal policies and institutions and informal pressures compromised Solomon Islands' officials' delivery on education sector goals and policies for broader education access. In contrast, the hybridity of formal and informal institutions in Vanuatu labour mobility likely contributed to wide participation across island communities while meeting formal national, Australian and New Zealand scheme rules. In all cases, what goes beyond informal pressures to be seen as corruption is contextual and subjective. This research found overall that different arrangements and contestation of formal and informal institutions, including actual and perceived clientelist and corrupt practices, in different cases complicated, undermined, and at times even supported employment policy commitment and delivery.

A key finding was the role of variance in accountabilities, accountability institutions and incentives in explaining policy commitment, delivery and reform. Considering the role of culture in shaping policy delivery, the research found actors driven more by rational incentives. The research also identified policy feedback, with policy implementation in turn changing broader political dynamics, particularly where participation was broader.

This research identified factors and conditions that better enabled leaders to deliver employment policy and reform. These included sufficient resourcing and capacity, credible and enforced formal institutions balanced with informal institutions to meet needs; shared objectives, policy networks and coordination; accountability and incentives aligned to policy goals, including among media and societal groups; political and bureaucratic commitment; and sustained donor support.

More of these factors were in place in Vanuatu policy cases, enabling key conditions for leadership for developmental change – motivated and strategic individuals, overcoming

barriers to cooperation and forming coalitions able to contest ideas and reshape societal roles (Table 8.4). Solomon Islands policy cases included leaders who committed to and led change, but faced more barriers in the process, and therefore were less able to deliver more complex policy reforms. With greater political stability, Vanuatu's new generation of technocratic leaders elected in 2016 were better positioned to commit to and deliver such policy reforms in tertiary education.

Beyond Pacific politicians and officials, this research has examined different voter and societal interests driving personalised and politicised selection pressures in employment policy implementation. Rather than unions, this research describes divergent societal interests shaping Solomon Islands and Vanuatu policy-making. Interests of relative elites were distinct from those of the less educated and more rural majority of national populations, who had less voice or collective influence over policy-making. External development partners had significant roles in all policy cases, expressing agency through multiple modes, with mixed results, including that donor 'ring-fencing' discouraged political engagement. At times, donors sustained engagement in support of local leadership of policy development and delivery. In other instances, donor engagement was subject to strategic compromises and changes in approach.

The findings of this research have identified patterns of employment policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Solomon Islands' durable political dynamic of short-term, personalised and localised interests present barriers to launching and delivering complex, multi-sectoral policy efforts such as employment responses. In a politically volatile context, Vanuatu's pattern of employment policy responses was also personalised, targeted at specific interests, and presented weakness in bureaucratic policy development or stakeholder consultation. Individual political and bureaucratic leaders emerged in both states and overcame challenges. However, those in Vanuatu were able to benefit from local policy networks, multi-sectoral coordination and conditions enabling commitment to longer-term, more programmatic policy, at times also integrating informal practices in hybrid approaches to policy to support wider participation.

9.2: Theoretical and empirical contribution

This thesis adds to literature finding that in real-world circumstances, particularly in developing countries (Grindle & Thomas, 1989), and in the Pacific (Aiafi, 2016), policy processes proceed in nonlinear and unpredictable ways. This thesis has presented new research on employment policy-making cases in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in which policies were

clearly defined but not implemented, where resource-intensive implementation occurred without domestic policies in place, and the same individuals at times approved, advanced, reversed and undermined the delivery of stated policies and formal institutions. This research has identified characteristics of policy-making in Pacific island countries that help to explain why policies diverge in implementation. In addition to structural challenges and systemic resource and capacity constraints, policy commitment varied because of power relations among actors, collective action problems, and contestation and negotiation of formal and informal institutions and practices. Thesis findings emphasise the importance of how formal and informal institutions emerge, are negotiated and change as key to Pacific policy-making, implementation and change.

The research has proven the initial hypothesis (1.1.3) that critically analysing political economy dynamics of structures, institutions and agency can help explain unexpected pathways between employment policy formulation, implementation and reform, even in similar contexts. This thesis emphasises the value of synthesising different theoretical approaches to fully understand real-world policy-making, divergence and change, overcoming assumptions and blind spots from any one discipline. From critical public policy analysis using a political economy framework, key findings of this research demonstrate the value of this synthesised approach, ‘bringing the politics back in’ to resolve gaps in understanding how divergence occurs in structurally similar contexts.

From this synthesised approach, this research has identified political economy factors and conditions supporting greater or lesser policy alignment and programmatic, long-term policies with broader impact and distribution of benefits, with relevance to employment policy. This study of employment policy as social sector policy complements existing studies and approaches analysing the politics of other sectors in developing countries. These include political economy approaches to understanding Pacific public sector reform (Ron Duncan, 2011b); studies of the political economy of educational reforms (Hickey & Hossain, 2019); and Ostrom’s Institutional Analysis for Development Framework, developed from a focus on common-pool environmental resource management issues (Ostrom, 2011). The complementarity of this study is in identifying political and institutional characteristics explaining policy pathway differences where economic understandings have been insufficient, presenting rich data triangulation and empirical research findings to better understanding political and social realities of employment policy delivery.

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By applying global theories to understand real-world policy-making and delivery in the Pacific, this thesis presents a more significant empirical than theoretical contribution. It adds in particular to literature on (1) politics and policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu; (2) contemporary politics of employment policy and delivery; and (3) the role of institutional hybridity and clientelism in public policy in the Pacific.

9.2.1: Politics and policy-making in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

This rare tracing and comparison of policy-making in structurally similar contexts of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu synthesised political, economic and sociological factors to identify variations of structures, formal and informal institutions, incentives and accountabilities shaping different policy pathways. Broader political dynamics and critical junctures changed political opportunities for sectoral policy-making. While policy menus were very similar, variations in power, institutions and incentives explained different abilities of policy elites to commit to and deliver policies and reforms.

