



Original Article

Aiding Women Candidates in Solomon Islands: Suggestions for Development Policy

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Abstract

This article discusses the poor performance of women candidates in Solomon Islands elections and potential aid policy responses. The article outlines women candidates' performance, details challenges faced by women, examines existing aid work designed to help women candidates and provides policy suggestions. The article argues that existing aid policy focused on candidate training and voter education has achieved little because the main impediments women candidates face are access to finance and local gatekeepers, alongside more subtle normative constraints. These are barriers that are not easily shifted by training or education programs. Meanwhile, for reasons of political economy, another area of aid-supported engagement, a parliamentary gender quota, is unlikely to be enacted. Reflecting this, and the nature of the challenges women candidates face, the article recommends donors also undertake work to help prospective women candidates engage

with communities over time, building ties and reputations as providers of assistance.

Key words: gender, voting, politics, aid, Solomon Islands

1. Introduction

Having more women elected to national legislative bodies is desirable both for reasons of equity and because evidence suggests countries with more women legislators experience development benefits in areas including governance (Dollar et al. 2001), economic performance (Jayasuriya & Burke 2012), and health and education (Knack & Sanyal 2000). Internationally, the proportion of legislators who are women is rising. However, improvement is almost completely absent in the Pacific and the region has the world's lowest proportion of female legislators.¹ Among the states of the Pacific, Solomon Islands is one of the worst performers. At present, the country has only one woman member of parliament (MP).

In this article, I focus on impediments faced by women candidates in Solomon Islands before discussing aid-funded efforts at increasing female representation. Making use of survey data, interviews, election results and secondary sources, I argue that the main bar-

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1. The International Parliamentary Union reports that in 1997 2.96 per cent of the Pacific's national-level legislators were women. This had increased to just 4.33 per cent by 2014. Globally the average was 10.57 per cent in 1997 and 20.23 per cent in 2014. Data are online at <<http://ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>>.

riers women face come in the form of structural features, including access to finance and local powerbrokers, as well as more subtle norm-related issues. I then examine existing aid work aimed at helping women candidates. I look first at voter education and candidate training, and show that, while work in these areas may have some use, it does little to address the structural challenges women face. I also argue that, for reasons of national political economy, the one area where aid-funded work has occurred that could quickly deliver results—the introduction of parliamentary gender quotas—is unlikely to be voted for by existing MPs.

Reflecting these facts, and the nature of Solomon Islands' electoral politics, I contend aid policy aimed at promoting women MPs should also include work to strengthen connections between potential women candidates and communities. Such an approach would be easier to effect than legislative change and, because it reflects the actual impediments women candidates face, can usefully add to existing work.

2. The Solomon Islands Context

Solomon Islands' unicameral parliament has 50 MPs, who are elected using a single member district plurality voting system. There are no legal restrictions on women voting or contesting elections (Steeves 2001). Procedurally, recent elections have also been free of major electoral fraud (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010). Vote buying is common, however, and some small scale coercion occurs (Scales & Teakeni 2006; Dawea 2013).

While political parties exist in Solomon Islands, they are weak. Electorally, weak political parties come with voting that is almost exclusively based on candidate attributes, not party affiliation (Steeves 2011). Voting is strongly clientelist—voters typically vote for candidates they think likely to provide personalised or localised benefits if elected, rather than on the basis of national issues or programmatic politics (Wood 2013). Under such circumstances, electoral success in Solomon Islands requires that individual can-

didates possess a profile, financial resources and linkages to communities in their constituency. Having a profile is necessary to convince voters that a candidate is a viable contender for election, and is usually gained through having an education and having lived in Honiara working in a senior role for government or the private sector (Corbett & Wood 2013). Access to financial resources is important both because it is needed for vote buying, and because it allows a candidate to cultivate, through material help provided over longer time frames, a reputation as the sort of person likely to deliver if elected (Whittington et al. 2006; Wood 2014b). Linkages to communities are important for similar reasons: they give voters cause to believe candidates are more likely to assist if elected. Such linkages usually come through familial or church ties and via the support of influential community figures (Wood 2014b).

