

# The Honiara Seminar: a proposal

by Transform Aqorau

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Far-flung in the Pacific, Solomon Islands might seem isolated and insignificant on the global stage. However, this archipelago of nearly 1,000 islands is central to some of the world's most urgent challenges facing small island developing states (SIDS). From climate change to societal shifts, these islands present a complex study landscape. This blog advocates for immediate academic focus on Solomon Islands and proposes that the [Solomon Islands National University](#) (SINU) organises an annual seminar series to explore these multidimensional challenges.

## Climate impacts and sea level rise

Solomon Islands faces [immediate threats from climate change](#) and sea level rise. As low-lying territories, even minor sea level shifts can yield catastrophic results such as land loss, water contamination and food insecurity. Researchers can study real-world consequences and community resilience strategies, contributing to universally relevant models, particularly for other SIDS and coastal regions.

## Non-communicable diseases

An emerging concern in Solomon Islands, like other Pacific Island countries, is the [surge in non-communicable diseases](#) such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Lifestyle shifts, influenced by Western diets and decreased physical activity, are primary contributing factors. Academic inquiries in this realm could reveal the intricate connections between globalisation, socio-economic status and public health.

## Livelihood challenges

Traditional livelihoods in Solomon Islands, notably fishing and subsistence farming, encounter increasing stress due to overfishing, climate shifts and changing economic landscapes. Research can uncover sustainable development tactics, eco-conscious practices, and methods to harmonise traditional lifestyles with

contemporary needs.

## **Societal and governance challenges**

Solomon Islands is experiencing swift societal changes propelled by urbanisation, globalisation and evolving cultural norms. Additionally, the islands offer a singular context for understanding the interplay between state and community governance. Researchers can gain valuable insights into governance frameworks that successfully merge modern systems with traditional local structures.

## **Youth unemployment and economic development**

The burgeoning youth population and high unemployment rates present a multifaceted issue with economic and societal implications. Research on this topic can assess the efficacy of interventions like the labour mobility program, that are potentially scalable or adaptable to other settings.

The [labour mobility program between Solomon Islands and Australia](#) represents an exemplary model of mutually advantageous international collaboration. This initiative offers more than employment opportunities; it provides cultural exposure, skill enhancement and networking. For Solomon Islands, dealing with elevated unemployment, this scheme offers an immediate, practical solution. It mitigates domestic joblessness by providing an external employment route and enables workers to remit substantial earnings back home, stimulating local economies and reducing poverty. Skills and experiences acquired abroad can be deployed to tackle local challenges, yielding wider societal advantages.

The new proposed Pacific Engagement Visa is a critical development. This would lead to a Solomon Islands diaspora in Australia, which could exponentially amplify these benefits. A diaspora serves not merely as a labour export but as a long-term investment in human assets and global partnerships. An integrated diaspora can function as a channel for knowledge exchange, trade ties, and even foreign investments, establishing a virtuous cycle of skilled Solomon Islanders contributing to both Australian society and their homeland's development.

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme and the Pacific Engagement Visa offer more than transient employment solutions; they are strategic efforts that could yield enduring impacts on unemployment reduction and socio-economic development in Solomon Islands.

## **Ecological concerns**

Environmental degradation, mainly [from logging](#) and other anthropogenic activities,

is an immediate ecological issue. Research in this field can offer valuable case studies for examining stressed ecosystems and contribute to innovative conservation approaches.

### **Geopolitical struggles**

Solomon Islands also lies at the heart of **geopolitical tensions** between the West and China. The nation provides a fertile ground for studying the evolving challenges of a country navigating complex choices among varying development partners, making it a battleground of negotiation and strategy amid conflicting interests from powers like China and the USA.

### **The need for an annual seminar hosted by the Solomon Islands National University**

Established as a cornerstone in the nation's commitment to education and sustainable growth, SINU is more than an educational institution – it's a crucible for future leaders, researchers and skilled workers. Beyond academic training, SINU can serve as a hub for critical thought and debate on urgent Solomon Islands issues, ranging from climate impacts to governance. Through academic programs, research projects and public discussions, SINU can foster a knowledge-driven society that can thoughtfully engage with current and future challenges.

Furthermore, SINU is a natural ally for both domestic and international entities aiming to collaborate on research for social and economic advancement. Its research departments can generate data, insights and solutions deeply rooted in Solomon Islands' unique conditions, transforming SINU into an essential player in nation-building. It instils a sense of collective identity while preparing its students to actively engage in the country's progress. Thus, SINU stands as a bastion of intellectual and societal advancement, shaping the nation's destiny.

Given Solomon Islands' complex challenges, an annual seminar led by SINU is urgently needed. This seminar would:

- gather global experts, local stakeholders, policy architects and students
- promote the sharing of research outcomes, insights and best practices
- spur collaborative research endeavours
- offer a platform for local voices and viewpoints
- guide policy and stimulate actionable sustainability strategies.

The proposed Honiara Seminar could serve as a nexus for interdisciplinary dialogue, research and debate about Solomon Islands' pressing issues and development. Modelled after the groundbreaking Waigani Seminar in Papua New

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Guinea in the 1970s and the well-attended PNG Updates, the Honiara Seminar would aspire to convene leaders, scholars, activists and intellectuals from Solomon Islands and the wider region.

In conclusion, the envisioned Honiara Seminar, coordinated by SINU, could act as an intellectual crossroads, fostering the mingling of varied thoughts and encouraging multidisciplinary resolutions to challenges that are both local and universal. As Solomon Islands navigates intricate socio-economic terrains and crucial decision-making that will shape its future, this seminar could be a pivotal and crucial initiative.

Further details will be announced in due course as this proposal takes shape. I also welcome suggestions and offers of support from all interested parties.

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/the-honiara-seminar-a-proposal-20230912/>