

# TI IPP STRONGG IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

## Citizens Holding Power to Account in Solomon Islands

Founded in 2003, Transparency Solomon Islands (TI Solomon Islands) is part of the Transparency International global coalition against corruption that brings together chapters operating in more than 100 countries worldwide with an international Secretariat based in Berlin, working towards a shared vision: a world free of corruption.

### BACKGROUND

Solomon Islands' score in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) remains below 50 and has remained stagnant between 42 (2020, 2022) and 43 (2021, 2023), indicating high levels of perceived corruption in the public sector. Many public officials are alleged to have misused state resources, abused entrusted power, and have faced charges of corruption. A few top-ranking officials were convicted under the "conflict of interest offense". Aid funds and public service are too often seen as opportunities for personal gain by those in positions of entrusted power. Many communities in the Solomon Islands have been victims of undemocratic decisions and

corrupt conduct, and have witnessed corrupt conducts and practices, but do not have information on where to go to report. TI Solomon Islands empowers citizens and helps them raise their concerns regarding these widespread corrupt practices.

### PROJECT APPROACH

With support from the *TI Indo-Pacific Partnership for Strong, Transparent, Responsive & Open Networks for Good Governance (TI IPP STRONGG) 2020 - 2023*, TI Solomon Islands was able to increase its geographical coverage and the number of citizens reached, including remote communities and the youth population. Youth are the most important stakeholder in the fight against corruption, as 70% of the population are aged between 15 - 34 years old. Through the *Citizens Holding Power to Account* project, the chapter empowered citizens with key and critical information and knowledge about their democratic, political, legal, civil, and human rights and the responsibilities that come with these rights. It further provided them with information on the legal instruments, and mechanisms that underpin these rights such as the Constitution of Solomon Islands - the Supreme Law of the country.



*TI Solomon Islands at the Bills & Legislative Committee © TI Solomon Islands*

Equipped with an understanding of this critical information, citizens are inspired to engage constructively in public debates, in the fight against corruption and holding power to account. TI Solomon Islands is the only civil society organisation that advocates towards improving citizens' knowledge and understanding of democratic processes, their political, legal, and civil rights including the protection of civil society space, and against corrupt conduct and practice, calling for anti-corruption reforms. The programme also supported the chapter's overall strategy providing access to core funding, contributing to the chapter's multi-facet ongoing advocacy targeting decision-makers and supporting people's activism against corruption. The project was implemented over a period of 3 years and 11 months, from February 2020 to December 2023.

## Fighting corruption amid political turmoil

The struggle against corruption in Solomon Islands is deeply rooted in a multitude of factors, prominently characterized by the erosion of democratic principles and political integrity. Over the past five years, the nation has witnessed a concerning trend of democracy backsliding, exacerbated by legislative measures that effectively shield politicians from accountability while serving geo-political interests. Political corruption not only obstructs vital public service delivery to both rural and urban populations but also enforces socio-economic inequalities, particularly impacting marginalized groups. Despite the critical role of national elections in shaping the country's governance, there exists a lack of awareness among citizens regarding their significance, further compounded by a passive civil society and a media landscape marked by self-censorship. The logging sector, intertwined with political interests, has become a hotbed for corruption, with collusion between state officials and industry players distorting both legal and illegal trade practices. TI's CPI underscores the pervasive nature of corruption in the Solomon Islands, with high levels of perceived corruption persisting within the public sector. Despite international efforts and financial investments aimed at promoting good governance, the entrenched influence of corrupt political leadership continues to obstruct progress. TI

Solomon Islands is steadfast in its advocacy against political corruption and empowering citizens with vital information to engage in anti-corruption initiatives.

However, the path towards combating corruption remains difficult, needing comprehensive reforms and heightened public awareness to foster a culture of transparency, accountability, and integrity within the nation's governance structures.

### Halting Government's Bid to Extend Parliamentary Term

In 2022, the Executive Government introduced a controversial policy to amend the Constitution, seeking to extend the parliamentary term from four to five years. This move faced strong opposition from the people of Solomon Islands. Critics found the government's rationale for the amendment unconvincing. They argued that they had elected their representatives for four-year terms and insisted that any alterations to this arrangement should be decided through an election.

Transparency Solomon Islands emerged as a prominent voice during this period. Responding to public demand, TSI initiated a parliamentary petition and conducted a survey, engaging over two thousand participants. The survey results overwhelmingly reflected citizens' opposition to the proposed policy, with 84% (face-to-face) and 94% (online) expressing disapproval.

Citizens cited several grievances, including the misuse of public funds, poor leadership, and corruption, as root causes of government inefficiency. They argued that extending the parliamentary term would not address these underlying issues and could potentially exacerbate governance challenges. The widespread resistance, evidenced by TSI's survey findings and media coverage, compelled the government to withdraw its proposal to extend the parliamentary term. Instead, a Constitution Amendment Bill was introduced to defer the National General Election due to the South Pacific Games, shifting it to 2024.

TSI's proactive engagement, including facilitating public discourse and protecting citizens' rights to voice dissent, played a crucial role in influencing the government's decision. Without TSI's dedication for amplifying citizen voices and presenting their arguments, the withdrawal of the government's policy might not have been possible.

# TI SOLOMON ISLANDS ACHIEVEMENTS

## Holding the government to account

Whilst Transparency Solomon Islands is criticized on the floor of parliament by the government, it has also gained its respect for the quality, substance, and depth of its contribution in matters of national interest and concern and its stand on democracy. TI Solomon Islands is invited to appear and make submissions before Parliamentary Standing and Special Committees on proposed bills and policy reforms. It is the only civil society organisation that is given an hour to make its submissions.