Long case study periods (13 to 22 years) over which policy evolution and resourcing were examined went beyond many point-in-time sectoral studies. This identified how long-term structural factors shaped divergence in policy delivery, and could be addressed differently in different political dynamics. Solomon Islands' political dynamic made it more difficult to overcome the country's long-term tertiary education financing problem, and external migration barriers. Vanuatu's conditions and opportunities better enabled these barriers to be overcome. Study of longer-term policy delivery helped reveal longer term negotiation of institutional arrangements, and trends in incentives and accountabilities shaping the ability of leaders to commit to and deliver reform. Over this period there was also strengthening and transparency of specific formal institutions that enhanced their reach, credibility and enforcement. This contrasts to static external prescriptions of 'limited capacity' and informal pressures. Finally, this longer case study period also identifies longer trends and patterns in resourcing, budgets and worker participation relative to policy decisions and leadership changes. This revealed the differences between short-term or long-term decisions, policy commitments and policy delivery by different leaders.

This research has 'brought the politics back in' to understandings of policy-making in Pacific states. As well as critical differences in political structures, power dynamics and incentives, it has also revealed diverse approaches used by bureaucrats and political actors to 'protect from politics' with diverse results. This political analysis has presented the complexity of individual

actors, both criticising and participating in ‘politics’ and personalised and politicised selection practices.

This research also identifies that development partners – despite their attempts to ‘de-politicise’ their interventions and ring-fence counterpart policy areas from political interference - are inevitably themselves political actors in policy-making. Donors’ inability to recognise their own political agency contributed to mixed consequences of their actions. These included donor ring-fencing undermining local ownership and disincentivising politicians’ engagement, such as in Solomon Islands labour mobility.

This research has identified key conditions within which individual leaders were better able to launch, commit to, deliver and reform longer-term policies. Among these, coordination, policy networks and collective action emerge as critical variables for explaining leadership commitment and policy delivery on complex policy challenges such as employment. Chapter 2 introduced the importance of building coalitions for action across sector stakeholders to mobilise complex reforms, challenged by widespread coordination problems of policy stakeholders even in small Pacific policy systems (2.4.1). Factors in mobilising coordination and collective action for complex policy reforms at sector level are proposed by this research, and identified as an area for further investigation (section 9.4).

This research adds insights on the agency of actors in Pacific policy-making. As well as deepening existing understandings of Pacific leaders’ and officials’ actions, this research contributes findings on the policy influence of divergent societal interests: crucial to mobilizing collective action. Across the policy cases, a societal group of more educated, formally employed and urban citizens of two Pacific states had greater voice; connections to policy networking; and influence over policy-making, which they exerted in their distinct interests. Examples include strong engagement and elite capture in tertiary education policies; lack of engagement on Solomon Islands Labour Mobility; and increasing engagement, with interests distinct from the majority of workers, in Vanuatu labour mobility. These are significant domestic, sectoral factors in employment policy-making. Beyond dominant donor dynamics, all four policy case areas also identified policy transfer, idea sharing or even competition with other Pacific states and even regional entities as significant in shaping policy-making and -reform.

9.2.2: The politics of employment policy and delivery

This thesis contributes a long-overdue, contemporary understanding of the politics of employment policy-making in Pacific states, a long-term, ‘wicked’ and complex policy problem in the region (Hassall, 2020, p. 124). ‘Bringing the politics back in’, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the role of power dynamics, incentives and accountabilities, informal institutions and pressures, corruption, and divergent societal influences on divergent policy pathways on employment. Distinct from previous more economic perspectives on Pacific labour, thesis findings present an understanding of employment policy as an important and complex sector of social policy in two Pacific states, replete with societal values, engagement, and impacts.

A key empirical contribution is increased understanding of domestic, sectoral dynamics specific to employment policy-making in Pacific states. These include the role and potential of negotiated institutional hybridity, including in achieving nationwide reach in Vanuatu labour mobility. Specific sectoral dynamics included personalised and politicised selection pressures and corrupt practices in social sectors, in a context of surging demand. This competition for access to services of formal institutions reflected the value placed on formal and national institutions, such as education and public service employment, even when they were compromised. The pressured, seasonal nature of commitment to policy reform is another distinct sectoral dynamic of personalised selection pressures. This research brings new insight into the domestic policy dynamics behind rapid changes in tertiary education demand and opportunities, including newly established national universities.

This research has also updated the understanding of how divergent societal interests shape employment policy. A historic focus on trade unions’ role in the politics of employment in both states, has been replaced with new understanding of divergent interests and influence over policy, between more educated, connected and advantaged members of society and the rural and less educated majority of students and workers. This increased understanding of domestic politics shifts focus beyond the traditional ‘external/ local’ binary focus on aid donors. Nevertheless, this research has profiled the long-term, extensive but changing influence and agency of external development partners in employment policy-making in the Pacific.

Rather than employment policy being solely subject to national politics, and ‘done to’ people, the political economy approach of this research has also enabled findings on the agency of actors and participants in policy implementation, as a source of political change. This is most

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evident in the case study with widest participation and most thoroughly researched change impacts, Vanuatu Labour Mobility, including a change to voter incentives. However, it is also evident in all the case studies, including in the rapid increase in Solomon Islands labour mobility, and the generational change from more widespread post-secondary education and increased qualifications, including among politicians. This potential for policy feedback and change arises as an area of potential future research (section 9.4).

9.2.3: Informal institutions and clientelism in public policy in Pacific states

The empirical contribution of this research includes five key findings about informal institutions and clientelism in Pacific public policy in these two nations.

Firstly, examination of formal and informal institutional arrangements in this research contributes to theories of informal institutions as applied in policy-making in Pacific states. In Chapter 2, Helmke and Levitsky proposed identifying informal institutions by comparing different outcomes of similar formal institutions, and attributing the difference to informal institutions (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 733). Such comparison in this research identified not full informal institutions, but rather opportunistic and varying informal practices driven by localised and personalised incentives. The institutional hybridity this research has identified is of different interactions of formal institutions and informal networks and practices (rather than institutions) which explained different policy pathways. As presented at 8.3.3, while informal practices and pressures were influential, it is also not clear that they formed identifiable and coherent ‘cultural’ institutions. Adding to the research of Haque (2012) and Wood (2016), the limited information available suggests that rather than coherent cultural institutions, broadly, policy actors and voters responded to largely rational incentives in their choices to engage in personalised selection or corrupt practices in the institutional contexts they worked within.

