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# Draft Floricultural Value Chains in the Solomon Islands Revisited

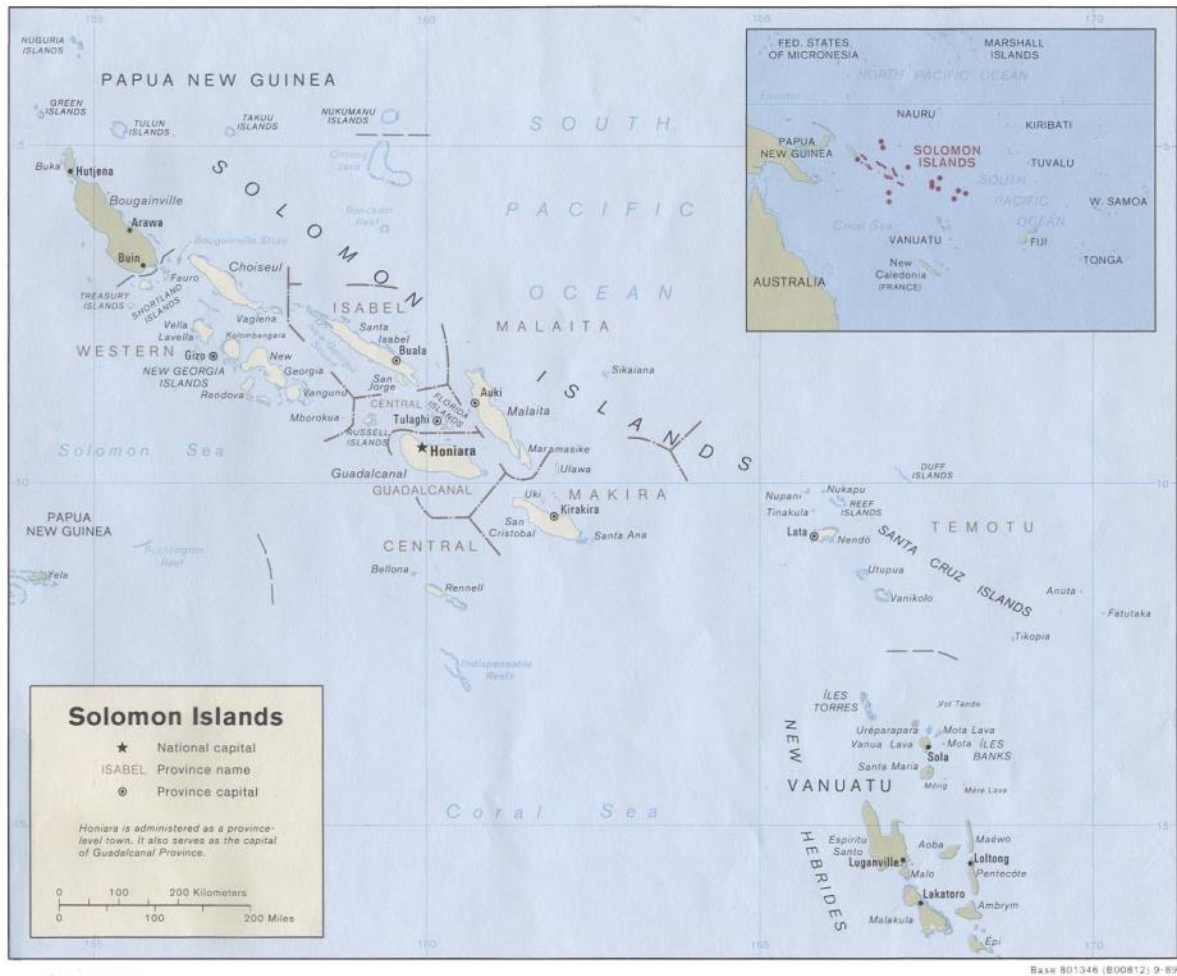
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ACIAR Trip Report  
February 2014

