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FOREWORD

Regularly occurring variabilities in climate change impacts and effects such as heavy rainfalls, hot and dry spells, extremely high and low temperatures, coastal sea level rise, coastal salinity and infiltration, threaten food security and agriculture, infrastructure, and other resources that provide for the wellbeing of men, women, and children of Solomon Islands.

Land Use Planning must now be seriously addressed in light of the increasing environment and land resources exploitation. The fast increasing population demands more food and incomes that in turn put more pressure on the land and other resources. In the rush to satisfy these needs most people are unaware that they are contributing to negative results like soil degradation, low soil fertility, low crops productivity, health mishaps such as malnutrition, poverty and lack of economic wellbeing.

Furthermore these activities result in more problems like uncontrolled subsistence practices, water catchment deforestation and reduction, nutrients leaching and depletion, use of agro-chemicals detrimental to the environment, clear felling of forest lands, open mining activities, just to mention some of the leading adverse activities that come about with no proper land use planning.

The land use planning modules espoused here will equip land use planning facilitators to make assessments of, and identify adaptations to the forces of change confronting communities – including climate change, vulnerability to natural disasters, population changes, development pressures and development choices, ecosystem degradation and threats to local ecosystem services

Land Use Planning is an integrated approach to problem solving to allow communities to make informed choices about their future sustainable land use. The impacts of climate change and the frequency of natural disasters that confront our communities also affects food production. Also the need for financial incomes for other needs other than food contributes also to the multiple challenges that communities face and how to build their resilience to cope with these forces of change.

When communities are not aware of the forces of change that confront them or know less of these changes, people make uninformed decisions because they rush to satisfy their needs. When people rush to satisfy these needs, they are unaware of causing negative results like soil degradation, low soil fertility, low crops production, malnutrition, and poverty. Now these are problems and risks that calls for serious stakeholders to work together toward addressing, mitigating and build resilience from the use of Land Use Planning as the adoptable and adaption tool that enhances the adaptive capacity of communities. Effective land use planning is critical to the sustainable future of the country. As has been seen over the years, there is urgent need for Land Reform to enable land to be utilized for development. Not just any development for that matter, but sustainable development.





It is critically important to establish effective measures to protect the traditional rights of indigenous resource owners so that they receive maximum benefit, and gain ownership from the development and utilization of their resources. Land is a major resource that people own and depend on for many reasons. The utilization of this resource however, must be managed properly.

We have over the years experienced that without sound land use planning the country is prone to unsustainable development, natural resource degradation, food insecurity, loss of opportunities for productive development and income generation, loss and destruction of expensive infrastructure, increased natural resource and land conflicts, and of course damage to the livelihoods of communities.

As a cross-cutting issue, Land Use Planning must guide developments, help town and village communities adapt to climate change, improve agricultural production, chart future development directions, and ensure that infrastructure is built in the correct locations.

A lot of provincial consultations had been undertaken during the process of developing this policy, with the hope that all views are considered, being mindful of the fact that land use planning must be community –based for it to be effective in the rural areas. The DCC Government is committed to facilitating sustainable land use policies developed and implemented.

In conclusion, let me say that the Solomon Islands National Rural Land Use Policy can only be proven its worth, if it helps to improve the livelihoods of the Solomon Islands people in the long run.

Hon. Minister Augustine Mae'ue Auga
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
Solomon Islands Government





Permanent Secretary's Note

Most communities are not aware of the fundamental aspects of their land systems to make informed decisions about how to use their land, when confronted by the many man-made and natural forces of change, including logging, mining, agriculture, and climate change.

Community Based Land Use Planning (CBLUP) is a capacity-bound organizing framework. Using the process, communities can determine their fundamental development goals, assess the status of their environment, landform, biodiversity, resource base, identify possible threats, risks, and obstacles to achieving resilient land use planning, and prioritizing key actions against the backdrop of increasing climate change threats to food security at the community level.

In implementing Government Policy, CBLUP links communities to Ward Development Plans and subsequently to Provincial level Development Plans. It is a medium to long term plan using a participatory approach to mobilize the planning process.

The increasing variabilities in climate change impacts such as heavy prolonged rainfalls, hot and dry spells, extreme high temperatures, sea level rise, and salt water intrusion, threaten food security, agriculture and other resources.

These problems and risks call for serious stakeholders working together toward adaptability, mitigation and resilience, by using Land Use Planning as the community tool of intervention.

LUP must now be the focus for addressing environment and land resources management, not only for agriculture development, but also for other sectors.

A fast increasing population demands more food and incomes, which in turn put more pressure on the land and other resources. Furthermore, some of these human-activity related outcomes are the leading cause of adverse effects that come about with no proper Land Use Planning.

The community consultations give this work a community ownership, since communities are the ones who deal with the issues of concern on a daily basis. Therefore the Land Use Policy will be dedicated to Solomon Islands Communities, especially rural communities. Effective land use planning is critical to the sustainable future of the Solomon Islands.

It must guide our developments, help our town and village communities adapt to climate change, improve their agricultural production, chart their future development directions, and ensure that our infrastructure is built in the correct location.

Land use planning is multi-sectoral, and operates at many scales: national, provincial, constituency, community and project levels. Not only does it affect the agricultural





sector, but also the forestry, mining and fishery sectors, among others. There is need to mainstream sound land use planning throughout government activities.

Also, let us not forget that the non-government sector and the private sector have critically important roles in adopting and promoting sound land use planning. Consequently many of our future challenges will be institutional. However, there is also a powerful opportunity to forge productive collaborative partnerships between us all, to promote and support land use planning activities.

The National Land Use Policy will be the guiding principles on how we use land sustainably for development in Solomon Islands. Currently we have been making uninformed decisions about how to use land in the face of so many developments including logging, mining, agriculture, and climate change. The decisions we have been making are not always the best. We should not be blaming anyone also for the unsustainable developments that has been going on in the country.