Secondly, this research identifies how corrupt and personalised practices incentivised, and were perceived by, Pacific policy stakeholders. Identifiable in all four policy cases, these practices were at once subjective, hard to measure, relatively widespread, easily recognisable, and widely criticised. Participants in all four cases identified corrupt behaviour. This suggests the possibility of a kind of Pacific ‘pub test’ [the opinion of everyday people on a policy or behaviour (SBS, 2019)] - of what could normally be accepted or not. Policy elites were significantly implicated. In all four cases there were research participants who both accused others, and were accused themselves, of corrupt practices. Vanuatu labour mobility in Chapter 7 demonstrated that some institutional hybridity can support national reach. Locally acceptable

definitions and approaches are important to guide policy-makers' decisions on any hybrid approaches supporting broad employment policy delivery.

Thirdly, this research contributes to theories of the role of clientelism in public policy in Pacific states. Chapters 2 and 3 presented perspectives on pervasive clientelism affecting policy-making in Pacific states including Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. This research did not attempt rigorous definition and measurement of corruption on public policy. Instead, this research identified and explained the significant role of politicised and personalised pressures, informal practices and perceived and actual corruption in the non-linear policy-making and -delivery pathways in Pacific states. Different arrangements and contestation of formal and informal institutions, including actual and perceived clientelist and corrupt practices, complicated, undermined, and at times even supported employment policy commitment and delivery. Complementing some specific literature, Solomon Islands 'Constituency Awards' paralleled more widely studied CDFs, with some key differences including reinforcement of a formal national institution: education.

Fourth, this research contributes to theories of the role and interests of policy elites and societal interests in formal and informal institutional arrangements which shape policy commitment and delivery. Reflecting Khan's insights on elite interests in rents and elite capture of policies, case studies found evidence of policy elites contesting and controlling selection to access education and employment programs, to the disadvantage of others. However, in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the opportunistic and non-iterative nature of informal practices of personalised selection in these policy areas meant that 'deals' were not systematised among elites as they had been for Khan (Khan, 2011). Each year's scholarship selection lists were newly contested, and the role of labour mobility agents continually contested in Vanuatu.

Fifth, this research raises the question of equity in participation, and whether it could be addressed through hybrid institutional approaches. Equity of distribution was a policy priority in all four policy cases, but also the subject of significant contestation. In each case area, achieving equitable distribution was also at times used as a justification for politicised selection (through Constituency Awards, the Social Inclusion List, and selective compliance measures on labour mobility recruitment approaches). While it was a consistent policy priority, local definitions of what is equitable in distribution are unclear, and are among further research priorities (section 9.4).

9.3: Practical Implications

From research of employment policies in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, this research adds new insights and practical implications for policy-makers, employment actors and development practitioners in Pacific island countries and beyond, in three key areas. These include a shift in focus, practical understanding of formal and informal institutions, and bringing politics back into Pacific policy-making.

The practical implications of this research reinforce many existing recommendations for Pacific policy actors; that effective, sustained delivery of policies and reforms requires:

- improved coherence of policy advocacy and initiatives across macro- and sectoral-levels (Aiafi, 2016, p. 269);
- greater accountability in the use of aid and for political reform to enable development outcomes (Hughes, 2013, p. 11);
- careful sequencing of policy reforms (Edwards, 1989; Haque, 2016);
- ways to align personalised interests with wider, longer-term local and national interests (Hughes, 2012, p. 39); and also
- greater societal participation in policy-making processes, through civil education, and integration of indigenous systems and practices in policy-making (Aiafi, 2016, pp. 263-264).

This research also reinforces many existing recommendations for Pacific development partners. The need for policies to be developed locally and organically rather than externally imposed have been widely articulated by Pacific public policy authors (Aiafi, 2016, p. 245; Henderson, 2003; Keen & Sora, 2024; Ratuva, 2011; Sutherland, 2000). The last thirty years has seen repeated calls for aid donors to better support aid recipient countries to lead their own development agendas (Brautigam, 2000; OECD, 2005; PIFS, 2007). Development practitioners have also been repeatedly urged to shift from deficit- to strength-based approaches to external assistance (Winterford et al., 2023); and to apply realistic timeframes to foster local ownership, policy dialogue, political support and sustainable capacity development and institutional change (DFAT, 2023; Haque, 2013, p. 8; Sterrett, 2015). The difficulty realising these practical recommendations over recent decades indicates the durable and sustained incentives shaping policy-making and development aid approaches, even as formal institutions strengthen and Pacific aid flows increase.

Among new insights, firstly, this research on domestic policy making encourages a shift of focus from centring the role of external aid donors, to better understanding indigenous drivers and dynamics, and divergent societal interests, within Pacific polities. The depth and timespan of this research calls for development practitioners to:

- 1) look beyond point-in-time analyses, to better understand longer term trends in employment sector interventions, and situating policy interventions within these long-term trends;
- 2) shift focus from smallness and capacity constraints, to recognising the role of political incentives in policy delivery and change in segmented polities;
- 3) go beyond co-drafting of policies, to supporting local actors to lead policy development and negotiate difficult transitions to delivery and change within a political context; and
- 4) to add political and social inclusion perspectives to better understand the dynamics important to employment policy delivery and reform.

Secondly, this research provides practical understandings of how formal and informal institutions are negotiated and contested in sector level policy delivery in Pacific states. This helps practitioners move beyond perceptions of ‘formal’ and ‘informal institutions’ as respectively ‘external/ modern/ good’ and ‘local/ traditional/ bad’ in policy-making for delivery. In contrast to traditional negative framings of ‘wantok’ network development approaches (Fukuyama, 2008), case study examples reintroduce the potential of informal practices to support leadership and broad reach. This research echoes previous authors in recommending participatory local Pacific definitions of corruption to adapt service delivery to local needs (Bond, 2024; Huffer, 2005; Nimbtik, 2016b). Guided by what has been possible through institutional hybridity in supporting Vanuatu labour mobility, in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, joint local dialogue and consultation to formalise guidelines and definitions of ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ practices in labour mobility selection could help achieve equity, fairness and distribution of scheme participation.