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Sherrie Wei

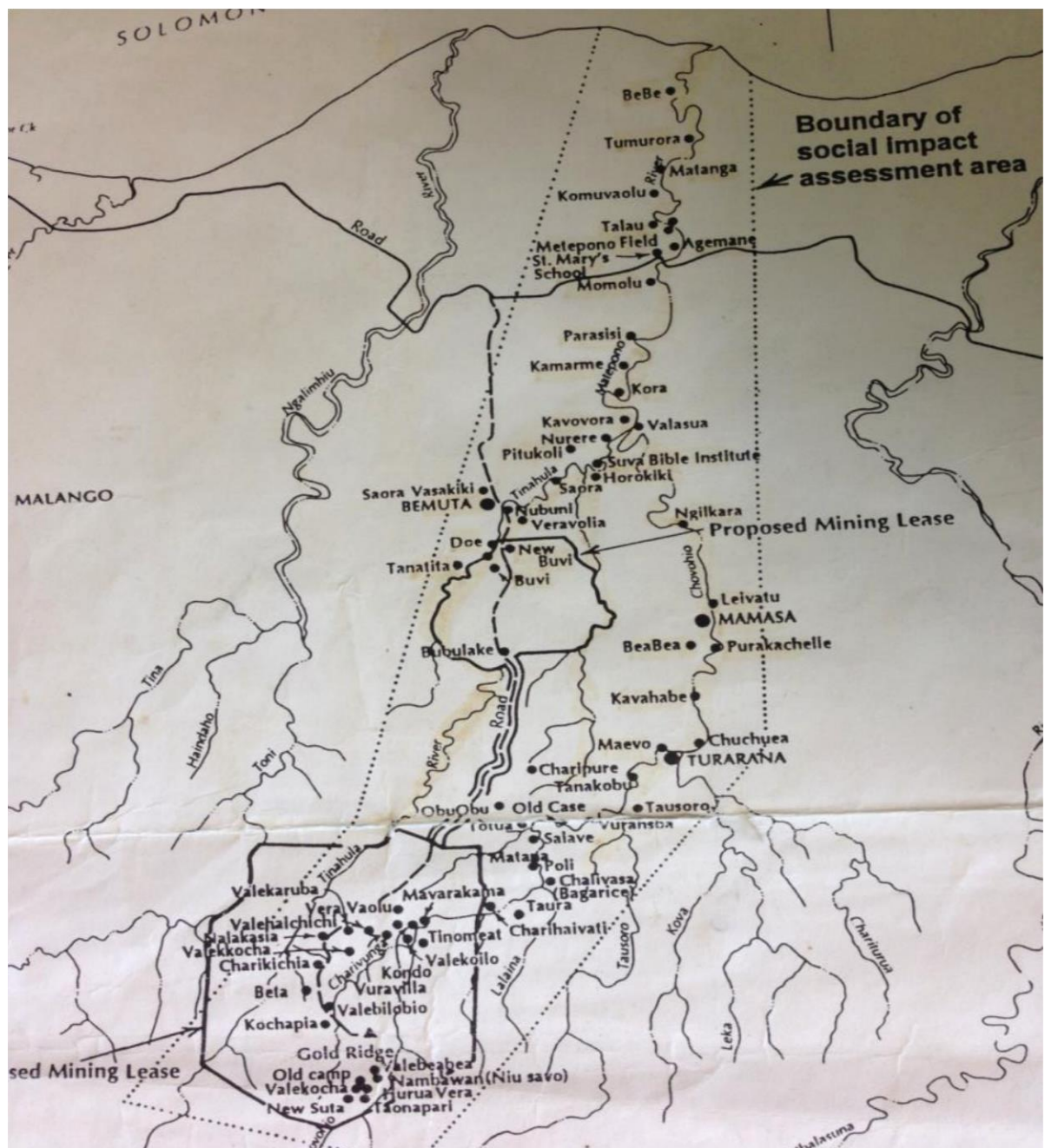
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Map of the Solomon Islands.



The gold mining operation by St Barbara Limited in the Gold Ridge area is about 30 kms southeast of the capital city Honiara.



Boundary of social impact assessment area of the gold mining operation by St Barbara Limited in the Solomon Islands.

## **Acronyms**

ABT	Aboriginal Bush Traders
DOOR	Do Your Own Research
GRML	Gold Ridge Mining Limited
PHAMA	Pacific Horticulture and Marketing Access
SI	Solomon Islands
SIFA	Solomon Islands Floricultural Association

## **Executive Summary**

This report documents the activities and observations from a field visit to the Solomon Islands (SI) in February 2014. There are two parts in this report. The first part documents the findings from interviews and focus group discussions with growers and florists from a new flower growing group in the Gold Ridge area of the Guadalcanal province. The second part updates the previous report made in late 2011 which looked at the floricultural value chains in the Honiara area. This update discussed on the progress of two successful floricultural players, one grower and one florist, and the export trial by a team of growers and florists from Honiara to Brisbane in February 2012.

Currently there is a mining lease between the SI government and the Gold Ridge Mining Limited (GRML), a wholly-owned subsidiary of St Barbara Limited, an Australian company. Most of the women in the Gold Ridge area are encouraged by the Community Relations office of GRML to engage in floriculture, in addition to growing vegetables, to improve livelihoods. A workshop was conducted with 11 community women from the Gold Ridge catchment area. During the workshop, the women were briefed about the floricultural value chains in Honiara and discussed their perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of their venture into floriculture.

The major strength that the participants saw is that they have a close network and are ready to share experiences and support each other. They saw many weaknesses among the group in developing floriculture. Most of women are new to growing flowers and floristry. There is general lack of knowledge and skills in growing and marketing. For some families, lack of family support in floriculture among competing commitments might be an issue. The main opportunities are from the natural endowments that they have, especially sufficient rain. A seemingly immediate marketing opportunity for the women is to supply to the various offices associated with GRML. However, for the opportunity to be sustainable, one must pay attention to the issue of fairness to all. The women said they could share with each other, through taking turns to supply, the potential order or contract with the mining company. The major threat perceived is that the community are selling the same kind of flowers, such as gingers, being the greatest threat to each other. Other threats that the women mentioned beyond their control are poor transport and lack of a marketing channel.

It was also revealed that at the workshop that ‘fairness to all’ is important for any program, including this floricultural project, to be successful in the communities. The women mentioned that, if they can get a contract with the mining company, they would share the contract.

