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**BISINIS BELONG OLGETA MERE
LONG HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS**

*(INFORMAL ACTIVITIES OF THE WOMEN
OF HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS)*







31.798: RESEARCH PROJECT

**Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
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Massey University**

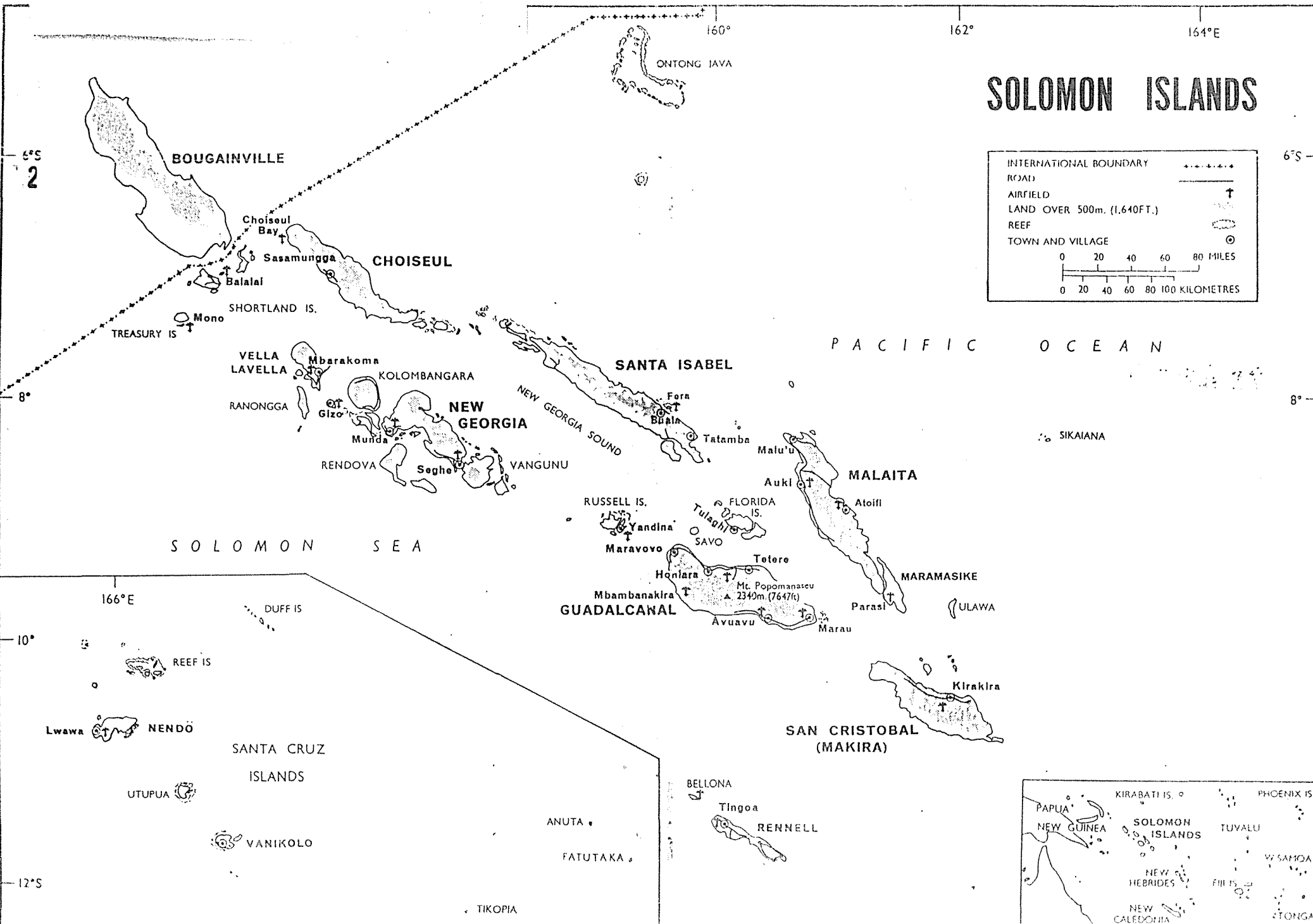
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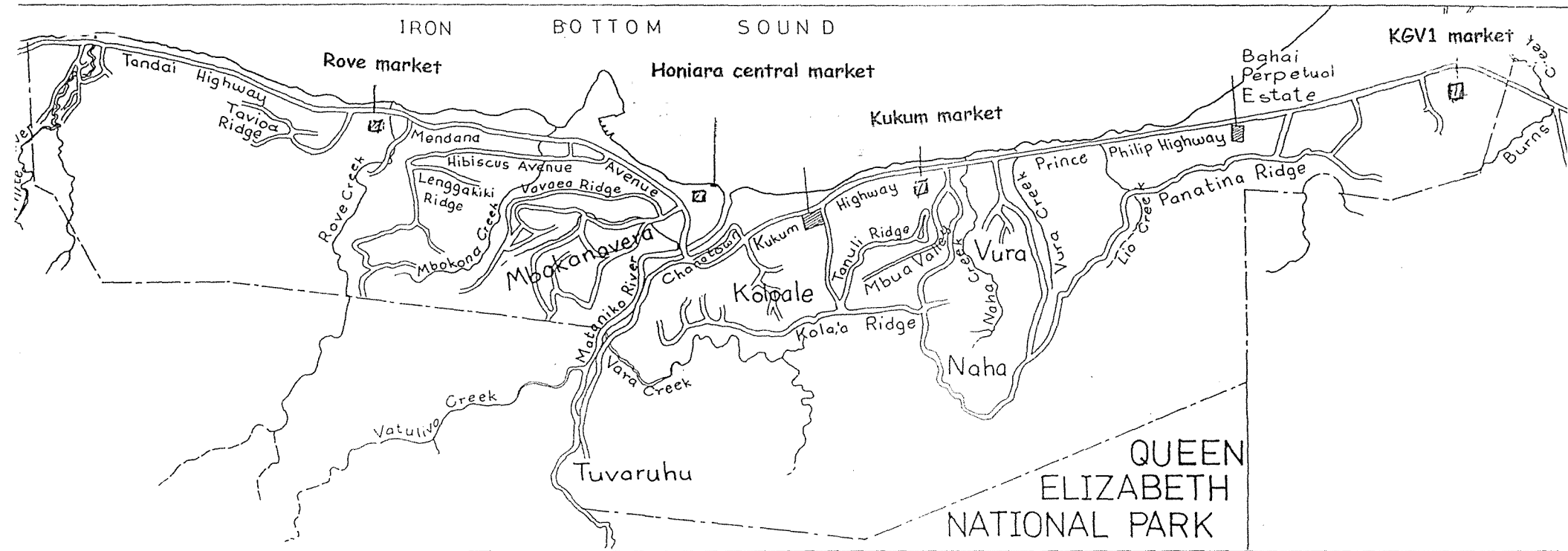
SOLOMON ISLANDS