Thirdly, ‘bringing the politics back in’ to understanding Pacific policy-making leads to a key practical implication of this research for Pacific policy actors to shift from ‘protecting from -’ to ‘engaging with’ politics. Bureaucrats and donors have often sought to protect formal bureaucratic institutions by neglecting ‘politics’ in favour of depoliticised technical and managerial reforms focused on filling policy and capacity gaps. However, the process of developmental change is inherently political (Chapter 2). Depoliticization risks resulting in blindness to domestic political costs and interests that can impede policy delivery and reform.

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The case studies indicate this in the mixed consequences of ‘protection from politics’, including ‘ring fencing’ that constrains, discourages or raises suspicion among political actors. ‘Bringing the politics back in’ to policy-making requires thinking and working politically in ways that enables political actors as well as senior bureaucrats to see through commitment to policy goals and manage domestic pressures for personalised selection in a balance that contributes to policy delivery. Policy-makers can be supported to engage both the informal and the political. This includes support to negotiate political incentives and adapt hybrid institutional arrangements to local needs, as well as strengthening formal and impersonal service delivery. Examples striking this balance include in MEHRD’s Cabinet Briefing on Scholarships, leadership on Vanuatu labour mobility, and the Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

Fourth, leadership is essential to practical delivery of policies and reforms. Therefore, identification of the conditions within which leadership can be exercised that mobilises collective action to deliver policies in hybrid institutional contexts also constitutes practical implications of this research. Given the need for greater societal engagement in Pacific policy-making, practical implications also include the need for policy-makers to foster resourcing and roles for civil society organisations to engage in support of policy development and delivery. Identified policy transfer from other Pacific states also indicates an opportunity for Pacific regional expertise and policy goods in employment policy.

9.4: Further Research

Both the findings and the necessary limitations of this research (introduced in section 1.2) yield multiple opportunities for further research, particularly on domestic politics and policy-making in Pacific states.

This research has focused on one critical public policy problem within two Pacific states to identify distinct sectoral and national dynamics. Developing systematic understandings of factors in policy alignment or divergence as they apply in other policy areas or other Pacific states remains for other research.

Research findings emphasise the importance of different negotiated combinations of formal and informal arrangements for Pacific policy-making, and subjectivity and context in assessing what is ‘acceptable’, ‘questionable’ or ‘corrupt’. Understanding hybrid institutional balance and negotiation requires local discussion, and objective assessment of informal practices as well as formal institutions, if it is to further inform effective social sector policy measures and

reforms. Similarly, while equity was a consistent political priority across all four policy cases, work remains to develop a definition of equitable distribution in these state contexts. This research could offer a starting point for local identification of appropriate institutions and practices in achieving broader impacts in Melanesian social sector policy.

Domestic agency and political dynamics present multiple opportunities for further investigation. This research has revealed distinct voices of different voter and societal groups in both countries. Difference and change in these voices emerge as a priority for further research. As Pacific citizens remain excluded from policy-making processes (Aiafi, 2016, pp. 243-244), their voices remain a knowledge gap, including in surveying. When asked, social sector priorities including education, health and youth issues continue to score highly among Pacific peoples' concerns (Keen, 2022; Mudaliar et al., 2024); adequate surveying is needed to ensure that employment policy is afforded the strong leadership, resources and collaboration it requires to be delivered effectively. Research is needed on issues and approaches in mobilising much-needed domestic coordination and collective action for complex policy reforms at sector level. The conditions under which regional capability and civil society agency influence national policy efforts could also be better understood. As indicated in Vanuatu and with potential in Solomon Islands, dynamic political changes arising from widespread participation in labour mobility merits monitoring, discussion and research, as workers and their communities increasingly access education, goods and services and urban lifestyles, as well as collective platforms and increased voice. Finally, dynamic social change, rapid spread of telecommunications and greater access to higher education including through national universities in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, offer more opportunities for such further research to be done by local researchers themselves.

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Appendix 1: Participant information sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Researcher: My name is Stephen Close and I am a PhD candidate in Public Policy at the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University.

Project Title: Factors explaining institutional responses to employment in Pacific Island Countries: a comparative study

General Outline of the Project:

Description and Methodology: In this research in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu I am seeking to explore the factors shaping tertiary scholarships and overseas labour mobility as two major policy and institutional responses to public policy on employment. The research is intended to understand how policy goals are delivered in the development and implementation of policy and institutions. The research uses political economy analysis to understand different factors, incentives and drivers. The research will be conducted through semi-structured interviews with responsible actors and stakeholders in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Participants: Data will be collected from participants through semi-structured interviews. Approximately 50 participants will be involved in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Use of Data and Feedback: Preliminary analysis of the data will be conducted in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. However, most of the analysis will take place at the Australian National University in Australia. Information obtained from your interview may be published in formats such as conference papers, blogs and articles, some of which will be publically available on the internet. Copies of all publications resulting from the research will be lodged with Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) in Solomon Islands and the Vanuatu National Cultural Council, in accordance with national research policies. Options for how the results can best be reported back to participants in Solomon Islands will also be explored.

Project Funding: The project is funded as PhD research by the Australian National University.

Participant Involvement:

Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal: Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may decline to take part or to withdraw from the research without providing an explanation at any time until the work is prepared for publication. Within the research, you may also decline to answer any question. If you withdraw, the data you have provided prior to withdrawal will be destroyed and not used. If you withdraw your consent, options for continuing to use your data can be discussed, but your right to have all data and records

associated with your participation destroyed will be respected. Participants will be asked to undertake a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Audio recordings of interviews will be made only if the participant consents prior to the beginning of the interview, and then transcribed in Australia. Audio recordings will be retained for at least five years from the time of any publications. Written notes will also be made at the time of the interview. Participants are welcome to check the accuracy of these notes after the interview has finished, although they will only be allowed to read the notes relating to them. The researcher will also attempt to contact participants to seek their approval prior to the publication of any quotations that are attributed to them.

