This paper will endeavour to: i) describe youth employment issues and constraints in Honiara; ii) examine international evidence and experience relating to job creation programs and their capacity to address youth unemployment; iii) provide a summary of the two Honiara-based employment programs together with an overview of available data relating to their effectiveness (as well as a discussion of evidence gaps); and iv) within the limits of the available evidence, assess the extent to which these programs are fostering youth work and addressing employment constraints in Honiara, reflecting lessons from international experience.

A further point of discussion will be the extent to which these programs can be said to be contributing to increased social stability in the capital.

The first part of the paper commences with an overview of the position of youth in Solomon Islands, including a discussion of the youth labour market in Honiara and factors influencing the formal and informal employment dynamics of the country. A broader examination of Solomon Islands' economic and sociocultural context is then provided, including issues of political economy. This analysis suggests that employment in the Solomon Islands context is, and will remain, different from that experienced in many other contexts, requiring targeted policy responses.

Having set the context for the analysis, the second part of the paper commences with an overview of international practice in the area of youth employment programming, before turning to an overview of REP and Y@W, together with an assessment of their achievements using available program data. Drawing on this analysis, a number of tentative policy implications for current, and future, youth employment initiatives are presented.
Figure 1: Solomon Islands’ Urban Youth ‘Bulge’ and Rural Youth ‘Dent’, 2009

Urban population pyramid by age (2009)

Rural population pyramid by age (2009)

Source: Adapted from SIG (2013c); reproduced with permission of the National Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Solomon Islands Government.
Setting the Scene: Youth in Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands, an archipelagic nation of around 1000 scattered islands in the Southwest Pacific, is a fragile, post-conflict state. With a population of a little over half a million people, it is characterised by a large number of young people that are often undereducated, underemployed and increasingly urban. It has all of the hallmarks of a country experiencing a significant urban youth bulge (see Figure 1). According to the latest census, 60 per cent of the Solomon Islands population is aged 24 or under, with Honiara exhibiting similar dynamics, with around 56 per cent of the population being 24 or under (SIG 2013b).

From 1998 to 2003, Solomon Islands experienced a low-level civil conflict, locally known as ‘the tension’. This period had a profound, although largely undocumented, impact on youth (Evans 2016). Young people were key actors in the fighting that transpired, both as combatants and as victims. Many of today’s cohort of teens and those aged in their twenties were subject to or witnessed displacement, violence, and a breakdown in government services, including education. The legacy of this episode of death, destruction and dislocation hangs heavily over the country today, although it is not commonly spoken about in public discourse, particularly amongst young people.

There is a widespread societal expectation in Solomon Islands that young people will attend school. Almost all children will undertake a period of primary schooling, although the quality is variable with low functional literacy rates. At secondary school, enrolment and completion rates decline markedly. Large numbers of students are ‘pushed out’ — that is, fail to pass national examinations in order to proceed to higher levels of education — in standard/grade 6, form 3 and form 5. In 2005, it was reported that 40 per cent of the nation’s youth were ‘push outs’ (Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs 2010).

Those with minimal education levels face severe hardship when it comes to entering the formal labour market, with jobseekers vastly outstripping employment vacancies. It has been documented that there are 10,000 school leavers in Solomon Islands each year (Asian Development Bank 2016; Bartlett 2015; World Bank 2010b). While not longitudinal, government figures for the period 2012–14 suggest that this may be an underestimate. The number of new jobs generated by the formal economy per annum is equally difficult to quantify. Although the figures fluctuate, from 2007 to 2015 the national public service added an average of around 930 employees per annum. Using active National Provident Fund accounts from 2007 to 2014 as a proxy for employment — a flawed measure — private and public sector employment grew by around 3200 positions per annum. That equates to a shortfall of over 6000 jobs for youth every year.

The prospect of future poverty awaits those with limited education, especially those residing in urban environments. The link between poverty and education levels in Solomon Islands has been demonstrated by the country’s most recent poverty profile (SIG 2015). It found that around 40 per cent of those defined as living in poverty reside in households in which the ‘head’ does not have at least six years of primary school education. As education levels increase, so too does the prospect of employment and moving out of poverty.

Finding formal employment in Honiara is a difficult endeavour, especially for young people. It can entail responding to advertised positions and word-of-mouth offers, but school leavers rely more frequently upon the largesse of employed relatives and friends. There is only one employment agency, and very little reliable data on job market demand or supply within the city. So despite high levels of unemployment, employers anecdotally report difficulty finding people with the right skills to fill their vacancies.

There are no accurate formal unemployment figures for youth in Solomon Islands, with reported rates varying widely (see Close 2012). More reliable reports have suggested a youth unemployment rate of around 70 per cent. World Bank research conducted in the ‘squatter settlement’ of White River, west Honiara, in 2010, found 67 per cent of youth reported that they had no regular source of cash employment — either formal or informal — and were seeking work (World Bank 2014). The Solomon Islands National Youth Policy states that in
2005 the unemployment rate amongst those aged 15 to 19 was 75 per cent (Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs 2010; see also Jourdan 2008). Reflective of this uncertainty, in 2016 the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggested a youth unemployment rate of, 'above 35 percent' (ILO 2016). Whatever the real situation, all of these figures would place the country amongst those with the highest youth unemployment rates in the world (see Antoniou and Dalla 2015).

Rates of informal employment are similarly unknown, although census data would indicate that 37 per cent of the workforce earns a livelihood through informal means, such as selling betelnut, cigarettes, handicrafts and other consumables, particularly fruit and vegetables (Donnelly and Jiwanji 2010; Maebuta and Maebuta 2008; World Bank 2014). Informal work opportunities for young people are not well studied. It is known that casual cash-in-hand service provision is prolific across most age groups, especially amongst mature males, including building, carpentry, electrical work, transport services, small-scale timber extraction and mechanical repairs. House cleaning and child care are more typical carried out by women and girls.

Recognising that crime can be an occupation like any other, young people in particular are involved in the trade of illicit substances, with cannabis, kwaso and ‘black market’ alcohol sales being common. These can be highly lucrative as seen in Box 1, making the risks of detection incommensurate with the potential financial rewards. Theft, typically of a petty nature, is a further means which a minority of citizens, especially young people, employ to support themselves, or maintain their preferred lifestyles.

**Creating Youth Livelihoods — The Challenges Ahead**

Youth unemployment is considered a key development and security issue. The link between joblessness and criminality is well documented, with a significant amount of literature, often utilising vast datasets across a variety of contexts, pointing to a positive correlation between crime and unemployment. The association between employment and economic advancement is similarly well established.