Solomon Islands elections take place within a broader social context that privileges men in number of ways. Formal community leadership roles are usually held by men (Scales & Teakeni 2006).² Moreover, while women are active participants in aspects of community governance and in local associational life, such spheres of participation tend to be viewed as less important (by men at least) than the male arena of community leadership (Scheyvens 2003). As a consequence, in most communities men possess significantly more power (Whittington et al. 2006). In the economic sphere, women's domestic and agricultural work is often devalued (True et al. 2012), and at the time of the 2009 census only 28 per cent of the of the 55,500 Solomon Islanders working in the formal economy were women (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office 2013, p. vi). Women working in the formal sector have also tended to work in lower pay and status positions (Huffer 2006, p. 37).³ In the social sphere, women are frequently

2. Some women serve as community leaders in parts of the country, although they are a small minority (Scales & Teakeni 2006).

3. The number of Solomon Islanders working in the formal sector was calculated by adding together the categories 'Employer', 'Employee' and 'Self-employed'.

subjected to different regimes of normative appraisal in areas such as marital behaviour (Whittington et al. 2006).

Despite such imbalances, it would be a mistake to conclude that women in Solomon Islands have no power or that the current situation is static. Women are increasingly working in senior civil service roles (Morgan 2005), and women are active participants in Solomon Islands' civil society (Pollard 2003). Nevertheless, in Solomon Islands, as in many countries, social context affords an unequal playing field for aspiring politicians, one that is tilted heavily against women.

3. Women's Electoral Performance in Solomon Islands

Between the country's first post-independence general election in 1980 and 2013, a total of 72 different women contested general elections (4.1 per cent of all candidates).⁴ Over the same period, only two women won national elections. In 1989, Hilda Kari won a by-election in the electorate currently known as East Central Guadalcanal (Frazer 1997; Pollard 2006), and went on to win two general elections (1993 and 1997). In 2012, Vika Lusibaea, the Fijian-born wife of the former MP and protagonist in the country's civil conflict, Jimmy Lusibaea, won a by-election held in the North Malaita electorate after her husband was removed from office through a court challenge.⁵ Between 1980 and 2013, five women (including Hilda

4. Some women have stood more than once; between 1980 and 2010 there were a total of 96 women candidacies (that is, individual attempts by women) in general elections. Unless otherwise stated all election results data come from the author's results database. This database was compiled between 2010 and 2013 using results obtained from the electoral commission, Government Gazettes from the Solomon Islands Parliament Library, and newspaper records of results collected by Jon Fraenkel and Ian Frazer. A copy can be obtained by emailing the author. Results for all women candidates can be accessed at <<http://wp.me/aSQRs-zF>>.

5. In the 2014 general election, which was held as this article was being revised, only one woman, Freda Tuki, won (in the seat of Temotu Vatud). I have not covered the 2014 in this article as full data for it are not yet available.

Kari in 2001) finished second in elections, one of them, Afu Billy, losing by only two votes. However, while some women have polled well, the majority have not. A measure of candidate competitiveness from 1980 until 2013 for women candidates is plotted in Figure 1. Each point on the chart is a woman's candidacy. The x axis is years and the y axis is a measure ranging from zero to one representing the number of votes won by the candidate in question as a proportion of the number of votes won by the electorate's winner in that election. A score of one means the woman candidate won. In instances where a woman won, her name is used to label their data point. Data are included for all general elections and those by-elections for which the data exist. The downward sloping black line on the chart is an ordinary least squares fitted trend line of female candidate competitiveness. The dashed grey line is a similarly fitted line for male candidates, included for reference.

