Online safety in the Pacific

// SOLOMON ISLANDS PRELIMINARY REPORT

FEBRUARY 2020

SUMMARY

In December 2019, the Intergener8 Co-Research and Design team in the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University, together with co-facilitators from the Plan International Solomon Islands Office, ran workshops with children, their families and other stakeholders to identify the key issues impacting children's online safety, and to map the current agencies, programs and frameworks in operation. This report presents the findings and preliminary recommendations from this process.

ONLINE SAFETY IN THE PACIFIC

// Solomon Islands Preliminary Report

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PROFESSOR AMANDA THIRD, DR GIRISH LALA, MS LILLY MOODY & DR NUKTE OGUN
Young and Resilient Research Centre
Western Sydney University

For any other information on the publication, please contact:

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the rollout of a 730km submarine, fibre optic cable system networking Honiara with Auki (Malaita Island), Noro (New Georgia Island) and Taro Island, digital connectivity in the Solomon Islands is set to rapidly expand, opening up unprecedented opportunities for children in the archipelago, but also potentially exposing them to new risks of harm. Child online safety in the nation thus stands at a critical juncture.

Deeply cognisant of the need to successfully mitigate potential risks of harm while nurturing the opportunities for children in the region, the Intergener8 Co-Research and Design team in the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney, in partnership with Childfund Australia and Plan International, has embarked on a project to map the challenges and opportunities children's technology use presents in the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea. This report presents the findings of the first phase of this project, conducted with 28 children aged 10-18, 19 parents and 23 representatives of government departments, local and international NGOs, schools, police, and telecommunications companies in Honiara, the capital city of the Solomon Islands.

The project deployed a participatory methodology, developed by the Intergener8 team and previously used in over 60 countries, to conduct qualitative data-gathering workshops with the three participant groups: children, parents and adult. Workshops of approx. five hours in length each, comprised a series of activities, which participants completed individually, in small groups, or as a whole group. Activities involved writing, drawing, collage, polls and discussions. Workshop activities explored key themes relating to each group's perceptions and experiences of children's digital media use and online safety, with the overall aim of generating an evidence base for ChildFund Australia's and Plan International's future child protection interventions and programs in the Solomon Islands.

ACCESS

Workshops revealed that a significant proportion of child participants do not personally own a digital device. Nonetheless, despite varying patterns of ownership and use, it appears children have some opportunity to access a wide range of technologies. They report using smart/mobile phones, landline telephones, desktop computers, laptops, tablets, televisions, and cameras. Children's digital ecology comprises social media, video streaming websites, search engines, games and photo editors. Even so, there is clear scope to improve children's access to and use of digital technology.

Where children use digital technology, they commonly do so at home or at school, for the purposes of communication (with parents, friends, service providers), entertainment (movies, games, apps), accessing information, education (research, writing), and religious purposes. Despite growing opportunities to connect with individuals, organisations and interest groups internationally, children in the Solomons primarily mobilise the social affordances of technology to sustain localised friendships and social networks.

Reflecting their diverse levels of exposure to technology, children report varied knowledge and fluency with platform operations and capabilities. Even so, children in the Solomons generally are significantly heavier users of technology than their parents and so tend to have higher levels of knowledge and expertise, limiting the capacity of parents to adequately guide their children's digital engagement. It appears that ideas about a generational divide structure perceptions of technology use in the Solomons, with both children and adults suggesting that children have greater levels of affinity with technology and capacity to understand and/or use new technologies than their parents.

OPPORTUNITIES

Like children in other countries around the world, children in the Solomon Islands are positive about the educational opportunities and greater access to information, and believe technology has the potential to create a brighter future for young people in the Solomon Islands. Benefits that excite children include communicating with peers and family members, improved English skills, a grasp of news and current affairs in the region and overseas, inspirational advice from successful entrepreneurs and access to religious resources. Children also appreciate the entertainment value of social media and other websites.

Parents tend to emphasise the value of access to religious and cultural content, news and even entertainment over the communicative dimensions of technology use. Some recognise that increased access to online

technologies could play an important role in their child's development, as well as encourage them to become well-informed global citizens, and lead to increased business and job prospects.

Overall, while they acknowledge the risks associated with using online technology, participants believe there are also ample benefits and opportunities associated with digital engagement. Given the critical developments in digital technology policy and infrastructure underway in the Solomon Islands, strategies to support online safety should build digital competencies that enable children to both minimise the risks of harm and maximise these opportunities.

RISKS

It is widely acknowledged that, as children's access to online technologies increases, so too do the risks they encounter online. Children in the Solomons are most concerned about the negative behaviours or consequences related to social media (including bad or fake friends, catfishing, and unsolicited photo requests); entertainment (swearing, bad behaviour); inappropriate online content (e.g. pornography), cyberbullying, and hacking. Notably a slight majority believe that they are unlikely to encounter cyberbullying and inappropriate content. Risks of lesser concern include cultural/family disruption, unhealthy lifestyles, distraction, laziness and addiction. It will be critical to understand what drives local perceptions of risk, in order that strategies can effectively contextualise and/or address local concerns. Very few children identify child abuse as an extremely dangerous risk online, and even fewer think it is likely to happen to them. Further, unlike children in other parts of the world, few children in the Solomons appear to recognise the health risks associated with the use of digital technologies.

Children generally believe girls are more at risk than boys both online and offline and, while they tend to believe that boys are more likely to perpetrate harm than girls, they also believe girls are implicated in the forms of online harm they experience. Strategies to promote online safety in the Solomons will need to align with and amplify broader strategies underway to prevent offline, gender-based violence.

Parents are most concerned about inappropriate content online, including pornography, violent or explicit content, followed by other risks such as cyberbullying, negative influence of advertising, stranger danger and online grooming. Parents also worry about how their children's technology use undermines their capacity to protect their children from harm.

