



## INSIGHT SERIES

Supporting More Women into Construction

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## Summary

In 2023, Australia's Solomon Islands Infrastructure Program (SIIP) introduced an innovative program to increase the number of qualified women employed in the male-dominated Solomon Islands construction industry. The Green Construction Training Program (GCTP) aimed to provide 20 women with basic skills and qualifications in construction and solar power systems. The program included a Certificate II in Construction through Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC), and a separate one-month training course in basic solar panel design, installation and maintenance delivered through the Solomon Islands National University. The initiative was the first all-female cohort to undertake construction training by APTC in Solomon Islands and after 12-months, has resulted in half the participants going in to paid employment.

## About the Green Construction Training Program

Women and people with disabilities are under-represented in the Solomon Islands infrastructure sector. The inclusion of women in construction has positive economic and social impacts. It leads to a more robust and resilient workforce, drives innovation, and contributes to the overall growth of the industry<sup>1</sup>. Construction is also a traditionally well-paid sector in Solomon Islands, providing better income pathways for women. To help address this issue, SIIP partnered with APTC and the Solomon Islands National University to deliver the GCTP. The program aims to increase the number of women with qualification able to work in Solomon Islands' construction industry.

### Participant #1 | Daisy



Prior to undertaking the GCTP, Daisy had an engineering background, but had only worked in administration jobs. After completing the program, Daisy was awarded with a scholarship for a further Certificate III in Carpentry. Post-graduation, Daisy was employed by Reeves, where she learnt to implement safety protocols and checks in construction work. In October 2024, Daisy got a new job working on the Australian-funded Naha Birthing and Urban Health Centre construction project, managed by SIIP. As a Leading Hand, Daisy was responsible for carpentry and blockwork, and supervising a team of 12.

*From the GCTP, I expanded my knowledge and honed my practical skills. For example, I use my new skills to read and interpret construction plans and ensure adherence to work health and safety regulations. The GCTP training gave me the confidence to lead teams and manage quality checks. I aspire to be a professional woman in construction, making impactful contributions.*



*In the future, I aim to mentor and inspire other women to join and excel in this field. My message to women working in the construction field is to maintain a strong mindset, focus on your goals and embrace the challenges and barriers as part of your personal growth industry. Working in a male-dominated industry is challenging, but rewarding.*

## Evaluation Findings

An evaluation of the GCTP was undertaken in 2024. This included feedback from all GCTP participants, and focused interviews with two employers, three trainers and 14 participants. Overall, the evaluation found the training was successful with 18 participants passing the training exam. However, the program has had mixed success supporting GCTP graduates into employment in the Solomon Islands construction industry. The evaluation found the following key findings:

### SIIP excelled at supporting women to complete the GCTP training

There was high demand for the training. Approximately 120 applications were received for the first cohort of 20 training places. SIIP met its target of reaching participants from six provinces of the Solomon Islands. Eighteen of the twenty initial participants completed the training, with two participants dropping out due to family or medical reasons.

All graduates were satisfied with SIIP's support during the training, with accommodation provided for participants and additional support provided for two students with family issues. The GCTP participants generally performed well in the training. All 18 women passed the tests, with four women getting 100 per cent. The trainer reported that most women were not confident in the practical elements in the early stages of the course, but as they progressed, they excelled in both theory and practice.

### The GCTP has contributed to women working in the Solomon Islands construction industry

Half (nine) of the 18 GCTP graduates have found employment in construction (noting two are currently in unpaid internship roles). Six applied directly to the job opportunity without SIIP support. SIIP supported two graduates to find work with Tropic Group Builders, who are currently employed on SIIP-supported infrastructure projects.

All nine employed GCTP graduates said they have gained experience and skills through their current roles and planned to continue working in construction. Two GCTP graduates have developed an interest in engineering and are hoping to study engineering in the future.