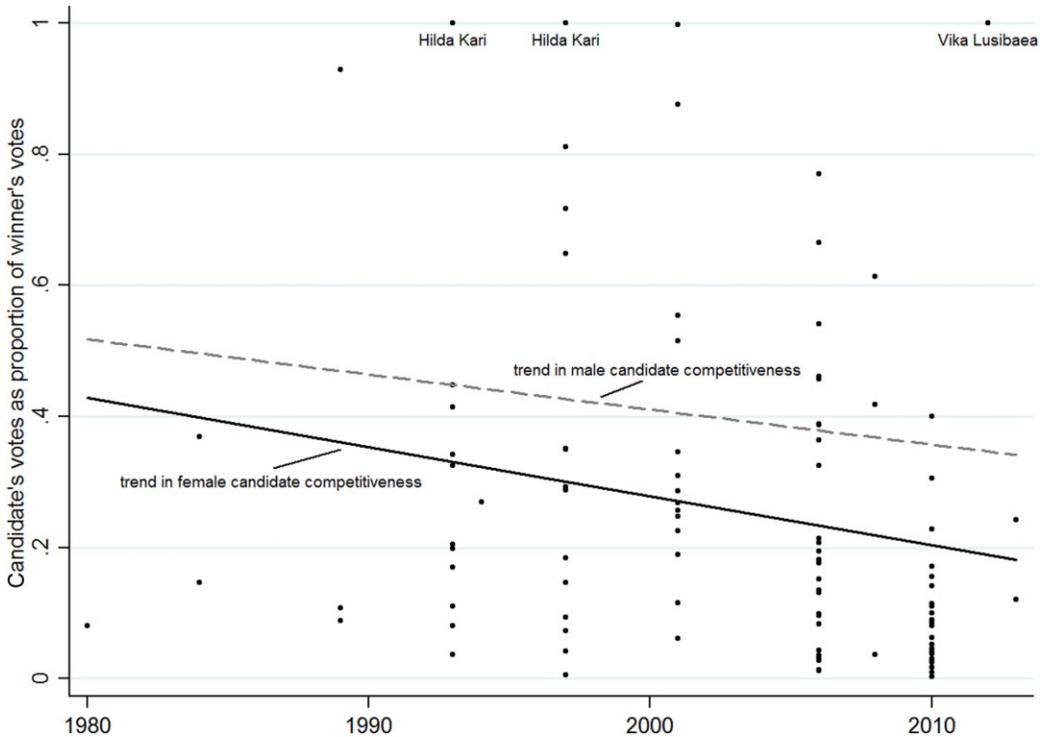
As the downward slope of the trend line suggests, women candidates have on average, if anything, become less competitive over time. It would be a mistake to put too much weight on the downward trend, as the dashed grey line suggests a similar trend is also present for male candidates, and for both men and women trends are driven mostly by high numbers of uncompetitive candidates in 2010. Nevertheless, the data do not paint an encouraging picture of female competitiveness, nor do they suggest existing aid work aimed at helping women candidates has been effective in overcoming the challenges women candidates face.

4. Impediments to Electoral Success

Discussing the constraints faced globally by women candidates, Krook and Norris (2014, p. 4) write that debates exist:

[A]s to whether women's under-representation stems primarily from gender differences in ambition that cause fewer women than men to consider running for political office, biases in the recruitment practices of gatekeepers . . . or prejudices on the part of voters who prefer to elect men over women.

Figure 1 Competitiveness of Women Candidates in Solomon Islands Elections over Time



Other international work on women candidates suggests two further constraints: access to finance for campaigns (Sidhu & Meena 2007); and normative constraints that see women politicians held to different standards of behaviour (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008).

In this section, I discuss these potential impediments with respect to Solomon Islands. I start with the decision to stand, followed by gendered voter preferences and the closely related area of gender-based assessments of behaviour. I then discuss access to finance and gatekeepers.

4.1 Aspirations and Deciding to Stand

Given only a small proportion of the candidates who have stood in Solomon Islands elections have been women, the possibility that women simply do not aspire to be MPs appears plausible. However, before this conclusion can be made, we need to distinguish carefully between women's beliefs about whether they *should* be MPs, and women's beliefs about

whether they *could* be MPs. Beliefs to do with 'should' are related to aspirations; beliefs to do with 'could', on the other hand, are not aspiration based but are the products of potential candidates' appraisals of practical matters.