Finally, I would like to thank the UNDP- SWoCK Project for funding the technical assistance and development of this Policy. Overall, I acknowledge the involvement of many stakeholders especially Dr. Julian Prior, the Land Use Consultant, the MAL Land Use team, the SWoCK Project team, and everybody who in one way or another contributed to the development of the Solomon Islands Rural Land Use Policy.

Mr. Jimi Saelea
PERMANENT SECRETARY
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock





Acknowledgement

To formulate a policy that is cross-cutting in different sectors or organisations and communities has been a challenge. However, after having engaged in various consultations at national and provincial levels, we are pleased to now have a National Rural Land Use Policy (NRLUP) to guide our work and decisions to address land use issues starting at rural level.

The development of this policy has been possible with the funding support of the Global Environment Facility through the Strongim Waka lo Community for Kaikai (SWoCK) Project through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL).

We would like to acknowledge MAL for initiating development of this policy document and most importantly, the Minister, Hon. Augustine Auga Mae'ue for his support.

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The former Permanent Secretary, Mr. Frank Wickham and the current, Mr. Jimmy Saelea, and the hard working staff of the Ministry, particularly, the Under Secretaries, Directors and representatives from various sectors reviewed and condensed the manuscript.

A huge appreciation and billions of thanks to all who wilfully involved and contributed, particularly, the reps of the governments of six provinces (Choiseul, Western, Isabel, Guadalcana/Honiara, Malaita and Makira) visited, None Government Organisations (NGOs), private sector, church leaders and farmers.

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ACRONYMS

CBLUP	Community based land used Planning
DPRP	Displaced People Relocation Planning
FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
GIS	Geographical Information System
LLC	Lauru Land Conference
LRSI	Land Resource of Solomon island
LUP	Land Use Policy
MAL	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
NDS	National Development Strategy
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NRLUP	National Rural Land Use Policy
NLUDB	National Land Use Database
NLUS	National Land Use Secretariat
REDD+	Reducing Emission from Deforestation forest Degradation
SINLUP	Solomon Island National Land Use Policy
SWoCK	Strongem Waka Lo Community Fo Kaikai
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UN	United Nations





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CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Rationale

The development and implementation of a National Rural Land Use Policy (NRLUP) is a critical need for the Solomon Islands. Such a policy will address several high priority issues for the country, contribute to addressing areas of land use conflict, and allow opportunities the sustainable development and income generation to be realised.

The Solomon Islands has several characteristics that will define the focus of the NRLUP. These characteristics include customary land ownership, generally strong and viable subsistence agriculture, low levels of development, poor transport and communications infrastructure, increasing development pressures, increasing population, agricultural land use intensification, increasing conflicts over land use and land ownership, a limited ability of local communities to realise development opportunities and capture the benefits, a declining natural resource base, and the high vulnerability of many households and communities to climate change impacts.

A well-designed and effectively- implemented NRLUP has the potential to deliver multiple benefits at multiple scales for the Solomon Islands and its people. Benefits include sustainable land use; systematic land use planning; the maintenance and enhancement of subsistence agriculture; the development of market agriculture; a reduction in land use conflicts; and infrastructure development and income generation for households and communities, provincially and nationally.

There are numerous challenges to achieving these outcomes, the most significant of which are institutional challenges. Defining and putting in place the institutions and institutional relationships required to implement the NRLUP is critical to the success of the policy. Constructive working relationships and collaboration between government ministries at the national level, and between national institutions and provincial institutions is critical to the success of this policy.

Land use planning may occur at multiple scales: at the national, provincial, constituency, ward and community and household levels. National and provincial governments may undertake land use planning to ensure systematic and planned development, reduce land use conflicts, and to generate national and provincial wealth and income. However, governments must accept that the primary purpose of land use planning is to achieve appropriate development, sustainable livelihoods and food security of households and communities in the Solomon Islands.

Consequently, at the core of the NRLUP is participatory community-based land use planning, whereby communities actively contribute to the development of their own land use plans, and as a consequence, are more likely to own and implement these plans. In this approach, households and communities make their own *informed choices* about their development futures and development pathways. Thus the role of government is the provision of the knowledge, resources and processes necessary to enable local





communities to understand and assess their local forces of change impinging on them, and to make the development decisions they may wish.

Several broad issues define the context and operating environment underpinning land use planning in the Solomon Islands. Some of these issues can be identified from global trends (e.g. climate change impacts), others were identified from the previous studies conducted in the Solomon Islands, and still others emerged from the extensive stakeholder consultation process conducted throughout the Solomon Islands Provinces, and nationally. Each of these issues is described briefly below, followed by the Policy Objectives and Implementation Guidelines developed in response to these issues.





CHAPTER 2: Issues Relevant to the National Rural Land Use Policy

2.0 Climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation

The impacts of climate change pose considerable challenges for land use and land use planning in the Solomon Islands. Temperature rises, changes in rainfall patterns (timing, intensity and amount), sea level rise, salinisation of water tables and of soils, and changes in flooding patterns among other impacts, will have serious and far-reaching implications for agriculture and food security, fisheries, urban settlements and tourism. Climate change impacts will require responses from National and Provincial governments, and from communities and individual family households. Some communities, for example coastal settlements and communities on low-lying atolls, may be under imminent threat from climate change, and should commence immediate land use planning to enable them to adapt to climate change impacts. Other changes, such as the development of sustainable agricultural systems that are adapted to new climate regimes, will require progressive and evolving responses. Land that was previously assessed as suitable for particular agricultural production systems may no longer be suited over the medium to longer term, and communities must adjust their agricultural production systems accordingly.

The recent village-level climate change vulnerability and adaptation study of Choiseul Province highlighted the critical need to undertake climate adaptation planning at the household and community levels (Mataki et al. 2013).

For these reasons, land use planning and land use policy in the Solomon Islands must incorporate climate change adaptation measures at all necessary spatial scales, from National and Provincial, to community and household.