RESILIENCE AND SELF-PROTECTIVE SKILLS

Despite sometimes irregular access to technology, children identify a range of self-protective behaviours and actions, including: avoiding potentially harmful situations; blocking websites and harmful users; protecting passwords; setting up firewalls; not talking to or adding strangers on social media; refraining from sending sexual images; and generally exercising self-control. Some believe they can avoid online risks by following their parents' advice. However, while they generally feel confident about staying safe online, they also report not always having the digital skills to implement the necessary protective strategies. Some children identify that, because their parents prohibit technology use, they have not had opportunity to develop online safety literacies.

Children are most likely to resolve an adverse situation by seeking parental support or guidance. This is consistent with their belief that parents are responsible for keeping children safe, pointing to the need to better equip parents to support their children's online safety, as well as to raise children's awareness of other avenues of support available to them.

MEDIATION AND SUPPORT

Children recognise that there are circumstances where they should and/or would seek the support of others to support them to deal with issues they encounter online. However, they identify a limited range of actions, services or supports available to them in these circumstances, suggesting that there is scope to improve the available support channels and raise children's awareness of them.

Children are most likely to turn first to parents, not least because they believe parents are best positioned to intervene. Children also say that they would report to the police if there was no other avenue for resolving issues.

Many parents believe the best way to keep their children safe from online dangers is to keep them offline altogether. Some place strict age restrictions (commonly 16 years) around children's access to technology. Where they allow their children to use technology, parents moderate that usage through rules regarding times of use, access to particular content or services, and asking for permission. Parents have rules around what their child can share online and many try to supervise their children online. One parent spoke passionately about the

need to have discussions with children about their technology use to build trust and open communication. Overall, the support that parents feel able to provide largely depends on prohibitive strategies and mediating technology use through other rules, rather than providing educational support and guidance.

While parents report that they are the primary mediators and source of support for their children in the digital environment, their own digital literacy skills are often limited and their confidence to support children is quite low, possibly impacting their capacity to provide effective support. Indeed, they generally feel under-equipped to effectively support and protect their children online. Parents would appreciate and benefit from targeted guidance about how to support their children's digital technology use, and their online safety in particular.

RESPONSIBILITY

Children in the Solomons currently see their parents and teachers as primarily responsible for protecting them and supporting them to respond to online harms. They also believe that the government and other organisations have an important role in developing policies, education, and legislation to keep children safe online.

Parents, while recognising their own responsibility but limited capabilities, also emphasise the responsibilities of schools and government departments to ensure children's online safety. In particular, they call for online safety skills to be embedded in the education curriculum for primary and secondary students and for the government to develop and implement policies and laws (e.g. age restrictions or bans on particular websites) to support children's safe digital engagement.

Stakeholders assert the need for a cross-sector, multi-stakeholder approach – engaging churches and other religious organisations, NGOs, global agencies (e.g. UNICEF), the police, the Council of Elders, independent regulators, and so on – to develop policy and legislation pertaining to children's online safety.

COLLABORATION

Adult stakeholders identify a range of initiatives being implemented in the Solomon Islands, and the Pacific region more broadly, that address the risks and opportunities of children's digital technology use. These initiatives span legislation and policy (e.g. National Strategy for Child Protection and Online Safety), community initiatives and events (e.g. Girls in ICT Day, DreamCast youth theatre), and development programs (e.g. Cyber Safety Pasifika, Positive Parenting Program). Reflecting on the current offerings, adult stakeholders suggest that existing initiatives are siloed, and that there is a scope for improved communication, collaboration and coordination across sectors. Indeed, the workshop was the first time many stakeholders had heard about other initiatives being implemented in different sectors. The development of cross-sector, multi-stakeholder interventions will be critical to addressing the complexities and challenges while also leveraging the opportunities of the digital environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

Future programs and initiatives addressing children's online safety should seek to:

- Centre **children's needs, rights and aspirations**;
- Support children to **identify, understand, contextualise and respond to both the risks of harm and the benefits** they might encounter using digital technology;
- Support **parents' digital engagement and their digital literacies**, so that they may more effectively support children's digital practices;
- Raise parent's awareness of the opportunities and risks their children might encounter and promote strategies of **active mediation**;
- Adopt a **holistic approach** by balancing risk mitigation strategies with education and skill development in digital technology use to ensure children can minimise the potential harms and maximising the opportunities of their digital engagement;
- Understand the **drivers of community perceptions** of online risks, in order that local concerns can be effectively addressed;
- Align with, and amplify broader strategies to prevent **gender-based violence** in offline settings;
- Raise children's awareness of the potential **health risks** of technology use, and support them to find strategies to balance physical and other activities with their technological engagement;
- Focus on **'appropriate use'** of digital technology use;

- Explore ways to leverage and/or transform current beliefs about different generational capacities to use technology through **intergenerational training and knowledge exchange**, while also remaining sensitive to local, sociocultural structures;
- Raise children's **awareness of available avenues of support** to help navigate risk online;
- Enhance children's **capacities to implement protective strategies** online, including, but not limited to, privacy and security settings;
- **Review existing legislation** and identify new legal protections that can strengthen children's online safety; and
- Adopt a **cross-sector, multi-pronged, coordinated approach** to address children's online safety.

2. INTRODUCTION

Working with ChildFund Australia and Plan International, the Intergener8 Co-Research and Design team in the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University is investigating perceptions and experiences of the internet and online technologies in key sites in the Pacific region: Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea. The project tailors unique, participant-centred methods to explore and understand children's, parents', grandparents' and other stakeholders' ideas about exposure to online risks and protective factors related to cyberbullying and sexual exploitation. It also maps current agencies, programs and frameworks operating in the cyber safety domain.

