

**NGO SHADOW REPORT ON THE STATUS OF
WOMEN IN SAMOA**

**4th & 5th Periodic reports of State Parties
(2005-2009)**

This report was prepared by the following NGOs:

SUNGO - Samoa Umbrella for Non Governmental Organisations

SENESE - Inclusive Education Support Services

Nuanua o le Alofa (NOLA) National Council for People with Disabilities

Pan Pacific South East Asia Women Association- Samoa (PPSEAWA)

Samoa Aids Foundation

Faasao Savaii - Conservation

Gataula Primary Health Care

PacTraining and Advisory

Animal Protection Society

BeeKeepers Association

Samoa Red Cross

Goshen Trust -

Courier of Samoa – Occupational training

PIU Community – Rural Village Development

YWCA of Samoa

Mapusaga O Aiga – Domestic Violence

Samoa Family Health Association

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The contributions of above mentioned NGOs of Samoa to this Shadow Report have been collaborated under **The Samoa Umbrella Organisation for NGOs (SUNGO)**.

NGOs acknowledge the continued partnership with Government of Samoa through the CEDAW and CRC partnerships as focal points for the implementation of these Conventions.

Without doubt there has been continuing progress in areas of legislative reform, the adoption of the National policy for Women and National Action Plan, the establishment and appointment of the Law Reform Commissioner and establishment of her office and concerted efforts across all sectors to eliminate domestic violence.

NGOs would be failing in their duty as the voice of civil society, if they did not bring to light the issues that still face many women in Samoa. With limited financial resources, trained personnel and other constraints, the collaboration of NGOs and Government is essential, however the partnerships must be genuine and meaningful to be effective.

Critical issues cited by NGOs include:

- Legislative Reform and the domestication of CEDAW into the Constitution and domestic laws: ***set timeline for definition incorporation.***
- Establishment of a Family Court and Human Rights Commission: ***urgent special measure to establish a family court***
- Domestic Violence against Women: ***urgent passage of legislation***
- Discrimination on the Basis of Sex: ***need for anti- sex discrimination law***

- Incorporation of CEDAW into the Strategy for Development of Samoa (SDS) and other sector plans: ***mainstreaming gender across all sector policy planning***
- Women with Disabilities: ***health and educational access***
- Maternity leave: ***urgent need for Government to subsidize maternity leave in private sector***
- Barriers to Education for Young Mothers: ***urgent educational policy and support systems for the reentry of teenage mothers into education.***
- Political participation : ***legislation to end discrimination against women from bestowment of matai chiefly titles and or participation in local and national government.***
Measures to ensure substantive equality in public and political bodies.
- Cultural vulnerability : ***measures to ensure protection for vulnerable women due to cultural status and practices.***
- Rural Women and Healthcare: ***access to clean water, health services and ICT.***
- Stereotyping and Sex Roles: ***measures to ensure gender equality of Government Women Representatives.***

Samoa is a small Pacific Island state that has enjoyed political and economic stability for over 20 years. Its culture pervades all aspects of daily life. As a least developed country Samoa continues a steady path to development.

Women in Samoa are among the most vulnerable group in society and cash poverty is apparent by the continued reliance on cash remittances from expatriate family members for daily sustenance and family obligations.

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BACKGROUND

The State Report has adequately provided background information of Samoa which remains one of the most politically and economically stable islands in the Pacific region.

The country has had the same political party in Government for over 20 years. Status of Women is culturally high and there are few instances of extreme exploitation and suppression of women's rights. Many barriers are in attitudes and stereotypes and discrimination against women is indirect in nature.

Article 1: Definition of Discrimination

Incorporation of Definition of Discrimination against Women

Government has yet to adopt and incorporate into the Constitution, a definition of "discrimination against women" as defined in Article 1 of the CEDAW.