Sustainable land use can also contribute to climate change mitigation. In the Solomon Islands context, forest clearing is a major contributor to national greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing emissions through sustainable land use can be achieved through reductions in forest clearing. The engagement of forested areas in the UN Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation program (UNREDD+) offers an opportunity for income generation by land owners whereby ecosystem services payments for carbon stored in living trees are received by those who conserve the trees. REDD+ payments offer a viable alternative to forestry on land that should not be cleared due to steep slopes, shallow soils, sensitive catchment areas and adjacent to water courses, or the need to preserve forests for biodiversity conservation purposes.

2.1 Identification and extension of sustainable agricultural systems to ensure food security

Identification and extension of sustainable agricultural systems adapted to new climate regimes (and other forces of change) is necessary to ensure food security. Subsistence agriculture in the Solomon Islands is generally strong, and many communities currently





have an adequate level of food security. However, climate change impacts will render some of these traditional agricultural systems less effective over time. For example, with climate change, some areas of the Solomon Islands may experience increased rainfall days and decreased solar radiation (Mataki et al. 2013). In the southwest Pacific, mean annual rainfall over 4000 mm is considered excessive for agriculture, and some staple crops in the Solomon Islands such as a sweet potato are particularly sensitive to long periods of rainfall (AusAID 2006). In addition, climate change impacts may force the retreat of some agricultural production from the coastal plains into higher slope mountainous areas, which in turn will require changes to traditional agricultural systems to ensure their sustainability. Consequently, the development of new sustainable agricultural systems adapted to evolving climate regimes must accompany land use planning.

In addition to climate change impacts, other forces of change affecting subsistence agriculture include agricultural intensification caused by reductions in shifting cultivation, reductions in garden size, shortened fallow periods, and population increases. Loss of soil fertility is also contributing to decreased agricultural production (AusAID 2006; Mataki et al. 2013; Solomon Islands National Land Use Policy Consultation Report 2014).

At the core of rural land use planning is the assessment of land capability (limitations) and land suitability (opportunities) for agriculture. Knowledge of what land is suited, or unsuited, to particular crops, is critical for farmers. The Solomon Islands Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) has traditionally provided this information to farmers, although this function has diminished in recent years due to lack of funding. However, it is critical that this function be reinstated immediately and expanded as part of the community-based land use planning process. The trend towards agricultural intensification, coupled with climate change impacts, will require that land suitability assessments be adjusted accordingly, and MAL will need to adjust its assessment procedures to suit this new land use planning environment.

2.2 Accommodating population increases and increasing land use pressure

Population increases due to natural increase (e.g. Malaita Province), in-migration (Honiara City), and relocation of displaced communities due to climate change, are increasing were reported during the policy formation process (SINLUP Consultation Report). Land use pressure and land use conflict is increasing in several areas. During the Malaita Provincial consultation, participating stakeholders made a specific request for urgent land use planning support to help accommodate population increases and increasing land use pressure and conflict in their Province. Targeted land use planning in areas of high population pressure and increasing land use intensification must be a priority.

2.3 Relocation of displaced people





People may be displaced from their home areas due to a variety of factors, including sea level rise (inundation of land and farm gardens, saltwater contamination of freshwater aquifers, flooding of low-lying atolls etc.), land degradation, population increases, earthquake disasters, and developments such as urban expansion and mining. Land use planning for the relocation of displaced communities will be the responsibility of both National and Provincial governments, as well as the affected communities themselves. Affected communities will include those who are displaced, as well as those who live in areas where displaced communities are to be relocated. Displaced people relocation planning (DPRP) must be one of the central strategies of National and Provincial land use planning.

2.4 Assessing the cumulative impacts of land use change

Land use change, for example from forested land through logging activities to agricultural use or degraded land, or from agricultural use to mining or urban settlement; and land use intensification from smallholder subsistence agriculture to broad scale plantation agriculture, is occurring at various rates throughout the Solomon Islands.

While the positive and negative impacts of these individual developments may be minor, their cumulative impacts at a ward, landscape, catchment, provincial or national scale, may be significant. Negative impacts may include a reduction in ecosystem services, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, and increased food insecurity. For example, one small scale inappropriate logging operation may result in only localised land degradation impacts, while several inappropriate logging operations within a single catchment may have significant impacts on catchment erosion, river turbidity, sedimentation, river courses and flooding regimes, and loss of productivity of coastal fisheries.

For example, during the Makira Provincial stakeholder consultation, participants reported the case of a community that had changed its land use from subsistence agriculture to predominately cash-crop, non-food agriculture. According to participants, this community was no longer self-sufficient in food production, and now had to travel several kilometres from their home area to purchase required food. While this impact may have affected only one community, a significant expansion of cash-crop, non-food agriculture over time may have ward-level or even provincial impacts.

Also of concern is the potential loss of high quality agricultural land to other land uses, for example to urban settlement or industrial use. High quality agricultural land should be identified, and protected from loss to other uses. Urban expansion in particular has the potential to remove locally valuable agricultural land from production, thus requiring food for growing urban markets to be transported further than necessary.

2.5 Natural resource and environmental decline due to inappropriate forest logging and sustainable agricultural systems

Decline in natural resource condition and loss of environmental assets and processes were reported during the provincial consultations, as well as being noted in several





studies conducted in the in the Solomon Islands (AusAID 2006; Mataki et al. 2013). Issues such as soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, loss of agricultural productivity, water quality decline, fishery decline and loss of ecosystem services have been reported. During the provincial consultations, the expansion of inappropriate forest logging operations was frequently mentioned. Land use planning must deal with sustainable land use and land management; and mitigation and reversal of land degradation. In particular, sound land use planning prior to, and during, forestry operations is a high priority.