**Box 1: Earning a Living from Illicit Trade**

The production and sale of kwaso is widespread across most provinces in Solomon Islands and is particularly prolific in Honiara to the extent that it appears to have become a ‘normal’ livelihood strategy. Kwaso ‘cooks’ can be charged under the Liquor Act for making liquor without the necessary approval. A husband and wife interviewed in mid-2016, at their home in a settlement on the eastern outskirts of Honiara, stated that their last ‘cook’ earned them SBD $1100, over seven times the minimum weekly wage (excluding labour costs and following expenditure of around SBD $230 on ingredients). This was for minimal labour input with a key appeal being the ability to generate ‘fast cash’, the fermenting and distillation process generally taking three to four days. Like cannabis, in some places in Solomon Islands kwaso has become a form of currency for the payment of services, particularly manual work carried out by youth.

Youth unemployment in the Pacific region is said to represent a significant economic loss, calculated at approximately USD $828 million in 2011, increasing to USD $3.18 billion by 2020 (SPC 2015b). Slow growth and job creation affect all age groups, but particularly young people who have a higher job turnover than adults and take longer to find employment (World Bank 2013a).

A common refrain in post-conflict Solomon Islands has been the need to address youth unemployment. In addition to higher-level policy commitments, no fewer than eight public reports in the post-conflict period have made recommendations relevant to youth employment. Youth unemployment in the urban environment raises concerns around a number of issues which Urdal’s ‘youth bulge’ speaks to, including grievances linked to low rates of economic growth and the limited means by which young people can influence the political process (Urdal 2004). Within Solomon Islands such anxieties extend further, encompassing exclusion, boredom, substance abuse and violence.
Popularly, unemployment in Solomon Islands is framed as a security imperative, with an underlying concern being that large numbers of unemployed, urban youth, particularly males, will fuel future disorder, both public and private. And while the genesis of the tension has been attributed to a number of complex, underlying causes (see Allen et al. 2013), youth unemployment is not commonly cited as one of them; although some have suggested a link:

Unemployment creates demoralisation and has been identified by many observers as one of the underlying causes of the 1999–2000 armed conflict (ACFOA 2000). ‘The bulk of Solomons youth has been schooled for non-existent urban jobs, effectively alienating them from their village resource base and branding them as failures in a system foreign to their lives’ (Roughan 2000). (Chevalier 2001)

Despite the above circumstances, it would be inappropriate to narrowly render ‘employment’ in Solomon Islands to that most commonly experienced in developed countries. The Solomon Islands labour market functions differently. It is highly dualistic, characterised by a large, and mainly rural, informal sector and a small and predominantly Honiara-based formal employment market.

Employment in Solomon Islands does not strictly mean a full-time position in the public or private sector with a prescribed minimum wage and associated benefits. This is not to say that such arrangements will not exist in the future and will not remain important; however, they will be the exception, not being the path that the vast majority of citizens will follow in order to earn an income and raise their living standards. And the youth labour market will remain particularly fraught, being largely informal, small, and characterised by instability as young people move in and out of work.

The future development trajectory of Solomon Islands will also differ from various other countries that have transitioned from rural subsistence agriculture to economies based on export-driven manufacturing and services. A number of fundamental constraints related to geography, limited resource diversification and ‘weak governance and limited capacity for regulatory and economic policy reform’ (World Bank 2010b) mean that the Solomon Islands economy will, at least over the medium term, remain small and niche. The following World Bank analysis (2014) encapsulates this: ‘Pacific island countries are unlikely to experience export-driven development and associated employment creation of the scale and nature seen in much of the East Asia Pacific region, even with the best possible business environment.’

The economic reality for the vast majority of Solomon Islanders, including young people who are part of the estimated 80 per cent of the population residing in rural areas, is that reliance on smallholder agriculture for their livelihoods will remain a constant over the medium to long-term. Personal consumption will, when the conditions are right, be supplemented by income generated from the sale of excess product. For this group the employment programs discussed in this paper are, in the main, irrelevant. Enhancing their livelihoods will require a whole different set of policy responses.

Intricately linked with the above are the existing employment dynamics in Solomon Islands, or what can loosely be referred to as the ‘culture’ of employment. These are complex, unlikely to change anytime soon, and are of equal importance to young people as they are to adults. They, too, render a neat portrait of formal, ‘nine-to-five’ employment problematic.

In contemporary Solomon Islands, particularly urban areas, many people, including the young, combine formal and informal income generation, or even opt out of secure formal employment because they can earn more from informal activities. Discussions with male youths in a settlement to the east of Honiara problematise the notion that obtaining full-time formal employment with an established business in Honiara is the Holy Grail of all young job seekers. A number of young people indicated that having found such employment they thereafter resigned, variously citing ‘stress’, a desire to ‘rest’, or the paucity of the wages as the reasons for doing so.

Further, a stigmatisation around certain jobs is evident amongst pockets of urban youth, also discouraging involvement in potential livelihood
activities. A focus group discussion with young people involved in the two employment programs discussed in this paper indicated a strong preference for formal employment, especially ‘office work’, describing the ‘shame’ that attaches to activities such as street cleaning or grass cutting.19

Casual ‘moonlighting’ on the side or running a business in addition to a full-time job in a government ministry or with a private company is not unusual in Honiara. Depending on the position, a job in the formal sector, especially with government, can be leveraged to award (or block) all manner of benefits to friends and family, including contracts, permanent employment and promotions. Far from demonstrating inflexibility, the existing labour market in Solomon Islands is highly dynamic, periodic and creative. People may be economically inactive at one moment, and lucratively employed in a variety of legitimate and illegitimate ways the next.20

A further feature of this discussion is the absence of a national policy dialogue around employment, or indeed, the long-term macro-economic position of the country. Due, in part, to issues relevant to Solomon Islands’ political economy (see Haque 2012) the government course of action on many issues in Solomon Islands — beyond written documents — is often difficult to determine, with politics being acutely localised and personal. A coherent national approach to unemployment (beyond what are largely generic aspirational policy statements) is difficult to discern. An example of this is demonstrated by the latest National Development Strategy with its non-descript (and unrealistic) goal of, ‘full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people’ by 2030 (SIG 2016).

