

Solomon Islands Decentralization Efforts

Authors : Samson Viulu, Hugo Hebala, Duddley Kopu

Abstract : Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is a controversial fund that has existed in the Solomon Islands since the early 90s to date. It is largely controversial because it is directly handled by members of parliament (MPs) of the Solomon Islands legislation chamber. It is commonly described as a political slash fund because only voters of MPs benefit from it to retain loyalty. The CDF was established by a legislative act in 2013; however, it does not have any subsidiary regulations to it, therefore, very weak governance. CDF is purposely to establish development projects in the rural areas of the Solomon Islands to spur economic growth. Although almost USD500M was spent in CDF in the last decade, there has been no growth in the economy of the Solomon Islands; rather, a regress. Solomon Islands has now formulated a first home-grown policy aimed at guiding the overall development of the fifty constituencies, improving delivery mechanisms of the CDF, and strengthening its governance through the regulation of the CDF Act 2013. The Solomon Islands Constituency Development Policy is the first for the country since gaining independence in 1978 and gives strong emphasis on a cross-sectoral approach through effective partnerships and collaborations and decentralizing government services to the isolated rural areas of the country. The new policy is driving the efforts of the political government to decentralize government services to isolated rural communities to encourage the participation of rural dwellers in economic activities. The decentralization will see the establishment of constituency offices within all constituencies and the piloting of townships in constituencies that have met the statutory requirements of the state. It also encourages constituencies to become development agents of the national government than being mere political boundaries. The decentralization will go in line with the establishment of the Solomon Islands Special Economic Zones (SEZ), where investors will be given special privileges and exemptions from government taxes and permits to attract tangible development to occur in rural constituencies. The design and formulation of the new development policy are supported by the UNDP office in the Solomon Islands. The new policy is promoting a reorientation on the allocation of resources more toward the productive and resource sectors, making access to finance easier for entrepreneurs and encouraging growth in rural entrepreneurship in the fields of agriculture, fisheries, down streaming, and tourism across the Solomon Islands. This new policy approach will greatly assist the country to graduate from the least developed countries status in a few years' time.

Keywords : decentralization, constituency development fund, Solomon Islands constituency development policy, partnership, entrepreneurship

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