2.6 Adoption of broad scale, landscape-level approaches to land use planning

Ecosystem and environmental processes operate at a broader landscape and catchment scales. For example, conservation of biodiversity values, and maintenance of ecosystem services and hydrological processes require a broad scale planning approach. Thus land use planning in the Solomon Islands must also operate at a broader landscape level, as well as at a smaller, local level. It is only through this approach that the cumulative impacts of development and land use change and intensification can also be addressed in land use planning. Calls for land use planning to adopt a 'ridge-to-reef' approach are appropriate, and landscape approaches to land use planning must be adopted as a guiding principal for the Solomon Islands land use policy.

2.7 Development pressures, opportunities and risks

Development pressures are increasing in many parts of the Solomon Islands. This is clear from newspaper reports quoting both land owners and prospective developers, and from the provincial consultation outcomes conducted as part of this study.

Developments involving intensification of land use or changes to land use pose both opportunities and risks. The opportunities relate to the potential for increased household, community, provincial, and national incomes, provision of much needed infrastructure such as roads, ports and communications, and provision of improved social services such as education and health services. The risks of inappropriate or unsustainable development relate to degradation of natural resources and the environment, the loss of ecosystem services upon which communities and households depend, threats to food security, and the opportunity-cost of not pursuing more sustainable or appropriate developments. Another risk associated with inappropriate or ill-planned developments is that local communities may not be able to capture the financial benefits of local developments, while accruing many of the social and economic costs of such developments. Inappropriate or poorly planned forestry and mining operations provide examples of where this risk is high.

It is clear from the NRLUP provincial consultations, and media reports over the last 12 months, that many communities feel ill-prepared to evaluate, control, plan for, and adapt to new developments with which they are unfamiliar. The Solomon Islands has





experienced numerous inappropriate, unsustainable or poorly planned and executed developments in the fields of forestry, mining and agricultural intensification. Nevertheless, developments in each of these industries offer significant potential for providing financial and other benefits to local communities, and provincially and nationally.

Customary land tenure is often reported as a constraint to development, as local communities either resist land use intensification and land use change, or struggle to reach consensus among customary land owners as to an appropriate course of action, or the equitable sharing of costs and benefits that may accrue from the development.

On the other hand, customary land ownership can be seen as a strength from the point of view of land use planning. Communities have the right to reject what they see as inappropriate development, and are in a strong negotiating position with prospective developers to ensure that the communities achieve their desired economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes. However, in order to be able to take advantage of this strength requires that certain preconditions be met.

- Conflicts around customary land ownership must be resolved; and formal legal recognition of ownership must be established.
- Communities must have the knowledge required, and the planning, decision making and consensus building capacity, to enable them to make *informed choices* about their development future.
- A robust and appropriate consensus building process is required that will enable communities to reach agreement about their future development options.
- Communities that are embarking on particular development pathways such as those involving forest logging or significant intensification of agriculture (e.g. extensive plantation agriculture) will require participatory guidance and mentoring from technically competent organisations. The respective government line-ministries at both the National and Provincial levels should provide this guidance and mentoring. Anecdotal evidence, including the outcomes from the provincial consultations conducted as part of the land use policy formulation, suggests that government line-ministries are not currently adequately fulfilling this role, and there is potential to strengthen this governmental role in guiding community decision making. Alternatively, appropriately skilled and adequately resourced NGOs may be able to contribute to this role in partnership with government, or as an alternative to government participation.

2.8 Free, prior and informed consent of customary land owners to development

One specific area of informed-choice decision making relates to the situation where proposed developments involving land use are imposed on a community by outside





interests, without the community's informed consent or control. This issue was raised several times during the provincial consultations in relation to the activities of forest logging companies, and during the community-based land use planning pilot in Choiseul Province in relation to mining development.

The concept of *free, prior and informed consent* to development is relevant to the Solomon Islands NRLUP context. Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of customary land owners must be required before proposed developments are approved by government or allowed to proceed. FPIC is progressively being adopted as an international policy and legal standard, particularly in relation to protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. It is now enshrined in the indigenous land rights laws of countries such as Australia and Canada, and Article 10 of the United Nations (UN) Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007), and is required by the UN in its operations (e.g. UNDP 2013).

The need for FPIC has been particularly highlighted in relation to mining development (e.g. Buxton and Wilson 2013, Doyle and Carino 2013).

Brief definitions of the key terms of FPIC concept (adapted from UNDP 2013) are provided below.

'Free' refers to a consent given voluntarily and in the absence of coercion, intimidation or manipulation. The concept also requires that the decision making processes instituted to give consent, are conducted in a timeframe, location, language and process that is best suited to those whose consent is sought. It also requires that all those in the community must actively and freely participate in the decision making process, regardless of age, gender or standing.

'Prior' means that the consent should be sought well in advance of government approval or development commencement. This requires that the process commences at the early stage of planning investment so that those giving their consent have stronger influence over the final design of the proposed development, and that sufficient time is allowed for analysing and understanding what is being proposed.

'Informed' refers to the need for appropriate engagement, awareness raising, knowledge acquisition, understanding, and capacity development among those giving consent so that they can make an informed decision regarding the proposed development. This requires that the nature of the information, and how it is presented, should be in a manner that is fully comprehensible, culturally appropriate, balanced, unbiased and independent. This information should be provided on an ongoing basis as is necessary.

'Consent' means that a decision is reached using appropriate participatory and customary decision making processes. Consent may be conditional on other things occurring first, it may apply to part or all of a development proposal, and it may be reviewable at a future time.





FPIC is *not* synonymous with ‘consultation’. Although consultation processes may be employed as part of the FPIC procedures, FPIC requires that a much higher standard of engagement and capacity development is achieved, and considerable power in land use decision making is conferred on those who must give their consent.

Many of the land use conflicts occurring in the Solomon Islands are due to the lack of a formal FPIC process being adopted in public policy. The lack of an FCIP process means that many communities are deeply suspicious of development opportunities. The inability of communities to effectively assess and give formal consent to these opportunities is posing a constraint on potential appropriate and sustainable development proceeding.