The governing Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) has enjoyed a two thirds majority for over 27 years in Parliament which allows the amendment of the Constitution without having to garner support from the opposition party. Consequently there should not be any barriers hindering the Government from amending the Constitution to include the definition of "discrimination against women" as contained in Article 1 of the CEDAW and in compliance with the concluding comments in the last CEDAW Reporting Process, 2005.

Additionally there appears to be no cultural barriers for such a change, given the overall high cultural status of women to such an amendment, and the provision in Article 15 of the Constitution prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex.

The key barriers are the lack of appropriate knowledge of CEDAW and its obligations resulting in a lack of political will to action this State obligation.

The domestication of the CEDAW in full into local laws, is expectedly slow in progress. The establishment of the Law Reform Commission in 2008 has enabled the review of legislation to determine compliance with CEDAW.

Given the majority that the current Government holds in Parliament it is an opportune time for the Ministry of Women, the Office of the Attorney General and the Law Reform Commission to advocate for the incorporation of CEDAW into domestic laws and to "strike while the iron is hot."

Matrimonial Property legislation

Matrimonial property legislation has not been developed and women must resort to the common law and institute legal proceedings to recover a share of any matrimonial property.

Abortion

Abortion remains illegal and is still a sensitive topic. There has been a case of a women being imprisoned for performing abortions illegally. There appears to be a scourge of incest and rape cases especially of teenage girls. There is no provision for abortion on those grounds.

Family Court

There is still no Family Court available to exclusively handle cases in the family arena. The District Court has set aside a particular day and time to deal with Youth, maintenance and family cases.

The Government already provides a Maintenance office with trained Maintenance officers that represent women to claim child care payments in the District Court.

However where other issues including divorce, matrimonial property are an issue, many women are unable to afford a lawyer to represent them.

If a Family Court is established, the Court process becomes less intimidating and more accessible to women in need. Legal representation for women in the Family Court could be provided by personnel with roles similar to the current Government Maintenance officers.

This would provide women with ease of access to the legal process in situations where they experience separation, divorce or family violence.

Rape in marriage is still not illegal.

Recommended Measures:

The Government of Samoa adopts the definition of “discrimination against women” contained in Article 1 of the Convention and incorporates this definition into the Constitution of Samoa without further delay.

That Government incorporates into the Constitution, an amendment to ensure that “...any legislation for the advancement of women, girls or persons with disabilities shall not be discriminatory.”

The Government develops a timeline for the incorporation of the CEDAW into local laws.

Government to acknowledge its obligation under CEDAW to provide training in the CEDAW to all sectors of Government including: Members of Parliament, financial planners and economic advisors, to ensure that Government personnel in every sector of Government are trained to carry out their obligations under CEDAW.

That Government establishes a Family Court to provide a non adversarial forum in which family matters are discussed and handled. Legal representation for women should also be provided.

Government to repeal s47 (3) to ensure that the definition of “Rape” under the Crimes Ordinance 1961 includes “rape within marriage”.

That Government amends the Crimes Ordinance 1961 to allow abortion on specific grounds such as rape and incest etc.

Article 2: Obligations to Eliminate Discrimination

The Government has yet to legally provide for the principles of substantive equality and non-discrimination defined by the CEDAW Convention to be incorporated into domestic laws at the national level.

Recognition of CEDAW by Courts

Even without incorporation of CEDAW into domestic laws, the convention is applicable in the courts and lawyers are able to freely cite the CEDAW in legal submissions. The Courts recognise and acknowledge CEDAW as legally binding.

Customary Rights

The superior customary rights of male heirs or male lines over those of their sisters have been advanced to prevent women from being bestowed matai/chiefly titles or having authority over customary land.

The Land and Titles Court has ruled that male and female heirs have equal rights to matai/chiefly titles and customary land and discrimination against women on the basis of their sex is rejected based on the Constitution of Samoa 1961.

Recommended Measures:

Government to provide a timeline for the incorporation of substantive equality and non-discrimination defined under CEDAW into all its domestic laws.