Common Approaches to Youth Employment Programs

Youth employment is a complex and challenging issue. It frequently involves a multipronged response encompassing a variety of macro- and micro-economic interventions. Presented here are three common government and donor-supported employment approaches for youth: skills training programs; demand-side labour programs, namely large-scale public works schemes; and entrepreneur capital programs. These initiatives, either stand-alone, or more usually in combination, routinely feature in post-conflict, developing contexts, so much so that is has been said that ‘nearly every fragile state’ has adopted one of these approaches or a variation upon them (Blattman and Annan 2016). Solomon Islands is no exception.

The logic behind adopting any one of the approaches described here, and others, is largely linked to context and the underlying objective/s of the intervention. Different initiatives typically focus on different parts of the youth employment problem. Accordingly, some programs are best targeted at informal employment (e.g. entrepreneur capital programs) while others are more appropriately directed towards formal employment (e.g. skills training which encompass business internships).

While the three approaches discussed are common responses to youth unemployment, other initiatives which are not presented include: improving the general business and investment climate; introducing or easing regulations around the hiring of young people, such as introducing a youth sub-minimum wage; microfinance provision for youth; and providing subsidies or other benefits to employers who hire youth. As discussed, any of the approaches outlined need to be assessed in the given context, in particular an understanding of what, if any, constraint/s exist within the labour market. Multiple constraints will mean utilising a blend of approaches.

Skills Training Programs

Skills training provides job seekers with skills that will enhance their prospects of finding work. These can be technical, managerial, vocational, business and/or ‘soft skills’ (non-technical skills pertaining to, inter alia, social interaction, character and work ethic). The methods by which these skills are taught vary and commonly include classroom teaching, and/or on-the-job or vocational learning.

Skills training is a common feature of employment programs and is a component of the two main Solomon Islands initiatives discussed in this paper. Its ubiquity is demonstrated by the fact that from 2002 to 2012 the World Bank and its client governments invested nearly USD $9 billion in
93 skills training projects, equating to nearly USD $100 million per project (Twose 2015, quoted in Blattman and Ralston 2015).

International evidence tends to suggest that on balance the returns from skills training, of all types, are low relative to their costs. The reasons for this are not clear. Blattman and Ralston (2015) assess a handful of international examples of technical and vocational training programs and show a combination of high dropouts, modest or ambiguous effects on labour market outcomes, and high program costs. They question if the problem ‘is with the approach to training and the targeting of disadvantaged youth, or if the assumptions underlying the programs — that low skills and skills mismatches are impeding development in some countries — are themselves wrong’ (ibid.:10).

An important feature of seemingly all youth employment initiatives in Honiara, and true of REP and Y@W, has been ‘soft skills’ training. These are sometimes referred to as ‘transferable skills’ (see Rankin et al. 2015). They are distinct from the other skills discussed and frequently encompass social and emotional learning. Soft skills may include topics such as work culture, gender and diversity, healthy relationships and anger management. Preliminary international evidence suggests that this type of cognitive behavioural training may be effective at reducing crime and violence, but less successful for employment outcomes. However, results remain difficult to discern. One of the most recent and comprehensive evidence gap evaluations of soft skills for youth in medium- to low-income countries suggests that, ‘more high-quality evidence is needed to inform’ the design of these programs (ibid.).

In Honiara there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that soft skills are especially valued by employers. In particular, employers have lamented the lack of employee readiness for work, highlighting the need for training in matters of work culture, behaviour and expectations.

**Demand-side Labour Intensive Programs**

Demand-side labour programs are typically temporary in nature and often follow a cookie-cutter modality, entailing short-term, low-skilled, labour-intensive work for a minimum wage. These types of initiatives are most common in high unemployment contexts where supply-side initiatives (such as skills training) are of ‘little impact’ (World Bank 2013a). An important feature of these types of programs is that they generate the work which participants undertake. In this regard, rather than operating to create sustainable employment they function as social safety nets and temporary income generators in hard times.

Large-scale variations of these types of schemes have been carried out globally, often in low-income, post-conflict countries and they often employ tens or even hundreds of thousands. Solomon Islands’ REP — described in detail below — is a quintessential example of this type of program with its objectives of providing skills to participants, helping to distribute money in the form of wages, and providing small-scale infrastructure to disadvantaged communities.

A number of assumptions flow from these demand-side initiatives, including that they will have a multiplier effect on local economies following an injection of cash, and that credit-constrained participants will use earnings to invest in physical or human capital, such as skills, education or tools, to commence a small business. Despite their prevalence, evidence as to their performance is sparse:

Strikingly, there is little to no rigorous, counterfactual-based evidence of the effects of a workforce program in a low-income country. A range of casual, often descriptive evaluations suggest that these programs help people boost their stock of savings or pay off debts. It is not clear, however, whether there are lasting effects on poverty or income-generation, or whether post-crisis programs help stimulate recovery. (Blattman and Ralston 2015:19)

The above assessment would generally accord with a limited number of World Bank evaluations (World Bank 2013a). In Argentina and Colombia, impact evaluations of these types of demand-side labour responses reported short-term positive income effects, ‘related to the income transfer received, but no information on post-program employment’ (ibid.:40). Yet typically the raison d’être of such programs is not post-program work,
with the rates of returns on infrastructure and wages being their primary justification.

**Entrepreneur Programs**

Capital or credit entrepreneur programs, which often go by other titles, such as ‘capital-centric programs’, endeavour to stimulate employment by relieving capital burdens, a common feature of fragile states and particularly true of Solomon Islands. Capital comes in various forms, including cash transfers, in-kind (such as equipment) or credit. The objective is to encourage recipients to use the capital provided in order to set up or expand small businesses. This is frequently in combination with skills training, often in topics such as small business management, budgeting and business plan development. Supervision and mentoring is also a common feature of these initiatives. Depending on context, business initiatives which entrepreneur capital programs may seek to support include smallholder farming, petty trading and unskilled service provision.

As elaborated upon in greater detail below when looking at the Honiara experience, the evidence of an increasing number of evaluations is that capital entrepreneur programs can stimulate self-employment in a cost-effective manner. These point to a combination of inputs being required, in particular both training and capital, particularly cash.

**An Overview of Contemporary Youth Employment Programs in Honiara**

In response to the context described, the Solomon Islands Government, with significant donor support, instigated REP in 2010 and Y@W in 2012. Both initiatives utilise different modalities when it comes to addressing urban youth unemployment, although they share a number of commonalities.

Y@W and REP are simultaneously supply-side and demand-side. On the supply-side, each has components that provide skills training, while an aspect of Y@W entails small, non-cash capital for youth entrepreneurs. However, in the main, and in contrast to Y@W, REP is a classical demand-side project, increasing labour demand for participants through a variety of public works.