The second part of this report updates the progress of floricultural activities in the Honiara area and the export trial to Brisbane in February 2012. The two floricultural players, one grower and one florist, continue doing well. Both of them go to the outskirts of Honiara or other provinces to form their value chains because these growers do not have a regular selling channel. The florist, being listed under Department of Commerce’s webpage, has been contacted by an U.S. company Gift Baskets, to deliver arrangements in the Honiara area. This kind of deal is very profitable for the florist. She also applied her knowledge on ‘Do Your Own Research’, obtained from this project in her own vase life trial. The grower, while expanding production in cut flowers, is now venturing into ecotourism by using her income and entrepreneurial experiences from floriculture.

A trial shipment of Vandas, Arachnids and Crotons was made by a group of seven producers and florists from Honiara to two Brisbane wholesalers in February 2014. The trial was funded by two projects under Pacific Horticulture and Agricultural Market Access (PHAMA). The aims of the trial mission were to test both commercial and quarantine aspects of the pathway. The main issues raised by the Brisbane importers included stem length, shelf life, bunch size and bunch quantity per box, terms of trade, packaging and seasonal calendar of demand. No further action is planned at this stage due to marginal commercial viability.

## **I. The Emerging Floricultural Value Chain in the Gold Ridge Area in the Guadalcanal Province**

### **Background**

The Gold Ridge area in the Guadalcanal province, about 30 kms southeast of Honiara, has a rich deposit of gold. Currently there is a mining lease between the Solomon Island (SI) government and Gold Ridge Mining Limited (GRML), a wholly-owned subsidiary of St Barbara Limited, an Australian company. The operation employs about 800 people of local people and expats mainly from Australia, Fiji and Papua New Guinea<sup>1</sup>. While Gold Ridge is not far from the capital city of Honiara, given the current road conditions, it takes more than an hour to drive from Honiara.

Through negotiation for mining deposits of gold in the Gold Ridge area, five communities consisting of a few hundred households have been relocated. The relocated communities are: Bubulake, Ravua, Matavuka, Turarana and Obo Obo. The GRML catchment area includes two more downstream communities: MDA and KTDA as they were assessed to be affected by the mining activities. These seven communities are the clients of Community Relations office of GRML. The office is located at the Bubulake settlement and employs 12 people dealing with the logistics and various issues arising directly or indirectly from GRML's mining activities.

Through the Community Relations office, the mining company has encouraged new settlers to grow vegetables and, more recently flowers, to improve their income. To this end, a greenhouse was built and some local horticulturalists were employed by the mining company. An undercover market was also built to offer a selling outlet. The market opened only briefly in the mid 1990s, but soon after there was the ethnic tension around 1997-2002. To date, the market hasn't re-opened. One reason mentioned was that the mining catchment committee, composed of local people, set the rules high to sell at the market. For example, the rent was prohibitively high for most women to hire a stand.

The relocated communities start everything from scratch. The first activity of the floricultural programme happened in January 2014 with Jan Hintze's training workshop for floricultural skills and to bring interest in floriculture. Some twenty women participated in that workshop. New planting materials, bright-coloured Zingibers, were brought in from Australia for these communities. Most of the Zingibers seen at the market in the SI were pale-coloured. Like most other bunches, they were sold for SBD5 per bunch<sup>2</sup>. This first training workshop included how to grow Zingibers. Currently the new planting material is with Quarantine but will be distributed to the women in the communities. Women who participated in the workshop will have priority to receive the material. Further planting material for Curcuma will be brought in by Ruth Liloqula sometime in 2014.

The second floricultural activity for the communities was the marketing workshop and focus group discussion conducted by the author in February in 2014. There were 11 women participants, five from the relocated communities, the rest from the downstream part of the mining activity catchment area. All the 11 participants attended Jan Hintze's technical training workshop. All the participants for this marketing workshop have attended Jan

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<sup>1</sup> About 70 of them are expats from Australia, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

<sup>2</sup> A pot of Zingiber is currently sold for SBD300-500. In comparison, a pot of heliconia is sold for SBD50-100.



Hintze's training workshop. (See Appendix 1 for a list of the participants and the communities that they come from.) In the second workshop, information on the two major floricultural value chains in Honiara, the Betikama and the Kakabona chains were shared with the participants. From the interest established with the group that attended both workshops, the Social Relations office will continue to work on developing this industry.

The Gold Ridge group can be contrasted with other floricultural groups in several ways. Firstly, the women in the Betikama and Kakabona groups made their decisions into floriculture with little external influence. It was more or less their own independent decisions and their businesses took off organically. In contrast, the Gold Ridge women were assisted by the Community Relations office of the mining company to develop floriculture to improve livelihoods. Secondly, Honiara growers and florists are close to the major markets, whereas the Gold Ridge women are away (over one hour drive given the current poor road conditions) from the major markets. The seemingly obvious customer for the Gold Ridge women is the mining company's various offices<sup>3</sup>. Other demands are more event-based.