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY 
ROAD 
AIRFIELD 
LAND OVER 500m. (1,640FT.) 
REEF 
TOWN AND VILLAGE 

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Map of Honiara showing research sites



ABSTRACT

Solomon Islands' women in the Urban Informal Sector (UIS) seem to be invisible to the policy makers both from the perspective of their contribution and their needs. Although government programs aim at assisting small scale entrepreneurs, women as a group are not considered for any form of special assistance. The major reason for this is that most of the enterprises women engaged in, such as petty trading, food processing and livestock raising fall outside census of production survey. Often, these surveys are only conducted among enterprises employing ten or more workers. The small enterprises which are crucially important to the survival of women and their families are ignored.

Women have limited access to critical resources like education, land, technology and credit. Hence they are often excluded from employment in the formal sector. Theoretically, the UIS provides employment for the groups excluded from employment in the formal sector. The notion of the informal sector captures certain peculiarities, such as informality of business organization, use of rudimentary technology, lack of separation of consumption and production, ease of entry and exit, reliance on family labour and apprentices and small requirement for capital.

This study has been carried out on Solomon Islands women in UIS to view the nature and the extent of their activities today and to critically assess any measures in place to support those activities. The data from the fieldwork shows the importance of UIS activities to the food security of urban households, community development, the national economy and individual empowerment. The study reveals the link between UIS and the rural subsistence economy with reciprocal support of cash and food crops. It also reveals that there are women who could have worked in the formal sector actually chose to work in the UIS, for various reasons. The report concludes with a discussion of measures that could be taken to support UIS women in their activities.