Initiatives like REP and Y@W are not new to Honiara, although their scale is. One of the earliest organised youth employment schemes can be traced to the mid-1970s — the ‘Masta Liu Youth Project’. A modest and largely organic scheme, it shared a number of commonalities with its contemporary incarnations, focusing on addressing youth unemployment through skills training and the provision of a small wage and equipment to carry out agricultural work (Palmer 1979).

**The Rapid Employment Project**

The REP seeks ‘to assist targeted vulnerable urban populations’ primarily through short-term labour-intensive activities, such as the construction of small-scale urban infrastructure and road rehabilitation and maintenance (World Bank 2010a). These works are created by the project. A second feature is classroom-based life skills and employment training, referred to as ‘pre-employment training’ (PET). This is directed towards improving participants’ knowledge, experience and basic employment skills that are valued in the workplace and society’ (ibid.:v). PET involves a week of classroom training following a syllabus designed by the project. Participants in the public works component of REP must initially undertake PET.

REP activities take place in Honiara, with a small number outside of the city boundary. It is funded through World Bank–administered trust funds and is managed and administered by Honiara-based staff employed by the project’s implementing agencies, the Honiara City Council and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development.

REP is not specifically cast as a youth employment initiative, although it does seek to have 50 per cent youth participation, defined as those aged between 16 and 29. Over 2015 some 53 per cent of participants fell within this age group (REP 2016). And while REP seeks to foster ongoing employment, principally through the transfer of appropriate skills and experience, it is largely concerned with distributing money in the form of wages and in providing small-scale urban infrastructure and services. Project documents disclose a belief that project activities would mitigate social unrest and instability (World Bank 2010a).
REP involves community groups forming into teams and completing a written application to undertake work. This includes indicating the type of work they would like to do. Common activities include street cleaning and rubbish collection, cutting grass on roadsides, drain cleaning and the construction of 'Jacob's Ladders' (see photograph). Reflecting the temporary nature of the work, typically participants work for 20 days, while those engaged on small-scale infrastructure initiatives, such as Jacob's Ladders, will work on average 54 days. Regular labourers are paid SBD $4 per hour, equal to Solomon Islands’ minimum hourly wage rate, while group leaders are paid SBD $5.

As of the end of 2015 some 12,280 participants had taken part in the urban works and services component of REP, while a total of 11,558 had graduated from PET (REP 2016).

The current phase of REP is due to come to end in December 2016, although additional financing will see it extended through to 2018. Plans are also underway for a follow-on project with a possible feature being an expansion to various provincial locations.

**The Youth at Work Program**

Y@W, unlike REP, is solely targeted at young people, in particular, those that the program calls 'disengaged youth'. The development objectives of Y@W are not clearly defined in available project documentation. The principal modality adopted by Y@W is different from that of REP, it being largely concerned with on-the-job skills training, including mentoring.

While Y@W is mostly Honiara-based, a variation of the program previously operated in Choiseul Province and in mid-2016 it expanded to Auki, the capital of Malaita Province. As at mid-2016, funding was drawn from a variety of non-government organisation (NGO) and donor sources. The project is overseen and managed by the Secretariat of Pacific Communities.

All participants in Y@W initially undertake 80 hours of voluntary community service. Those who successfully complete this then take part in a two-week lecture-style training program (see photograph next page). This shares parallels with REP’s PET, including soft skills as described above. Participants are then channelled into one of two streams, largely on the basis of self-selection.

The first, and most popular, stream involves the placement of participants in an internship, involving on-the-job mentoring. The internships, of 3 to 12 months, may be with the private sector, NGOs,
donors or the public sector. In some instances, employers retain interns in either a full-time or part-time capacity. Interns are not paid, and therefore unlike REP the project is not concerned with income distribution, however, they do receive a modest stipend to pay for transport and sustenance.

The second stream involves further training, and funding, in small business start-up. This is called the ‘Youth Entrepreneur Program’ and commenced in 2014. In Honiara, this involves a smaller number of participants than the internship component. After a two-week period of business training following a syllabus tailored to the program by the ILO, and the development of a business plan, participants are given resources equivalent to SBD $2000 (approx. USD $260) to commence a business. Examples of past businesses include mobile phone credit ‘top-up’ services, second-hand clothes sales, jewellery making, catering and T-shirt screen printing.

Participants in Y@W are chosen on the basis of self-referral, turning up to advertised awareness sessions. As at August 2016, Y@W had reached its tenth phase. Each phase, typically two per annum, contains approximately 250 young people. In total, more than 2000 youth have participated in the internship component of the program.

Y@W will continue until at least 2020 with donor support. It is hoped that the program will then transition into mainstream government programming.

Performance of Solomon Islands’ Employment Programs

As at mid-2016, both REP and Y@W had been operational for around six and four years respectively. During that time both have accumulated data directed towards assessing their performance.

Given different modalities, it is difficult to make direct comparisons between the programs. In the case of REP, participation is open to both adults and youth, although data collected has not been adult/youth disaggregated. While the geographic focus of Y@W extends beyond Honiara data collection has not, nor has it focused on the entrepreneur component of the program. Both projects use vastly different indicators and employ different monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

This part of the paper will draw on available data to examine how both projects have fared in terms of affecting youth employment levels in Honiara. In evaluating both programs, the discussion will also encompass an examination of the extent to which programs like Y@W and REP can be said to contribute to reduced social instability. It needs to be noted that a constraint with the data of both programs is the lack of a control group. This hinders an ability to make credible findings and is discussed in further detail below.
The Rapid Employment Project

The REP uses a number of key indicators to track how the project is performing.

An important caveat in relation to REP, and in contrast to Y@W, was its planned short-term focus. When it was designed, REP was categorised as an ‘emergency project’ to assist vulnerable Honiara communities from a deteriorating domestic fiscal position in the wake of the global financial crisis. According to project documentation it was not intended to be a long-term, sustainable endeavour: ‘[t]he project was not designed with sustainability in mind and consequently, there are few initiatives to secure continuity of project gains’ (World Bank 2013b).

The two main measures used to track REP’s achievements against its development objectives are labour-days generated and wages transferred — indicators commonly used in large-scale public works programs. The latest data shows that since its inception to the end of 2015 the project had generated 657,400 labour-days and had transferred a total of USD $22.6 million in wages. This data is largely internally focused, not being particularly helpful to domestic policymakers, especially the labour-days generated count, with there being no comparative domestic data against which this figure can be measured.