		
<p>Entrance to of the camp for employees of St Barbara's Gold Ridge Operation.</p>	<p>One of the many blocks of accommodation for employees and visitors of St Barbara's Gold Ridge Operation.</p>	<p>A greenhouse was built by the mining company</p>

	
<p>An undercover market was built by GRML but has not been open for nearly two decades.</p>	<p>The 'GRML Community Market' sign remains there behind grasses.</p>

<sup>3</sup> Both camp managers, Mark and Allen (Australians taking turns to work at the mining site) were approached by the author for the potential supply of pot plants and arrangements. They are willing to pay for weekly arrangements around the budget of SBD100-150.





GRML has a Community Relations office located in the Bubulake settlement.



Houses built by St Barbara at its Gold Ridge operations to relocate households for its mining activities.



Women from the Gold Ridge area attended the floriculture marketing workshop and focus group discussion.



Merriam's garden came fourth at the community garden competition held by the Gold Ridge operations. Flowers grown include ginger, gerbera, costus and crown of thorns.







The plants in the dining mess of Gold Ridge operations are artificial. This presents an opportunity for Gold Ridge communities.



The arrangement in the wet mess of Gold Ridge operations is composed of leaves only. This also presents an opportunity for Gold Ridge communities.



Some Zigibers were seen in the market, but generally with pale colours.



Zebras (in orange, white and maroon) were sold by just a couple of growers at the Market



Most cut flower bunches, foliage bunches were also sold for SBD5.



From left, Arachnids, Zinnias and heliconias were all sold for SBD5 per bunch.

## **Focus group discussions with Gold Ridge community women**

For the Gold Ridge women who attended workshops and started floriculture together, have developed similar skills in growing and marketing in floriculture. There is yet differentiation of skills to complement each other in the supply of floricultural products. It was considered useful to run a discussion session of a SWOT style on how the participants saw their venture into floriculture.

### **Strengths**

Initially, the participants had difficulty in identifying their strengths in building floriculture in the communities. Nevertheless, one woman mentioned that they know each other well and visit each other often. She recalled that when she was praised for her garden, she was motivated to expand her operation. A close network among the women who are ready to share experiences and support each other is one strength that the group has. Perhaps being community-based lends the women the support that they need for the labourious hands-on work in floriculture.

### **Weaknesses**

Nine out of the 11 participants are new to growing flowers. They expressed the view that they are still trying to take in whatever information is available on growing and marketing flowers. A few women divulged that their husband and children (teenagers or older) wondered what they were doing and suspected that their efforts may be futile. However, some other husbands and children are hopeful for their efforts and have helped to move good soil from the bush to their gardens. For some families, lack of family support in their venture into floriculture, among women's competing commitments, might be an issue although this can be improved through communication.

Among the 11 participants, only two had basic floristry skills. Others are hoping to get such skills. Participants mentioned that, once they have the floristry skills, they can offer arrangements to sell at the Honiara Market and the mining company offices might be among their customers. Needs for plant protection assistance were raised. One grower mentioned that recently the petals of her Vanda orchids turned white. She wondered if the problem came from too much rain. Other weaknesses that the participants mentioned were lack of proper garden tools.

### **Opportunities**

The women stated that 'Everything grows here! We just plant and it grows by itself'. Their natural endowments, especially sufficient rain, make the growing aspect easier. A seemingly immediate marketing opportunity for the women is to supply to the various offices associated with GRML, such as the Community Relations, dining mess (currently having artificial pot plants), wet or beer bar (currently having artificial pot plants and a poor arrangement composed of foliage only) and recreational offices. However, for the opportunity to be sustainable, one must pay attention to the issue of fairness to all.

There have been several anecdotes indicating that, if fairness to all is ignored, there will be unfortunate consequences. One of the two camp managers, both from Australia, divulged the following story. The residency management has been encouraging the relocated community

to grow vegetables and promised to buy from the relocated residents. It was mentioned that residents just bought from the market and resold to the camp management at a high price<sup>4</sup>. One man, however, did the right thing to grow quality potatoes. The camp management, as promised, bought from him. Perhaps out of jealousy, his vegetable garden was soon vandalised. Since then, the camp management returned to buy from the Honiara Municipal Market again and the bill was cut down to less than half<sup>5</sup>. In another account, one woman came first in the competition to beautify the gardens among the relocated communities. It was indicated that her garden was also vandalised soon after the good news. It appeared that the woman came from a different area and the locals were not happy about the first prize being won by a new settler.

At the workshop, the women said they could share with each other the potential order or supply contract with the mining company. For example, arrangements can be made to rotate on a weekly basis. It was highlighted to the workshop participants that, if different people were supplying the same customer, they need to set the same quality standard to ensure consistency and reliability of supply.

### **Threat**

At the individual level, the community women saw growing and selling the same kind of flowers, such as gingers, being the greatest threat to each other. Other threats that the women mentioned beyond their control are poor transport and lack of marketing channel. One woman is selling at the Honiara Municipal Market every other Saturday. She mentioned that transport is an issue. She uses the bus, which is hot and usually crowded on Saturdays. Given that the community market has been closed for nearly two decades, lack of marketing channel is an issue.

## **II. An Update on Floricultural Industry Progress in Honiara**

It was highlighted in the previous report over two years ago that some informed and motivated women with floristry skills from Betikama and Kakabona groups were able to network with women growers to drive their mini value chains (Wei, 2011). This update focuses on the progress of two successful floricultural players, one grower, Mary Bojia and one florist, Anne Maedia and the export trial by a team in Honiaria to send cut flowers and foliage to Brisbane in February 2012.