2.9 Customary land ownership and customary land use decision making

Community-based land use planning and the establishment of land ownership will often be linked. The establishment of land ownership, in both a culturally acceptable and legal sense, may be necessary before land use planning can proceed. This may be both a community need, as well as a prerequisite for prospective investors. Alternatively, where land ownership is already established, or where land use decisions do not impinge upon land ownership boundaries, land use planning may proceed without processes to establish land ownership.

During both the National and Provincial stakeholder consultations, there were strong calls for a more robust and accessible system for establishing customary land ownership boundaries using the traditional community-based and chiefly system. Concerns were expressed that the current land ownership dispute resolution system involving local courts was inadequate and inappropriate, and tended to amplify disputes due to the adversarial nature of courts, and the lack of opportunities for consensus building and compromise. Many stakeholders felt that a reversion to the traditional Chiefly system of customary land ownership decision-making was necessary. During the Choiseul Provincial consultation, it emerged that a local NGO, the Luru Land Conference, was successfully implementing a community-based, customary land ownership recognition process in that Province.

In contrast to the view that it was necessary to revert to the traditional system of customary land ownership decision-making, was the opinion expressed during two of the provincial consultation workshops (Malaita and Makira), that traditional land ownership and land use decision making systems were breaking down, and may be inadequate for contemporary circumstances. This reported breakdown in customary land-related decision making, may be a reflection of the rapid social and economic changes occurring in these two provinces.

Stakeholders claimed that:

- people no longer always consulted the chief when making land use decisions, as they would have traditionally done;





- the number of absentee landowners was increasing, as people now commonly own land in more than one location, and therefore did not reside in the area where they owned land, and thus may not participate in local decision making processes involving land ownership and land use;
- individuals or families increasingly wanted their own land, and were breaking away from the community or the customary (chiefly) decision making process; some people were seen as “greedy” who wished to sell their land, or operate as an individual household, rather than as a member of the community;
- some chiefs did not have the personal and leadership attributes necessary to enable them to build consensus around customary land ownership, or around future land use decisions;
- some chiefs had a perceived ‘conflict of interest’ where land use or land ownership decisions were being made, and stood to personally benefit from particular decisions.

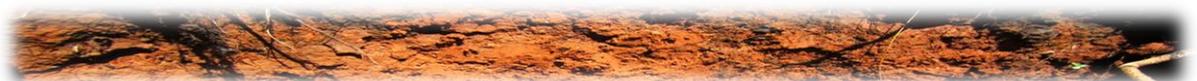
This is a critical issue for the Solomon Islands, and despite several attempts to do so, it has yet to be resolved. Given the above discussion, it is clear that the local court-based system alone is considered unsatisfactory by many stakeholders. During the consultation, many stakeholders stated that the traditional chiefly system should be used to establish land ownership boundaries. On the other hand, for the reasons given above, the traditional chiefly system for establishing land ownership may be inadequate or ill-equipped to deal with contemporary circumstances in some areas.

It is clear that establishment of customary land ownership, and community-based land use planning, should be integrated processes. It is essential that community-based land use planning only proceed in areas where customary land ownership is already established and agreed upon, or where land ownership is not an issue.

Consequently, where community-based land use planning is requested, an initial assessment must be undertaken that establishes the ownership status of the land.

2.10 The need for equal participation on decisions regarding the use of land, including women’s participation

During both the national and provincial consultations, concerns were raised regarding the unequal participation of some groups, in particular, women, in land use decision making at the community level. It was recognised that participation in community-based land use planning processes would need to specifically target women in a manner that allows them to express opinions unfettered by traditional constraints. During the provincial consultations, it was noted that, while several women attended, discussions tended to be dominated by the men, and it was uncommon for women to publicly express an opinion in such forums. Community-based land use planning must employ





strategies and techniques that allow both women and less powerful groups to participate fully in discussions and decision making.

2.11 The necessary institutional arrangements to facilitate the implementation of the Solomon Islands National Land Use Policy

The greatest single challenge to implementing a National Land Use Policy in the Solomon Islands is the institutional challenge. The new land use policy requires a collaborative, inter-sectoral, inter-organisational response from government and other stakeholders, where rural land use planning is defined more broadly than was previously the case in the Solomon Islands. Land use planning was traditionally confined to technical decisions surrounding agricultural land use. Secondly, the new land use policy requires that the philosophy underpinning land use in the Solomon Islands evolve from a narrow technical assessment of land suitability for agriculture, to a participatory, community-based land use planning process, whereby participating communities also assess their land resources, and development opportunities, in relation to climate change adaptation, disaster risk mitigation, and other non-agricultural land uses. In addition, this new process also requires a targeted capacity building and training program with communities and other stakeholders, including government staff, so that community-based land use planning processes can be sustained after the departure of technical experts. The role of local 'community facilitators' will be critical to ensuring that this process continues.

Against this backdrop of significant change, is the current limited capacity of the Land Use Branch of Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, which is located within the Department of Agricultural Planning. The Land Use Branch has not been functioning effectively for several years, and is severely under-resourced. Although Land Use Officers have been deployed in five Provinces, none of them has received the required training in land resource assessment and land use planning, and they are thus unable to fulfil the function for which they are employed. There is only one trained Land Use Officer in the country, based in Honiara, and the sole natural resource information source used in land use planning is the 1976 publication *Land Resources of the Solomon Islands* by the authors Hansell and Wall. While much of the information included in this publication still be relevant, some will be now outdated and requires updating.

Consequently, there is a critical need to implement the institutional arrangements necessary to drive the implementation of the NRLUP. One immediate challenge is a need to forge a collaborative, whole-of-government approach to land use planning, where individual ministries undertake appropriate and effective land use planning in their own sectors, but also come together to work collaboratively on implementing and reviewing land use planning. In particular, the Ministries of Forestry, Agriculture, and Environment must work together, both at the community level and at broader scales.





