



INSIGHT SERIES

Connecting Communities - Telekom Towers Project

September 2025



SOLOMON ISLANDS
**INFRASTRUCTURE
PROGRAM**

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The new tower at Pelau, Malaita Province¹

Summary

Australia funded the purchase and installation of six 4G mobile phone towers in remote areas across four provinces (Choiseul, Isabel, Malaita and Western Province) with the aim of improving connectivity, strengthening security, and improving health, education and business development.

The SBD36 million project was delivered in partnership with Our Telekom. Follow-up research conducted with communities accessing the Vadede tower (Choiseul), found significant benefits have flowed to these communities from access to fast, reliable 4G signal. These include improved connection to families living elsewhere, improved business efficiency, and health and education benefits from online resources and mobile connectivity.

Across the six locations, the project has benefited approximately 7,200 people. The Vadede case study also details the benefit of project partnership with community and Our Telekom for creating local jobs and the ongoing sustainability of the tower asset, including local installation of solar-diesel hybrid power systems at each location.

¹ <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/pelau-communication-tower-now-online/13127>

Mobile Communications in Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands has a population of approximately 800,000, with approximately 80 percent living in rural or remote areas. Solomon Islands' geography and dispersed population makes the provision of mobile connectivity infrastructure challenging. In 2023, it was estimated that that only 29.5 percent of the population had access to the 4G mobile network.² This is thought to increase to 81.8 percent when considering access to the 3G network³.

The primary difference between 3G and 4G is speed. 3G is suitable for messaging and web browsing, whilst 4G offers significantly faster data speeds, enabling more data-intensive applications like telehealth, video streaming and mobile banking – essential for equitable development across the Solomon Islands population.

Whilst accessing social media and entertainment were the main reasons given for accessing mobile communication in Honiara, Guadalcanal and Western Province, this was less important in provinces where the 4G network is not readily accessible. In Choiseul, Isabel and Temotu provinces, 'communication' was noted as the main reason for accessing mobile communications.

The 2019 Census showed very little use of mobile internet for health, online banking, online shopping and such services, particularly outside large urban centres.

About the Telekom Towers Project

Australia partnered with Our Telekom⁴ to fully fund the project, valued SBD36 million, to improve connectivity to remote communities, and support improvements in:

- security, including responses to humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters
- health and education outcomes, including telehealth, and access to online learning resources
- business development, including access to online banking.

The investment included the purchase, installation and commissioning of six 4G mobile phone towers, together with solar-diesel hybrid power systems in following locations: Kariki, Nila, Kamaleai (Western Province), Vadede (Choiseul), Kia (Isabel) and Pelau (Malaita).

The project used world-leading Ericsson mobile equipment mounted on towers provided by Australian company Powertec Telecommunications. Polar Power, a United States based firm, provided the solar diesel hybrid power system, enabling reliable power with lower running costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

The total funding (SBD36 million) was provided as a 100 percent grant (rather than a loan) meaning this funding will not have to be repaid to Australia.

Australian High Commissioner, His Excellency Rod Hilton, said access to the internet had become a right, like clean water. "The Telekom Towers project complements Australia's SBD1.1 billion undersea cable investment which has connected Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to the rest of the world. Connecting to digital infrastructure is connecting to the future. These towers, together with the high speed Coral Sea Cable, have opened people living in the remotest of communities to a wealth of healthcare, education and business opportunities, strengthening communities and their economy.

2 <https://pacificcommerce.org/pei-project/4g-internet-penetration-in-pacific-island-countries/>

3 <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-solomon-islands#:~:text=Data%20from%20GSMASMA%20Intelligence%20shows,exceed%20figures%20for%20total%20population.>

4 Solomon Telekom Company Limited (Our Telekom) is a joint venture company between the Solomon Islands National Provident Fund, (SINPF) which holds 97.32% of the shares, and the Investment Corporation of the Solomon Islands (ICSI) which owns 2.68% of the shares.

Strengthening border security and humanitarian response



Closing communication blind spots around Solomon Islands enhances maritime security and disaster response. The three towers in Shortland Islands (Kamaleai, Kariki and Nila) enable better management of the border with Papua New Guinea, and aid faster national responses in times of natural disasters. The project's alignment with the 2020 National Security Strategy⁵ provides the government with the strategic means to modernise its border management and security infrastructure, and is another important way Australia is helping Solomon Islands secure its borders.

“From a national perspective, the new towers provide excellent border protection around the Shortlands, Northwest Choiseul, Pelau and Kia. It is a big asset for the country, and opens up communication to the people.”

Our Telekom Board Chairman, Mr. Baoro Koraua

The new towers currently benefit approximately 7,200 people. The improved connectivity enables people and businesses to reliably access mobile banking through Telekom's 'm-selen' app. It also facilitates people to people connections, and access to social media and other internet applications.

The project employed 150 local workers during the installation phase across all six sites. This included civil works, rigging contractors, and staff from Our Telekom who worked with Ericsson and Polar Power teams to test and commission the new towers.

