

RED BEACH, GUADALCANAL PROVINCE

A community
case study on climate
(im)mobility from
Solomon Islands

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1. Research Context

Climate change is intensifying with a wide range of challenges to the sustainable development and resilience of all Pacific Island countries. Pacific political leaders collectively and individually continue to underscore that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific. Community leaders also emphasise the need to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change because communities want to continue living in their own countries, for as long as possible.

Mobility has always been a part of Pacific ways of living and is part of our resilience. This means that mobility is a measure of last resort when other options for the ongoing flourishing of life have been exhausted. In the context of climate change, mobility includes a broad range of responses influenced by individual, family, and community circumstances. It can include temporary movement of people within and between countries to support community resilience (e.g., via internal recruitment for work and international labour mobility schemes), relocation of people and communities within a country (whether voluntary or not, including in response to climate-related hazards), and permanent migration across the Pacific or further afield.

Consideration of climate-related (im)mobility also needs to account for other common forms of human mobility such as displacement, where people are forced to leave home to save their lives, and immobility, where people and communities adapt and respond to climate change without everyone moving, whether that ‘immobility’ is voluntary or not.

Climate change is adding to existing drivers of mobility, especially economic mobility, in the Pacific and elsewhere. Attributing current mobility decisions to the direct effects of climate change can be difficult, but climate change-related hazards will impact Pacific Island peoples’ wellbeing including their heritage, culture, language, and ancestral connections to land; security, including water shortages, the actual loss of land and increased risk to life from intensifying extreme weather events; and livelihoods, including salt-water intrusion affecting agricultural production.

This case study is one of 17 undertaken as part of a comprehensive research project, funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), known as Climate Immobility Research in the Pacific. The overall goal of the research is to “enhance Pacific resilience and well-being and ensure the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific are protected in the context of climate change” (MFAT, 2021, p. 25). Underpinning the overall goal is acknowledgement of Pacific values, knowledge and culture, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Each case study explores climate and hazard risk factors, resilience and decision-making practices, mobility patterns, land and marine tenure, understandings of wellbeing and climate mobility associated loss.

This case study was undertaken in Red Beach in Solomon Islands, a country consisting of six large and 900 small islands. Solomon Islands is in the western Pacific, southeast of Papua New Guinea, and has a population of 734,887 as at 2023.

2. Red Beach

Brief introduction

Red Beach is a coastal community located 12 km outside the Honiara City boundary. The community is situated along the northern coastline of Guadalcanal.

Figure 1: Location of Red Beach, Guadalcanal



Red Beach is important to this study because it is an informally relocated community. In the 1960s, community members moved internally from the isolated Sikaiana atoll (212 km northeast of island of Malaita) in search of employment and education opportunities for their children.

The place

Red Beach is a low-lying coastal community in north Guadalcanal; however, the community falls under the administrative responsibility of the provincial government of Malaita which is primarily responsible for their home atoll of Sikaiana. The land area is also known as Tenaru which includes the Sikaiana Red Beach community settlement. The Tenaru area is referred to as Red Beach and named so as a military code name given by the American marines during World War II.¹

The people and the town of Tenaru are under the jurisdiction of the Guadalcanal provincial government, which maintains the local roads, plus clinics and police posts a few kilometres away. However, provincial government support is not always constant, resulting in deteriorating roads and other vital infrastructure. Behind the Red beach community are hectares of oil palm plants owned by Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Plantations Limited (Nanau & Pendevevana, 2021; Pendevevana, 2020).

In the centre of the community is the Red Beach Sikaiana Cultural Village, built by the community and funded by the government, which attracts tourists and visitors. Houses are built of modern and traditional materials (sago palm leaves and bamboo). The community has an Anglican Church and a community hall.

The people

The Red Beach community is made up of families who originate from the Polynesian atoll of Sikaiana. About 300 people currently live in Red Beach. The community is not densely populated. Families settle on land given to them by their grandparents and parents who

¹ World War II is a key event in the history of Red Beach with both Allied and Japanese armies in nearby battles (Kwai, 2017). It's unknown how this led to the displacement of Indigenous residents. 'The Tensions' in Solomon Islands (1998–2003) also feature in the history of Red Beach with many residents being displaced or fleeing and the Australian Regional Assistance Mission establishing itself in this area.

initially acquired the land from the original landowners through a customary exchange process.