Constraints at the level of 'should' are normative, born of gendered norms about the appropriate role of women in society. If a cultural group strongly proscribes women from adopting leadership roles, and if these beliefs are internalised by women, women may not aspire to stand as MPs because they think doing so is inappropriate. Some qualitative evidence suggests this issue could be present in some cases (see, for example, Maka'a 2010, p. 13). However, survey evidence from the People's Survey, a large ($n = 4\text{--}5,000$) study undertaken by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands annually since 2007, suggests social proscriptions against women standing as candidates cannot explain the full scale of the gap in male and female candidate numbers. McMurray (2011, pp. 6–8) summarises survey responses from 2007–2010

waves of the survey to the question, ‘should there be women MPs in Parliament?’ On average 82.4 per cent of respondents answered this question affirmatively, indicating most Solomon Islanders do not view it as wrong for women to contest elections.⁶

A more plausible explanation of low candidate numbers stems not from whether women think they should stand, but whether they think they could stand—and, specifically, whether they could stand successfully. Because candidates are wary of futile runs (campaigning is expensive in Solomon Islands), a major reason why women do not stand is likely that they perceive their chances of winning to be low—a perception that stems both from a demonstration effect (because so few women win, potential candidates conclude their chances of winning are slight) and from women lacking the financial resources they know to be necessary for victory. Further adding to this is the fact that, as discussed above, status and profile are important for electoral success—something that combines with the gendered nature of work in the country to further reduce the pool of women who believe they could achieve electoral success.

While quantitative data are not available to systematically test women’s perceptions of their chances of winning, qualitative data on candidate experiences make it clear that at least some potential candidates do factor such challenges into their decision to stand or not. Billy, for example (Billy 2002, p. 58), describes her initial incredulous reaction to suggestions she stand, and does so in a way which suggests she thought her chances of winning were slight.

4.2 Voter Preferences and Voter Prejudices

In Solomon Islands, women stand less often than men do, but this alone is not enough to explain low numbers of women MPs in Solomon Islands. Of the 2,556 male can-

didacies who stood in general elections between 1980 and 2010, 358 (14 per cent) were successful. Of the 96 female candidacies over the same period, two (2.1 per cent) were successful.

The most obvious explanation of women candidates’ poor performance in Solomon Islands elections is a form of voter prejudice in which patriarchal culture brings beliefs that see voters believing men to be better suited to political power than women. If present, such beliefs would lead directly to gendered voter preferences and a situation in which most voters prefer to vote for male candidates for no reason other than the fact they are male. However, survey data do not suggest it is gendered voter preferences *per se* that prevent women from winning. Table 1 below summarises responses to a People’s Survey question asking whether the respondent would vote for a ‘Good woman candidate’ (a question asked in 2007, 2008 and 2009; data are from McMurray 2011, p. 7).

What is more, although women candidates often experience some sexism while campaigning, women candidates’ descriptions of their experiences of campaigning (Billy 2002; Maka’a 2010) suggest the candidates themselves do not believe they suffered significant disadvantages as a direct result of voters not wanting to vote for women simply because they are women. Reflecting this, Kama (n.d., p. 9) after interviewing women around Solomon Islands in the wake of the 2010 elections, concluded that culturally mandated prejudices against women candidates were ‘diminishing’ and that, ‘factor[s] other than cultural attitudes’ were thought by her interviewees to be more significant barriers. Combined with responses to the People’s Survey, such observations suggest that, everything else being

Table 1 Percentage of Respondents Who Said They Would ‘Vote for a Good Woman Candidate’

	2007	2008	2009
Men	86.0	80.3	81.1
Women	91.7	91.9	86.0
<i>n</i>	5,154	4,304	5,035

6. One possible problem with these data comes in the form of social desirability bias (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012). However, People’s Survey interviewees were Solomon Islanders (and of the same gender as the respondents) which would likely minimise any such effect.

equal, the average Solomon Islands voter is not fundamentally opposed to voting for a woman candidate.

4.3 Culture and Appraisal

However, everything else is not equal and, importantly, the question asked in the People's Survey about voting for a woman was asked in the abstract: a hypothetical question about candidates, devoid of information about other features that might be important in winning voter allegiance. As such, it was a question at least one degree removed from the realities of campaigning and from the social and material structures of power that are crucial to electoral success. In Solomon Islands, there are a number of ways in which structural impediments are decisive in preventing women candidates from winning, even in a context where the average voter is not averse to voting for a woman in some abstract sense.