To facilitate the implementation of the new policy it is proposed that a National Land Use Secretariat be established within the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Secretariat must have clear guidelines and terms of reference, dedicated staff, and sufficient political and policy power to drive the institutional changes necessary within each Ministry and between Ministries. Led by its own senior manager, the Secretariat will be staffed by specifically recruited specialised officers who have expertise in key areas. The Secretariat will work with a National Land Use Working Group made up of the Permanent Secretaries of each of the participating ministries. The Secretariat and the Working Group will report to the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

2.12 Establishing the political will and leadership necessary to champion and implement the policy at all levels of government

The national government must generate the political will and leadership required to implement the NRLUP. Four strategies will help to develop this political will.

- Strong political and policy leadership must be demonstrated by the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet in supporting the adoption and implementation of the policy.
- Cabinet Ministers, in particular those whose government agencies have responsibility for land use planning in their own sectors, must support the NRLUP and its implementation, and hold their agencies and the senior executive accountable.
- Generating grassroots demand for the implementation of community-based land use planning, through public awareness and publicity campaigns, will create community pressure for the delivery of government services to support the process.
- Devolving the knowledge, skills and resources necessary to deliver the program to the Provincial level of government is likely to be more successful due to improved cost-effectiveness of local delivery, and stronger accountability to local communities.
- The role of the National Land Use Secretariat in facilitating, overseeing, coordinating, monitoring and reporting on the progress of implementing the NRLUP, and the performance of each Ministry will help improve the governance and impact of the policy.

2.13 Promoting and publicising community-based land use planning

Communities must be made aware of the opportunity to participate in community-based land use planning, what it entails, the outcomes it can achieve for them, and invited to participate if they wish. This requires that community-based land use planning have a clear identity, standardised and high quality procedures and processes, and a clear





branding. The program must be easy for communities to identify and access. The community-based land use planning program will be given a working title of the *Our Land* program, and this title (or its replacement) will be used in all publicity promoting the program. There will be multiple pathways provided for communities to register an interest in participating in the program viz. through the collaborating ministries, by phone, mail and online.

Case-study examples of communities who have successfully completed the *Our Land* Program and testimonials from community members will be used to promote the program.

The Solomon Islands National Rural Land Use Policy has three goals and fourteen policy objectives.







CHAPTER 3: National Rural Land Use Policy Goals

To accomplish the objectives and strategy of the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2011 – 2020, and the Policy Statements of the present Solomon Islands Government, NRLUP has developed the following goals to guide and achieve its objectives and strategies.

1. To enhance, facilitate and support commercial development for Productive Sectors within government Ministries, ensure Natural Resources are used sustainably to empower economic activities.
2. To establish a National Land Use Secretariat with representative from relevant Government agencies and interested stakeholders organizations.
3. To ensure that natural resources are used sustainably, and that environmental assets and ecosystem services are maintained and enhanced.
4. To ensure that critical forces of change, such as climate change impacts, disaster risk reduction, population increases, and sustainable development opportunities are addressed in land use planning.
5. To implement participatory community-based land use planning, and community-capacity development, so that Solomon Islanders can make *informed choices* about how they will use their land in order to sustain and improve their future livelihoods and maintain food security.







CHAPTER 4: Policy Context, linkages and Approaches

4.0 Context and linkages

The National Rural Land Use Policy 2015 – 2020 is aligned with and will contribute to the achievement of:

- The Policy Statement of the present Solomon Islands Government. The NRLUP addresses its objectives through the following Ministries; Environment, Conservation, Climate Change, Meteorology and Disaster Management; Agriculture and Livestock; Lands, Housing and Survey; Infrastructure Development; and Forestry and Reforestation.
- The Solomon Islands **NDS**. In particular, it addresses the objective; “Promote sustainable use of natural resources to increase production, productivity, value adding and rural incomes”, and strategy to; “Develop agriculture and livestock through agricultural marketing and land planning to improve food security, livelihoods and community sufficiency in the rural areas through targeted multi-disciplinary interventions to diversify agriculture and promote agribusiness and alternative livelihoods”.

The policy is in line with and supports the implementation of the **National Agriculture and Livestock Sector Policy** and the **National Action Plan to address Land Degradation**. The National Rural Land Use Policy is intended to deliver on the Government’s policies targeting the land users from rural to national level.

4.1 Guiding Principles

The Solomon Islands National Rural Land Use Policy shall be guided by the following principles:

- 4.1.1 Alignment with and guidance from the Solomon Islands national constitution
This policy framework and its implementation modalities shall be guided by the constitution of the independent state of Solomon Islands.
- 4.1.2 Gender equity and involvement of youth, children, people with special needs and church leaders
Land Use Planning and decision makings will determine activities in the future generations. The implementation of this policy shall ensure equity of all the above mentioned.
- 4.1.3 Respect for culture and rights of indigenous people
Land use will impact on land resources utilization and people’s livelihoods. The culture and rights of indigenous communities shall be respected throughout the planning and implementation of the NLUP programs and activities.





4.1.4 Alignment with and guidance from recommendations from relevant and original resources on natural resources and non-living resources of Solomon Islands
The framework and implementation modalities of this policy shall be guided by recommendations of resources that cover the original classification, conservation, use and management of natural resources and non-living resources of Solomon Islands.

4.1.5 Land use planning that promotes friendly environment, risk reductions, economic development and sustainability

The implementation of this policy shall ensure promotion of all the above mentioned.

4.1.6 Mainstreaming and integration

Land use planning is everyone's business and shall involve relevant experts, responsible authorities, stakeholders, communities or individuals in an integrated and holistic manner.