The people of Red Beach converse in their language from Sikaiana, but it is not as commonly used as it once was. Pijin is widely spoken.

3. Methodology

The research project *Climate (Im)mobility in the Pacific* was co-designed to utilise both formal and informal Indigenous qualitative social science methods. For each country involved, the research approach was guided by methodological contributions and insights from Indigenous scholars to ensure consistency with Indigenous research principles.

Relationship building, ethics and community approval

Before any fieldwork was conducted, the researchers and institutions needed to create a positive relationship and connection with the Red Beach community. The first contact was made through Kerryn Sogha Galokale. In May 2023, the team from the University of Auckland (UoA) and Solomon Island National University (SINU) made their first visit to Red Beach and met with elders of the Red Beach community. Father Eric Tevaiola, a chief, and Ruben Bako, the community's chairman, welcomed them. During the first visit, relevant information about the research study was shared and a letter seeking permission was given to the leaders. They were happy to agree to allow the research to be conducted in their community.

The UoA research team obtained UoA Human Participants Ethics Committee approval on 20 March 2023. As part of the ethics application, we had already secured support from Solomon Island National University (SINU) in the form of a letter of understanding between the dean of the Faculty of Arts (UoA) and the vice chancellor of SINU. This outlined the mutually beneficial aspects of the research collaboration and specified each party's responsibilities and commitments, including the allocation of resources.

The research team

The research team comprised Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem, Dr Christina Newport, and Kerryn Sogha Galokale (all UoA) and Jamesford Keboy and Marklyn Vovo from SINU.

The research team conducted the study of Red Beach Community from 11–12 July 2023.

Recruitment of participants

Before the research team arrived at Red Beach for the fieldwork, Father Eric informed the young people, men, and women of the community about the research and then, on arrival, presented the research team with a list of 28 participants.

All participants were interested and willing to participate in the study. Their consent was obtained verbally during the interview process and formally confirmed by signing their names on a provided sign-in sheet. A total of 28 participants participated in the study, with one individual participating in both the youth and men's workshops. In addition, it was noted that all research participants felt comfortable using Solomon Islands Pijin language throughout their engagement in the study. This shared language facilitated effective communication and ensured that all participants could fully engage in the research process (see **Appendix 1** for more details).

Methods

Three research methods were used to collect relevant data.

Tok stori interviews

This method involved one-on-one conversations with village elders on the first day. All tok stori interviews were conducted by Kerryn and Jamesford, with assistance from Christina and Marklyn. Pijin was the main language used during the tok stori interviews. Each tok stori lasted for up to 60 minutes.

Community workshops

Community workshops for men, women, and young people were conducted on the second day. The men's and women's workshops were conducted concurrently, with Kerryn facilitating the women's workshop, and Jamesford and Marklyn facilitating the men's. In each group, the researchers posed questions relating to the five predefined

themes – challenges and movements, decision making and peace, resilience and wellbeing, land and marine tenure, and climate im/mobility-associated loss. Participants shared their insights, stories, and experiences relating to the themes. Each discussion lasted for up to an hour. After that, each workshop group took turns to present their discussions.

At the youth workshop, the young people were divided into three groups and took turns to visit three ‘stations’ representing a different generational perspective: youth, mature adulthood, and grandparenthood. The young people were asked to share their thoughts on what they thought would make a good life from the perspective of different generations. Station 1 was facilitated by Jamesford, Station 2 by Kerryn, and Station 3 by Marklyn, assisted by Yvonne and Christina. The tok stori/sharing in each station lasted for 15–20 minutes.

Figure 2: Red Beach Men’s Community workshop



Sitting in front (L-R): Eddie Valoje, Rueben Bako, & Father Eric Tevaiola. Standing – middle row (L-R): Jamesford Keboy, Rodney Bona Kalisalo, Marklyn Vovo & Badley Ngaia (with the bilum). Back row (L-R): Sammy Fangata, Arnold Kalae, Thomas Sapivaka & George Warren. Red Beach Community Workshop Men Participants, 12 July 2023. Photographer: Prof. Yvonne Underhill-Sem

Walk the land

The walk-the-land method was undertaken on the second day after completion of the community workshops. Father Eric and Christina walked around the community noting and observing the environment. Father Eric shared stories and experiences relating to the impacts of climate change on his people's lives.