If cyber safety initiatives are to be successfully implemented, it is critical that children's voices and experiences meaningfully inform their development. Accordingly, workshops were undertaken with children, parents and key stakeholders in Honiara, Solomon Islands, to gather intergenerational experiences and points of view. The rich understandings of children's digital media practices, the issues that affect them, and their local contexts, gained through this qualitative research will augment existing evidence and support the development of new knowledge and interventions to help ensure children's experiences online are safe, productive and rewarding.

With deep gratitude to the Plan International Solomon Islands team, Plan International Australia and ChildFund Australia, for their support and collaboration, we present some key insights generated in the first phase of this project by children, their parents and key stakeholders in the Solomon Islands.

3. BACKGROUND

The internet and digital technology have become central to young people's education and social development, providing them with increased opportunities to achieve their goals. Yet, online technologies can expose children to harmful experiences that can negatively impact their mental and physical health and safety. Internationally, efforts to understand and mitigate such risks are growing as access by children to the internet increases. Researching the effects of digital technologies in the Pacific region is particularly important because, to date, resources and capacities to tackle complex issues such as online sexual abuse, cyberbullying, and internet addiction have been limited, while at the same time the region is experiencing an expansion of access and availability of new digital technologies (Plan International, 2019).

Along those lines, online safety in the Pacific has been recognised as an emerging area of vulnerability for young people. The literature about the use and potential abuse of online technologies in the Pacific region is embryonic (Plan International, 2019), however recent research with adolescents in Fiji, Kiribati, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands found that most young people in the region have access to an online device at home and at school (Third et al., 2017). In the Solomon Islands, that ready access to technology combined with the forthcoming rollout of higher speed and more affordable internet via installation of a new submarine internet cable establishes a pressing need to keep young people safe online.

To date in the Solomon Islands, efforts to reduce harm have focussed around community policing education aimed at families and young people, such as the 'Cyber Safety Pasifika' program developed by the Australian Federal Police and the Pacific Transnational Crime Network. That program saw the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) conducting cyber security awareness exercises in a number of secondary schools in Honiara. In December of 2019, the Solomon Islands became the first site where country specific awareness and education training was completed. The RSIPF now have 25 trained presenters, located in Honiara and seven of the nine provinces (Cyber Safety Pasifika, 2019).

The Solomon Islands *National Cyber Crime and Information Security Bill* is currently being drafted with the aim of addressing the concerns of children, families and the wider community through federal legislation. However, a critical gap remains: in many instances, with limited access to online safety and digital literacy programs, the region's young people and their families feel under-equipped to reap the benefits of the digital age while also staying safe online (Third et al., 2017). Accordingly, while young people in the Solomon Islands have a strong sense of the ways digital technology might contribute to a better world, there is significant scope to encourage adolescents to think more expansively about future opportunities and how digital technology might be mobilised to connect and to participate safely and meaningfully (Third et al., 2017).

4. METHODS

This first phase of the project deployed a participatory methodology to conduct qualitative data-gathering workshops with three participant groups – children, parents and adult stakeholders – in Honiara, Solomon Islands. The workshops explored each group's perceptions and experiences of children's online safety, with the overall aim of generating an evidence base for Plan International and ChildFund Australia's future child protection interventions and programs in the Solomon Islands, and the Pacific region more broadly.

Workshops were comprised of a series of activities which participants completed individually, in small groups (3-5 per group), or as a whole group. Activities were interactive and involved writing, drawing, collage, polls and discussions. Group discussions were facilitated after each activity to feed back on responses and stimulate further discussion among participants.

Workshop activities were designed to explore key themes and questions relating to children's digital media use and online safety (see table below).

THEME	QUESTION
1. Access and ecology	- Where and how are young people most accessing the online environment in the country context? - What are the leading platforms used by children and young people? Are these the same, or known to, parents and supportive adults?
2. Opportunities and benefits	- What are the main opportunities and benefits of young people in the online environment?
3. Risks	- What risks are being encountered by youth online? - What is the frequency and experience of unwanted sexual experiences or other forms of online violence among young people?
4. Resilience and self-protective skills	- What skills do youth already have in resilience and self-protective behaviours? - Which areas needs to be developed to practice self-protective behaviours online?
5. Mediation and support	- What support services are available to children and young people who experience abuse, exploitation and cyberbullying? - How are they identified and accessed by target groups? - Who are youth-led services or identified supports where young people gather to receive guidance, life lessons and teaching?
6. Responsibility	- Who do children and adults see as the key actors bearing responsibility for protecting children against, and responding to risks online? - What can responsible adults do to ensure children's online safety?
7. Policy and practice context	- What online safety interventions and programs are currently being implemented in the country?

	- What are the challenges to implementing effective online safety strategies and programs? - What can be done to improve or ensure children's safety online at the policy and practice level?

A workshop was held with each of the three participant groups: children, parents, and other stakeholders from government, local and international NGOs, schools, police, and telecommunications companies. Activities and corresponding themes varied across all three workshops, with some overlap to allow for points of comparison between cohorts. The children's and parents' workshop focused on themes 1-6, while the stakeholder workshop focused primarily on themes 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7.

Workshop activities were designed by the Western Sydney University research team and refined in collaboration with Plan International staff prior to the workshops to ensure relevance and sensitivity to the local context. Two members of the Western Sydney University research team led the facilitation of the workshops, and local co-facilitators (Plan International staff and volunteers from the Safer Cities for Girls program) assisted groups with activities at each table. English comprehension was high among the cohorts and as such, workshops were delivered in English with some translation into the local Pidgin dialect by co-facilitators where necessary.

a) Recruitment and sample

Plan International (Solomon Islands) recruited a total of 70 participants across three participant groups – children, parents and other stakeholders. While most participants resided in Honiara, some also travelled from villages around Guadalcanal Island to attend the workshops.

PARTICIPANT GROUP	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Children	28
Families	19
Stakeholders	23
TOTAL	**70**

Children
Participants in the children's workshop were aged between 10 and 18 years old. Within the group, 53.6% (15) identified as female and 46.4% (13) identified as male. Participants were primarily recruited through schools and the Safer Cities for Girls program, run by Plan International in Honiara.