The backdrop of the two successful stories in floriculture in Honiara can be, to a large extent, attributed to the Solomon Islands' 'dual economy'. Dual economy refers to an economy with two unequivocal purchasing powers. An average Solomon Islander lives under a subsistence economy, whereas, although a small segment, the expats have the consumption pattern of a developed economy. In marketing terms, there is an experience sub-economy (where good services for good experiences present good returns for businesses) within a dominant 'ordinary economy' (where things get done just for survival) (Gronroos, 2007). In such an

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<sup>4</sup> The communities own a three-tonne truck which allows them to buy produce from the Honiara Municipal Market to on-sell to the Gold Ridge camp.




<sup>5</sup> Reduced from AUD2,200 to 1,000 weekly



economy, savvy local entrepreneurs can grasp the opportunities to service the very profitable expat segment if they understand the needs and wants of this segment<sup>6</sup>. Many florists have continued to do well in such a ‘dual economy’. Several of them are listed on the website of Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce for exposure to overseas opportunities.

Unlike most florists in Honiara, the two women, go to the outskirts of Honiara or other provinces to conduct training in growing flowers, floristry and craft skills (fee paying, generally between SBD50-100)<sup>7</sup>. This is because growers in Honiara have marketing outlets, but growers outside of Honiara have little opportunity and are more likely to work closely with them.

One florist described that, training sessions are often a very pleasant experience for villagers. They bring in plates of food to share. Some husbands and children come as well to socialise with others. These sessions are often the first time for women to hear that growing flowers can make money. As the florist described, ‘now they talk about flowers everyday! I visited their gardens. They have all bright colours. Growing flowers has impacted on the lives in the communities.’ When doing the training, the florist told the author that, she cited Mother Teresa’s words to motivate the community women: ‘Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person’.

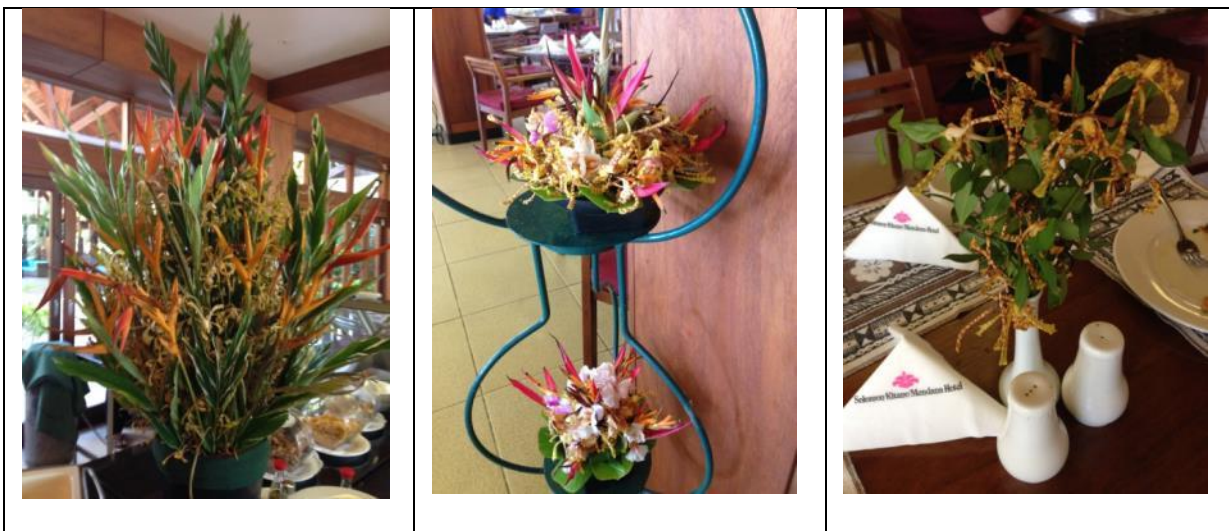
		
<p>White flowers of cordylines are sold in the market.</p>	<p>There are two names by locals for this Arachnid-like flower, Christmas flower and butterfly (as the leaves look like butterfly). It is sold for SBD10 for a larger bunch. The seedling (right photo) is sold for SBD50.</p>	

<sup>6</sup> To illustrate, Ms Nelly has been the food and beverage manager for six years at the Kitano Mendana Hotel, an upmarket hotel in Honiara. She said the biggest achievement for her is to get restaurant employees to wear shoes rather than thongs while on duty.

<sup>7</sup> As Mary travels around to conduct trainings, she has developed rapport with villagers. Mary said they even asked her to run for an MP position.



In one flight of Solomon Airlines, unlike most other airlines which use perfume, it uses fresh gardenia in the lavatory. In another flight, small helicolas were used.



At the Capitana restaurant of Kitano Mendana Hotel, arrangements are replaced on Saturday or Sunday, but the flowers in many arrangements are observed fading by Thursday.