Government to consider the inclusion of CEDAW in the Land and Titles Act 1981 to consolidate and reinforce the protection of customary rights of women to Land and Titles.

Government to provide training in CEDAW for Judges, lawyers, advocates and stakeholders in both Land and Titles Court, the Supreme and District Courts and the Law and Justice Sector.

Government Funded Shelters

Currently there is no Government funded shelter for women who are victims of violence. The only shelter available is currently administered by an NGO which has received Government support in the past. The demand for this type of service is not being fully met.

Recommended Measures:

Government under their auspices must accept their responsibility to provide fully funded shelters and rehabilitation services including counseling for women victims of violence.

Discrimination on the basis of Sex

Discrimination on the basis of gender has not been legislated against specifically, outside of Article 15 (2) of the Constitution of Samoa 1962. There are no legal sanctions in law at present, against discrimination against women as defined by the CEDAW.

A claim for damages or compensation based on discrimination against women in the private sector would require the filing of a civil action to be brought against the perpetrator.

A woman employed in the public sector can apply to the Ombudsman to investigate her complaint or file a proceeding for judicial review of an administrative decision against any Government authority in the Supreme Court. For many women, such legal proceedings are financially prohibitive and unaffordable.

The Ombudsman played a crucial role in a successful sexual harassment case brought by a female Government employee against her employer. The Ombudsman conducted an investigation into the allegations and his report recommendations resulted in the termination of employment of a male CEO. Harassment in the workplace has been legislated against the Public Service Amendment Act under its Code of Conduct provisions.

Recommended Measures:

Government to consider an anti –sex discrimination law to ensure the protection of women from discriminatory acts in both the public and private sector and providing a basis for legal action and recovery of damages, compensation, appointment or reinstatement.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse

A 2005 Survey funded by World Health Organisation in collaboration with the Ministry of Women in Samoa¹, revealed that of the 1,640 Samoan women surveyed, 41% had experienced physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner while 20% had experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.

Non partner physical and sexual violence figures were particularly revealing: 65% of those surveyed stated that they had been physically abused since age 15, whilst 62% had been physically abused and 11% had suffered sexual abuse. The main perpetrators of the physical abuse were female family members (63%) fathers (58%) and teachers (30%).

The results showed that 86% of physically abused Samoan women did not seek help because they thought that such abuse is “normal” or not serious enough to seek help.

In other words, most Samoan women will wait until they can no longer endure the violence (65% of those who sought help) had been seriously hurt or injured

¹WHO. *Multi Country Study On Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women*. 2005.

(27%), or the partner had threatened to kill them (7%) or the children were suffering (7%). This is a serious issue, knowing the threshold of pain that the average Samoan woman is able to bear.

To describe domestic violence and sexual abuse as a scourge within Samoa is not sensationalising the issue by any measure. Sufficient research has been completed both locally and internationally to provide a picture that is disturbing indeed².

Advocacy for the elimination of domestic violence and sexual abuse cannot be left solely to Government Ministries or civil society groups to deal with independently. Strategic interventions at every level and by all stakeholders working in close partnership is a critically urgent need.

To remain complacent is not an option for Government or any person who values human life.

Recommended Measures:

Government to recognise that women suffer violence and physical abuse at the hands of both partners and non partners. Passage of legislation that provides protection of women from violence and sexual abuse is urgently required.

Government to recognise that coordinated interventions by all stakeholders are key to the prevention of domestic violence and must include improved systems of recording instances of abuse, reporting of abuse and how these are dealt with in the legal system.

Government to implement gender campaigns to increase the awareness of gender issues which must continually advocate ensuring the mainstreaming of gender issues.

Strengthening National Mechanisms

The CEDAW partnership of key Government departments and NGOs is continuing its work to implement and promote CEDAW and develop policies to promote women's equality. Further resources need to be applied to enable the MWSCD's CEDAW partners and the Law Reform Commission to firstly develop and then measure the effectiveness of laws and policies that purport to promote women's equality.