In a number of cases, based on TSI's submission, bills were sent back for improvement, resulting in several improvements to the bills. The participation at this level in government is one of the biggest achievements where TI Solomon Islands was able to bring people's voices and concerns to the lawmakers. TSI has also used the respect it has to open doors for other CSOs to be included in stakeholder meetings, making submissions to Parliamentary Standing Committees.

Through the chapter's advocacy, citizens were engaged in national issues of democracy that affect their democratic rights. In an instance of successful advocacy, the intention of the Executive Government to bring in constitutional change to increase the term of each parliament from four to five years was withdrawn.



*Prime Minister Sogavare at the TI Solomon Islands booth*  
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## Amplifying the demand for accountability

Transparency Solomon Islands has reached several constituencies in person and through the media. It

also assisted several constituency Community Governance Structures Leadership with printed information for their own clean election campaign awareness sessions. The increase, impact and effectiveness of this multi-pronged advocacy strategy of empowering citizens to demand accountability was witnessed in the 2019 National General Election (NGE).

From 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions, TI Solomon Islands was the only civil society organisation that maintained its advocacy on air, television and social media. TSI also empowered women's and youth's voice throughout the country through talk-back shows on the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC).

In 2023, several bills were rushed through the parliamentary process and passed without much comment or input from the public. TI Solomons' articles and opinion pieces were not published until well after the event and as a chapter it has had to weigh the situation and the risk it poses to staff and office being charged with inciting social disorder. TSI concentrated on government bills and policies and issues of most importance in its reduced advocacy in media and social media. Whilst it was not safe for local people to demand accountability, as they did straight after the 2019 election, they went through TI Solomon Islands who then presented their demands to the government. TSI with its knowledge of the government, administrative management and political navigation skills, stepped in to raise peoples demands for accountability to the government directly. The chapter empowered citizens, especially youths, to have a voice of their own, to think and debate constructively, to assess their situation and understand the link of these to their ballot paper. It highlighted the need for them to be responsible citizens and emphasised their democratic, political, and legal rights and responsibilities to hold their representatives and themselves to account.

## Stronger Partnerships

Transparency Solomon Islands would not have been able to achieve so much if it did not have partners. The chapter is proud of its strong partnership with the media (national, regional, international), the Community Governance Structures Leaderships and of course the citizens of the country. There are also other partners that TSI networks with such as civil society organizations,



including church leaders, women's organizations, development partners, politicians (both provincial and national), financial institutions, institutions of integrity and accountability. There are many that request to partner with TI Solomon Islands. However, TI Solomon Islands guards its reputation, and credibility closely and chooses with care who it partners with, both inside the country and outside the country. Transparency Solomon Islands is known, nationally, regionally, and internationally. Journalist and TV crews have come from as far as Switzerland, USA and Germany to feature the work that TI Solomon Island does in the country.

Through its work, reputation, honesty, credibility and well-researched arguments the chapter has built stronger and trusted partnerships within the government circle, the public, development partners, church and most importantly the Community Governance Structures Leadership. Being accountable and transparent, TI Solomon Island has gained the trust of citizens and the respect of the government.



*Taking part in the Regional CSO Pacific Forum Leaders Meeting © TI Solomon Islands*

Transparency Solomon Islands has had to come up with increasingly innovative approaches for raising public awareness, including the building of coalitions with institutions of integrity, civil society networks, and supporting new legislative reforms to strengthen these institutions. In a highly politicized public sector, coalitions between institutions of integrity and accountability and civil society organisations are a necessity given the environment public officials find themselves in. Given TSI's reputation within the Solomon Islands for independence, accuracy, relevance, and responsibility in its public advocacy campaign against corruption, it does provide an indirect avenue for institutions of integrity to influence policy makers, as well as providing a layer of protection for the staff of those institutions and

citizens concerned with the rising corruption levels in the country. It is thanks to this professionalism that Transparency Solomon Islands is able to navigate the difficult political landscape, protect democratic rights and continue to be the voice of the people.

## Empowering Solomon Islands' Youth

Transparency Solomon Islands organised a series of Youth For Democracy Camps between 2021 and 2023, jointly funded by the Pacific People Advancing Change (PPAC) of the South Pacific Commission and the IPP STRONGG project. Despite challenges posed by Covid-19, these workshops in Honiara attracted over 600 applications, with 134 youths participating across the five events.

The impact of these workshops was profound. Participants from the inaugural workshop were so inspired that they formed the Youth for Democracy Network. This group took on the mission of spreading anti-corruption awareness among secondary school students in Honiara. With more workshops, more youth joined, expanding the network's reach and impact.

Through ongoing mentorship and skill-building sessions by TSI, the youths engaged in various activities, including election observation, surveys, radio programs, and community outreach. Their voices, once seen as mere troublemakers, are now valued contributions to national discourse. Many of the participants found employment, crediting TSI for equipping them with the skills and confidence needed for success.

TSI sees these outcomes as a testament to the effectiveness of its advocacy approach. By inspiring young leaders, TSI believes it can catalyse positive change in Solomon Islands, where youth make up a significant portion of the population. The continued engagement of these youths beyond workshop sessions underscores the lasting impact of TSI's efforts.



*Youth for Democracy Participants in 2023 © TI Solomon Islands*