4.2 *Policy Commitments*

The government of Solomon Islands:

- i. Recognizes the participation and roles of Solomon Islands citizens (landowners or communities, chiefs or tribal and church leaders), relevant experts, responsible authorities and stakeholders in relation to Land use aspects.
- ii. Shall support various developments and activities in agriculture sector to expand and maximise productions on available land, strengthen research and marketing links, establish partnerships and promote food security.
- iii. Shall develop the capacity of Solomon Islands citizens, institutions and communities to manage their land for economic development, sustainability and reduce related land issues.
- iv. Recognizes the importance of having relevant and up-to-date information on different land and its resources in Solomon Islands. It shall provide as the baseline for possible developments in all sectors.
- v. Shall ensure effective land use planning with sustainable land use and management; and mitigation and reversal of land degradation.
- vi. Shall forge and maintain partnerships and seek the support of its development partners through programs, projects, budget support mechanisms and innovative financing mechanisms for the implementation of this National Rural Land Use Policy.

4.3 *Vision*





Land use is an arena for all citizens, sectors, users and developers of Solomon Islands for discussion, planning and development from rural to national level. It will meet the demand for quality and affordable growth, enhance economic development and opportunity, maintain environmental quality and cultural heritage, and balance all objectives with protecting the property rights of landowners.

4.4 *Mission statement*

The National Rural Land Use Policy is a national document of Solomon Islands. Its mission is purposely to guide landowners, authorities, relevant experts, stakeholders and developers in planning and developing efficient strategies for sustainable and economical land use.







CHAPTER 5: Policy Objectives and Strategies

5.0 Solomon Islands Government will provide the necessary institutional support and appropriate governance for proactive land use planning.

5.0.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.0.1.1 Solomon Islands government will provide the institutional, organisational, financial and governance environment that will enable efficient and effective multi-sectoral land use planning throughout the country.

5.0.1.2 The government will ensure that the financial, human, and technological resources necessary are provided to undertake land use planning at the appropriate administrative and spatial scales.

5.0.1.3 As far as is possible, community-based land use planning processes, knowledge and skills will be developed within Provincial Government administrations to enable provincial implementation of the policy.

5.1 Effective institutional partnerships will be developed for collaboration, coordination, integration and resource sharing in relation to land use planning.

5.1.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.1.1.1 Land use planning will involve the development of strong and effective institutional partnerships between stakeholders for collaboration, coordination, integration, and resource sharing between relevant scales of national, provincial and local community land use planning. Partnering Institutions will include government, non-government, and private sector stakeholders.

5.1.1.2 The role of government staff will be to actively seek out, facilitate, and develop these collaborative partnerships.

5.1.1.3 Information and data relating to land and natural resources, land use and the environment will be freely shared between government agencies, including satellite images and aerial photos, and data stored in geographical information systems.

5.2 Land use planning considerations will be mainstreamed throughout all relevant government agencies and stakeholder organisations.

5.2.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.2.1.1 Land use planning will be a multisectoral process, and will be mainstreamed and coordinated throughout all agencies responsible for development, natural





resource and environmental management, and infrastructure planning and construction.

5.2.1.2A unified, intersectoral and collaborative ‘whole-of-government’ approach to land use planning will be adopted by the Solomon Islands Government.

5.2.1.3A National Land Use Working Group will be set up, constituted of the Permanent Secretaries of key ministries, including those responsible for agriculture, environment, lands, forestry, mines, provincial government, rural development, and fisheries, among others. The Working Group will report annually on progress on implementing this policy to the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

5.2.1.4A National Land Use Secretariat will be set up, constituted of dedicated, specialised staff. The Secretariat will report to both the National Land Use Working Group, and to Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

5.2.1.5The Land Use Secretariat will have clear guidelines and terms of reference, and will be responsible for ensuring that the high level coordination, collaboration and reporting is effective. The Secretariat will not be responsible for land use planning, as this activity will be the responsibility of each line ministry in each sector. The Secretariat’s responsibility lies with guiding, coordinating, and monitoring and reporting on, land use activities.

5.2.1.6Land use planning at the national, provincial, ward and community levels will include both top-down and bottom-up communication processes for consensus building, and integration of the interests and needs of the various land use planning scales.

5.3 Land use planning will be based on an integrated assessment of natural resources, and environmental processes and environmental assets.

5.3.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.3.1.1Land use planning will be based on a sound integrated assessment of natural resources and ecosystem services; including soil, vegetation, water resources, and landscape (‘ridge to reef’) elements and catchment processes.

5.3.1.2Land capability and land suitability assessments will be undertaken for significant developments, including changes of land use, or intensification of land use.

5.3.1.3As part of the community-based land use planning process, the community capacity will be developed to self-assess local natural resources and important ecosystem services, and land capability and land suitability in their local context.

5.4 The long-term sustainable livelihoods and food security needs of local communities will have priority in land use and development decision making.





5.4.1 *Implementation Guidelines*

5.4.1.1 First and foremost, land use planning at every level will consider the sustainable livelihood needs of local communities.

5.4.1.2 The maintenance and enhancement of household and community food security is a priority for land use planning.

5.4.1.3 National and provincial interests will not be pursued to the detriment of local community interests, particularly their sustainable livelihood and food security needs.

5.5 *Community-based land use planning and capacity development will be a priority throughout the Solomon Islands.*

5.5.1 *Implementation Guidelines*

5.5.1.1 Community-based land use planning will be undertaken as a priority throughout the Solomon Islands.

5.5.1.2 Those communities most under pressure from forces of change, or risks to their livelihoods, will be encouraged to participate in a local land use planning process.

5.5.1.3 Local and traditional knowledge, as well as scientific knowledge, will be utilised in the community-based land use planning process.

5.5.1.4 Traditional and customary land use policies will be recognised in the community-based land use planning process.

5.5.1.5 Land use planning will be undertaken within a broader community development decision-making context, whereby participating communities reflect upon their desired future development objectives and modalities.

5.5.1.6 Land use planning processes will be accompanied by community capacity development, education and awareness-raising, and *informed-choice community decision-making*, so that communities feel strong ownership of their plans.

5.5.1.7 Where land ownership is unclear, or land ownership disputes are present or likely to occur, land use planning will incorporate an appropriate customary land ownership recognition consensus-building process as a prerequisite.