Recommended Measures:

Government to provide increased budgetary resources to enable both the Ministry of Women's CEDAW partnership and the Law Reform Commission respectively to develop, implement and measure the effectiveness of laws and policies to promote women's equality.

² Peteru ,M.V. "The Scourge of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse – A Samoan Snapshot" 2008.

Resources to include the appointment by Government of Gender specialists and / or legal personnel to promote the CEDAW in both the Ministry of Women Social and Community Development and Law Reform Commission. Government to establish a Sector Wide Approach Project (SWAp) donor program at the MWSCD to ensure appropriation of funds for NGOs to deliver CEDAW related initiatives.

Article 3: Development and Advancement of Women

The Strategy for Development of Samoa (SDS) has included the National Policy for Women and Action Plan for the implementation of CEDAW in its Social policy goals and community development.

The implementation of CEDAW will be most effective in the overall development of Samoa if it is applied across all sectors and particularly to the development of macro-economic policy.

Recommended Measures:

Government to develop macro-economic policies that will ensure women's access and enjoyment to overall economic and social development and stability.

Government to include a percentage of its annual budget allocated towards goals for the development and advancement of women in all sectors.

That Government to utilise the definition of "discrimination against women" in its plans and SDS thus ensuring that the SDS does not discriminate against women, either directly or indirectly.

Government to ensure that the SDS and other national development plans and policies include specific provisions for specific groups of women including rural women, women with disabilities, and marginalized or vulnerable women.

Government to put in place monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the implementation of CEDAW incorporation into the Samoa Development Strategy.

Guarantee of Human Rights for Women

Advocacy and legislation alone is insufficient to ensure the advancement of women and the protection of their human rights. Attitudinal changes are required and respect for the human rights of women to live without violence and abuse as provided for under the Constitution of Samoa.

The greatest challenge is against ingrained and entrenched social and cultural mores and attitudes about women and about domestic violence and sexual abuse. People must be shown by example and by continual reinforcement that physical and sexual abuse is neither "normal" nor acceptable behavior and it is a violation of the human rights of women.

Government has completed consultations for the establishment of a Human Rights Commission for Samoa. Women suffering human rights abuses would benefit greatly from the establishment of a Human Rights Commission

Recommended Measures:

Government to give special attention to the establishment of a Human Rights Commission without delay.

The Human Rights Commission to advocate for the protection of women, recognizing that domestic violence and sexual abuse are violations of the human rights of women.

Article 5: Sex Roles and Stereotyping**Women in Religion**

The status of Samoan women has advanced significantly in many areas of secular society, yet the ordination of women is prohibited by most religious institutions. There are more career choices available to women in the academic, public and private sector, however, within the Church and religious sector, only the Anglican Church allows women to be ordained as Ministers of Religion or Pastors. Currently, there are three woman ordained as Priests, in the Anglican Church, in Samoa.

Recommended Measures:

That Government considers measures to facilitate the inclusion of women as Ministers of Religion and to train as Ministers of Religion.

Cultural Vulnerability

One of the most vulnerable groups in village settings is women married to untitled men and residing in their husband's village. Discrimination against the wives of untitled men in some families/villages remains unchecked. Many such women have no choice but to follow their husbands and live amongst their in-laws. They are vulnerable to abuse not only from their husbands but also their in-laws.

Recommended Measures:

In recognising the vulnerability of this group of women and prevalent attitudes, Government to provide national educational programmes to raise awareness of the issues that this vulnerable group of women encounter. Emphasis must be given to the rights of wives of untitled men to live without discrimination and abuse within their husband's family and village.

Village Banishment

Wives and children of village law-breakers are unfairly impacted by village sentencing, such as banishment which involves the expulsion of an individual from the village so that he, and sometimes his family, may not continue to reside in the village but must leave the village and live somewhere else. The banishment is imposed by the village council for serious misconduct such as murder, rape, serious or repeated disobedience of village by-laws.

