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**Decentralisation and Central-Local Relations:
A Solomon Islands Case Study on the
Negotiations of Relations
between National and Provincial Governments**

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Abstract

The literature on decentralisation and development emphasises the prominent role played by representatives of central government and representatives of local government in the negotiations of central-local relations. This thesis seeks to investigate this argument by examining the institutional framework between national and provincial governments and the negotiations taking place within a decentralised framework in the Solomon Islands context, focusing on government officials' experiences. Drawing from a case study in the Malaita Province, the most important institutions and procedures for negotiating relations between the national and provincial governments are explored and the extent to which government officials utilise these structures. Furthermore, government officials shared their assessment of the most important institutions dealing with the negotiation of central-local relations. This was important to understand how decentralisation has affected central-local relations.

This study which adopted a qualitative case study approach found that two institutions were established by the national government to undertake negotiations between the national and provincial governments within a decentralised framework. While these institutions do exist in theory, in practice they have not been fully utilised by national government officials, which undermined their ability to fulfil their mandate. Furthermore, the absence of policies and clear guidelines on the conduct of central-local relations means that national officials are not obliged to utilise these institutions, and can use or create alternative platforms such as sectoral mechanisms. Provincial officials, however, do not have this opportunity. This study also found that in the Solomon Islands context, the Ministry of Provincial Government and the Premiers' Conference, as the institutional channels for negotiating central-local relation are not effective due to their limited institutional capacities.

Overall, this thesis concludes that within the context of the provincial government system in the Solomon Islands, the decentralisation policies introduced since the 1980s have had minimal impact in enhancing the relation between the national and provincial governments. In this respect, the establishment of institutions resulting from decentralisation are not the only platforms for encouraging cooperation and collaboration between the national and provincial governments. While the existence of these institutions benefited government officials by providing them with platforms to carry out negotiations between the two different levels of government, their limited utilisation by national officials is contradictory to the initial purposes of decentralisation policy, which is to foster a relation between national provincial and local politicians where they can work together for the people they represent.

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Abbreviations and Glossaries

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
HMA	Honiara Municipal Authority
IGR	Intergovernmental Relations
MDP	Ministry of Development Planning
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOFT	Ministry of Finance and Treasury
MPGIS	Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening
MTDS	Medium Term Development Strategy
NCP	National Coalition Partner
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NFC	National Fiscal Commission
PC	Premiers' Conference
PGA	Provincial Government Act
PGSP	Provincial Governance Strengthening Programme
PIC	Pacific Island Countries
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSC	Public Service Commission
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RC	Resident Commissioner
SMT	Senior Management Team
TPA	Townsville Peace Agreement
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme