

A close-up photograph of a smiling woman with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a floral patterned top. She is standing in a lush green garden with various plants and trees in the background. The lighting is bright and natural, suggesting an outdoor setting.

# Community Perceptions of Gender Norms and Economic Opportunity in Solomon Islands

A study funded by Oxfam and the Australian  
Government initiative Strongim Bisnis



# Strongim Bisnis in Solomon Islands

- Inclusive economic development program funded by the Australian Government
- Focus sectors: tourism, cocoa, coconut
- Strengthening women's participation and empowerment

# Strongim Bisnis – Why women?

- Women have vital roles across the whole value chain and produce positive, long-lasting economic results.
- Strongim Bisnis believes Improving women's capacity of engaging in business will improve the competitiveness of its focus sectors – cocoa, coconut and tourism – and it makes business sense for the private sector to promote WEE

# Oxfam in Solomon Islands

- Since 2003
- Gender Justice, Active Citizenship, Resilience, Humanitarian
- Partnerships: communities, NGOs, government, aid agencies, CSOs

# The study

- In-depth qualitative study in 3 communities: Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western Provinces (161 participants)
- Community participatory gender analysis workshops (*SEED/SNAP*)
- KIIs (*positive deviants*)
- A detailed discussion and analysis of the norms explored through the vignettes (below)

## Norm: Men should not be involved in unpaid care work

**Scenario summary:** Anna is a successful virgin coconut oil producer and is active in community work. She recently secured a contract with a large coconut oil buyer. The contract has increased Anna's workload and made it difficult for her to manage the business and the domestic work, to the detriment of the business. Anna asks John to do more to help her more around the house and share the household and business responsibilities.

“This is not *kastom* or John does not have any *kastom*. It is women’s work.” Adult woman, Guadalcanal

“It is not the woman who bought the man, It is the man who bought the woman with bride price, so the woman must work for the husband.” Adult woman, Guadalcanal

“A few men will say it’s nice for you to help your wife, but the majority of men will disagree with John helping Anna.” Adult woman, Guadalcanal

“Others will advise John to leave the woman because she is making use of him.” Adult woman, Guadalcanal

“Community will say that John is being led by a woman. He has no power.” Young woman, Western Province

“Most might be jealous and spoil<sup>5</sup> him and advise him not to help her...They will gossip about him. They will cause family problems.” Young woman, Malaita

“[Other men] would think it’s not his role and he’s not behaving like a man.” Young woman, Malaita

“Men who listen to their wife are pulled by the nose and are not men.” Adult man, Malaita

“Most men would remind John of his *kastom* and not to act like a woman in his own home” Adult man, Western Province

“Only men who have jealousy in their minds will discourage John to support his wife because they envy the same opportunity.” Adult man, Western Province

## What people said about sanctions for John and Anna

"They would *spoil* him because he'd be the first one in the community to do work like this."  
Young man, Guadalcanal

"Many men will spoil, tease and laugh at him."  
Adult woman, Guadalcanal

"They will call him a 'houseboy' and will try to influence John not to help Anna. Many of his friends will not want to be his friend anymore as he cannot find time to hang out with them anymore."  
Adult woman, Guadalcanal

"They will look down on John because he is doing a woman's job. They will say that Anna does not respect her husband and they will call John '*Keni Oroa*' (a man who a woman orders around). They will say that John is a woman."  
Adult woman, Malaita

"Although most men may help their wives in the first place, they will be pressured to stop to follow the customary expectations and the normal way of living expected by the community and his family. If he doesn't then it will affect his relationship with the community.

will say to the children, "Go back to your mummy and daddy...they have better food than us. You have a successful business which has turned your father into a woman by doing all the women's jobs."  
Adult woman, Malaita

"Men would discriminate against him and he'd be made fun of by the community, especially men."  
Adult man, Malaita

"Most men would laugh at John for not being able to earn money and doing women's work instead."  
Adult man, Malaita

"They would say that the woman has made John like a slave."  
Adult man, Malaita

"According to culture, an older male relative of John's would tell Anna in the face that the work she wants John to do is not men's work, 'Do not force our boy to do your work for you, we paid big bride price for you so you should do it.'"  
Adult woman, Malaita

## Example finding: unpaid care work

- Unpaid care work a significant barrier to WEE (time and risks).
- Strong norm with sanctions
- Change is wanted and possible if spouses & community members receive financial/other benefits



# Cutting-edge

- Context
- Approach & tools
- Community ownership of information

# Relevance of the study for program design & implementation

- Provided recommendations for programming/partnerships (address norms, economic opportunities, access)
- Deep internal gender reflection/learning by study team -> gender transformative practice