What does participation in the research entail? You are invited to take part in an interview with me about your experiences and knowledge of tertiary scholarships or labour mobility. Information may be given by you in the course of interview which reveals that you (or others, identified or otherwise) have breached public service code of conduct and absolute confidentiality concerning this information cannot be guaranteed. This is relevant to the 'risks' involved in taking part in the interview or focus group discussion (see 'risks' outlined below). With your permission, the interview will be recorded (audio only) and later transcribed. Written notes will also be taken. You are welcome to look at the written notes at the end of the interview/focus group to check their accuracy. The recording will be kept secure and only I have will access to it. It may be retained securely for at least five years from the time of any publications related to the research. If you have access to email a copy of the interview and/or focus group transcript once completed can be sent to you if you request. An attempt will also be made to contact you to seek your approval prior to the publication of any quotations that are attributed to you, whether by name or anonymous. The information sheet will detail the risk of possible investigation by third parties such as audit authorities.

Location and Duration: Interviews will be undertaken once in the office of your organisation or at an agreed location, and are expected to last about an hour. The total time requested of you in this research is one hour and thirty minutes. You may be asked to participate in a follow up interview.

Remuneration: Transport costs will be reimbursed at cost up to SBD30/ VUV410.

Benefits: It is unlikely that you will personally benefit from participation in this research. However, the work will improve understanding of public policy and institutional responses to employment in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and we hope this understanding/ knowledge will enhance policy development in this area.

Risk and Confidentiality:

Risk and confidentiality: I will keep your identity confidential as far as allowed by law, unless you elect to be named within the research. Despite my best efforts to hide identities in the research, participants representing the institutions or agencies they are working for may be identifiable through the research, so you should not tell me anything that would incriminate you or cause others to take an unfavourable view of you. Information that you provide may reveal that you or others have breached public service code of conduct in Solomon Islands or Vanuatu and there is a remote possibility that my research notes or recordings could be requested as part of ministry/departmental, audit office or public service commission investigations. Absolute confidentiality concerning this information cannot be guaranteed. There is also a risk that you may be identified by third parties. Throughout the

interview or focus group, you will be asked if you still feel comfortable participating. Interviews and focus groups will be immediately discontinued if you are experiencing emotional distress or discomfort, if you are divulging information revealing that you (or others you identify individually) have breached code of conduct. In the event that the discussion causes emotional discomfort you should consider seeking counselling from your local church leader or speaking to the Social Affairs Division of the Ministry of Health located at the Central Hospital, Kukum (Solomon Islands) or the Mental Health staff of the Vila Central Hospital (Vanuatu).

Access to the data you provide will be restricted to the research team, and identifying details will be stored separately from the rest of the research data. Published results will only be reported in aggregate, and you will not be identifiable within published outputs unless you have elected otherwise.

Data Storage:

- **Where:** While in Solomon Islands and in Vanuatu, only I will have access to hardcopies of the data (written notes) and it will be kept in lockable filing containers. Digital notes and recordings will be protected by a password-enabled laptop and backed-up on a hard drive as soon as possible. Likewise, in Australia all data will be stored on a password-enabled hard drive or in locked filing containers. Data will be stored at the ANU.
- **How Long:** The data will be stored for at least five years from the time of any publications arising from the research.
- **Handling of Data following the required storage period:** At the end of the storage period digital data will be archived or retained in a de-identified format. Non-digital data (such as field notes and transcripts) will be destroyed.

Queries and Concerns:

Contact Details for More Information: Any requests for information or queries regarding the study participants should be directed to

Department of Pacific Affairs, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific,
Canberra, ACT 0200 Australia
Telephone: +(61 0421115802
Email: stephen.close@anu.edu.au

Stephen Close's supervisor is Dr Julien Barbara and his contact details are:
Dr Julien Barbara, Senior Policy Fellow
Department of Pacific Affairs, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific,
Canberra, ACT 0200 Australia
Telephone: +61 2 6125 9612; Email: (Julien.barbara@anu.edu.au),

Ethics Committee Clearance:

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol 2018/413). If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact: [L]
[SEP]

Ethics Manager

-

The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee
The Australian National University
Telephone: +61 2 6125 3427
Email: Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au

Appendix 2: Research method and semi-structured interview questionnaire

As submitted in approved ANU Research Ethics Protocol 2018.413

Factors in institutional responses to employment in Pacific Island Countries

Research Method

My proposed methodology will include three key types of data collection:

- d) *Existing data* from my previous work and studies on public policy and outcomes on education, youth employment, labour markets in Pacific Island countries. As part of research proposal preparations in 2016 I prepared an overview of statistical information relevant to youth employment from across PICs, identifying trends where possible but also assessing the utility and constraints on evidence relevant to the youth unemployment challenge. Sources included census, household information and expenditure surveying (HIES), labour force surveying and school-to-work transition surveying (where possible). This economic and labour market data illustrates the outcomes and characteristics of the public policy problem. I propose to update this data where possible but I do not propose new economic analysis;
- e) *Primary and secondary document analysis* of institutions including legislation, policy, plans, and historical case studies; and
- f) *Semi-structured interviews* with actors (whether within institutions, or stakeholders of the case study issue) which will address key questions guided by the above research questions and the conceptual model, with openness to new information, topics and insights.
- g) *Focus Group Discussions*.

Research Method Three: Semi- Structured Interviews

The conceptual model guides the selection of actors and the approach to semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview questions are proposed below based on the three stages of the conceptual model.

1. **Problem Identification:** *What is the public policy problem: Youth Employment*
 - Outcomes of public policy-making; to which political economy issues may contribute
 - Public reform success or failures
 - Previous or current interventions, their effectiveness, and the theory of change underpinning them

2. Environmental & Structural Diagnosis: Context & Institutions

What are the systemic features in place that are relevant to the problem?

Who are the agents, institutions and arenas for policy-making?