In the next section, we present historical information about mobility relevant to the people of Red Beach. This is followed by feedback and findings from the community on a range of topics that demonstrate how a resilient relocated community is experiencing and responding to significant climate change-related threats and challenges.

4. Historical Mobility and Settlement

In the 1960s, elders from the distant atoll of Sikaiana bought land from the traditional Guadalcanal landowners in the Red Beach area. The motivation for this internal relocation was mainly for better schools, job opportunities, and medical attention.

During civil unrest and ethnic tension ('the Tensions') between 1998 and 2003, some Red Beach families fled to Honiara, leaving their houses and properties behind. After the Tensions, some Guadalcanal landowners moved into the empty houses and occupied them. This continues as an issue for the Red Beach community.

As a trans-local community retaining their ties to their home, Sikaiana families travel from their atoll islands to visit family at Red Beach, some return after spending several months or even up to a year with their family. Others, especially young people, decide to stay and further their education or employment. Red Beach families also maintain their connection with Sikaiana and travel to the atoll for important events and gatherings.

Over the last 5 years, several young men and women of the community have joined the Labour Mobility Programme to work in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.

5. Language and Customs

Traditional culture

The residents of Red Beach maintain their rich cultural heritage through customary practices such as traditional dance, songs, and marriage within their ethnic group. Travel

from Red Beach to Sikaiana is undertaken for important cultural and social events and gatherings to maintain these links.

Some of the second-generation occupants at Red Beach believe that, for them, their home is Red Beach, not Sikaiana. Similarly, for the Sikaiana people in Honiara and Tenaru, according to William Donner (2002), an anthropologist studying the Sikaiana community, “Kinship and social relations remain important in towns, but there are some changes that suggest increasing differentiation and attenuation of kinship ties” (p.35).

Some of community residents proudly speak their native language, further preserving their unique Polynesian identity. However, Donner (2020) noted that “one of the biggest changes is the loss of the Sikaiana language as the main medium for everyday speech. I am told it simply is not used very much at all. This is probably the most dramatic change” (p. ii).

The Sikaiana people are intermarrying with other ethnic groups in Solomon Islands. A community member shared that, in the past, marrying outside their culture was not allowed. Intermarriage will have impacts on the preservation of the Sikaiana Polynesian culture. How intermarriage might impact the community in the future was expressed at the women’s workshop:

In 20 years’ time, our children should marry to another province because in Red Beach there is already a shortage of land. (Member of women’s community workshop)

Community cooperation and leadership

The community has a committee structure to oversee and manage community affairs. There is a process for resolving issues in the community. According to a village elder, if village committees cannot deal with, for example, community crime and violence, the village committees will usually refer the matter to the police.

As the residents observe changes and hazards related to climate change, community cooperation is considered an important part of their resilience and wellbeing:

For us to have a good life everyone must work together for a common goal. (Young female community member)

However, lack of access to basic needs such as food can be a source of conflict and threaten communal values and ways of living:

There are things that we need to survive in our daily life. If these things are not available, then it will result in trouble and conflict. Such that if we do not have food then we will end up stealing from our neighbours and so on. (Young male community member)

Good leadership was considered a key factor in addressing issues and tensions that arise in the village related to social behaviour as well as land tenure and use:

If leaders always speak up for the community and speak against violence in the community and being proactive then this means that the community will have a good life. (Female community member)

Living in a town, contemporary behaviour and other related socioeconomic factors like church, urbanisation, education, and popular culture continue to influence the lifestyles of this community. The impact of modernisation is substantial.

Figure 3: Red Beach Cultural Centre



Red Beach, 2023. Photographer: Roi Burnett

Mindful of these influences, the Red Beach elders and community have built a cultural centre with the help of the state (the Ministry of Culture and Tourism). The cultural village provides a space for the community's elders to transmit essential cultural practices and knowledge to the young generation while also educating visitors about the Sikaiana people.

6. Faith and Education

Most of the Red Beach Sikaiana community members adhere to the teachings of the Anglican Church of Melanesia. There are a small number of adherents of other churches.

In terms of education, specific community infrastructure is lacking. The Red Beach community needs a primary and a secondary school, as currently the children must commute to either the Kaotave School of Guadalcanal Province or the schools in Honiara (16 km away). Bus fares are expensive. To make commuting to school more accessible some students choose to reside with their families (or wantoks) in Honiara.