Our Telekom owns, operates, and maintains the towers as part of its national network. Our Telekom staff were trained in asset maintenance to ensure ongoing maintenance can be provided locally, rather than relying on external expertise. Each tower has a caretaker for both tower and power system. Our Telekom conduct regular inspections and continuous remote monitoring of power and network performance to ensure standards, safety, and requirements are met.

⁵ National Security Goal 8: Develop the country's infrastructure.



The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) played an important logistics role in the project, airfreighting the power system from the United States to the Solomon Islands via Australia. This journey involved careful planning, coordination, and cooperation between multiple agencies and countries to ensure the safe and efficient transport of these critical components.

Vadede Tower Case Study

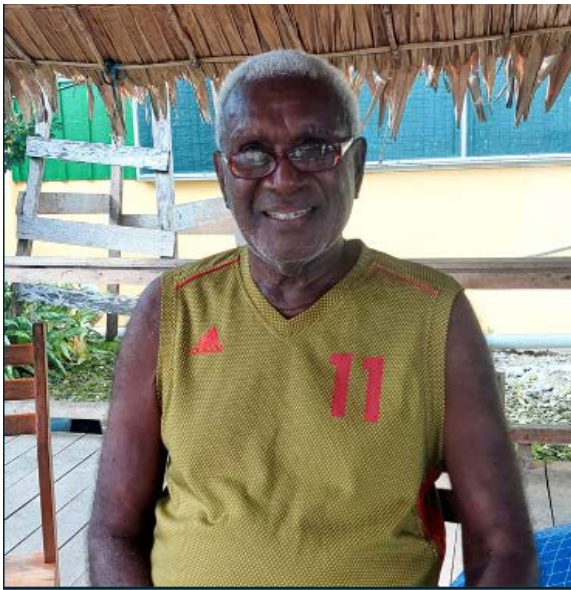


The new tower at Vadede, Choiseul Province⁶

The 20 North Choiseul communities serviced by the new Vadede tower have warmly welcomed the improved, more reliable signal. Prior to the new tower, communities frequently had to travel to catch signal or reliable mobile coverage. The community identified three key improvements: keeping in touch, business efficiency, and enhanced education and health service provision.

⁶ <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/pelau-communication-tower-now-online/13127>

1. Keeping in touch



Chief Lemeus Manavakana Molevanga Village

“Our coverage used to be spotty. People had to walk to specific areas—like up the hills or closer to the coast—to get any signal. At times, we even traveled to Bushu, a neighbouring area, just to access mobile services. There was a gathering spot in our village where people from nearby communities like Poroporo would come together, as it was the only place with a connection. People can now make calls or send messages without needing to travel far, which has improved the speed and ease of communication.”

People reported that the new tower has led to a stronger mobile signal and wider range of network coverage. Previous mobile ‘blackspots’ without signal can now access the network. Users noted that voice services are mostly uninterrupted, even during busy peak hours.

Specifically, people reported that improved coverage allowed them to more easily communicate with family in Honiara and their children boarding at schools around the country. This included communicating during critical times such as when family members are sick or have passed away.

For example, Chief Lemeus Manavakana spoke of benefits of the tower following the recent death in the village:

“Thanks to the telecom tower, we quickly communicated to all relatives from abroad to come to the funeral. With the mobile network it helped to quickly make arrangements for transport, get money for financial support and inform the minister to conduct the funeral.”

2. Helping business



Lina Vaqalo (pictured above right), the owner of BSQ Store in Molevanga, highlighted the positive impact of improved network for her store:

“The ability to call cargo suppliers directly has streamlined operations. It’s now much easier to arrange deliveries and communicate efficiently”. Internet access has also allowed me to check cargo prices and product availability online, which was challenging before the tower’s installation. It’s made my business more efficient and more competitive.”

Mobile banking services and the ability to top-up her balance via mobile have also been game-changers, as this was not possible before the tower was built.

The benefits of the new tower and improved access to mobile communication will increase over time as customers switch to internet-enabled phones. Currently, many people still have older phones that cannot access mobile internet, so they are not yet benefiting from the range of new services available. Additionally, there’s a need for more awareness about how to use the new technology effectively.

3. Enhanced health and education



Access to internet has transformed many aspects of health and education services around the world. The new tower at Vadede means these benefits are now available to them.

At Molevanga Primary School, Chairman Gerald Mingasipo (pictured above right) said the impact on education has been life changing.

“Teachers now use their phones to plan lessons and download e-learning materials, while parents can help their children with assignments more easily. This is a big help—especially when we don’t have many physical resources in the school.”

Loemuni Clinic nurse, Lucy Bose (pictured above left), can often consult more than 50 patients in one day. She says mobile access has allowed them to respond quickly to emergencies and coordinate patient care with the provincial hospital in Taro.

“Before, we had to travel far or send letters if we needed help. Now, I can just call the doctor if I need advice, especially for emergency cases. We can now prepare for cases ahead of time—like if someone is coming in very sick, I can call the doctor for advice and make sure we’re ready. For outreach or general medical programs, it’s also easier to coordinate everything. It’s the same with medicines – before, we used to run out of stock and had to wait for canoes or write letters to restock. Now, I just call the pharmacy when the canoe is going out. It’s much more efficient.”