Of more relevance to this discussion is a semi-annual survey which the project undertakes. This involves a group of enumerators surveying around 500 to 650 REP participants. Those surveyed are randomly selected — drawn from the total pool of REP participants since its inception, although they must have completed their involvement in the project at least six months prior to the survey.

Looking at two semi-annual surveys, conducted in August/September 2015 (survey five) and November 2014 (survey four), the following results are informative (Pacific Horizons Consulting Group 2015):

- The vast majority of REP participants (84.4 per cent in survey five and 87.6 per cent in survey four) had not found employment after REP.
- A minority of participants — 9 per cent from survey five and 16.5 per cent from survey four — had looked for work in the 30 days prior to the survey.
- Only a minority of participants had saved wages they earnt from REP. This being 15.9 per cent from survey five and 22 per cent for survey four.
- Earlier surveys would tend to indicate that participants are spending their income predominantly on food and clothing (World Bank 2013b). While a significant amount of participants have spent their income on ‘education’ it is not clear if this is for themselves or others.

These results are perhaps to be expected given the nature of REP — it is a demand-side program concerned with short-term employment generation, income transfer, and the economic return on small-scale infrastructure and service provision. An ex ante economic analysis of REP points to the numerous positive economic impacts of the project (World Bank 2010a). The employment results for post-REP participants, however, are worse than any published formal employment figures for Solomon Islands, for both adults and youth. And there is no data on long-term employment outcomes. While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions, these findings seem to suggest that most participants do not take part in REP as an immediate stepping stone to future employment, instead pursuing quick money for instant consumption. Accordingly, REP corresponds with the available international evidence around demand-side labour programs: there is a short-term positive income result linked to cash transfers but evidence on post-project employment is scant.

The Youth at Work Program

The main method used by Y@W to track how the program has been performing is a series of biannual tracer studies. This involves those who have undertaken internships (not the Youth Entrepreneur Scheme) completing an online survey comprising around 20 mixed qualitative and quantitative questions. In addition, a series of focus group discussions have also been conducted with former interns. A number of employers involved in the program have been similarly surveyed.

The first tracer study was conducted in March 2013, with the last one prior to the publication of this paper taking place in April 2016. During that period respondents from new phases have been
cumulatively added, although as Table 1 shows, the number of survey participants has been slowly declining, especially following survey number four.

The underlying finding of these surveys is that as at the last survey, number seven, some 24 per cent of intern participants, or roughly one in every four, were employed in either a full-time or part-time capacity, with around three quarters of those positions being with the employer with whom they had undertaken their internship. In practice, survey seven should include a cumulative figure of all participants to have taken part in Y@W up to that phase, however, as discussed below, this is not the case.

Figure 2 shows that at each survey the employment figures have shifted, averaging around 33 per cent over the life of Y@W, or one in three survey participants having obtained full- or part-time work, mainly with the employer with whom they did their internship. The length of time they have remained in these positions is unknown. At the time of survey number three 38 per cent of participants were employed, 35 per cent at survey five, 26 per cent at survey six and 24 per cent at survey seven. It was suggested by some people spoken to during the preparation of this paper that this downward trend is indicative of Y@W saturating the low-skilled segment of the Honiara formal labour-market. However, an absence of data makes the reason/s for this scenario indiscernible. It may be the case that other factors are contributing to a declining uptake in employment.

A further concern articulated in the Y@W tracer studies is that some employers may be taking advantage of what is essentially free labour, churning through participants by not retaining old ones and engaging new ones. Perversely, this may mean the program is having a regressive effect on employment generation with employers not hiring staff and instead using a free, readily available and replaceable labour source. There is no disincentive to this behaviour and it would be wrong to necessarily view it as a negative occurrence. If the rationale of Y@W is to maximise those exposed to the formal work environment with the belief that this improves employment prospects, then the program is achieving its goal. To this end, employers may believe they are doing the right thing by engaging as many participants as possible. To fully assess employer motivations around this issue would require further enquiry.

An absence of longitudinal data makes it difficult to discern the success of Y@W in terms of long-term formal employment outcomes. As each new survey has been conducted, there has been a significant drop in the number of participants taking part from previous phases of the program. Accordingly, by survey number seven none of the earlier interns (phases one to four) were being traced. Potentially, those who have recently completed their internship are more likely to be in work, serving to skew the figures.

Table 1: Youth at Work Tracer Study Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Number</th>
<th>Phase/s Participating</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No. of Youth Surveys Completed</th>
<th>No. of Youth Focus Group Participants</th>
<th>Employer Surveys Completed</th>
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Source: Pasifiki Services Ltd (various dates): Tracer Study Reports 1 to 7.

Given the above limitations, it is difficult to compare Y@W employment results with available employment data for Solomon Islands. Potentially, the different composition of the samples involved also mean that comparisons between program employment outcomes and economy-wide employment outcomes should be treated with a degree of
Nevertheless, if it is accepted that around 33 per cent of Y@W participants are obtaining work then this figure is a worse result than the national average for 15–24 year olds, with Close (2012), on the basis of 2009 census figures, indicating an employment rate of 43 per cent for this age group. Accepting the lowest published youth employment rates (see above) ranging from 25 to 33 per cent, then the program is in line with these figures or may be doing marginally better.

As is the case with REP, these results are not particularly surprising. International studies have found that formal employment skills programs similar to Solomon Islands efforts do not greatly affect employment outcomes. In the period immediately following their internship, participants have been positive about finding work. It is less clear if, or how, this attitude changed over time given the limitations with the data. Consistently, survey and focus group participants were of the belief that their biggest hurdle to finding work was a lack of experience and/or limited education. In this regard, a positive outcome of Y@W has been its demonstrative effect, helping some participants realise that they need to acquire additional skills should they wish to enter the formal labour employment.

Evaluating the Honiara Employment Programs

At the outset, it needs to be noted that globally the evidence in this space is lacking. This is especially so for countries like Solomon Islands. The World Bank has commented that there is ‘little evidence of the impact on youth-targeted programs in labour-abundant, low-income countries with weak institutions’, with the evidence that does exist suggesting that they are ‘less likely to be effective, and programs targeting formal employment may be regressive’ (World Bank 2013a). The following analysis generally accords with this observation.

In Solomon Islands an initial question is whether the training being provided by the programs (in all forms — classroom, on-the-job mentoring — and encompassing all topics) actually leads to an increase in formal or informal employment. Blattman and Ralston (2015) state: ‘The success of all of these supply-side programs depends on getting the diagnosis right: that these market failures or constraints actually exist, are binding, and that relieving them is enough to increase some employment.’