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ABBREVIATIONS

RLF	Rural Loan Fund
PfP/K	Partnership for Productivity foundation of Kenya
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
TOL	Temporary Occupation Land
HMA	Honiara Municipal Authority
MOF	Ministry of Finance
ADB	Asian Development Bank
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association
UN	United Nation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
PSRP	Policy and Structural Reform Programme

HRPI Honiara Retail Price Index

SBD Solomon Island Dollar

GLOSSARY

gong hallowed tree trunk used as drum

tuskers pigs raised for their tusks

fono Samoan Governing Council

mana natural power

mafa'a to curse

CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDY

Introduction

To the visitor to Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, the first striking feature as one drives into the city is of women sitting on the road side selling their products. These are women betel nut and fresh coconut sellers whose targeted customers are pedestrians who stop to chat or quench their thirst in the heat and the dust of Honiara. There are many more stalls away from the main road. As one wanders around the back streets, the full picture comes into view. Just about everywhere are women and teenage girls selling their wares, jewelry, cooked food, dyed clothes and so on. This scene is not only confined to the commercial areas of the city, but also in the residential estates and squatter settlements. In the Honiara main market and other city markets there are women with plastic cool boxes of various sizes, from which they sell fresh fish and chicken.

Some of the activities, which start about seven o'clock in the morning each day, do not stop after sunset but continue into the night. As such there is a joke of a local air pilot who had mistakenly took the Kukum Highway with both its sides lined with hurricane lamps to be Henderson Airport runway.

These striking features show the wide spread of these informal activities both in and out in the city's periphery. From observation, women and young girls form the majority of those engaged in urban informal sector. There has been a census carried out on those who are involved but their contribution to the national economy and their own needs have never being recognized. Literature on the UIS in the past has been primarily confined to the print media, often as news items portraying the illegality of UIS activities. Such news headlines as "Closure of open fire food preparation at Rove Market by Honiara Municipal law enforcing agents" or "Street vendors harassed and fined by HMA constables" are examples. Today the print media continues to provide literature on the UIS but is more positive than in the past. Although the newspaper article below (Box 1.0) illustrates the changing approach in the media, that has not reflected a more positive attitude to the UIS by the local authorities, policy makers, development agents and financial institutions.

Rural Women and Work

In the rural communities, women are more represented in village work than men. Although men and women are assigned different tasks in village agriculture, women seem to do more work than men. This pattern of traditional life is changing as men have diverted their activities away from agriculture.

Box 1.0

Money from betel nuts help pay for school fees

Selling betel nut helps to pay for children's school fees. This is one reason why women are willing to sell these products at the markets.

Mary, Stella and Georgina cannot miss being in the Kukum market selling their betel nuts. They are always among other women selling their products there. They have good reason to do that.

"We want to support our husbands to pay for the basic things in the house", said Stella.

Sometimes there are dry days, sometimes they sell very well.

"It depends on our supplies," she added. "Betel nut prices vary- depending on the supply," she said.

She said the highest charge that she had put on each betel nut was \$1.00. When asked how much she earns in one day after sitting at the Kukum market for the whole day?

"It varies each day," she added

But she added that her normal earning each day is \$100.00 or more than that.

To Mary, it is so.

"It helps a lot to supplement the salary of my husband. Without me selling betel nuts at the market, we would find it very difficult to pay school fees for our children," Mary added.

Source: Solomon Star, Wednesday 19 April 2000: 7

This is partly caused by, and partly allows, migration of men for wages. This leaves subsistence gardening to be carried out entirely by women. However, women are still not active in the trading of copra, or in other cash generating activities. It might be difficult getting women into the cash economy in the villages, despite the fact that it is they who do much of the production. However, school fees and contributions to church activities and social obligations have been the incentives for women to be more involved in the cash

economy. In an urban context, however, there is tendency for women, as they are removed from the land, to be marginalized and to become entirely reliant on male-generated cash incomes. An expansion of the informal sector and cooperatives is offsetting this; women are exploiting the potential for food production and preparation, poultry raising, petty trading and the provision of cleaning and domestic work.

Women who migrated were dependents of males moving for employment in the towns. In towns, they are marginalised, having lost their food growing function. Those who find work as domestic workers and are employed by nationals, are protected by the wantok system though the minimum wage is generally ignored and the protection is not extended to other groups. In this way wantok helps the migration process and introduces females to wage labour market.

Women in Wage Employment

In rural communities women play an important role in productive work particularly in subsistence agriculture. In the 1999 Census, 88.1% of economically active women were engaged only in village work, compared to 68.3 per cent of men (1999 Census Report). Though this is important to the country's economy, the women themselves, men, decision makers and development agencies, do not see the value of their contribution in the subsistence sector. Only when they engage in the cash income activities that they feel that they contribute to the country's economy while subsistence productive work is only recognized at the family and the local community level.

Therefore having access to cash means raising their status in the society. But the women are aware of the potential of their traditional skills for cash income.