Families
Participants in the parents' workshop ranged in age from 29 to 54 years old. Of 19 total participants, 73.7% (14) identified as female, and 26.3% (5) as male. Participants in this group were the parents of child workshop participants, and were recruited through the same programs. This allowed for some interesting analysis of intrafamilial dynamics and comparisons between responses in these groups.

Stakeholders
The stakeholder workshop comprised participants aged 20 to 60 years old, of which 65.2% (15) identified as female and 34.8% (8) as male. Two participants did not stay for the entire duration of the

workshop – one participant contributed to the first exercise only, and the other completed approximately 80% of activities. Participants in this cohort were representatives of government departments, local and international NGOs, schools, police, and telecommunications companies (BMobile and Telekom), and were recruited through Plan International's local networks.

b) Data and analysis

Data from workshop activities was primarily captured on printed worksheets designed by the Western Sydney University team, or large blank paper sheets for collaborative activities. These were supplemented by observations and notes from the workshop made by Western Sydney University facilitators and local co-facilitators.

Data was entered into spreadsheets and analysis was carried out manually by members of the research team using thematic and discourse analysis. Key insights were collated according to the central research questions defined by Plan International and ChildFund Australia. The Western Sydney University team has also supplemented these findings with additional insights which arose from the data.

5. KEY FINDINGS

a) Access and digital ecology

Children and parents were asked where they access and use technology and online services, and for what purposes they use those technologies and services. Ownership and use of technologies varies within and between both child and parent participant groups. For example, a number of child participants do not personally own a digital device, and nor do they regularly use digital technologies such as laptops, mobile phones, the internet. While a larger proportion of parents are owners or users of technology, some are not regular users.

Despite varying patterns of ownership and direct use by participants, parents and children report using smart/mobile phones, landline telephones, desktop computers, laptops, tablets, televisions, and cameras in their communities. It thus appears that parents and children have reasonable opportunity to access a wide range of technologies. Participants also talked about more general interactions with technology in their communities: For example, computers for *"sermon presentations"* (Parent) and cameras for *"security purpose"* (Child).

Children identify a range of platforms and apps that constitute their digital ecology, including social media (in particular Facebook, but also Facebook Messenger and Instagram), video streaming websites (YouTube, VidMate and Netflix), search engines (specifically Google), games (MineCraft, PubG), and photo editors. While most parents are aware that their children access social media, movies, and games online, many parents tend to describe the platforms in general terms such as 'movie sites' or 'computer game websites', indicating that they may not be familiar with the specific sites that children use.

Like many children around the world (Third et al, 2017), those in the Solomon Islands most commonly use technology for communication (with parents, friends, service providers), entertainment (movies, games, apps), accessing information, and education (research, writing). However, it appears that, despite growing opportunities to connect with individuals, organisations and interest groups internationally, children in the Solomons are primarily using the communicative dimensions of technology to sustain localised friendships and social networks.

Distinct from children in some other settings, children in the Solomons also reported that they commonly use digital technology for religious purposes – for example, using Bible apps, reading "gospel news" online, or taking photos during special occasions at church. Both children and parents identify social media (in particular, Facebook[1]), direct messaging and voice communication platforms, and online video repositories as the leading platforms being used and accessed by children.

Reflecting other studies of children's digital practices internationally (see for example, Third et al, 2017; Third et al, 2014), both the child and parent participants in this project identify homes and schools as the most common environments for technology use by children. Like their counterparts in other countries in the global South (Third et al, 2017), children mention using technology at friends' homes, or other locations where they can get a free or reliable wifi connection (such as at their parents' workplace). They sometimes seek access in these places as a workaround when digital technology or the internet is not readily accessible. They also access technology at a range of other locations in their communities, including businesses (stores/shops, fuel station, internet cafés), markets, churches, public spaces (bus stops, playgrounds), and service providers (clinics/hospitals, police stations).

Reflecting the range of technology experience and use, participants also report varied knowledge and fluency with the details of platform operations and capabilities. Moreover, while both children and adults (parents and stakeholders) report that children frequently access video content, parents in particular demonstrate a marked difference in their knowledge of specific video viewing websites or apps used by their children. A few parents are well-versed in the types of video content available online, however, many others have little or no actual experience or exposure accessing video content online. Stakeholder participants, by contrast, are, overall, much more experienced with a variety of forms of technology.

Both children and parents are keenly aware of the differences in knowledge and experience between their respective groups. Both groups explicitly recognise that children in the Solomons generally are significantly heavier users of technology and so have much higher levels of knowledge and expertise. Moreover, as in many parts of the world, the oft-made distinction between 'digital natives' and 'digital migrants' has taken hold. Both children and adults believe children and young people have greater levels of affinity with technology and are able to understand and/or use new technologies much more readily than their parents. While we must be wary of making generational generalisations, our findings indicate that, in the Solomons today, even those children who use technologies relatively infrequently generally evince greater confidence in how technologies work than their more inexperienced parent counterparts. Situating this finding in relation to the broader body of scholarship and experience implementing online safety strategies, there is both risk and opportunity at play here. On the one hand, unless perceptions – and current actualities – of intergenerational differences pertaining to digital technologies and their use are explicitly tackled, we risk entrenching such generational differences, fuelling both parental anxieties and failing to create the environments in which children are supported by their elders to use technology well. On the other hand, given the regard in which children's technological expertise is held, current beliefs about generational technical capacities might be leveraged to have young people strengthen their existing knowledge about online safety and so position themselves to teach adults about online risks and strategies for handling them. In this way, intergenerational capacities could be nurtured.

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[1] Facebook is currently the most popular social media platform in use, with 13-14% of the total population identifying as users. Only 1% of the total population report using Instagram, a platform that is currently particularly popular with children and young people in many other parts of the world (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-solomon-islands).

b) Opportunities and benefits

The opportunities presented by technology were a common theme across the workshops with all three cohorts.