5.6 *Development opportunities and risks will be systematically and rigorously assessed, and integrated into the land use planning process.*

5.6.1 *Implementation Guidelines*





5.6.1.1 Land use planning will include systematic and rigorous technical, financial and community-based assessments of potential development opportunities and risks, including ecosystem service payment opportunities (e.g. REDD+).

5.6.1.2 Development opportunities will be linked to improving and sustaining the livelihoods of local communities, as well as the maintenance and enhancement of natural resources and environmental assets.

5.6.1.3 Land use planning will include assessments of the cumulative and landscape impacts of proposed developments (biophysical, socio-cultural and economic).

5.6.1.4 Community decision making regarding development opportunities and risks will be based on effective community education and awareness programs, and Informed-choice decision making processes.

5.7 Government will adopt an explicit and well-structured 'free, prior and informed consent' process with customary land owners and affected communities when proposing, authorising or approving developments

5.7.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.7.1.1 Government at all levels will adopt a 'free, prior and informed consent' (FPIC) process with customary land owners and affected communities when proposing, authorising or approving developments.

5.7.1.2 Clear guidelines will be provided by the National Land Use Secretariat to both government agencies and prospective developers as to how a FPIC process must be structured and implemented.

5.7.1.3 Government agencies authorising or approving significant developments affecting communities, such as those related to mining, forestry or large scale intensive agriculture will, at the early stages of development design, submit an FPIC plan to their Permanent Secretaries for approval.

5.7.1.4 Responsible government agencies will require that developers report periodically on the implementation of an approved FPIC plan.

5.8 Education, awareness and capacity development programs for relevant stakeholders will accompany land use planning processes.

5.8.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.8.1.1 Land use planning will be undertaken by or facilitated by multiple sectors and multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, civil society and private sector organisations, as well as local communities.

5.8.1.2 Education and awareness programs will be implemented that develop an understanding of sustainable land use planning, and, where necessary and





relevant, to develop the capacity to undertake in-house land use planning assessments. This will include training for the staff of government, NGOs and private sector organisations, and the formation of land use planning institutional relationships for co-learning and collaboration.

5.8.1.3 Land use planning processes must be trusted by local communities to provide independent advice that is guided by the long term community interests.

5.8.1.4 The Solomon Islands Government will develop a targeted education and advocacy program using electronic, web-based and print media publicising the land use planning program (the “OUR LAND” program), and describing clear pathways through which individuals, groups and communities can participate.

5.8.1.5 Successful case-study examples of community-based land use planning and development will be identified and promoted as a key feature of the education and awareness strategy to demonstrate what is possible.

5.9 Government line-agencies will undertake multiple-objective land use planning that considers important issues beyond their narrow sectoral boundaries.

5.9.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.9.1.1 Land use planning will be considered a holistic process involving the consideration of multiple objectives.

5.9.1.2 Government natural resource management line-agencies (forestry, agriculture, mines, environment etc.) will adopt multiple-objective land use planning that considers issues relating to sustainability and the protection of household and community livelihoods, which may extend beyond their narrow sectoral concerns.

5.9.1.3 Relevant ministries will report annually to the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet on the initiatives undertaken in the previous 12 months for mainstreaming and implementing land use planning within their organisations.

5.10 Avoidance and mitigation of land use disputes will be central to land use planning processes.

5.10.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.10.1.1 Land use planning will incorporate strategies that will lead to the avoidance and mitigation of land use disputes. Such strategies will involve inclusive, participatory land use planning exercises involving all key stakeholders, as well as a clear conflict-assessment process.





5.10.1.2 Local land tenure assessment processes, based on traditional customary land ownership and participatory genealogy assessments, will be undertaken when deemed necessary.

5.10.1.3 Training will be undertaken, as necessary, for government and non-government staff in stakeholder consensus building and dispute resolution strategies, particularly designed for community-based land use planning and natural resource management.

5.10.1.4 Community-based land use planning will undertake a preliminary assessment of the need for customary land ownership recording before proceeding with land use planning exercises with participating communities.

5.11 Land use planning will ensure intergenerational equity, and participation and social justice for disadvantaged or less powerful groups.

5.11.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.11.1.1 Land use planning involves making longer terms decisions regarding the future of households and communities and their livelihoods. Consequently, land use planning processes will consider the needs and interests of future generations (intergenerational equity), as well as addressing the needs of women and disadvantaged or less powerful groups in the community.

5.11.1.2 Land use planning processes will ensure the effective participation of women and disadvantaged groups in land use decision making.

5.12 National and Provincial Land Use Strategies will be developed to plan for future development, and to accommodate the forces of change affecting land use.

5.12.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.12.1.1 Both National and Provincial governments will develop land use strategies in priority areas, to plan for future development, and to accommodate the forces of change affecting the communities for whom they are planning.

5.12.1.2 National and provincial land use strategies will be developed collaboratively by National and Provincial governments in order that issues of importance at the various spatial, social and economic scales are incorporated into the planning process.

5.12.1.3 Provincial governments in particular will work closely with their local communities in identifying land use planning priorities, and opportunities.





5.12.1.4 National and provincial land use strategies will plan for the expansion of urban development into rural land; the resettlement of displaced communities; and the protection of high quality agricultural land from loss to other uses, particularly on urban fringes to maintain food supply to local urban markets.

5.13 A Solomon Islands national land use inventory and database will be instituted.

5.13.1 Implementation Guidelines

5.13.1.1 The government will develop a national land use geographical information system and data base (NLUDB), and require that new developments are entered into this data base through focal points in each Ministry.

5.13.1.2 The NLUDB will list land highly suited to specific developments, and allow Provincial and National governments to bring together willing communities and interested investors.

5.13.1.3 The Solomon Islands Government, through the National Land Use Secretariat, will undertake a systematic monitoring and reporting of land use and land use change in the Solomon Islands. This reporting will be undertaken on an annual basis.

5.13.1.4 Data stored in geographical information systems, and other land use related information, will be freely shared between government agencies, and made available to be stored on the NLUDB.







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