Formal employment requires educational qualifications and skills which women are being deprived because of their gender. In 1996 only 70 percent of the girls in the school age group were enrolled in the primary school compared with 78 percent of boys. The number decreases as one goes up to higher education levels. For instance only 38 percent of the total secondary enrolment are girls despite almost the same number as boys starting at the primary level (ADB 1997). The village is regarded as the proper place for girls where they learn and help their mothers in subsistence production. The long distance that the girls have to walk to schools or having to live in a boarding school with the boys, are concerns of the parents who only trust themselves for the security of their daughters. This results in girls being denied greater representation in formal education and potential for formal and self-employment.

Women's involvement in wage employment has been increasing over the years. Between 1985 and 1996 there has been a steady increase in formal employment of 3.3 percent. Women were less involved in waged employment than men, but there has been a recent

rapid increase in female participation relative to men. In 1987, 4052 women were in wage employment, representing 17.6 percent of total of wage employment of Solomon Islanders but in 1995, 7,413 women, accounted for 23 percent of the wage employment (Table 1.0).

Even those already in employment, are yet to overcome problems of exploitation and harassment in certain employment areas. Disparity in enumeration between gender reflects an established attitude towards women productive work and the value placed on their contribution. Women who are seen to have potential for promotion, are often harassed by male workers causing them to leave employment altogether or move to new employment(Scheyvens, 1993). These have been the contributing factors to the low status of women in the formal employment structure and at the decision making levels.

Table 1.0 Wage Employment, by Gender, 1987-1995

Year	Males	Females	Total	%males	%Females
1987	18980	4052	23032	82.4	17.6
1988	19524	4613	24137	80.9	19.1
1989	na	na	na	na	na
1990	na	na	na	na	na
1991	21431	4502	25933	82.6	17.4
1992	21306	4874	26180	81.4	18.6
1993	22162	6556	28718	77.2	22.8
1994	24214	7337	31551	76.7	23.3
1995	24754	7413	32167	77.0	23.0

Notes: na=not available. Part-time employees assumed to be Solomon Islanders .

Source: Employment surveys-MOF

Women and the Informal Sector

There has been minimal published research on informal economic activities of women in urban or in rural areas(ILO/UNDP,1994). The literature published so far is on women in general and their role in the traditional economy. Solomon Islands since the 1986 census has recognized village work as one of the three categories of employment. Village work refers to all non-monetary work undertaken in villages, including subsistence gardening. Village work is regarded as the main source of livelihood for most Solomon Islanders and which occupied 71.4 percent of the economically active population 14 years and over according to the 1990s Income and expenditure surveys. Women did a disproportionate amount of this work as oppose to men (ADB, 1997: 136).

Similar to village work, is work consisting of those who are engaged in both village work and work for money. Those in this category accounted for 14.5 percent of the economically active population, with about half working for wages and half involved in cash sales of garden produce, copra, fish, betel nut and other products. Two thirds of those in this category were males and one third, females (ADB, 1997: 136).

The third work category consists of those who worked exclusively for money. They accounted for 14 percent of the economically active population and they were predominantly wage earners (88%), with the rest self-employed in various commercial activities. Men dominated, constituting 82% of the total (ADB, 1997:137).

The above statistics show that women are increasingly participating in doing work that will enable them to fulfil their obligations. Lacked of formal education may be a disadvantage to getting better paid job but a village worker can also be an urban worker in the informal sector.

Likewise, the women who engaged in subsistence gardening and wage work become engaged in informal sector by selling their garden produce, copra, fish, betel nut, cooked food, handicrafts etc and as wage workers by assisting men with copra or other cash crops production, (See Table 1.2. below)

Table 1.2 Household Work for Money, 1986

Primary Industry		Commercial	
Activity	% of private Households engaged	Activity	% of private households engaged
Produce food crop	34.6	Run store	12.1
Produce copra	29.4	Make mats/baskets	10.5
Catch fish	17.2	Build houses	4.9
Produce betel nut	17.1	Run boat	4.8
Collect shells	17.0	Make handicrafts	4.5
Raise pigs	12.5	Make thatch	3.5
Raise poultry	9.8	Make canoes	3.4
Produce cocoa	9.0	Run truck	1.6
Collect beche-de-mer	6.9		
Catch crabs/lobsters	3.7		
Raise cattle	2.5		
Note: Total households = 43,386.		Average size = 6.4 persons	

Source: MOF (1989)

Problem of recognition

The categorization of work in the census of economic activities, does not mention urban informal economic activities which is work predominantly performed by women. Whether this is because of the insignificant of the numbers involved or because of what seem illegal the way these activities are carried out. As such, there is little information on this sector, and no survey has been carried out specifically on the UIS to highlight the important role this sector plays in household and national development. Additionally, the literature on women's ventures so far often focuses only on rural employment, especially in agricultural production and processing. For example the survey that was carried out by ILO/UNDP in 1994 (Box 1.1) was limited to informal rural traders.