As concerns formal employment, is a lack of skills of the type being provided by REP and Y@W a binding constraint on employers taking on additional workers in Solomon Islands? There is no
evidence to suggest that this is the case. To put this another way: there is an absence of data suggesting that employers will engage more employees if such employees possess the skills that the programs are providing. Again, the lack of a counterfactual severely limits the ability to answer this question — foremost, it hinders an informed assessment of whether employees would have engaged staff irrespective of the various programs.

Available evidence on skills gaps in Solomon Islands would tend to show that these occur at the opposite end of the job market: the technical and the professional (although not exclusively). These include life-science and health professionals; extraction and building trades workers; teachers; retail and other services managers; science and engineering professionals; and physical and engineering science technicians (Curtain 2013). In contrast, the spectrum of the jobs market which both programs are targeting is characterised by an abundance of supply. In the case of Y@W this is potentially problematic as employers have a ready supply of adults who can undertake the same work as young people. An omission of either program — particularly Y@W — to examine whether target employers see a lack of skills as a constraint to investment remains a missing piece of the puzzle.

In post-conflict Solomon Islands the soft skills that both REP and Y@W impart are potentially important, although impacts are hard to measure. It is likely that these skills do not affect employment (there is no evidence to suggest that they do), but are seemingly important in terms of deterring crime and violence and contributing to social stability — attributes which do indirectly impact upon the employment conditions of the country, with a peaceful environment being conducive to business.

While there is no hard data on the outcome of these soft skills in Solomon Islands, emerging international evidence, which Blattman and Ralston (2015) describe as ‘promising but nascent’, points to a positive correlation between soft skills and reduced violence and crime. They refer to a number of studies from Africa and the United States to support their argument (see also, Blattman et al. 2015). It would be wrong to overestimate the import of these findings — being preliminary and from vastly different contexts, such that their application to Honiara is not readily apparent. Further evidence is needed, particularly from within Melanesia.

Equally, there is no evidence that the skills training provided by the programs is leading to an increased uptake in informal employment. This analysis is of most relevance to the Young Entrepreneurs component of Y@W. If Solomon Islands is anything like the international experience, it is unlikely that the skills being imparted under the Solomon Islands programs will see participants make a decision to start or expand a business. According to recent available evidence, vastly more important in contexts akin to Solomon Islands is the provision of capital. Blattman and Annan (2016) outline an example from Liberia. Their evaluation found successful outcomes on various measures from a project aimed at high-risk men: ex-combatants, those occupying rural resource enclaves, and other rural ‘hotspots’. The program provided a mixture of skills training and a capital/cash injection or, indeed, the prospect of a future cash injection.26 The results reinforced the authors’ theoretical model: ‘if people are poor and credit-constrained then the return to skills alone will be low’ (ibid.:15).

This analysis invites the question of whether providing capital is likely to increase employment prospects in Solomon Islands. Again, owing to a lack of data it is not possible to answer this question. However, an argument can be made that capital, particularly in the form of cash, is a constraint to commencing a business in Honiara, especially for young people. Within Solomon Islands bank credit is non-existent for the unemployed. Outside of the largesse of family and friends, this potentially leaves sourcing finance to formal and informal moneylenders on unfavourable terms.

The advantages of providing capital is supported by a growing number of studies showing that the poor have high returns to capital investment. Blattman and Ralston (2015) present several international examples which suggest that the provision of cash, both conditional and non-conditional, is likely to stimulate self-employment in a cost-effective manner. They also refute concerns that participants will misuse transfers, pointing to recent
Evidence from 19 studies around the world which "found almost no evidence of increased spending on alcohol, tobacco, or other "temptation goods"" (ibid.:14–15).

Finally, returning to a further question raised in the introduction: do these programs result in less crime and violence? While ensuring social stability was a key motivation behind the implementation of REP, the answer to this question is unknown for Solomon Islands. Anecdotal and individual case studies would suggest that for some participants the structure provided by the programs, particularly Y@W, does result in various lifestyle changes, such as reduced alcohol and drug intake.

Accepting that people will rationally seek the most lucrative and stable work available, if crime pays then it is unlikely that participants will forego this income source altogether, even if involved in other licit activities (Blattman and Ralston 2015). The Liberian example discussed above is demonstrative. This provided training and capital inputs to 'high-risk men' in an effort to shift them away from illegal activities and mercenary recruitment. The authors found that higher returns from farming (even small higher returns) did lead to a change in participants' behaviour, there being less incentive for crime and mercenary work, although involvement in illicit activities did not cease completely (Blattman and Annan 2016). This scenario shares some parallels with preliminary fieldwork conducted by the author in 2016 on illicit livelihoods in Honiara, with the majority of kwaso producers spoken to combining their illicit trade with licit means of income generation, both formal and informal. For others, illicit activities would typically be engaged in when additional household finances were required, usually for one-off expenditure.

A recent examination of the impact on crime of the largest demand-side public works program in the world, the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme of India, found that employment generated by the program saw a decline in both property and violent crimes, although the impact was minimal (Das and Mocan 2016).

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The above analysis together with the further application of international evidence has potential policy implications relevant to the programs discussed and measures directed towards reducing youth unemployment in Honiara. Given the state of available evidence, recommendations in this space remain tentative and further programming would benefit from additional empirical enquiry around a number of issues, some of which are raised below.

First, greater emphasis should be placed on informal employment programs. The international experience would tend to suggest that for an economy like Solomon Islands an entrepreneurial or capital-centric approach should take priority over formal employment programs, or, at the very least, be of equal relevance.

For example, the skills training components of both REP and Y@W place disproportionate emphasis on formal employment given the Solomon Islands context where most opportunities exist in the informal sector. Out of 30 topics taught during PET, only three explicitly relate to self-employment. The initial two-week Y@W training is similarly concerned with the formal (although it has a separate business training course for those undertaking the Youth Entrepreneur Scheme).

Y@W is only distributing data around its formal employment (internship) component, there being no knowledge of how those young people who have participated in the Youth Entrepreneur Scheme have fared. And both programs invest in CV writing and job finding assistance, measures that are only of relevance to those seeking employment in the formal sector.

Neither program provides ongoing monitoring and advice for those involved in informal income-generation activities, although Y@W is seeking to do so. Finally, in what is an interesting footnote, a small number of participants who have managed to secure employment under the internship program of Y@W have left it in order to commence their own business.