By law, banishment can be imposed by the Lands and Titles Court upon petition. However, many village councils banish people without observing the required legalities. Women may be left in a village without the support of their husbands or are forced to relocate to another village with their banished spouse.

Recommended Measures:

Government to consider legislation and policies to prevent banishment on arbitrary grounds and ensure that women are not disadvantaged as a result of banishment of their husbands.

Village mayors and Government women representatives to receive training on the Land and Titles Act 1981 the effect and implications of arbitrary banishment on women in the village.

Government Women Representatives

Government women representatives (GWR / “Sui Tamaitai”) play an important role as liaison between Government and village women’s Committees.

GWR’s are responsible for the registration of births and facilitate programmes for women in rural areas. They work collaboratively with Village Mayors who are matai and members of the village council.

However, GWRs receive only half the salaries of their male counterpart. This anomaly entrenches the stereotype that women play a subordinate role and perpetuates the idea that the work of women, women’s issues and programmes are less valued in the development of a village.

Recommended Measures:

Government to ensure that GWRs receive equal pay as village mayors in recognition of the importance of women’s’ roles and programmes which contribute equally to the development and well being of the village.

Government to abolish the use of the term “pulenu’u” for village mayors and utilise the title of “Sui o le Malo” or Government Representative for both male and female village representatives of the Government. This will reduce the perception that village mayors are the “supreme authority” in a village, as opposed to the Government Women Representative’s a subordinate role of less importance.

Article 6: Suppression of Prostitution

Currently there are no statistics or research to confirm the rate and type of prostitution in Samoa, though there is clearly an increase in the number of women involved in prostitution. In a landmark case in 2010, seven local women were charged with numerous counts of prostitution. While these women claim to have spent years trading money for sex, no men were implicated in this case. While this instance involved foreign males there exists a local demand for such services.

Recommended Measures:

Government to urgently prioritise the completion of a situational analysis of sex workers and trafficking of Samoan women.

Government equalize the penalties for prostitution so that the women who provide these services and the men who purchase them are equally incriminated.

PART II

Article 7: Public and Political Life

Since gaining independence in 1962, female representation in government remains morbidly low in a trend that begins at village level. Hence, the highest number of women in Parliament has been only 4 out of a total of 49 representatives in Parliament. It is a requirement that a political candidate must be a holder of a “matai title.”

Many villages in Samoa still currently prohibit women from holding *matai* titles, thus, political representation remains securely in the hands of men. In fact, the ratio of female to male “matai” title holders is 1:3. This, essentially, affects the participation of women in politics at local through to the national level.’

The rights of women to enter politics are violated by such village by laws which directly discriminate against some women and breach Article 15 of the Constitution of Samoa.

In other villages, women can be bestowed a “matai” title but are banned by village by law, from participating in the village council meetings.

The Land and Titles Court have received at least two petitions in which women have challenged village by laws or restrictions imposed by her own family. The challenge was successful.

Recommended Measures:

Government to introduce legislation to ban any village by laws or individuals that discriminate against women by restricting female heirs from bestowment of “matai” titles and / or participating in village governance or running as a candidate for election to Parliament.

Women representation in Public Bodies

The table below further disaggregates the information provided in the State Report in regards to % of female staff members in various State corporations and organizations. These positions are selected by the State and are largely politically driven so the appointments generally favour men over women.

This proves detrimental for women since they are now excluded from any significant policy making and implementation at the nexus of village and government.

The table below clearly highlights the lack of a 30% critical mass of women on boards to influence decision making.

Percentage of Female Representation on Government Boards	
No female representation	16%
20% or less	56%
30% or less	75%
Less than 50%	88%

Recommended Measures:

Government to implement a policy that ensures gender equality and equal representation in all public bodies.

Additionally, women should be encouraged to apply and since board appointments are political appointments they should be merit based.