Figure 4: Church in Red Beach



Red Beach, 2023. Photographer: Dr Christina Newport

7. Vegetation and Gardening

The location of Red Beach as a coastal community has significantly influenced the vegetation and gardening practices in its sandy area. Flora is characterised by shrubs, fruit trees, and coconut trees. Most coconut trees are infected and spoilt by rhinoceros beetles.

As mentioned earlier, the presence of oil palm trees is prominent near the community. Some families of the Red Beach locality have established gardens along the periphery of the oil palm plantation, growing tapioca and potatoes as their primary root crops, mainly for family consumption. The surplus produce is usually put aside to sell at the markets. However, these gardens are vulnerable to flooding due to drainage from the plantation area. Because Red Beach is very close to the seaside, salination also affects gardens.

Fishing is also a vital subsistence activity and source of food for the community, but like gardening is negatively affected by unseasonal weather patterns that affect their ability to use traditional knowledge to predict fish movements and locations.

8. Climate and Weather Patterns

Red Beach is already experiencing the impact of sea-level rise.

Some houses that are located near the shoreline have been removed and the people rebuild inland. Only some houses still remain in the shoreline. Very soon they will be removed. (Community leader)

The ever-changing weather patterns heavily influence Red Beach, and the increasing occurrence of extreme weather events has made it increasingly difficult for people to garden and fish. During heavy rainfall, root crops are usually substantially destroyed by becoming waterlogged, which is compounded by the impact of invasive species.

Before the village had no creek and a lot of coconut trees but after the flash flood in 2014 it formed two big creeks near our cultural village and also coconut trees have been reduced in numbers due to beetle infestation. The creek keeps on increasing in width every year due to soil erosion. So, this is also an issue because in years to come it will destroy their cultural house. (Community leader)

Garden yields have also been affected. Unpredictable weather patterns are affecting the community's ability to use traditional methods to time planting and harvesting, for example. These same weather patterns also make it difficult for fishermen to predict the right season for fishing, which impacts the size and type of their catch. Fluctuating water temperatures, shifting currents, and unpredictable weather conditions all pose a significant challenge to the livelihoods of the Red Beach community.

Climate and environmental hazards are compounded by economic activities in the area such as deforestation and commercial oil palm plantations which, among other things, cause damage via introducing debris in waterways.

9. Land and Marine Ownership

The Sikaiana community at Red Beach (Tenaru area) acquired the customary land through a process known as the *chupu* – a Guadalcanal customary practice fundamental to land ownership and transfer.² Donner (2002) argued that “the purchase of land at Tenaru was based, in part, on Western concepts of leases deeded to individuals; nevertheless, the Sikaiana use the settlement to preserve a collective identity” (p. 39). Donner elaborated as follows:

Land purchased in other parts of Solomon Islands is owned by an individual and is inherited by that person's children, both male and female, not by the patrilineage. Whereas the control of land on Sikaiana has emphasised the solidarity of expanding patrilineages, Sikaiana land tenure in other parts of Solomon Islands emphasises individual rights and inheritance in the nuclear family.

Several men proudly told me of the land they had purchased in other areas of Solomon Islands and that they planned to leave that land as an inheritance for their children. The land at Tenaru is held in long-term leases by specific individuals. (p. 36)

In essence, on the atoll, land ownership and control are held by patrilineages, while at Red Beach (Tenaru) land is owned by specific individuals. Generally, both spaces are

² For an in-depth explanation of *chupu* see: Monson (2023, pp. 142–146).

regulated by different norms concerning land ownership, control, and usage – one is based on a traditional context, and the other is premised on contemporary practices recognised by law. Against this background, some residents of Red Beach believe that due to the growing population and the negative impacts of sea-level rise and related climate-change conditions that are reducing the land area, the land will not be enough for future generations.

10. Water Availability

Water availability in the Red Beach community is a significant challenge. The people mainly depend on rainfall captured in their water tanks for cooking and drinking. There is no piped water supply, which causes considerable strain on people's health.

Wells provide water for washing and bathing, however, salination is a significant issue in these wells.

To mitigate water shortage during long dry periods or droughts, the residents of Red Beach have to hire water trucks to fill their water tanks.

Water availability at Red Beach will remain a significant challenge in the foreseeable future if the relevant state and nonstate actors are not proactive in dealing with this challenge.