The first of these is the role of gendered norms of behaviour in shaping how actual woman candidates are appraised. In many societies, female political actors are held to different standards of behaviour from men (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008), and this is also true in Solomon Islands where women candidates are held to different standards of 'good'. It would be unusual, for example, in Solomon Islands for the attributes of a male candidate's spouse to be a major factor in how voters appraise them, yet women candidates have in instances faced questioning about the behaviour or birthplace of their spouses (Whittington et al. 2006). Similarly, Billy (2002, p. 60) recounts being asked repeatedly on the campaign trail how often she had been married, with questions conveying connotations that she was not a moral woman and, by inference, not to be trusted with political power.

4.4 Campaign Resources

Another gendered aspect of electoral competition is access to electoral finances. In a country where vote buying is common and money

often necessary to prove a candidate's propensity to provide future help even when exchange is not actively transactional, financial resources matter. And, as discussed, the formal cash economy in Solomon Islands is predominantly the domain of men, particularly in its upper echelons. While a number of male candidates in 2010 owned logging firms or received support from logging companies, none of the women who stood in 2010 had access to these sorts of resources (Kama n.d.).⁷ As a result, access to money for campaigning is a major impediment faced by women candidates—a barrier women face that major male candidates do not (Kama n.d.; Scales & Teakeni 2006). Seven out of the nine women candidates interviewed by Maka'a (2010) highlighted material aspects of campaigning among the challenges they faced. One candidate, Rhoda Sikilabu, for example, stated (p. 13) that:

The barrier I faced in the last election was [a] lack of money because people go for material things. One of the challenge [sic] was a lot of untrue stories were made against me, including I don't have the money to pay voters.

4.5 Powerbrokers

A further impediment faced by women candidates is their restricted access to powerful local gatekeepers. Although discussion of gatekeepers in most gender and politics work tends to focus on party gatekeepers—individuals who can determine electoral fates through the power they hold to decide candidates' rankings in party lists or the seats they can contest (for example, Kenny 2013)—and while parties are largely irrelevant in Solomon Islands elections, the support of powerful individuals is still crucial, albeit at a much more localised level. Specifically, power lies in the hands of local interlocutors who are essential in winning support within most communities.

7. Interestingly, the one woman who won a seat in the 2014 election co-owns a logging firm (with her husband). It would seem likely this was a major factor in her win, although this remains a question for future work.

Typically these community-level interlocutors are recruited by candidates and tasked with winning votes, which they subsequently garner through purchase, persuasion or coercion. In the Solomon, the most effective brokers are usually local community leaders, heads of families and clans, and sometimes church leaders (Wood 2014b).

Obtaining influential, loyal brokers is a significant challenge for most candidates, but it is a particular challenge for women. There are several reasons why, the first being that money is often required to purchase gatekeepers' support (Scales & Teakeni 2006) and, as discussed, money tends to be a resource women candidates want for. Also important is the fact that most influential local leaders, be they heads of families, clans, villages or churches, are male (Scales & Teakeni 2006)—and patriarchal local leadership norms bring reluctance to work for women candidates. This is not inevitably insurmountable: one of the clear strengths of Afu Billy's 2001 campaign (Billy 2002) was a strong network of supporters, many who appear to have been gained through family ties (she was from a large well-regarded family associated with the dominant church in the electorate). However, such ready-made networks are not automatically available to women candidates, and the situation of Judy Barty, a candidate who stood in the Malaitan Electorate of Aoke/Langalanga in 2010 was more typical. I undertook fieldwork throughout this electorate and in none of the villages I visited did Barty have influential male supporters. In one large village, I interviewed her key advocate, a woman who was influential but who had not been able to win votes in significant numbers (Barty won just three votes in the village and only 1.4 per cent of the votes cast in the electorate).