The two employers who were interviewed reported that most of the GCTP graduate work was undertaken to a high standard. They reported that the GCTP graduates did well when given clear instructions and implementing tasks. One employer noted that sometimes the graduates lacked confidence or needed supervision or guidance on some tasks. When asked about the performance of the women in their new roles, one Ministry of Infrastructure Development respondent stated:

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*Compared to the men, there is no difference. They are performing similarly to men. Some of the men do not have the APTC training, they come from regional training centres with a lower academic level. So, these girls come with very good knowledge in how to work.*

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The six women yet to gain employment still hope to work in construction. One woman said that the lack of work experience was a barrier since many construction jobs required work experience that she didn't have.

## Most GCTP graduates need additional support to gain employment

The evaluation found that supporting graduates to find paid employment is more complex than delivering the training component of the program. Several barriers to GCTP graduates gaining employment in the construction industry were identified including:

- most local construction companies are too small to take on extra employees
- the lack of contractual requirements or incentives requiring or encouraging construction companies to employ female graduates
- potential gender discrimination towards females, due to a male-dominated construction industry
- the limited amount of construction work experience held by most GCTP graduates
- delays in SIIP supporting GCTP graduates to connect with potential employers.

### Participants #2&3 | Edith and Nanny



Edith Asa and Nanny Walasi have been working with local Solomon Islands company Tropic Group Builders since April 2024 after SIIP secured two placements for GCTP graduates on the Australian-funded/SIIP managed Honiara Central Market Western Extension project. The two were then employed by Tropic Group Builders on the Buala Market site, another SIIP-managed project. Nanny works in logistics, responsible for materials and cargo, while Edith is working as a Health and Safety Officer.



When asked what is going well in their current roles, Edith and Nanny say that what they learnt during training has become much clearer since working. They also stated increasing confidence to undertake work they are assigned. However, both have described the challenges of working in a male-dominated field. This has reduced their confidence to speak up to either correct other (male) worker's mistakes, or to offer helpful advice on how a job could be done better. However, as time passes both women say they are slowly feeling more confident to speak up.

Nanny and Edith say their employer has provided a three-bedroom rental accommodation for them to share, private female toilets on construction sites, safety measures for late work pick up/drop offs, feeling safe while working on the construction site, and being offered advice about safe/unsafe areas in Buala.

Edith and Nanny both say they had a very good experiences with the GCTP, and were satisfied with the SIIP support provided. In particular, the stipends they received reduced the financial burden on their families whilst undertaking the training including providing daily bus fares. Both women said they would like to remain in the construction industry, and would like to be part of any future training in work health and safety.

#### Participant #4 | Florence

Florence gained a job with the Ministry of Infrastructure Development after completing the GCTP and says she is getting positive encouragement and advice from her supervisor.

*I started a job in roadworks with the Ministry of Infrastructure in May 2024. I enjoy working with the Ministry, the teamwork involved and gaining new experiences and knowledge doing road infrastructure. A challenge for me has been that I am new to road infrastructure and feel I need to learn more. I plan to stay in this job, because my interest is in infrastructure.*

### Summary lessons

The evaluation found several improvements for SIIP to support future GCTP graduates find construction employment.

- Use internships as a bridge between training and paid employment, particularly for graduates with limited work experience.
- Consider adding contractual requirements in future projects for the construction company to employ female construction graduates.
- Early engagement with the construction industry to minimise the time between graduates finishing their training and starting an internship or gaining employment.
- Broad construction industry engagement to increase employment options for female construction graduates.

### About the Solomon Islands Infrastructure Program

Launched in 2021, the Solomon Islands Infrastructure Program (SIIP) is Australia's 10-year partnership with Solomon Islands to create local economic opportunities through a large pipeline of economic infrastructure projects, and build the skills of Solomon Islanders to plan, design, build and maintain good quality, safe and inclusive infrastructure.

<sup>i</sup> Building a Balanced Workforce, WorkCon Insight. <https://insight.workcon.com.au/building-a-balanced-workforce-the-importance-of-women-in-construction/#:~:text=The%20inclusion%20of%20women%20in%20construction%20has%20positive%20economic%20and,overall%20growth%20of%20the%20industry.>