## Anne Maedia

The florist, Anne Maedia, trained women on the outskirts of Honiara to grow flowers and to become her suppliers. The reason for engaging women a bit away from Honiara is that, unlike Honiara, there is no centralised selling venue for them. So, there is strong interdependency between the florist and the grower suppliers. Anne has over 100 women behind her, or to see it from another perspective, over 100 women are relying on her orders to improve livelihoods. The business relationship between them may be better called teamwork. Anne would call her growers giving very clear instructions, such as ‘I want the gingers to be cut between 6-7 am and be washed and placed in water. I need a total of 30 with 10 red large ones, 10 red small ones and 10 pink medium ones and I will arrive between 7-7:30am’. She is driven around by her grandson to pick up the flowers from grower to grower. Payment is made on the spot. This is vital for, not just the women growers themselves, but also for the



women to win support from their husbands for the time that the women could have spent with the husband and children<sup>8</sup>.

In teaching the women to grow flowers, Anne told them that: 'There are three ways of learning. The first way is learning by listening, imagining, then trying out. The second way is learning by seeing with two eyes, then trying out what you have seen. The third way is learning by hearing, seeing, touching, then trying out yourself. The third way of learning is more powerful and I am adopting the third way to teach you how to grow flowers'. This Do Your Own Research (DOOR) extension technique is what Anne learned from this ACIAR project workshop in February 2012 conducted by Malcolm Hunter.

Anne also applied her knowledge on DOOR to her own vase life trial. The trial included Vandas and Arachnids in fresh water, gel and fresh water with cresol added. She monitored and recorded the cut flowers for their performance for 10 days. Although flowers were doing well in the cresol solution, it attracted ants, so did gel.

Anne's floristry business is listed on the webpage of SI's Department of Commerce. Since this exposure, she has been contacted by an American company, Gift Baskets, which has worldwide business, including that of SI, to deliver arrangements to named persons or offices in the SI. When Gift Baskets receives an order, the company e-mails a photo to the florist as to how the arrangement will roughly look like with a quote. Often there are some simple instructions, such as writing something on a card to be delivered together with the arrangement. Once the florist in the SI confirms that she can do it, she receives full pre-payment through telegraphic transfer. The florist in the SI then fulfils the delivery of the arrangement. Many such deals have been done successfully through the intermediary role played by Gift Baskets. This selling channel is very profitable for the florist as arrangements are usually in the order of USD100-200.

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this kind of teamwork between florists and growers, to the author's knowledge, has not emerged in the floricultural supply chains in Papua New Guinea, either in Lae or Port Moresby.

Vandas Orchid					Observations and Comments
Day	Day Number	Time	Temperature of the day		
Arachnid	1	6 pm	Cooling		5 open fresh leaves and 2 still shut.
Arachnid	2				Still the same no difference seen.
Arachnid	3				The bottom leaves are starting to change its colour but the other leaves are still fresh.
Arachnid	4				5 blooms from the bottom is changing colour.
Arachnid	5				3 blooms are starting to open but is still aged in colour and from the top is slowly to open.
Arachnid	6				2 blooms from the 3rd and 4th are still close. The bottom ones are slowly opening. The top one is still closed.
Arachnid	7				3 old leaves have fallen off. The new ones are starting to open. The bottom ones are still slowly opening and the top one is still closed.
Arachnid	8				No new leaves open. The bottom leaves are still slowly opening.
Arachnid	9				All the bottom leaves fall in its new opening of leaves.
Arachnid	10				Flower look very weak no new.

Day 1 and day10 for the Arachnid trial. Anne Maedia applied her ‘Do your own research’ knowledge, obtained from this ACIAR project workshop conducted in Feb 2012, in her own vase life research for Vandas and Arachnids.

To better service the needs of her expat customers, Anne Maedia is thinking about importing regularly, not necessarily during calendar event periods (such as Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, etc.) roses, carnations and maroon-coloured anthuriums. As she explained, conversation like this happened frequently ‘You are a florist! Do you have roses?’ ‘Sorry! No, but how about anthuriums?’ ‘Do you have maroon anthuriums, then?’ She estimated that she can take about 200 stems weekly for each flower and about 300 stems during calendar event periods. This quantity is small for firms in floriculture export nations, such as Columbia and Israel, but can be an opportunity for Papua New Guinea highland growers to send flowers to SI if their supply chains can be aligned to trial a small quantity.

While in Australia, Anne visited the Toowoomba flower festival. This encounter stimulated her the idea of hosting a similar one but with a lesser scale in Honiara. She hopes this can happen in 2015.

## Mary Bojia

Mary Bojia, an ex teacher, is a successful flower grower from Kakabona village in Honiara. She also travels around the country to conduct trainings in growing flowers, as well as dyeing and screen printing. Mary’s flower marketing channels include direct sell at the market, supply to florists and self use to make arrangements. As Mary has been selling well, she is expanding the scale of production at her newly inherited land on Guadalcanal<sup>9</sup>. Using her good income from growing flowers as a start-up fund, she is now venturing into ecotourism while continuing to expand production in floriculture. The attraction, Valalea Evergreen

<sup>9</sup> In Guadalcanal culture, land is passed to females. Mary has an ecotourism business away from Honiara, at the Rennel and Bellon province (The province is composed of two islands, Rennel and Bellon).