5. Existing Policies for Helping Women Win and Suggested Policy Changes

Reflecting the strength of the case for increasing the numbers of women serving in Solomon Islands' parliament, and the barriers women face, the international community has devoted considerable resources to aiding women in

their attempts at winning elections (Scales & Teakeni 2006; UN Women 2014). Attempts have taken three forms: voter education, candidate training and support for a legislated quota of women MPs in parliament. In the first part of this section I discuss each of these, along with evidence of their efficacy and limitations. In the final subsection I propose an additional policy option involving strengthening, over the medium term, women candidates' ties to their constituencies and enhancing their reputation as candidates who are capable of delivering tangible benefits to voters.⁸

5.1 Existing Policy: Voter Education

Recent elections in Solomon Islands have been accompanied by substantial donor-funded voter education work. This has covered most aspects of the electoral process, including educating voters as to why they should vote for women candidates (Lee 2008; Commonwealth Secretariat 2010).

The rationale for work involving efforts to educate voters in favour of women candidates appears to be a belief that voters fail to vote for women candidates because they are ignorant of the merits of women political leaders, or that they are prejudiced against women candidates. Yet, as discussed above, the best available evidence (both qualitative and large-N) suggests that it is not voter ignorance that is preventing voters from voting for women. Moreover, more general academic work on voter behaviour in Solomon Islands finds no evidence to suggest voters vote the way they do because they want for information or are

8. Two other approaches are not discussed here. The first, donors directly giving money to women candidates has been suggested by some authors (for example Whittington et al. 2006) but I do not cover it because it is likely too direct an intervention into domestic politics to be safely undertaken by donors (for a full discussion of this issue see Wood 2014a). The second, a shift from a first past the post-electoral system to a different system is not discussed because the two most likely alternative systems, those used in Vanuatu (multi-member constituencies) and Papua New Guinea (limited preferential voting) have not brought substantially increased numbers of women MPs in either country.

misguided in their beliefs. Rather, the most salient aspect of voter choice in Solomon Islands—voters' propensity to vote for candidates who they think are likely to assist directly if elected—appears a reasonable reaction to an unresponsive state and voters' own immediate needs (Haque 2012; Wood 2014b). Needless to say, it is not easy to educate people away from actions that are sensible given their circumstances. Because of this, it is unsurprising that education programs have not been able to help women candidates win.

This is not to say that voter education more generally has no use. Informing voters of their rights and about electoral process likely delivers benefits in terms of electoral quality. Moreover, it is possible that voter education has, over time, helped shift voters' beliefs towards a favourable disposition regarding women candidates standing, and that it has also helped with voters' willingness to state they would vote for a women candidate when surveyed, as per the responses summarised in Table 1. Likewise, it is possible that voter education may slowly help ease voters' normative biases related to the judgment of women candidates' attributes in areas such as marital status. However, the ongoing poor performance of women candidates shown in Figure 1 suggests that, as a tool for helping elect women, voter education has been insufficient on its own. The most likely reason why this is the case is that voter education cannot offer voters tangible evidence that women candidates are more likely to provide material benefits of the sort voters seek if elected. Such evidence needs to come from candidates themselves.

5.2 Existing Policy: Candidate Training

In addition to voter education, candidate training has formed a major component of donor engagement in attempts to increase women's political representation in Solomon Islands (Kama n.d.; Scales & Teakeni 2006). Typically, candidate training has involved international trainers, with some local assistance, and the lessons taught have been a mix of campaign universals with some tailoring to context (see, for example, Centre for Democratic

Figure 2 Average Candidate Performance Comparing Trained Candidates with the Non-Trained



Institutions 2010). The content of previous training programs (for example, Centre for Democratic Institutions 2010) suggests that they are intended to help improve women candidates' performance through remedying candidates' poor knowledge of campaigning techniques.

As an illustration of the impact of training, Figure 2 compares the mean vote share of two subgroups of the women candidates who stood in the 2010 election: those who received candidate training at a 2010 workshop run by the Centre for Democratic Institutions and those who did not (11 women received training and 14 did not).⁹ As can be seen in the figure, women who attended the training event actually polled, on average, slightly worse than those who did not. Care should be taken not to read too much into this finding: as the 95 per cent confidence intervals on the chart suggest, the difference in performance is not statistically significant; moreover, because training was not randomly assigned across women candidates, it is impossible to isolate the impact of training free of selection effects, and trained candidates may have performed even worse had they not been trained. So it may be that training has some worth. Nevertheless, the

9. As far as I am aware, this was the only major candidate training event held in the immediate lead up to the 2010 elections in Solomon Islands. Results data in the chart come from the author's election results database. Data on training attendance were provided by the Centre for Democratic Institutions.

chart is suggestive: the average trained candidate in 2010 received 3 per cent of the votes cast in their electorate.

