

## **“Silent cry of John the village boy”**

**by Ms June Atomea, Solomon Islands**

John is his name although everybody in his village calls him ‘Dion’. This vibrant and intellectually-active lad of 13 years of age hails from a small village in the highlands of North Malaita, Solomon Islands. The village consists of six leaf houses isolated in the lavish green forests and uncontaminated air in the mountains of North Malaita, approximately 15 kilometres from the coastal village where most of the social and economic hype revolves. The last house in the far corner is where John lives with his seven older siblings who are all uneducated, and his mother who is the sole breadwinner after the loss of their father in 2008 due to cancer.

Seeing that all his older siblings are not interested in formal education, John persuaded his parents to send him to school in the coastal village. That was in 2002 when John started kindergarten at an age of five. He had to walk up and down the mountainous terrain every day to attend primary school which is around 16 kilometres away from his home. His parents who are both subsistence farmers had to wake him up around 4 am each morning to enable him to reach school by 7.30 am. His breakfast and lunch were mostly dry baked potato or taro, and other days he would just sacrifice lunch. He would always wonder why he can’t be like the children from the coastal village who usually brought biscuits, bread, or rice for their lunch.

One day little John innocently asked his mother, “*nai na’a ufita na toto kwesi ngalia bo’o bereta mada raisi uri lans nau?*” (Mummy why is that at no time I am able to take bread or rice for my lunch). Tears flowed down her mother’s cheek as she told her little John that it’s because they could not afford it. This motivated John to perform really well in school and topped his class from Grade 1 to Grade 6. He eventually passed the secondary school entrance examination in 2008 and was accepted into Form 1 at a top national secondary school in the city, Honiara. His aim was to become a school teacher.

However, things started to change when his father became sick in 2007 and was bedridden until his death in August 2008, the same month John sat for the secondary school entrance examination. John took courage and decided to continue with Form 1 in 2009. In order to attend secondary school, John’s mother had to prepare his school fees, personal belongings, stationeries, and transportation costs. This was obtained after John’s mother loaned some money from a businessman in the coastal village agreeing to repay it after she saved enough money from selling her fresh garden produce at the coastal village market.

John came to Honiara and topped his class with all straight ‘As’ in the semester 1 2009 examinations. Unfortunately the effects of the Global Economic Crisis crept into the Solomon Islands economy around that same period. Prices of food and other things skyrocketed, and gardens were also affected due to the effects of climate change. John’s mother had no other option to fend for her eight children and at the same time meet John’s school needs. As a result of the economic hardship, the very bright and promising little John was forced out of school ending his childhood dream of becoming a school teacher one day. There was no other alternative for John so he had to accept his fate.

When I went home at the end of 2009 I had the opportunity to meet John at the village market. One question that he asked which struck me to bone was “*ufita na kera sorea financial crisis sui tei wela la village kulu ne’e keka sukulu bada mani nau ka ai?*”(Why is that they say it’s the effect of the financial crisis yet some students from the coastal village still attend school but not me). As one of the coastal village students he was referring to, I did not know what to say but when I thought about it I was convinced that this is a time where only the ‘haves’ will survive and the ‘have-nots’ will suffer.

But the important question to think about is why this world is so unfair? The Global Financial Crisis is probably the result of human greed and the sad thing about it is that it costs the future of one village boy, and who knows he may be one of the many silent cries of similar nature throughout the Pacific.