Garden, at Verahue village, about 30km west of Honiara in Guadalcanal<sup>10</sup>, boasts untouched reef for diving experiences. A restaurant, conference room and over 10 bungalows will be built over several stages. She is starting to transplant various flowering plants from her garden, such as gingers, heliconias and Arachnids to the ecotourism site<sup>11</sup>. The business is expected to operate in late 2014. Her main target is international tourists. Mary explained that the entrepreneurial experiences that she learned from growing and marketing flowers have given her confidence in this ecotourism venture. She is a member of Solomon Island Floricultural Association (SIFA) and recently Assistant Director for Guadalcanal Ecotourism<sup>12</sup>. She said that her husband was doubtful in the beginning about the viability of the business, but he was convinced later as Mary put it 'When he saw I asked workers to cut the logs for building the bungalows, he knows I am serious. He is now helping me with the construction'.

SIFA, according to various people talked to, has not progressed much as a nation-wide floricultural organisation<sup>13</sup>. One issue, as pointed out, appears to be the Wantok cultural complex among the executive members.

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<sup>10</sup> As part of the road is dirt road, it would take an hour and a half to drive from Honiara.

<sup>11</sup> She will grow anthuriums, orchids and potted plants in her garden as they don't take much space as gingers and heliconias.

<sup>12</sup> The Director, Edison Saeni was trained for ecotourism operation in Japan. He is referred to as the Father of Ecotourism. Mary is referred to the Mother of ecotourism by locals.

<sup>13</sup> The current President Lily is also the President of Women in Agriculture. She travels around and has limited time for SIFA. As a result, many SIFA meetings had to be cancelled. Anne Maedia has left SIFA. She is now a member of Women in Business and sits in its Marketing Committee. She advocates 'stop logging and stop mining'.

## **Kitano Mendana Hotel in Honiara**

The arrangements at the Kitano Mendana Hotel are either made by Ms Nelly or Jeff's family. All vase arrangements are made by Ms Nelly, while all oasis arrangements are made by Jeff's family.

Ms Nelly, from the Philippines, is the food and drink manager. She is responsible for all the vase arrangements at the two restaurants in the hotel, the Japanese restaurant and the Capitana restaurant. She has a budget of SBD200 per week for cut flowers. She buys flowers from the market and makes vase arrangements herself. At the market, rather than buying from the same person, she walks around the market to see what is on offer first. She has been in her current position for six years. The flowers in the arrangements start fading by Thursday. Ms Nelly has to wait till Saturday to replace the arrangements<sup>14</sup>.

Jeff, a local man who works for Kitano Construction next to the hotel, delivers all the arrangements utilising oasis for the hotel lobby, courtyard and two restaurants. The connection was established when his late wife was the assistant to the hotel manager years ago. The arrangements were made by his wife before, but currently, the arrangements are made by his sister. The family gets cuttings from their garden, but most of the flowers are bought from the market on Saturdays. He comes in every Sunday to replace arrangements.



Nester (right), a grower and Kitano Mendana Hotel house keeping employee, sells what she has at the day, three bunches of Arachnid, at the market. Ms Nelly (second right), the hotel food and beverage manager, is buying all Nester's flowers so that Nester can go home early.



Ms Nelly is making a large arrangement from the flowers she just bought from the market to display at the salad buffet area at the Capitana restaurant of Kitano Mendana hotel.

<sup>14</sup> She does get staff to change water on Wednesdays. She adds a little bleach to the water. I also mentioned to her to trial some sugar into the water as well.

## Summary of Trial Shipment to Brisbane in February 2012

A trial shipment was made by a group of seven producers and florists from Honiara to two Brisbane wholesalers in February 2014. The trial was funded by Pacific Horticulture and Agricultural Market Access (PHAMA) SOL04: *Review of the potential for cut flower and foliage exports to Australia*, and SOL08: *Trial shipments of cut flowers and foliage to Australia*. The second project is a follow-on from the first project. The trial was led by Grant Vinning and facilitated by Andrew Sale. Including the producers, a team of nine members were involved in this trial (Vinning, 2012). Prior production-oriented activities instrumental to this trial were funded by two ACIAR projects, HORT/2011/065 and HORT/2008/011 (this project). HORT/2011/065 was purpose-designed to complement the PHAMA organisation of trial shipments of cut flowers to Australia (Holloway, 2012)<sup>15</sup>.

Other activities in preparation for the export trial were:

- (a) All the nine team members (seven producers, one team leader and one facilitator) visited Humpty Doo in the Northern Territory to observe commercial floricultural production of tropical plants,
- (b) The producers attended floral arrangement training provided by the Aboriginal Bush Traders (ABT) in Darwin<sup>16</sup>,
- (c) All the nine members visited a series of wholesalers and importers in Brisbane<sup>17</sup>,
- (d) All the members visited two floral art suppliers in Brisbane, and
- (e) Grant Vinning and Andrew Sale held discussions with a packaging manufacturer in Lautoka, Fiji, from which came a prototype inner and outer box for transporting cut flowers from Honiara to Brisbane (Vinning, 2012).