- a) **Analysis of relevant structural features:** demography, geography, culture and social structure, historical legacies, macro-economic conditions, pre-existing labour force capacities and conditions
- b) **Rules of the Game** – Relevant Institutions, including formal laws and regulations, and the political system operating around this issue (as below):

I propose the following question wording to apply the conceptual framework in semi-structured interviews with identified stakeholders.

The wording would be flexibly applied to stakeholders who (a) are interested in youth employment issues generally or specific programs and policy issues in youth employment outside the selected case study topics; (b) are active in the program/policy issue of overseas tertiary scholarships; or who (c) are active in the program/policy issue of overseas labour mobility.

“This research is about the development of policy on [overseas labour mobility/ tertiary scholarships] in [Solomon Islands/ Vanuatu] in the period since [2003/2007/2008/2009]. I would like to speak with you today about development of policy on [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in Solomon Islands.

1. In the period since [2003/2007/2008/2009], what have been the objectives of public policy on [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in Solomon Islands, in your view?
2. Can you please describe the role of your organisation in this issue?
3. Can you please describe the role of your [unit/organisation] in this issue?
4. Who are the main actors, positions and institutions involved in public policy on [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in Solomon Islands?
5. Who have been the stakeholders for your role – what actors, institutions or groups at home or overseas take an interest in your role or the role of your team or organisation?
6. Which political or public service positions have made decisions about policy and programs on [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] which affect the role of your agency?
7. Who has benefited from this program: can you tell me who has been able to go overseas for [tertiary study/ work]?
8. Who has not benefited from this program: can you tell me who hasn't been able to go overseas for [tertiary study/ work]?
9. What [unit/organization] have you found most helpful in your work?
 - a. How do you work together?

10. Which factors or issues have you found difficult to work with/ least helpful in your work/ makes your job difficult?
11. What role have development partners played in the issue of [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in this country in this period?
12. Do you think foreigners and Solomon Islanders see this issue differently? If so, how?
13. Is there a difference between how the [tertiary scholarships/ labour mobility program] is meant to work in policy, and how it works in reality?
18. Is there disagreement about [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in Solomon Islands? What issues are not agreed on and why?
19. In your view, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the way that [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] opportunities are decided?
- a. Is it fair? Why/ why not?
21. What has changed over time in public policy on [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in Solomon Islands?
22. Looking at the period since [2003,2007,2008,2009], which positions in the system have been the most important decision-makers?
- a. What change has resulted from these decisions?
- b. Have these roles changed in this period?
23. Has your [unit/organization] made decisions which changed how this program was implemented?
- a. What was easiest and hardest about this decision?
23. Looking at the period since [2003,2007,2008,2009], which positions or institutions have been the most important stakeholders?
- a. What change has resulted from demand from these stakeholders?
- b. Have their roles changed in this period?
24. What would you like to change or see changed about the issue of [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in your country?
25. What changes do other people or groups want to make change in the issue of [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in this country? Why?
24. What are some changes which are opposed in [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in this country? Why?

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25. What are the factors or issues which affect whether change will happen on this issue?
 26. How do you think change will happen?
 27. What do you think is the best way to change outcomes of [tertiary scholarships/overseas labour mobility] in this country?

Use of language: I will include in interview notes where I have used Solomon Pidgin to explain or explore concepts with interviewees.

Appendix 3: Thematic codes in participant comments

As introduced in Section 1.2.2: Data Approach, this appendix presents the full list of thematic codes used to categorise and analyse participant comments. The number of times these themes were raised in participant comments illustrates how prominent certain issues were in participants' understanding and views of key issues in each policy area. I used participant comments and their relative emphases to help answer the research question by identifying factors influencing policy pathways on employment. I include in each case chapter a table of the thematic ideas most frequently raised by policy stakeholders interviewed, and reflect on key inter-case differences in emphasis in Chapter 8: Analysis and Synthesis. Ideas and issues raised in participant comments were broad – this reflects the wide range of factors involved in employment policy areas and the key factors driving policy pathways from policy development to delivery, contestation and reform.

4. Solomon Islands Tertiary Scholarships

Codes	Categories	Number of mentions
	Strengths & Weaknesses in Tertiary Scholarships program	
SWTS		97
MBS	Merit-based selection	95
PITS	Patronage in tertiary scholarships	88
DPR	Devt Partner Role	66
BUDTS	Budget: Tertiary Scholarships	65
SINU	SINU	64
CHRTS	Chronology of Tertiary Scholarships	61
PSETR	PSET Reform	61
BETO	Basic Education Trade Off	60
EQUITY	Equity	53
CTS , CSS	MP's/ constituency scholarships	52
MIN	Ministers and their influence	50
OTS	Objectives of Tertiary Scholarships	50
LTD	Local tertiary delivery	47
DECNS	Decisions taken; critical junctures	46
DEMD	Demand and changing Demographics	44
I4M	Incentives for MPs	42

MPM	MP pressure on Ministry	42
TSPO	Tertiary Scholarships Policy	42
USP	University of the South Pacific	37
EVP	Education vision and perceptions of education and tertiary education	36
PTE	Preoccupation with tertiary education	34
TS#	TS Numbers	33
TVET	Technical & Vocational Education & Training	33
BEN	Who benefits and who doesn't benefit	32
CHGE	Change	32
ROLES	Agency and institutional roles	32
WSH TSR	What should happen; Tertiary Scholarships Reform	32
CYLTS	Change you'd like to see	31
LTS	Leadership in Tertiary Scholarships	31
TLC	Technical and legislative change	31
IAT	Incentives & Accountability & Transparency	29
HCMH	How change might happen	25
INDFIN/ HELF	Individual financing, loan schemes	25
BALTS	Budget & Analysis of OSTs	24
I4PI	Incentives for parents and individuals	24
KIDS	Kids or personal expce on TS	24
LCR, WPP	Lack of capacity and resources, weak public processes	24
POMP	Pressure on MPs	24
DBPI	Difference between policy and implementation	22
DPSAN	Devt Partner sanctions	21
INVDS	Individual Leaders	21
MOA	Ministry and officer accountability	20
DPP	Development partner pressure	18
FORINF	Foreign Influence	18
TSPQ	Tertiary scholarship program quality and grades	18
CSO	Civil society orgs and advocacy	17
EDU	Education more broadly	16
ALLOW	Allowances	15
CDF	CDFs more broadly	15
GEOG	Geographic Issues	15
DISAG	Disagreements	14
AMA	AMA University	13
POLAD	Political Advocacy, Awareness and Engagement	12
SMM	Skills mismatch and graduate unemployment	12
LSHP	Leadership	11
BILATS	Bilateral OSTs and Destinations	10