In part, the problem with training may stem from content not well designed for local context (Kama n.d.). However, a more fundamental issue is also present. This being that the main impediments faced by women candidates outlined above are not ones easily remedied by training. They do not stem from women candidates lacking attributes that can be taught, rather they stem from more systematic issues of obtaining the support of powerful brokers and the need for material resources in campaigning. To be clear, this does not mean that training should be curtailed. Instead, in the first instance future training should be carefully tailored to context, focusing on issues such as access to finance, gender norms and the types of accusations levelled at candidates, and working with gatekeepers. Training should also focus on longer time frames, rather the immediate electoral cycle, reflecting the importance of the time needed to cultivate ties, gain a profile and earn a reputation as someone who helps materially. Reflecting this, in addition to discrete training events, training could also involve ongoing work with groups such as the Young Women's Parliamentary Group, which currently serve as points of interaction for women with an interest in political participation (Spark 2014). Such changes may improve the outcomes of training and would better adapt the approach to the realities of electoral politics in Solomon Islands. However, even with these changes, because there is no evidence suggesting the foremost constraint on women's electoral success in Solomon Islands is that they do not understand how elections are won in their own country, there is no cause to believe that, on its own, training is likely to deliver major gains.

5.3 Existing Policy: Quotas for Women MPs

Legislation introducing quotas in which female parliamentary representation is mandated has been the third central means through which the aid community has tried to increase numbers of women MPs in Solomon Islands

(Pacific Women in Politics n.d.).¹⁰ By mandating seats which women candidates compete in only against other women, quotas level the playing field of electoral competition for women, even if only for the mandated seats. Internationally, quotas have been shown to be an effective means of increasing women's representation (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005; Pande & Ford 2011), and both donors and domestic reformers have advocated for them in Solomon Islands.

Quota initiatives have also, ostensibly, been supported by at least two of the last three Solomon Islands governments; however, underlying political will for change among sitting MPs appears to be much lower than rhetoric would suggest, and the required legislation has yet to make it to the floor of parliament. The reasons for this can be found in Solomon Islands' national political economy. Owing to the country's very weak political parties, governing coalitions in Solomon Islands are fragile and require considerable work to hold together. For most Prime Ministers, doing this becomes the central priority of their tenure, which makes expending political capital to pass legislation something they are unlikely to do unless there are strong incentives to act. Tellingly, elsewhere in the Pacific gender quota laws have only been passed at distinctive political junctures (such as the peace settlement in Bougainville) or in much more stable polities such as Sāmoa where stability has enabled senior political figures to force through an agenda (Baker 2014). Absent circumstances such as these, quota legislation is only likely to be passed if significant numbers of MPs are incentivised to act. Reward from women voters at the ballot box would offer a form of incentive; yet as voters do not vote along party lines, there is little chance a Prime Minister would see electoral rewards for passing quota legislation in the form of women voters voting for their party in greater numbers. Likewise, the main sources of money for political patronage in Solomon

10. The proposed quota for Solomon is usually one in which 10 additional seats (one for each province plus Honiara) would be allocated to women, who would be directly elected in a parallel electoral process.

Islands are industries such as the logging industry that have no interest in gender. Meanwhile, aid donors, who also have money and who are broadly in favour of reform, are constrained in their ability to intervene because they need to be wary of being seen to meddle in the domestic political processes of another country. Donors have played an important role in keeping the issue of quotas on the table. However, as outside actors they cannot be a decisive factor.

5.4 Proposed Policy Direction:

Strengthening Women Candidates' Ties to Constituencies

Of course, little is set in stone in politics and quota legislation may eventually pass. Also, as discussed, a reconfigured form of candidate training may be of some use, and it is plausible that voter education has contributed to some shift in attitudes. However, given the shortcomings of work covered thus far, alongside ongoing low female candidate success rates, alternate policies warrant investigation.