The three trial shipment products were Vandas, Arachnids and Crotons for ease of quarantine entry and that these flowers have the most marked point of differentiation of all candidate products. The aims of the trial mission were to test both commercial and quarantine aspects of the pathway. Specific objectives were to

- (a) Examine what do the producers need to aware of as they move from household and somewhat ad hoc production to commercial production of a planned nature;
- (b) Find out aspects of post harvest preservation
- (c) Meet with the importer to discuss the exact requirements, and
- (d) Visit floral art suppliers to acquire material needed for exporting (Vinning, 2012).

The main issues raised by the Brisbane importers included stem length, shelf life, bunch size and bunch quantity per box, terms of trade, packaging and seasonal calendar of demand. No further action is planned at this stage due to marginal commercial viability (Vinning, 2012).

## Other observations

### Fairness to all and the Wantok Culture

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<sup>15</sup> The author could not locate this ACIAR website although it was mentioned as such in Holloway's (2012) report.

<sup>16</sup> The linkage to ABT was made in this ACIAR floricultural project.

<sup>17</sup> Two producers visited the Brisbane market earlier funded by this ACIAR floricultural project.

As noted above, there have been several anecdotes indicating that, if fairness to all is ignored, there will be unfortunate consequences. Related to the issue of fairness is the deeply ingrained Wantok (one talk or one language) culture characterised by mutual help among people from the same area speaking the same language. In the past, this safety net has proved helpful to individuals enormously in times of difficulty. The flip side is that this social norm can undesirably slip into work circumstances in such a way that it is difficult to detach oneself from the Wantok culture when workplace professionalism is required.

On one occasion, an experienced florist noticed the mediocre arrangements that an upmarket hotel are displacing<sup>18</sup>. She approached the front desk hotel to supply arrangements to them. Due to the Wantok relationship between the current supplier and the hotel front desk manager, the florist cannot obtain an opportunity to supply.

Another case in point is the high standard of ethics and professionalism required in the security industry, yet difficult to abide by under the influence of the Wantok culture. To get around the issue, many supervisors in the Solomon Island security industry are hired from overseas, such as Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Similarly, in the hotel industry, most of the management level positions are held by expats. For example, in Kitano Mendata Hotel, there are five managers from the Philippines, Burma, and Japan. Two reasons were indicated why locals are not suitable for managerial level positions. One stems from the predicament to balance between the Wantok culture and work ethics. Another reason that was expressed is that rank and file people do not respect their local managers as much as they respect expat managers. This phenomenon often makes policy implementation difficult for managers who are locals, especially between the manager and the Wantok subordinates.

### **Bush harvest and other opportunities**

There might be an opportunity for the community women to engage in bush harvest. There are several cultivars of bush orchids identified by florists as being valuable to use in arrangements. The maroon-coloured orchids, as shown in the photo, were harvested from the wild and cultivated on a tree by a florist<sup>19</sup>. According to the florist, it blooms for 6 months on trees of its natural habitat. The orchid grows well on trees like cut nut, mango and orange trees, which have rough bark surface.

A type of fungi, similar to a popular fungus widely consumed by Chinese, was grown well naturally from coconut fibre. It would be another opportunity if this type of fungus is confirmed to be edible.

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<sup>18</sup> The florist explained that the arrangement near the hotel entrance should be 360, not only 180 as the arrangement should be seen from all angles. In another arrangement, the oasis of the arrangement was exposed and was not done professionally.

<sup>19</sup> The florist encourages grower to harvest them in the wild as she worries that logging activities happening now can wipe out these wild orchids.





This orchid is from the bush of Guadalcanal province.



This white orchid is from the bush of Western province.



This maroon-coloured orchid was harvested whole from Saint Isabel province and cultivated in the florist, Anne's garden.



Cut nut tree is good for the maroon-coloured orchid to grow on.



A type of fungi (right front corner), similar to a popular fungus widely consumed by Chinese, was grown well naturally from coconut fibre. It would be another opportunity if this type of fungus is confirmed to be edible.

**References**

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### Appendix 1: Workshop Participants

	Name	Community	Experience in floriculture
1	Abigail	Bubulake	New
2	Agape	Chichinge	New
3	Ester	St Mary	Yet to start
4	Gladys	Malaruka	22 years
5	Ireen	Bubulake	New
6	Ihida	St Mary	Yet to start
7	Merriam	Ravua	New
8	Priscilla	Ravua	New
9	Sari	Bubulake	New
10	Stella	Bubulake	New
11	Talita	Bubulake	New

## Appendix 2: Itinerary

12-17/2/2014

Date	Activity
12/2/2014 Wednesday Pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arrival at Honiara</li><li>• Travel to Gold Ridge camp</li></ul>
13/2/2014 Thursday 10-11 am 11am – 4pm  4-5pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Debrief with local project partner, Ruth Liloqula</li><li>• Workshop with Gold Ridge community women</li><li>• Focus group discussion with Gold Ridge community women</li><li>• Visit Merrian's garden</li></ul>
14/2/2014 Friday Am Pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Travel to Honiara</li><li>• Interview Ms Nelly, Kitano Mendana Hotel food and beverage manager</li></ul>
15/2/2014 Saturday Am Pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit market</li><li>• Meeting with florist, Anne Maedia</li></ul>
16/2/2014 Sunday Am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with grower, Mary</li></ul>
17/2/2014 Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Departure</li></ul>