C89	Change in the 80s and 90s	10
CULT	Socio-cultural issues	10
GUE	Graduate Unemployment	10
PEC	Broader political economy context/ patronage system	10
CTE	Costs of Tertiary Education	9
E4W	Education for What	9
INFO	Data and informal imbalance	9
LEG	Legislation or legal	9
BUDTI	Budget: Tertiary Institutions	8
C010	Change in the 00's and 10's	8
DEST	Destinations	8
I4B	Incentives for bureaucrats, Ministry level political culture	8
ISS	In-service scholarships	8
BUD	Budgeting	7
COOP	Cooperation, Collaboration & Collective Action	7
ELITE	Elites	7
LKLY	What's likely to happen	7
PCON	Political Contestation	7
PRV	Private sector engagement and role	7
PWILL	Political Will	7
ROI	Return on investment	7
MPA	MP accountability	6
TI / RTI	Role of tertiary institutions	6
COL	How things worked in colonial times	5
ICOR	Individual change on return	5
CONCH	Constituency for Change	4
ECOIM	Economic Impact	3
PSI	Public sector issues more broadly	3
A2P	Ability to pay	2
ECO	Economic context	2
HTS	History of Tertiary Scholarships	2
INFINS	Informal Institutions	2
PARL	Parliamentary	2
SVTS	Solomons Vanuatu Tertiary Scholarships comparison	2
VILL	Village	2
YUE	Youth Unemployment	2
EDUIM	Education impact	1
HPD	Historic path dependency	1
LANG	Language issues	1
MOP	Ministry officer patronage	1

REFCE	REFERENCE SUGGESTION	1
YOUTH	Youth	1
	Total comment code instances	2232

5. Vanuatu Government Funded Scholarships

Codes	Categories	Number of mentions
MBS	Merit-based selection	79
IAT	Incentives & Accountability & Transparency	67
CHGE	Change	63
MIN	Ministers and their influence	48
BUDTS	Budget: Tertiary Scholarships	46
DPR	Devt Partner Role	44
CHRTS	Chronology of Tertiary Scholarships	41
SMM	Skills mismatch and graduate unemployment	38
LSHP	Leadership	37
LTD	Local tertiary delivery	37
SWTS	Strengths & Weaknesses in Tertiary Scholarships program	36
OMB	Ombudsman	35
PEC	Broader political economy context/ patronage system	35
TSPO	Tertiary Scholarships Policy	35
YOUTH	Youth	31
CSO LOCAL	Civil society orgs and advocacy; Localisation	29
DEMD	Demand and changing Demographics	29
USP	University of the South Pacific	29
SVV	Solomon islands vs Vanuatu general	28
BETO	Basic Education Trade Off	27
POLAD	Political Advocacy, Awareness and Engagement	27
INVDS	Individual Leaders	26
LANG	Language issues	25
NATS	National (domestic) scholarships	24
DECNS	Decisions taken; critical junctures	22
BUD	Budgeting	21
EDU	Education more broadly	21
I4PI	Incentives for parents and individuals	21
CULT VILL	Socio-cultural and village issues	18
EVP	Education vision and perceptions of education and tertiary education	16

FORINF	Foreign Influence	15
LCR WPP	Lack of capacity and resources, weak public processes	15
BEN	Who benefits and who doesn't benefit	14
LTS	Leadership in Tertiary Scholarships	14
YUE	Youth Unemployment	14
ALLOW	Allowances	12
BILATS	Bilateral OSTs and Destinations	12
PCON	Political Contestation	12
SUBJ	Subject selection	12
TS#	TS Numbers	12
PSETR	PSET Reform	11
DISAG	Disagreements	10
INFO	Data and informal imbalance	10
PWILL	Political Will	10
INDFIN/ HELF	Individual financing, loan schemes	9
MOF	Ministry of Finance	9
POMP	Pressure on MPs	9
COOP	Cooperation, Collaboration & Collective Action	8
CYLTS	Change you'd like to see	8
DBPI	Difference between policy and implementation	8
HCMH	How change might happen	8
PARL PARTY	Parliamentary & Party politics	8
TVET	Technical & Vocational Education & Training	8
VSP	Vanuatu Skills Partnership	8
AUF	Agence Universitaire Francaise	7
EQUITY	Equity	7
LEG	Legislation or legal	7
PSI	Public sector issues more broadly	7
PTE	Preoccupation with tertiary education	7
ROLES	Agency and institutional roles	7
SVTS	Solomons Vanuatu Tertiary Scholarships comparison	7
ALTO	Adult Literacy and Training Organisations	6
C89	Change in the 80's and 90's	6
ECO	Economic context	6
GEOG	Geographic Issues	6
OTS	Objectives of Tertiary Scholarships	6
CONCH	Constituency for Change	5
KIDS	Kids or personal expce on TS	5
MOA	Ministry and officer accountability	5

PAC	Pacific issues	5
BUDTI	Budget: Tertiary Institutions	4
C010	Change in the 00's and 10's	4
DPSAN	Devt Partner sanctions	4
I4M	Incentives for MPs	4
MPM	MP pressure on Ministry	4
PRV	Private sector engagement and role	4
HTS	History of Tertiary Scholarships	3
TSR	Tertiary Scholarships Reform	3
A2P	Ability to pay	2
BALTS	Budget & Analysis of OSTs	2
CTE	Costs of Tertiary Education	2
HPD	Historic path dependency	2
I4B	Incentives for bureaucrats, Ministry level political culture	2
LMA	Labour Market Analysis	2
MPA	MP accountability	2
COL	How things worked in colonial times	1
ECOIM	Economic Impact	1
EDUIM	Education impact	1
EMPL	Employers	1
IME	Isomorphic mimicry, replicability	1
ISS	In-service scholarships	1
PITS	Patronage in tertiary scholarships	1
REFCE	REFERENCE SUGGESTION	1
CTS , CSS	MP's/ constituency scholarships	0
DPP	Development partner pressure	0
ELITE	Elites	0
ICOR	Individual change on return	0
INFINS	Informal Institutions	0
MOP	Ministry officer patronage	0
TSPQ	Tertiary scholarship program quality and grades	0
GUE	Graduate Unemployment	0
ROI	Return on investment	0
	Total comment code instances	1442