Once such area of work would involve work over the medium term, and would be designed to help strengthen the linkages between women candidates and voters. In the first section of this article I argued that success, for candidates of either gender, in elections in Solomon Islands typically requires candidates to have both an elevated profile and strong familial and/or church based ties to constituencies. These factors played a central role in the campaigns of women candidates who have performed well in past elections. Afu Billy and Hilda Kari, for example, benefitted in their constituencies from being known to be successful civil servants in Honiara. And Billy benefitted significantly from family ties and her family's church connections (Billy 2002), while Hilda Kari also had strong community ties and gained credit for anti-logging community work (Frazer 1997). In another case, in Gao/Bugotu constituency, interviewees stressed that Rhoda Sikilabu performed as well as she did (she won the highest vote share of any woman candidate standing in 2010, running second against a very popular

incumbent) owing to strong community ties, leadership of the local church women's association, and having been seen to have served the constituency well as a member of the Isabel provincial parliament.

However, while having a profile, being connected and having an elevated stature are important, these attributes are not easy to acquire together. For the typical candidate of either gender establishing a career in Honiara involves most of one's life lived outside of one's constituency of birth, which reduces linkages to communities within the constituency. For male candidates, this problem can be overcome by working with powerful local community leaders (for a detailed discussion of this see Wood 2014c, Chapter 8), but for women such gatekeepers, who are predominantly men, are much harder to work with. Then there is the issue of financial resources—which are important not only for vote buying but for establishing a reputation as someone who is likely to dispense material help if elected. As already outlined, women candidates typically want for such resources.

Together these are difficult constraints. Yet they are also constraints that aid funding may be able to help overcome to a degree. In particular, funding could be provided for community development work specifically structured to strengthen possible future women candidates' linkages in their constituencies. Such work would be medium term in focus, and would help women maintain ties and cultivate a reputation as someone associated with material assistance (and hence partially offset the resource challenge most women face). Funding would be future oriented and need not be explicitly tied to political aspirations (but rather strong women leaders more generally), and because of this, the risk of being seen as intervening in another country's politics would be reduced.¹¹ Crucially, because it would

11. Structured in this way, the work would also benefit from the fact that it would differ less from existing aid-funded women's empowerment-oriented community development work. It could also potentially make use of an existing delivery mechanism such as the World Bank-led Rural Development Programme. As such, the work could draw on existing best practice.

involve delivering tangible benefits to communities, the work would help future women candidates gain the much needed reputation as someone likely to help materially if elected. As a result the approach would likely fare better than activities such as training in helping tackle some of the structural issues women candidates face, particularly those associated with financial constraints.

To be clear, on its own, such a scheme would not overcome all the barriers women face: norms of appraisal will remain an issue, and even women who establish strong linkages to communities may be defeated by candidates with large sums of money such as those associated with the logging industry, or by candidates with better access to powerbrokers. What is more, because the work proposed is new we cannot know for certain how to optimise delivery. For these reasons, like all good aid work, it ought to be systematically evaluated over time. However, the policy I have outlined differs from existing work in that it reflects, and attempts to address, the most important barriers faced by women candidates.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the key barriers to female electoral success in Solomon Islands are structural issues such as access to finance and linkages to communities, and quasi-structural norm-based constraints. This distinction is not simply academic. As I show, different impediments lend themselves to different solutions. And as the aid community has tried to increase the number of women MPs in Solomon Islands, in its voter education and candidate training work it has used tools that do little to address structural barriers. As a result, such work has achieved little. At the same time, the aid community's efforts at encouraging quota legislation have faced a structural problem of their own: the absence of any significant domestic electoral incentive pushing lawmakers to pass quota legislation.

Reflecting this, I have proposed that aid policymakers also undertake work assisting potential women candidates in strengthening their ties to constituencies through funding

that helps promising women leaders foster linkages and gain reputations as providers of material assistance. The logic here is that, because ties to communities and a reputation as someone who will help are central to electoral success in Solomon Islands, aid work that can help women build linkages and gain reputations as providers of assistance offers the possibility of positive change. Of course, my proposed direction for aid policy would itself not be a panacea. But it benefits from drawing on the actual political context of Solomon Islands at the same time as it outlines a means of trying to change it.

July 2015.

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