Reflecting the views of children in other countries around the world (Third et al, 2017), children in the Solomon Islands are positive about the educational opportunities greater access to information provides, and believe technology has the potential to create a brighter future for young people in the Solomon Islands. Benefits that excite children include improved English skills, a grasp of news and current affairs in the region and overseas, and inspirational advice from successful entrepreneurs.

Children in the Solomon Islands were distinct from children in previous international studies (Third et al, 2017; Third et al, 2014) in that they highlighted access to religious resources as a key benefit.

Children also appreciate the entertainment value of social media and other websites. Remembering children's right to play, this is an important benefit afforded by children's digital engagement.

Stakeholder and parent groups listed similar benefits to those identified by children, with parents emphasising the value of access to religious and cultural content, news and even entertainment.

Some parents recognise that increased access to online technologies could play an important role in their child's development. As one group noted, technology affords: *"Activities that develop [children's] potential talents, positive behaviours"* (Parent).

In addition to the above, stakeholders applied a longer term lens, identifying that being part of a well-informed global community was a key benefit that could lead to increased options for business and job prospects. Further, both child and stakeholder participants cite the benefits of improved communication with family and friends, particularly with those living abroad. On the other hand, while some parents identify communication with immediate family members as a positive aspect of digital technology, overall they are more likely to focus on the educational opportunities of technology for their children, rather than advantages related to communication.

Overall, while they acknowledge the risks associated with using online technology, participants believe there are also ample benefits and opportunities associated with digital engagement. Given the critical developments in both digital technology policy and infrastructure currently underway in the Solomon Islands, and taking learnings from other settings (see Gasser & Cortesi, 2016) it is important to ensure that these opportunities are leveraged and maximised so that children can reap the benefits presented by access to online environments.

c) Risks

Generally, as young people's access to online technologies increases, so too do the risks they encounter online (see, for example, Livingstone et al, 2017). Children and stakeholders were asked to identify their perceptions of online risks (what risks they thought existed online), as well as the likelihood of encountering those risks (how common those risks are in practice).

The risks that children feel are of most concern include: negative behaviours or consequences related to social media (including bad or fake friends, catfishing, and unsolicited photo requests), negative influences of entertainment (swearing, bad behaviour), accessing inappropriate content online (e.g. pornography), cyberbullying, and hacking. Risks of lesser concern include addiction, cultural/family disruption, and other health risks (e.g. leading to unhealthy lifestyles). It is notable that children in the Solomons identify distraction, the promotion of laziness, and cultural/family disruption as risks, as

these have not commonly been identified in comparable studies internationally with children (Third et al, 2017; Third et al, 2014). It will be critical to understand what is driving these perceptions locally, in order that concerns can be effectively contextualised and/or addressed.

While groups consistently identify the same risks, they rate different risks as most concerning. Children consistently identify social media and entertainment as the platforms where they face the greatest risks. They conceive these platforms in particular as causing laziness, exposing them to inappropriate behaviour and negative influences, and putting them at risk of exploitation or harm. Unlike children in many parts of the region, and particularly those in South East Asia (Third et al, 2017), they are not overly concerned about becoming addicted to these platforms. Discourses of addiction often overstate the problem of addiction and obscure other more pressing challenges. Our data suggests that future initiatives should avoid highlighting addiction as a key concern lest this create unwarranted challenges; instead, initiatives might use the terminology of 'appropriate use' to positively affect children's online safety.

Children consider social media platforms – specifically Facebook – to be an avenue through which perpetrators of online violence and cyberbullying may reach them. It is clear that some cybersafety messaging has already been internalised by children in the Solomons. They identify receiving unsolicited images, having ones' private images exploited, and in some instances online relationships translating into offline violence, such as murder or rape, as experiences of violence that could eventuate through these platforms.

> *"Facebook [is a problem] because someone can send bad picture to you and can hacks your account and uploading bad picture in your account."* (Child, female, 14)

> *"Facebook is a risk for girls because sometimes people will lie to you and told you to wait for him anywhere but you didn't know that he was going to murder you or rape you. This was the biggest thing [to] happen now."* (Child, female, 14)

> *"Facebook because some girls would get messaged from boys to send nude pictures and some would ask the girl to hang out and then they would rape them."* (Child, male, 18)

Despite an awareness of the potential of social media platforms to expose them to violence and abuse, only three children explicitly identify child abuse as an extremely dangerous risk online, with one of these children indicating that they think it is likely to happen to them. Similarly, reflecting children's views from other studies (Third et al, 2014; Third et al, 2017), children also identify cyberbullying, hacking and inappropriate content (e.g. pornography) as very risky. Even so, a slight majority think it is unlikely they will experience cyberbullying or access inappropriate content.

Interestingly, while children in other parts of the world commonly identify health risks, such as obesity and poor eyesight, with the use of digital technologies (Third et al, 2014; Third et al, 2017), this was not a prominent concern for children in the Solomons. This suggests that there is scope to raise children's awareness of the potential health risks that attend digital technology use and to help them find strategies to best balance physical and other activities with their technological engagement.

One interesting finding is that children believe girls are more at risk than boys online because girls are thought to be more easily influenced and susceptible to online deception and cyberbullying. To put this concern in context, reflecting national statistics that indicate significant levels of physical and sexual violence against girls (Plan International, 2019), children also believe girls are more vulnerable to offline abuse and violence.

"I think it is riskier for girls because some people use fake account to gain their advantage and they can either get kidnapped, raped or killed." (Child, male, 18)

"Yes, social issues are riskier for girls because it can causes violence or any bad behaviour that would have a particular girl to be feel depressed and low self-esteem that sometime may lead to suicide." (Child, female, 16)

Relatedly, children generally identify boys as the perpetrators of harms directed at female children.