11. Sources of Income

People at Red Beach from Sikaiana derive their income from diverse sources. A segment of the population derives income from salaries and wages as they are employed in the public service as government employees, while others work in the private sector for various corporations and companies. A few people from the community hold prominent government jobs outside of Solomon Islands, like the current Solomon Islands High Commissioner to Australia.

Some villagers cultivate gardens and sell their surplus produce at local markets for additional income. Others have started small businesses by selling ring cakes and fish and chips at nearby markets or Honiara, while others operate small trade stores. Some community members have their own businesses in Honiara that employ family members.

As mentioned earlier, over the last 5 years, several young men and women from the community have joined the Labour Mobility Programme to work in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.

The Red Beach Sikaiana Cultural Village contributes economically to the community's sustainable livelihood through hosting visitor tours and as a venue for training events and meetings.

The Red Beach community sometimes holds fundraising events to raise money for community projects like churches.

12. National and Provincial Government Support

The national government has also offered financial support through various government ministries, but this depends on whether the residents apply for socioeconomic projects. For example, the national government granted funds for the construction of their cultural village based on an application submitted by the village committee on behalf of the residents to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

13. Future Thoughts on (Im)Mobility

Apart from occasional movements to and from their original village in Sikaiana, moving from Red Beach at Tenaru for another location is highly unlikely to be an option for now. Although the challenges imposed by climate change and related issues are threatening to some extent, residents of Red Beach are still sceptical about moving to other locations:

So far, the community still do not take the effect of the sea-level rise as serious. Only some people in the community were concerned and are trying to find other places such as moving inland. But nothing has been said about looking for a new place for the community to move to. (Male community member)

Some of the reasons for staying are that some of the residents have expensive well-built houses. Another important reason is the need to be close to dead relatives whom they love so dearly; they would feel a sense of loss and separation by leaving them behind. But if the effects of climate change on their livelihoods and location are substantial,

according to an elder who is a second-generation occupant of Red Beach, the occupants will have to accept it and move to another location. The elder also expressed that they must migrate to find and make another livelihood, for their betterment and advancement into the future.

Young people reiterated these views about having reasons to stay and accepting that in the future they may have to move due to the impacts of climate change.

14. Conclusion

Red Beach is an internally relocated coastal community. Individual community members moved to this location from Sikaiana atoll in the 1960s. During our research, the community highlighted the challenges they experience and outlined adaptation measures they have implemented over multiple generations. The climate im/mobility conclusions are as follows:

Climate and hazard risk factors impacting the community – As a coastal community, Red Beach is experiencing changes in weather and rainfall patterns, flooding, coastal erosion due to sea-level rise, and storm surges. Several households have already moved away from the shoreline. The climate is impacting food security, subsistence fishing and gardening, and water security. Due to periods of low rainfall and salination, water must be bought in via water tanks at certain times of the year. Food and water security will need to be addressed if they are to stay in place.

Practices of resilience and processes of decision making – The residents of Red Beach are resourceful and resilient having moved from their isolated atoll and made a new life in a new location. Faith and education have provided a solid foundation for resilience in the community. Decision making in the community centres around a community committee and leadership structure. Of note, relocating the community has not been discussed formally according to a workshop participant.

Understandings of wellbeing, security, and identity – Language and custom are key dimensions of resilience and wellbeing for this community. This includes their kinship ties to Sikaiana, which link them to their sense of identity, belonging, and community

cooperation. However, these dimensions are threatened with increasing changes to their way of life and livelihoods, particularly among younger generations.

Past, future and expected mobility patterns – The retention of relational ties with Sikaiana provides a trans-local base but younger generations are less connected to this traditional homeland and consider Red Beach their home from which they pursue educational and economic opportunities in Honiara and further afield as opportunities allow.

There is scope for sustainable circular mobility options with employment in Honiara and overseas which would allow some of the community to leave so others may stay.

Moving the community due to climate change is viewed with reluctance. Residents are aware that access to land and increasing population are pressing factors of how and where they live. This is important when relocation is on to noncustomary lands. A community participant involved in this research acknowledged that the reducing land area from sea-level rise will mean there will not be enough land for future generations.