Second, experimentation with entrepreneurship should be considered. As part of the focus on the Young Entrepreneurs component of Y@W, thought could be given to encouraging greater diversification in informal activities. In Honiara, these appear to be narrowly focused with some
activities not being sufficiently directed towards market demand. A clear understanding of prospective markets is crucial. Cash-constrained urban youth selling to similarly cash-constrained urban youth will not yield significant, long-term returns. A good alternative may be activities which target the aid economy, are niche, or which have a wide and stable consumer-base (and do not crowd out existing businesses). This is an area where additional analytical work around market demand would likely assist prospective participants.

Experimentation around credit, especially cash transfers, could also be contemplated. The method by which this is done would vary according to the nature of the employment program. It could include increasing the amount of credit provided in given circumstances (increased credit for high-risk ventures) or testing periodic conditional cash transfers (providing transfers for ‘high risk’ participants if they do not fall foul of the law, or providing additional cash to entrepreneurs when they meet business targets). There is international evidence to suggest this could be a fruitful area to trial.

Third, the failure to collect longitudinal data and implement a control group is a missed opportunity. The scale of the programs described are unprecedented in Solomon Islands with the involvement of around 9000 youth to mid-2016. A largely missed opportunity to date has been around learning. Little is publicly known about the impact that these programs have had on youth employment and social stability: what has worked and what hasn’t?

In particular, the omission of both programs to use a control group has severely affected the utility of the data collected and means there is little understanding of what dynamics drive certain segments of Honiara’s formal and informal employment markets. Further, there is little evidence that the data that has been collected has been analysed and effectively fed into the policymaking community so that learning can occur. There are also areas around which there are significant data gaps. A non-exhaustive list of examples is provided in Box 2.

Fourth, at present there is insufficient evidence to support the expansion of either program, at least in their current forms, beyond Honiara and its peri-urban environment. There are seemingly cogent reasons to expand youth employment programs beyond Honiara. As seen, the Solomon Islands rural economy engages the vast majority of the populace, a position that will not change anytime soon. However, leaving aside issues related to economies of scale, two arguments would suggest that directing scarce resources to Honiara and its surrounding areas offers the best potential return for investment and should take precedence over rural expansion.

First, and despite government aspirations, there is no prospect of reversing the rural to urban (Honiara) migration of young people in Solomon Islands. Young people are coming for a variety of reasons, with education and employment being key pull factors. Figure 1 above shows the extent

Box 2: Examples of Data Gaps in Honiara’s Youth Employment Programs

- Are formally employed youth carrying out jobs ‘on-the-side’? If so, what jobs and why?
- Is involvement in illicit activities reduced by involvement in licit activities? For youth at risk, have the programs reduced delinquency in the form of contact with police or other relevant state agencies?
- Are treatment groups which have had skills training earning more than control groups? Are treatment groups applying the skills they have learnt?
- Has involvement in formal or informal employment had a demonstrative affect amongst participants’ unemployed peers?
- Do participants in entrepreneur programs earn more and remain in business longer if they receive follow-up mentoring compared with those who receive no such assistance?
- Are certain areas of the formal and informal economy employing more youth than others?
- What is happening to the youth that have been engaged in these programs in terms of employment and livelihoods? If they remain employed formally or informally can this in anyway be attributable to the programs?
to which an exodus from rural areas is occurring, especially amongst those aged 15–30. This is causing the ‘bulge’ in the urban population pyramid, and the ‘dent’ in the rural population pyramid.

Assuming that by 2050 the Honiara population has caught up with the urban global average of 50 per cent, the city would be home to more than 600,000 people — surpassing the total population of the country on latest census data (Evans 2015). Efforts to expand Honiara’s boundary have been resisted by contiguous landowners, meaning this figure would largely be squeezed into 22 square kilometres, with spill over onto unserviced customary land. This scenario would appear to encompass all of the ingredients for future conflict: a large, youthful, urban population; heightened pressure on land and services; and labour bottlenecks.

Second, to the extent that these programs are responsive to social stability, international evidence, and past experience from Solomon Islands, suggests that future conflict will be an urban phenomenon. Over the last decade, numerous strategists, scholars and development institutions have begun focusing on a future where group violence is principally an urban occurrence (see, for example, Beall et al. 2011). The only significant urban site in Solomon Islands is Honiara; a place where predictable, episodic street violence dating back to the 1970s and often involving thousands of male youth is, arguably, showing signs of becoming normalised.

**Finally, a careful eye needs to be kept on issues of cost and duplication.** There are features of the two programs that appear to duplicate one another, as well as other smaller youth employment initiatives in Honiara. Potentially, economies of scale could be achieved by merging the two programs or, at the very least, components of the two. While REP’s PET ceased in the first half of 2016, the classroom skills training that both programs have delivered seems a prime candidate for integration. As of August 2014, REP has provided a careers coach and set up a referral service including a resource centre equipped with computers for CV writing. These are services that Y@W also provides. The crossover seems clear and the potential for integration obvious (should REP continue such services beyond 2016). Other existing and prospective initiatives in Honiara could also benefit from an integrated approach to addressing youth work, and it may be the case that a new or existing government agency specifically mandated to address youth employment would be best placed to lead this coordination.

While the international evidence around youth employment programming remains sparse, this paper has suggested that the Solomon Islands programs presented generally conform with contexts similar to Honiara. As the population of the capital continues to grow, the issues outlined will take on a level of increased importance.

One of the key challenges moving forward will be to compile a robust evidence base on which to build future programming. While this paper has examined two Honiara-based employment interventions, a missing piece of the puzzle for Solomon Islands — beyond the scope of this paper — is a comprehensive assessment of what particular modality, scale, temporal frame and cohort of participants is best suited to addressing the country’s youth unemployment situation. Given the diversity and number of employment and skills training initiatives that have been undertaken globally, and the pressing urgency of youth unemployment in Solomon Islands, particularly Honiara, this is a question that is highly current and, as this paper has attempted to impart, for which there is a critical need for further evidence-based enquiry.

And, importantly, moving forward, expectations will need to be kept in check. It has been argued that a focus on full-time, formal employment in the public or private sector will only ever have limited success in Honiara. In this regard, the situation facing Solomon Islands today is no different from that presented by Chevalier (2001) some 15 years ago: ‘[u]niversal … employment [is] a fantasy that needs debunking’. Given this situation, it has been contended that efforts to tackle youth unemployment in the capital, and the country, will need to adopt less conventional policy approaches and focus on areas where Solomon Islands has established strengths and advantages, such as the informal sector. Even so, unemployment will remain a permanent state of affairs for pockets of the country’s population, particularly uneducated, urban youth.
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Author Notes

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Endnotes

1 For policy purposes, the Solomon Islands Government's definition of youth is 'persons between 14 years of age and 29 years of age, inclusive' (Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs 2010). Unless otherwise stated, this paper adopts the same definition.