"Boys, because they can cause problems or troubles, even if they came into our lives." (Child, female, 13)

"I personally think these issues are riskier for girls, because young girls are mostly targets for men and boys." (Child, female, 12)

In some instances, however, children (including females) also allocate a level of blame to girls/victims.

"Us girls tend to do unthinkable stuff. I think girls are more targeted than boys with most of the issues." (Child, female, 12)

"Yes, child abuse because girls are not so protective and girls are not so brave or so strong to block boys or bad people that are so criminal. Girls do not care about anything." (Child, male, 10)

Clearly, strategies to promote online safety in the Solomons will need to articulate with, and amplify, broader strategies underway to prevent gender-based violence in offline settings.

In contrast to children, the majority of parents are first and foremost concerned about inappropriate content online, including pornography, violent or explicit content.

"My biggest fear or worry about my child is that they might access to websites that are harmful, e.g. pornography." (Parent)

The risks that young people may experience as a result of social media platforms, cyberbullying, advertisements, and risk of harm (such as stranger danger and online grooming) are secondary concerns for parents. However, where they were mentioned, these threats were thought to stem from external influences beyond the immediate family and cultural environment, with parents expressing concern that these risks infiltrate and threaten the sanctity of the family home as a safe environment.

"My fear is that my child will be exposed to this outside world where you have no control of the good and the bad." (Parent)

"Online safety. Children can no longer be safe in the house due to accessibility, various online content." (Parent)

As we discuss further below, parents also have concerns they are being ill-equipped to control or protect their children from inappropriate online content.

While children identify addiction and distractions as lesser risks, other stakeholders identify these as the risks young people face most frequently, explaining that using online technologies can detract

from schoolwork, hinder physical activity, and isolate them socially. Almost half of the stakeholders identify the impact of technology on family values as a risk. The most dangerous risks stakeholders list are pornography, cyberbullying and fraud. Fewer stakeholders recognise grooming and sexual exploitation as key risks, and human trafficking is noted even less frequently. Extremely dangerous potential risks, such as child trafficking, online grooming and child prostitution, were only listed as likely to happen by one stakeholder.

d) Resilience and self-protective skills

Even though not all children in the Solomon Islands have regular access to online technology, they generally feel confident in their ability to protect themselves online and suggest a range of self-protective behaviours and actions they as individuals should take personal responsibility for, including: avoiding potentially harmful situations or behaviours, disengaging from dangerous interactions (e.g. blocking websites), and adopting or implementing safe technological practices (such as password protection and setting up firewalls).

> *"Set up a security on the internet that can't be hacked."* (Children, group activity)

> *"You can protect yourself by blocking bad webs because it's dangerous for us."* (Child, male, 10)

> *"Do not add friend with those people you do not know or else they will abuse you."* (Child, female, 13)

> *"You can keep yourself online if somebody ask you to send bad pictures on messenger you just say no to them and do not send your bad pictures to them."* (Child, female, 14)

> *"Create strong passwords to secure; don't give out all personal information; find a way to secure the apps; don't give away your passwords; firewall (protection)."* (Child, group activity)

On the other hand, while some of them had heard of these measures, they also admitted to not necessarily having the skills to implement them.

> *"I don't know how to go against this risk."* (Child, female, 11)

There is clear scope to enhance children's capacities to enact these protective strategies.

Other personal strategies children deploy include not talking to or adding strangers on social media, and exercising self-control. They cite the need to protect themselves by not sending sexual images of themselves or mimicking online behaviours that they know to be inappropriate, and blocking "friends" who are inflicting harm.

> *"Do not add friend with those people you do not know or else they will abuse you."* (Child, female, 13)

> *"You can keep yourself online if somebody ask you to send bad pictures on messenger you just say no to them and do not send your bad pictures to them."* (Child, female, 14)

> *"Remove all bad friends that want to influence you into any bad things."* (Children, group activity)

> *"To solve the situation Rotani should block his/her friends."* (Child, female, 16)

Young people also identify the need to share their negative online experiences with an adult so they may intervene, while others believe they can avoid online risk altogether by following parental advice.

> *"Talk to someone, tell them about your problem; try and sort it out; don't try and respond to it or it'll make it worse; report to police if only necessary; find way to stop it from happening; try and secure your personal information."* (Children, group activity)

> *"Seek help from parents or right people to help you to deal with the cyber bully which you are being affected from it."* (Children, group activity)

Children are most likely to resolve a situation by seeking parental support or guidance. This is consistent with parents being identified by children as being responsible for keeping them safe, and also children's assertions that, in most instances, they follow the technology restrictions imposed by their parents.

> *"Which I click the power button off. I walk out of my room that night and call my parents. I told them the whole story and they just advise me not to get worried about it and said a quote to me which said "Intelligent people ignores" which gives me courage and I then realised that no matter what situation you've faced there is always a solution."* (Child, male, 17)

Importantly, some parents appear to protect their children by prohibiting digital technology use.

While children are respectful of such prohibitions, it is notable that three young people who do not have permission to use technology also claim they did not know how to protect themselves online because of their lack of experience and familiarity.

> *"No, [I don't know how to stay safe online] because my parent do not allowed me to internet."* (Child, male, 14)

> *"I don't know how to protect myself from risks."* (Child, female, 14)

e) Mediation and support

While children have strong opinions about who bears responsibility for protection and support from online harm, and keen ideas about mechanisms and strategies that could be developed to provide useful support (e.g. see "Responsibility" below), they identify a relatively limited range of actions, services or supports currently available to them for managing the harmful effects of their online engagements.

Despite general confidence in their ability to keep themselves safe, children nevertheless also recognise there are circumstances where they should and/or would seek the support of others. However, the avenues of actual support they identify are very few. Overall, children are most likely to seek parental support or guidance in order to resolve an issue related to their online safety. Some also suggest sharing experiences with other adults because they are better placed and able to intervene.