Appendix 1: Research Participants

Research workshops and interviews took place on July 11–12 2023 in Red Beach. There were 28 participants from Red Beach. One participant was part of a community workshop for men (CWM), and a workshop for youth (CWY), although he is not considered a youth. The rest of the participants were divided amongst CWM, community workshops for women (CWW), CWY, and key informant interviews (KII). Youth and men’s workshops each had nine participants. The women’s workshop had only six participants. There also were a total of five KIIs (see Figure 5). More men (18) than women (10) were able to participate in this research (see Figure 6). The largest age group was from 20–29 years old, with eight participants. This was followed by the 60–69 age group with six participants. The median age group was 40–49 years old (see Figure 7).

Figure 55: Types of community participation

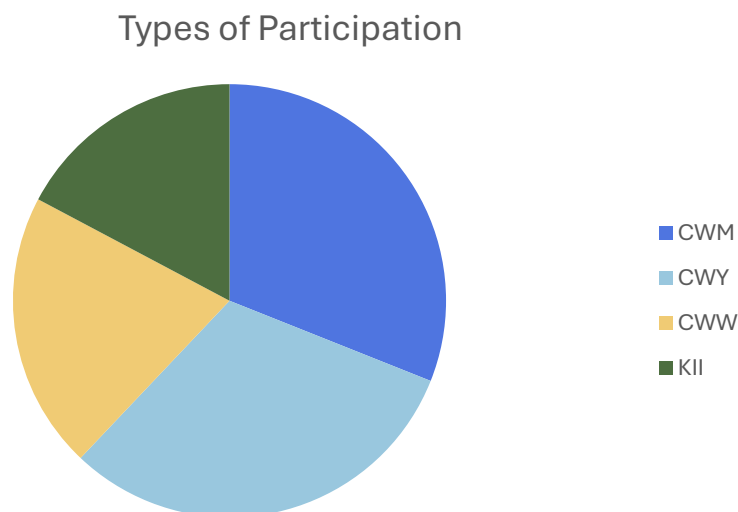


Figure 66: Gender representation

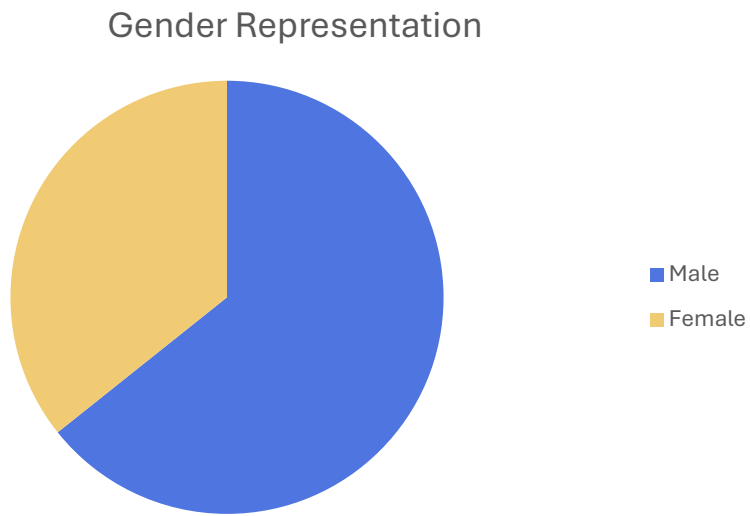
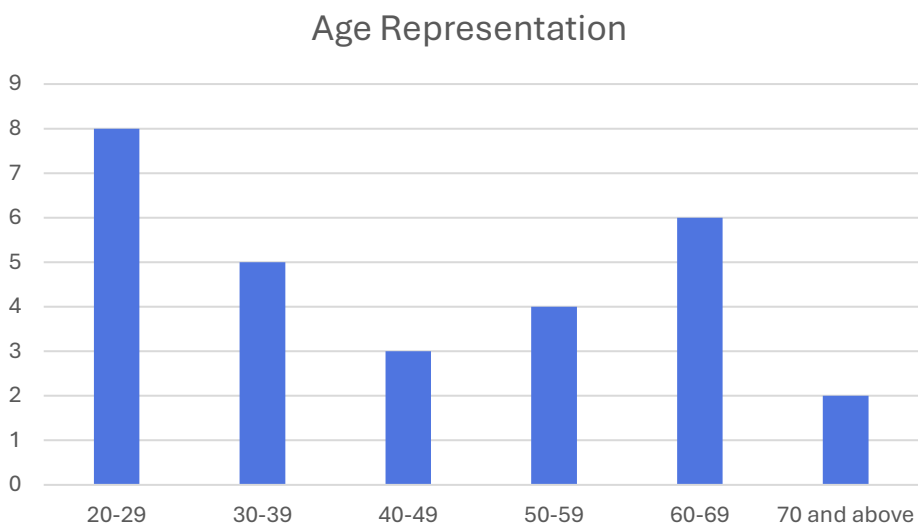
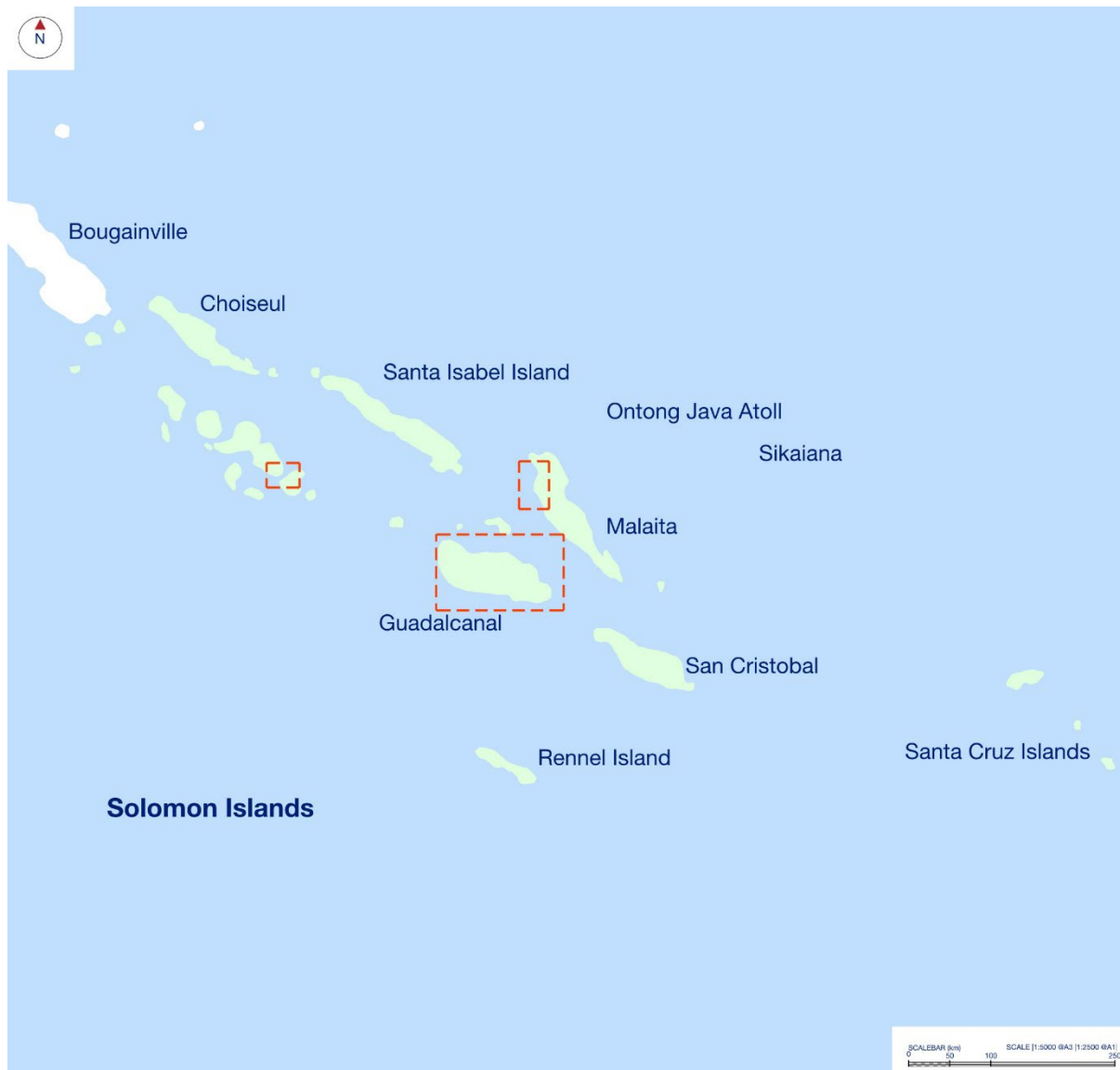


Figure 77: Age representation



Appendix 2: Map of Solomon Islands

Figure 8: Map of Solomon Islands



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