2 Falling within the World Bank's 'harmonized list of fragile situations'. Fragile situations include countries with a harmonised 'Country Policy and Institutional Assessment' (CPIA) rating of 3.2 or less. In FY 2016, Solomon Islands' CPIA rating was 3.1.

3 According to the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), in 2013 Solomon Islands has a net primary enrolment rate of 88.85 per cent (MEHRD 2013a). (Enrolment does not correlate with attendance.) Figures for 2010 indicate that 68 per cent of students had below satisfactory functional literacy and numeracy levels (Close 2012).

4 In 2008, the push out rate was said to be 26 per cent for junior secondary schools (more than 5000 students) and 63 per cent for senior secondary school (more than 6800 students): (Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs 2010).

5 This data shows a drop of around 17,700 student enrolments in standard/grade 1 to form 6 enrolments (SIG 2013b). On average 20,000 students have been enrolled in standard 1 over that period, while only 2600 are enrolled in form 6, meaning vast numbers are not progressing through primary and secondary schooling.

6 Based upon unpublished figures provided by the Solomon Islands Ministry of Public Service (December 2015).

7 Based upon annual 'active' NPF accounts as at December each year (2007–14), excluding 'slow active' and 'inactive' accounts. Sourced from unpublished figures provided by the Central Bank of Solomon Islands. NPF is the compulsory national provident/superannuation fund to which all employers in Solomon Islands are required to register their employees and pay contributions. In reality, this does not occur with various sectors being particularly prone to not registering staff, such as the private security industry and domestic services.

8 Poverty being based on, ‘the minimum expenditures needed to obtain basic food and non-food goods taking into account prevailing consumption patterns in the country’ (SIG 2015).

9 Betelnut is the nut of the fruit of the Areca palm tree. The nuts are chewed and combined in the mouth with crushed lime. Chewing has a mild stimulant effect.

10 Kwaso is a homemade distilled alcohol introduced in Solomon Islands in the mid-1990s. 'Black market' is a reference to the ubiquitous, around-the-clock roadside markets that mainly sell beer without a government-issued liquor license. The livelihood activities described here are far from exclusively a youth phenomenon.

11 With a recent World Bank study (which the author was involved in) finding that petty theft was widespread across Solomon Islands, in some communities being ‘rampant and of constant concern’ (Allen et al. 2013).

12 For an overview of the evidence in this space see, for example, Das and Mocan 2016.

13 Based upon a 38-hour working week at SBD $4 per hour (being the minimum hourly wage rate for all Solomon Islander employees except forestry and fisheries workers). At the time of publication, SBD $1 was equivalent to approximately AUD $0.17. Returns increase with the number of ‘pots’ employed (gas cylinders used as part of the distillation process). In the scenario described here two pots were used.

14 Pursuant to the Labour Act (Solomon Islands) (s.84) the minimum working age in Solomon Islands is 12...
(for a list of defined jobs), an age previously criticised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child as being too low (UNCRC 2003: para 19(c)).


16 According to the latest census some 32 per cent of the population aged 12 years and older in rural areas were subsistence workers, compared with 2 per cent in urban centres (SIG 2013c).

17 It is acknowledged that often employment creation programs will target agricultural livelihoods, particularly in rural areas, although this is not the case for the Honiara-based programs discussed in this paper.

18 These discussions, taking place between June and August 2016, were conducted as part of the author’s PhD fieldwork.

19 This focus group was conducted in July 2016 and included eight participants who had either taken part in REP or Y@W.

20 Dr Michael Goddard 28/2/2016. Honorary Associate, Department of Anthropology, Macquarie University, personal communication.

21 In the first quarter of 2016 Y@W was seeking a Program Design Specialist with one of their tasks being to clarify, ‘the program’s Theory of Change and primary purpose’ and ‘prepare a new Program Design Document’ (Cardno 2016).

22 A key finding being that the REP would deliver economic benefits of between USD $0.48 and $0.85 to the poor for every dollar of expenditure (World Bank 2010a).

23 Program and economy-wide comparisons need to be treated with a degree of caution. See endnote 25.

24 To some extent this is supported by the available data. For example, survey number five discloses that of the seven survey participants from survey number one who were still being tracked, none were employed. The drop-out of survey participants has been attributed to difficulties generating sufficient interest or incentives for former Y@W participants to attend to completing the survey.

25 It could be argued that participants in the Y@W program are not reflective of the overall youth demographic, with the program catering for those that are ‘disengaged’, which may mean those exhibiting worse employment outcomes and prospects than the wider youth community.

However, in practice both programs accept any youth who applies to take part. In the case of Y@W this includes those from standard/grade 6 to university graduates. Although the program does actively seek out those with a disability and former prisoners, a small minority of total program participants. REP participation is largely on the basis of place of residence. Difficulties with comparisons may also arise owing to differences between the age range of participants in the two programs and that for which Solomon Islands’ youth employment data has been collated.

26 This comprised the two-tiered provision of mainly agricultural tools/supplies and for various participants an untied amount of USD $50.


28 The crimes analysed were: murder, kidnapping and abduction, robbery, burglary, theft, and unlawful assembly and rioting. The magnitude of the impact of the program on crime ranged from -0.03 to -0.08 for property crimes and -0.03 to -0.04 for violent crimes (Das and Mocan 2016). More information on the scheme, in operation since 2006, can be found at: <www.nrega.nic.in>.

29 These relate to: ‘i). the importance of budget, with emphasis on savings and use of bank accounts; ii). starting an income generating project; and iii). preparing profit and loss reports’ (ABU Consult Berlin GmbH 2011).

30 This was 3 per cent according to Tracer Study number 7 (Pasifiki Services Ltd).

31 For a discussion of how the aid economy can potentially be harnessed in Solomon Islands (in relation to women, but equally applicable to youth) see Haque and Greig 2010.

32 Based on a population of 1.3 million using a ‘medium population scenario’ (SIG 2013c).

33 For example, since 2011 World Vision has implemented the ‘Honiara Youth Development, Employment and Small Enterprise Project’ which also includes a classroom-style skills training component.

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