6. Solomon Islands Labour Mobility

Codes	Categories	Number of mentions
LLM/ LSHP	Leadership in Labour Mobility	55

EQUITY	Equity	27
DPR	Development partner role	24
COOP/ COORD	Cooperation, Collaboration & Collective Action/ Coordination	18
GEOG	Geographic Issues	18
LCR/ WPP	Lack of capacity and resources, weak public processes	18
BEN	Who benefits and who doesn't benefit	17
CHRLM	Chronology of Labour Mobility	15
LM#	Labour mobility numbers	15
HCMH	How change might happen	14
CHGE/ TLC	Change/ Technical and Legislative Change	13
DECNS	Decisions	10
CAN	Canada	9
MIN	Ministers and their influence	9
BUDLM	Budget: Labour Mobility	8
ECOIM	Economic impact	8
DEMD	Demand & Changing Demographics	7
DISAG	Disagreements	7
ICOR	Individual change on return	7
FORINF	Foreign influence	6
CYLTS	Change you'd like to see	5
DBPI	Difference between policy and implementation	5
EMPL/ PRIV	Employer Influence/ Private sector engagement and role	5
I4PI	Incentives for parents and individuals	5
IAT	Incentives & Accountability & Transparency/ Ministry and Officer Accountability	5
MPM	MP pressure on Ministry	5
POMP	Pressure on MPs	5
KIDS/ KIDSPE	Kids/ personal experience	5
CULT	Socio-cultural issues	4
I4M	Incentives for MPs	4
COB	Coalition building	3
HLM	History of Labour mobility	3
CHRTS	Chronology of Tertiary Scholarships	2
DESTS	Destinations	2
I4B/ I4BI	Incentives for bureaucrats, Ministry level political culture	2
INDFINLM	Individual financing labour mobility	2
PSI	Public Sector Issues more broadly	2

CONCH	Constituency for change	1
CSO	Civil society organisations	1
ROI	Return on investment	1
LEG	Legislation	1
Total comment code instances		373

7. Vanuatu Labour Mobility

Codes	Categories	Number of mentions
SWLM	Strengths & Weaknesses in Labour Mobility program	77
LSHIP/ LLM	Leadership/ Leadership in Labour Mobility	59
DPR	Development partner role	35
AGENTS	Agents	34
CHRLM	Chronology of Labour Mobility	33
INVD/ INVDS	Individual Leaders	32
ECOIM	Economic Impact	28
LCR/ WPP	Lack of capacity and resources, weak public processes	27
PILM	Political interference in labour mobility	27
CHGE	Change	23
SVLM	SI vs Vanuatu comparison - LM-specific	23
ROLES	Roles	20
MIN	Ministers and their influence	19
HCMH	How change might happen	18
CULT	Socio-cultural issues	17
BEN	Who benefits and who doesn't benefit	15
I4M	Incentives for MPs	15
LMO/ OLM	Labour Mobility Objectives	15
CYLTS	Change you'd like to see	13
IAT	Incentives & Accountability & Transparency	13
ANZLM/ ANZS	Australia NZ in Labour Mobility	12
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme	12
COOP	Cooperation, Collaboration & Collective Action/ Coordination	11
LMIMP	Labour Mobility Impact	10
EQUITY	Equity	10
LMR	Labour Mobility Reform	10
MPM	MP pressure on Ministry	10
LM#	Labour mobility numbers	9

ELM	Educ & Lab mobility	9
FORINF	Foreign influence	9
PAC	Pacific issues	9
YOUTH	Youth issues	9
YUE	Youth unemployment	9
POLAD	Political advocacy, awareness and engagement	8
DECNS	Decisions	8
PRV	Private sector engagement and role	8
GEOG	Geographic Issues	8
PCON/ POLCON	Political contestation	8
HLM	History of Labour mobility	7
VILL	Village	7
LEG	Legislation	7
LMI	Labour Market Issues	6
DISAG	Disagreements	5
PWILL	Political Will	5
REFCE	References	4
LANG	Language issues	4
I4PI	Incentives for parents and individuals	4
MBS	Merit-based selection	4
PARTY	Party politics	4
SVV	Solomon Islands vs Vanuatu	4
C89	Change in the 80's and 90's	3
ICOR	Individual change on return	3
PSETR	Post secondary education & training reform & TVET	3
MOA	Ministry and officer accountability	3
PEC	Political Economy context	3
BUDLM	Budget: Labour Mobility	2
CONCH	Constituency for change	2
CONTACT	Contacts	2
DPP	Development partner pressure	2
ECO	Economic context	2
TRLM	Training for Labour Mobility	2
I4B/ I4BI	Incentives for bureaucrats, Ministry level political culture	2
KIDS/ KIDSPE	Kids/ kids personal experience	2
SMM	Skills Mismatch	2
POMP	Pressure on MPs	2
MSG	Melanesian Spearhead Group	2
PERF	Performance	2
WRP	Work Ready Pool	2

RSE	Registered Seasonal Employer scheme	2
SWP	Seasonal Workers Program	2
	Why it's taken so long to develop a Labour Mobility	
YLONG	Policy	2
CSO	Civil society organisations	1
KASTOM	Kastom	1
DBPI	Difference between policy and implementation	1
DEMD	Demand & Changing Demographics	1
INFO	Information management	1
PSI	Public Sector Issues more broadly	1
LTS	Leadership of Tertiary Scholarships	1
PERLM	Perception of labour mobility	1
MPA	MP accountability	1
MOP	Ministry officer patronage	1
	Total comment code instances	830

