



Australian High Commission  
Solomon Islands

## **“BELIEVE IN YOURSELF”: AUSTRALIA BRINGS TOGETHER WOMEN IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND STUDENTS**

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Seventy-five high school girls from Naha and East Honiara have been encouraged to work hard and dream of a career in engineering, construction or health.

At a special event celebrating International Women’s Day hosted by Australia, female students from the five schools surrounding the new Naha Birthing and Urban Health Centre were invited to hear from the women who have helped design, engineer and construct the ground-breaking new facility.

Counsellor Amy Sheridan from the Australian High Commission told students that she knew what it was like to be a woman in a male-dominated industry.

“With challenge comes growth, and our aim is to inspire and support you as the next generation of women in infrastructure,” Ms Sheridan said.

“We know that infrastructure is more effective when it is designed and built by diverse local teams that include women.

“Opportunities like today show what is possible. When students see engineers, builders and project leaders who look like them, it expands their sense of what they can achieve for their families, communities and the future of Solomon Islands.”

Australia advocates for the employment of women in every infrastructure project it supports in Solomon Islands, and provides women in the sector with qualifications and training.

As a result, more than 10 women are among the majority-Solomon Islands workforce on the Naha Birthing and Urban Health Centre project. Other major infrastructure projects, like CAUSE II, are creating hundreds of work and training opportunities for women in urban centres.

Students heard from seven women working in a range of construction, engineering and design roles on Australian-supported infrastructure projected.

They delivered a strong and unified message that women must believe in themselves, work hard and not let tradition be a barrier to a successful career.

Panelist Ms Netanya Tolinao encouraged students to consider construction as a rewarding and achievable career.

“I never imagined working on major construction projects, but with support and training I found my place,” Ms Tolinao said.

“I hope today helps young women see they belong in infrastructure, even though it is traditionally male-dominated.”

Daisy Roddie, mother and leading hand in carpentry on the Naha project acknowledged the challenges, but said overall, construction was a fun job.

“I face the same challenges as every woman working in a male-dominated field, but over time, I get respect, and my family and husband are very supportive of me being a working mum.”

“Overall, work hard, make good choices, and be confident in your ability.”

Students also toured the Birthing Centre and Urban Health Centre construction sites, guided by engineers and tradeswomen from Reeves Icon and Kramer.

Provincial Director of Health, Dr Lawrence Diau, acknowledged the privilege of working on the planning and operationalisation of the Naha Birthing and Urban Health Centre, and encouraged the girls to set their skills for engineering to design such buildings, or perhaps working in the facility as a doctor or nurse.

Deputy principal for Mbua Valley Community High School, Diana Votu, thanked Australia for organising the event with such inspirational speakers.

“This event helps break the mindset – that just like men, women too can do it. Believe in yourselves, work hard,” Ms Votu said to her students.

Once completed, Naha Birthing and Urban Health Centre will help reduce demand on the National Referral Hospital by expanding maternal and primary health services in Honiara.

It includes a 24-hour Birthing Centre with five birthing suites and 17 inpatient beds for low-risk births, and an Urban Health Centre offering outpatient services such as dental care, pathology, pharmacy and medical imaging.

Designed to be resilient and accessible, the facility features earthquake-resilient construction, solar power and backup water and power systems to support continuous operations.

The project has also employed a majority local workforce, including women and people with disabilities.

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**PHOTOS:**



Photo 1 – Students from the five high schools surrounding the new Naha Birthing and Urban Health Centre



Photo 2 – Four speakers presented their story into a career in infrastructure had a single message for the students – make good choices and believe in yourselves! (from left: Daisy Rodde, Phillipa Ramofafia, Winnie Sulumae and Netanya Tolinao)



Photo 3 – Australia's Infrastructure Counsellor, Amy Sheridan, said Australia aimed to inspire and support the next generation of women into infrastructure.



Photo 4 – Students from Naha Community High School during their tour of the brand new facility, soon to open.



Photo 5 – Students engaged with engineers and architects during the panel discussion about a career in infrastructure.



Photo 6 - The students are the first to tour the soon to be opened, state-of-the-art facility



Photo 7 - Provincial Director of Health, Dr Lawrence Diau, said it was a privilege to be working on the operationalisation of the new health centre