Box 1.1 : Women Informal Traders - Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands (1993) sample size 323, of specially selected group of women.

- [] Two - thirds of the sample were self- employed at the time of the interviews.
Of these 75% said they spent 16 hrs or more each week on their income-generating ventures.
- [] More than one- third of the women were sole- income providers .
- [] Agriculture were the major enterprises - farm gardening (38%) food catering (21%) crafts (15%) and textile (11%)
- [] 40% sold their products directly to consumers at the market, 34% sold from their homes, and 16% from shops.
- [] Over 75% had not received any assistance to run their business, whether from relatives , banks or other sources.

Personal data:

75% were married (average 5 children) and 25% lived in households of more than seven persons. More than 50% had only few years of primary school education and almost one fifth had no formal education at all. 25% were unable to write in any language and almost one-third could not do any calculations

Source: ILO/UNDP 1994

So far there has been no specific research on women in UIS because of the assumption that their situation and needs are the same as the women who are operating in the subsistence economy of rural communities. The activities of women in UIS are regarded as illegal because they are operating within an environment where they are required to

have certain licenses to operate or health regulations to follow. Because they are ignored as far as public policies are concerned, theirs is a hostile environment in which to operate. They are illegal traders vulnerable to harassment by law enforcement agents.

Their vulnerable position as seen by the authorities, has put them in a disadvantaged situation. They are denied access to credit, training opportunities and assistance from funding agencies. This will be further discussed in chapter 5.

The research

Women are involved in informal economic activities irrespective of whether they are in rural or urban environments because there are needs to be met. In both cases the income earned from informal activities is often vital to the livelihood of their families. Nevertheless there has not been specific policies and programmes for women informal activities and women in the UIS.

The old traditional belief that a woman's place is at 'home' [1] is no longer valid today. The rapid social and economic changes that have come about in Solomon Island society have impacted very much on women. They have become increasingly aware of their rights. They have also become more involved in urban migration in recent years, often migrating to the urban centres in search of employment. They are also being attracted by major celebrations and sports events in Honiara. The improved inter-island transport and

communication systems have made traveling easier and safer for women than in the past.

Still in the Solomon Islands where twenty percent of those of productive age are engaged in full time employment, only six percent are women. In Honiara women are employed mostly in the middle and the lower income brackets. Their access to, and progress in formal employment is limited due to many factors. Lack of formal education and the bias in the workforce are some of the barriers to their progress. In Honiara where wage employment is scarce women must have faith in themselves besides having the required skills and knowledge. As a result it is evident that the informal sector and self-employment provide more employment to women than the formal sector.

Unlike their counterparts in the rural areas who have subsistence gardening as a major economic activity, UIS women depend solely on informal activities for their family's livelihood. Though some may have home gardens to supplement their income. Beside their responsibility to their immediate family's welfare urban women also remit money or supply rice to parents and relatives in the villages in return for supply of raw food crops such as yam, taro, kumara and so on. This reciprocal gifts of money and kind that has been the vital link between the urban and the rural communities. It reinforces the wantok [2] which is the nation's social security system.

Research Objectives

This research focuses mainly on the nature and the extent of the UIS in providing employment opportunities for women in urban environments. It is the aim of the research to document different activities that women in the UIS are engaged in and how these activities contribute to the livelihood and the quality of life to the families in urban settings and to the national economy in general. In so doing I will critically review existing policies and programmes of the national and local government, development partners and NGOs and assess their adequacy and effectiveness in supporting women in UIS. The study is carried out on women in Honiara who are part of the informal sector to highlight the contribution they make to national development.

It is envisaged that the data from the research will:

- * High light the conditions under which UIS become the provider of employment and income generation for urban women.
- * Identify ways in which women in UIS contribute to the livelihood of their families and Solomon Islands economy generally.
- * Identify the constraints women in UIS faced in starting up income generating projects, ensuring security of their activities, expansion and improvement of the services provided.
- * Explain the need for future policy to facilitate women's role in UIS.

SUMMARY

This study explores how women in Solomon Islands urban environment engage in informal economic activities and to what extent the activities contribute to the welfare of their families. Unlike their counterparts in rural communities their activities are regarded as unlawful. They are harassed and intimidated by law enforcement agents.

Chapter Two will discuss methods including qualitative and quantitative approaches as they are applied to this study.

Notes

- 1 Home used in this context refers to place of origin.
- 2 Wantok refers to a member of an extended family, a community or village or a language group.