> *"Talk to someone, tell them about your problem; try and sort it out; don't try and respond to it or it'll make it worse; report to police if only necessary; find way to stop it from happening; try and secure your personal information."* (Children, group activity)

> *"Seek help from parents or right people to help you to deal with the cyber bully which you are being affected from it."* (Children, group activity)

However, while children occasionally mention the police, and adults generally, as general categories of support, they appear to really only identify their parents as specific avenues of support. There is thus scope to encourage children to think more broadly about the adults that can guide and help them when they encounter difficulties online.

With regards to providing support to their children, many parents believe the best way to keep their children safe from online dangers is to keep them offline altogether, reporting that their children are not allowed to use technology at all. In some of these instances, they indicate that their child will get access once they reached a certain age (often at least 16 years old or over), or enter high school.

> *"No mobile phone as my child is still of primary school."* (Parent)

> *"[I] allowed my child to have mobile phone when she reached 16 years."* (Parent)

For those children who have access to digital technologies, parents mediate their children's digital technology usage in others ways – through implementing rules regarding times of use, access to particular types of content or services, permission and supervisory strategies, and guidelines around what their child can share online.

> *"Be mindful of what you upload and share online: no address, no pictures in uniforms."* (Parent)

> *"Mum and dad are allowed to review social media accounts until 16."* (Parent)

One parent also spoke passionately about the need to engage their children in open and direct discussions around their digital technology use, in order to build trust and honest communication channels between themselves and their child. This support strategy appeared to be well-received by some participants in the room, however others discussed the need for their child to first demonstrate that they can be trusted with digital technology before exploring more collaborative options.

> *"Talk about his interests and ambitions, and if he find internet useful or if he needs to know about resourceful sites. Talk about any real issues or real experiences he's facing when using the internet. Talk about ways to control or overcome the issues. Talk about other activities he would like to engage in like sports, etc apart from online gaming or social media activities."* (Parent, female, 41)

> *"Have to trust my child before giving [it to] my child."* (Parent)

Parents share their children's sentiment that they are the primary mediators and source of support for their children in the digital environment.

> *"All parents must be active in bringing their children to respect other children and avoid bullying".*

Overall however, parents' digital literacy and confidence in their own skills is quite low, which may impact on the level of support they are able to provide to meet the needs of their children. Further, parents are not nearly as confident in their children's ability to keep themselves safe online as children themselves. This suggests that parents would appreciate targeted guidance about how to support their children's digital technology use, and their online safety in particular.

Overall then, while children (and adults) had a range of ideas about potentially useful services, policies or interventions they would like to see in place to support those experiencing online harm, parental support seems to be the only adult-centred intervention children are aware of or feel like they could

seek out. This indicates there is significant scope to raise children's awareness of other potential avenues of support, particularly where children feel their parents are unable to provide that advice and guidance. Meanwhile, the support that parents feel able to provide largely depends on prohibitive strategies and mediating technology use through other rules, rather than providing educational support and guidance.

f) Responsibility

While related to issues around mediation and support, participants' perceptions of responsibility among key actors bears particular mention. Responsible actors are those individuals, organisations or institutions who are most accountable for ensuring children are protected from risks online, and for responding to particular instances of harm if they arise. While participants consider individuals like parents and teachers to be responsible for guiding and supporting children, the government and other organisations are considered responsible for developing policies, educational interventions, and legislation to keep children safe online.

Across all three cohorts, parents are most frequently identified as highly responsible actors. Not surprisingly, children rely heavily on their parents for support in the online environment, turning to them not only for protection from harm online, but also for guidance and education on how to use digital technology well.

> *"Parent is responsible for their child. They should tell their child what to do or not what to do."* (Child, female, 13)

> *"I think parents should be responsible for this children online safety. They are our parents, they should keep their kids safe."* (Child, male, 13)

At the same time, findings from the parents' workshop indicate that parents themselves, while recognising their own responsibility, lack the necessary digital literacy skills and understanding of online safety to provide the level of protection and education that is expected of them. Given the responsibility borne by parents, they and other family members would benefit from educational opportunities and training in a range of digital literacy skills, including, but not limited to, online safety practices.

> *"[I'm] not familiar to web pages [and] how to go about it."* (Parent, male, 40)

> *"[I have] no knowledge of technology terminology."* (Parent, female, 50)

> *"[I do] not know how to go into internet."* (Parent, female, 45)

After parents, schools/teachers and government departments are also identified as highly responsible by all cohorts, however parents and stakeholders place greater emphasis on the role of these groups than children. The parents and stakeholder cohorts see schools and teachers as primarily responsible for implementing rules governing digital technology usage at school, however a number of participants also note that digital literacy and online safety skills should be embedded in the education curriculum.

> *"Children are at school 7/8 hours every weekday. Build it into their curriculum. Discuss it with educational authorities to build a culture that is safe for children online. Drive awareness/promotional campaigns throughout schools (communities). Legislation to follow as it might take a while."* (Parent, female, 39)

At the government level, participants from all three cohorts call for the development and implementation of policies, regulation and legislation to protect children online. Children and parents suggest that age restrictions and bans on certain websites (particularly those containing inappropriate content) would be effective cyber safety strategies, while a majority of stakeholders address the need for a cross-sector, multi-stakeholder approach to develop legislation around children's online safety. The National Cyber Crime and Information Security Bill currently being drafted in the Solomon Islands presents an opportunity to address the concerns of children, families and the wider community in federal legislation.

> *"Make policies on online safety for kids. Block some other websites for kids not to access. Illegalise age to used internet or online safety."* (Child, male, 10)

> *"I would invite my member of parliament for my constituency to talk about children online safety. I will tell them to control all website in their level, e.g. the bills. I think kids should be restricted on some page on website which might disturb them."* (Parent, male, 52)

Churches and other religious organisations, NGOs, global agencies (e.g. UNICEF), and police are all identified as having some level of responsibility by all cohorts, however children place a far greater emphasis on the responsibility of police and NGOs than parents and stakeholders. This may be a result of children's conceptualisations of the role of police and NGOs differing from the other two cohorts.

Finally, participants in the stakeholder group identified two additional groups – the Council of Elders and independent regulators – as actors who bear some responsibility for ensuring children's safety online. There is therefore scope to consider how to utilise the roles of these and other traditional cultural bodies in an online safety strategy within the Solomon Islands context.

g) Collaboration

Participants in the stakeholder workshop identified a number of initiatives that are currently being implemented in the Solomon Islands, and Pacific region more broadly, that address both the risks and opportunities of children's digital technology use. These initiatives span legislation and policy (including the National Strategy for Child Protection and Online Safety), community initiatives and events (e.g. Girls in ICT Day, DreamCast youth theatre), and development programs (e.g. Cyber Safety Pasifika, Positive Parenting Program).

However, despite the range of initiatives being implemented across the government, community and INGO sectors, adult stakeholder participants indicate that existing initiatives are currently siloed, and that there is a dearth of productive cross-sector collaboration. Indeed, the workshop was the first time many stakeholders had heard about other initiatives taking place in different sectors. As participants note, the "lack of coordination between stakeholders, similar programs done in isolation" presents a major challenge to implementing effective cyber safety strategies and programs for children.

Participants in the stakeholder group also developed action plans for addressing a particular issue relating to children's online safety. Action plans were intended to be aspirational projects and encouraged stakeholders to develop collaborative approaches to the issues they identified as most critical. Three out of four chose to address cyberbullying as the critical issue, while the fourth engaged with online protection more broadly.

Three out of four action plans[2] outlined steps for the development of legislation, and one of these also suggests incorporating cyberbullying education into the school curriculum. The development of the National Cyber Crime and Information Security Bill was a pervasive theme throughout the stakeholder workshop, and two participants are involved in the drafting of this strategy, which may have influenced the legislative approach taken by the majority of groups. The remaining group outlined a whole-of-community approach for supporting children's resilience and awareness of cyberbullying through education and advocacy. Integral to this plan is "strengthened coordination amongst stakeholders (NGO, government, private sector)" and "strengthened community mechanisms".

In order to enhance the efficacy of current and future initiatives, opportunities for fostering greater cross-sector awareness and collaboration should be explored. Further, in line with stakeholders' action plans, the development of cross-sector, multi-stakeholder interventions is crucial if these strategies are to address the complexities and challenges, while also leveraging the opportunities of the digital environment.

6. CONCLUSION

Children's technology use in the Solomon Islands is at a critical juncture. The rollout of high-speed internet via a new submarine internet cable, and the drafting of the National Cyber Crime and Information Security Bill, is transforming the landscape of digital technology use, creating conditions that encourage greater uptake of technology. While expanding the digital network and increasing access exposes children to a greater risk of harm, it also presents them with new opportunities.

Although technology use and access varies across the Solomon Islands, children and adults are acutely aware of the potential risks inherent in their technology use, and they have self-protection strategies in place and show resilience in the face of potential harms. However, they are also aware of the opportunities offered for their development and future. Children and their parents are excited about increased access to information and educational resources, further job seeking and business opportunities, and communicating with friends and family abroad.

However, if children are to maximise the transformative opportunities offered by technology, and reap the full benefits, there is a need for effective programs and strategies that can help children to become informed and active global citizens in a digital world, while also being mindful of and skilled to deal with the risks. There is a particular need for parents to undertake education and training, so they may support and mediate their children's responsible technology use. Ideally, these programs should be informed by a cross-sector and multi-stakeholder collaborative approach.

The drafting of the National Cyber Crime and Information Security Bill currently presents a unique opportunity to develop a holistic, whole-of-community approach that builds on the strengths of the Solomon Islands community and supports the realisation of children's provision, protection and participation rights.

7. PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations draw on the key insights from children, parents and stakeholder groups in the Solomon Islands, and seek to provide guidance for future initiatives and strategies to support children's safe and productive digital technology use.

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[2] Available from the Intergener8 team on request.

Future programs and initiatives addressing children's online safety should seek to:

- Centre **children's needs, rights and aspirations**.

- Support children to **identify, understand, contextualise and respond to both the risks of harm and the benefits** they might encounter using digital technology.

- Support **parents' digital engagement and their digital literacies**, so that they may more effectively support children's digital practices.

- Raise parent's awareness of the opportunities and risks their children might encounter and promote strategies of **active mediation**.

- Adopt a **holistic approach** by balancing risk mitigation strategies with education and skill development in digital technology use to ensure that children are capable of minimising the potential harms and maximising the opportunities of their digital engagement;

- Understand the **drivers of community perceptions** of online risks, in order that local concerns can be effectively addressed;

- Articulate with, and amplify broader strategies to prevent **gender-based violence** in offline settings;

- Raise children's awareness of the potential **health risks** of digital technology use, and support them to find strategies to balance physical and other activities with their technological engagement;

- Focus on **'appropriate use'** of digital technology use, rather than highlighting addiction as a key concern, lest this create unwarranted challenges;

- Explore ways to leverage and/or transform current beliefs about generational technical capacities through **intergenerational training and knowledge exchange**, while also remaining sensitive to local sociocultural structures;

- Raise children's **awareness of available avenues of support** to help navigate risk online, aside from relying on their parents, particularly where children feel their parents are unable to provide advice and guidance;

- Enhance children's **capacities to implement protective strategies** online, including, but not limited to, privacy and security settings;

- **Review existing legislation** and identify legal protections that would strengthen children's online safety; and

- Adopt a **cross-sector, multi-pronged approach** to online safety, thereby improving coordination and collaboration between stakeholders addressing children's online safety.

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