PART III

Article 10: Equality in Education

The stigma accompanying teenage pregnancy is so debilitating that young mothers face discrimination in accessing education during pregnancy and after giving birth. This results in the young women not completing secondary or tertiary education.

Recommended Measures:

Government to develop educational policy to support the re-entry of teenage mothers into secondary schools so that they can complete their secondary qualifications and seek tertiary education, if they so choose. Becoming a teenage mother should not preclude young women from completing their education.

Government to employ qualified Counselors to all secondary schools and tertiary institutions to offer information, advice and support for school girls.

Basic counseling principles should be mandatory in the curriculum of teachers training institutions.

“EDUCATION FOR ALL” is the Government’s overarching theme for education and we acknowledge the Inclusive Education initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and the collective NGO disability service providers. However more focused attention is still needed for girls and women with disabilities to achieve substantive equality as compared to women without disabilities in accessing education. Women with disabilities continue to experience less access to education than men with disabilities and the general population.³

Combined gross enrollment figures from primary, secondary and tertiary Samoan schools indicate that participation rates of 76% for females and 72% for males in 2004 enrollments.⁴ However no data exists to verify the net enrollment for women and boys with disability and it is likely that these populations are disproportionately represented in the percentage not enrolled at any level.

Samoa has established under the Ministry of Women, Youth and Community Development a disability task force and a disability support position. However the task force has not met in over a year and the disability support position is currently not filled. Additionally the membership of the task force does not reflect full government and non government representation. This has impacted negatively on the agenda for change to improve the situation for women with disabilities. It has also significantly delayed the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

³ World Health Organization, World report on Disability (2011).

⁴ Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2008-2012, Government of Samoa.

Recommended Measures:

Government to ensure that educational institutions use targeted strategies for women and girls with disabilities to ensure that they have increased enrollments with quality access to education. Access should provide students with educational resources in simple Samoan with visual support, Braille, sign language and access to the built environment for women with mobility issues.

We call on government to review the Disability Task force and strengthen its membership to reflect all government ministries and non government disability providers.

We call on Government to provide education enrollment statistics that are disaggregated by gender and disability.

We call on government to ratify the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities without further delay.

Article 11: Employment

Generally, places of business do not provide day care facilities for working mothers and breastfeeding or parental bonding is suspended in the workplace. Working mothers are disadvantaged when they return to work because most businesses do not provide day care facilities. Any childcare that draws the mother away from her work will require her to have to travel off-site and usually some distance, making it more difficult for mothers in the transition back to work.

Recommended Measures:

Government to subsidize private sector businesses to provide child day-care facilities to their staff who are mothers, making it easier for these women to balance their work and the demands of childcare and to make it more affordable for women in employment.

Amendment to current Labour & Employment Act 1972 has recommended the grant of three months maternity leave for women in the private sector with weeks on full pay and two thirds of the salary for the rest of the above period. Without government support for this initiative it is unlikely that private sector employers would be able financially afford to comply. If this occurs, women of child bearing age will suffer discrimination and have reduced employment opportunities.

Recommendation

Government to subsidise the proposed private sector maternity leave conditions.

Article 12: Health

The Health Sector Vision is for “A Healthy Samoa”. Its Mission being the provision of quality, accountable and sustainable health service through people working in partnership⁵. Historically the Samoan Health Sector is comprised of government and non government organisations, including faith based organizations and traditional healers.

Whilst the health status of the Samoan people has improved markedly over the past 2 decades ⁶ the following areas are of concern and need prioritized attention:

- a) Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) for Samoa in (2009) is reducing but needs further reduction 21.3/ 1000 births ⁷ and a coordinated strategy with other health care providers.
- b) There is low compliance for full course of immunisation resulting in girls and boys not protected. The system of immunizing children has changed and resulted in a low compliance for a full course of immunization especially in rural districts. Supposedly integrated immunisation programme coverage is not as effective as the previous community based strategy.
- c) STI rate is still very high. 38% - 40% of women attending antenatal clinics have some STI and the majority are women below 25years.
- d) Teenage pregnancy rates are relatively high (94/1000 teenage mothers, 13-19 years). Medical support for this population needs to be accessible, affordable and user friendly .Currently there is only two operational STI clinics in the country and is not of a high quality.
- e) The current comprehensive HIV policy and action plan need a timeframe and dedicated resources to implement to combat the possible spread of HIV especially in consideration of the government’s plan for increased tourism.
- f) Diabetes and obesity rates are dangerously high (23.1% and 57%) and result in secondary health related conditions, reduced quality of life and a reduced life expectancy. Results indicate that women are more obese than men and have higher rates of diabetes⁸.

⁵ Samoa Health Sector Plan 2008-2018

⁶ Samoa Ministry of Health Demographic Information, 2008

⁷ Samoa MOH Monitoring and Evaluation Operational Manual ,2001

⁸ National Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Diabetes and Complications, 2004)

Recommended Measures:

Genuine strategic partnerships between government and non government need to be strengthened, implemented and monitored in line with the Health Sector Plan to effectively address the aforementioned areas for priority concern. This will ensure genuine partnerships as described by the current Minister of Health are in place.

Specifically, we call for government to implement the strategies to improve compliance to a full course of immunisation and establish an immunisation policy including protocols and guidelines.

The role of the paid Government Women Representative (GWR) in villages needs to be supported and held accountable to assist in providing essential coordination of public health services such as clean water, sanitation, immunization, reproductive health /family planning /sexual health within their villages.

We call for government to have dedicated budget support for NGO operated clinics to ensure range of intervention services and an awareness programs that are user-friendly and aim at improved access to sexual reproductive health care.

We call for government to further develop services to support women with STIs, reiterating again the support for the development and alignment of both government and nongovernment services. A population- level intervention is required.

We call for government to support the appropriate national implementation of sex education in schools.

Health & Rural Women

Hospitals in rural areas are poorly resourced (understaffed and poorly equipped). They operate under more dire conditions than the National Hospital. Clearly women in these rural settings are denied the legal, ethical and professional standards they are entitled to. It is suspected that the morbidity and mortality rates are higher in these areas because of the limited accessibility to quality primary, secondary and tertiary services.

Recommended Measures:

Government to encourage the National Health Services to divert funds and resources to rural area hospitals to establish substantive equality of services to 80% of the population who reside in the rural area.

Government to renew health and educational outreach programs promoting the growing of local produce and the overall benefit of eating and living healthy. These programs must reinvigorate the rural health facilities and the village councils as a starting point for greater health awareness and maximizing primary healthcare.

Women & Cancer

Whilst the rates of cancer remain similar to other countries but the late presentation rates of women with cancer in Samoa are of major concern. The result of late presentation is a higher mortality rate.

Recommended Measures:

We call for government to work closely with private sector and non government agencies to focus on a funded strategy for awareness, prevention (including national screening) and treatment programs.

Breastfeeding Mothers

Whilst there is an upward trend in women exclusively breastfeeding, 49% of them still did not exclusively breast feed their children in the first 6months. Papers from the 5th Health Sector Forum, Ministry of Health Samoa

Recommended Measures:

There is a need for government in partnership with private sector and nongovernment agencies to put in place the appropriate strategies in line with the National Nutrition Policy and Plan of Action to continually advocate for the benefits of breast feeding to women and the future generation of mothers.

Women with Disabilities

According to a report on the Status of Women with disAbilities in Samoa⁹ women have been relegated to the margins of Samoan society where they may be perceived to be a burden. As such one would conclude that measures to specifically address the health needs of women with disabilities are almost non-existent.

At least 15% (13 530) of the population of women in Samoa (90 203)¹⁰ would have some kind of disability according to the statistics presented in the World Health Organization Report (2011)¹¹ on disability. According to this report, several factors impact the ability of women with disabilities to access quality health and rehabilitation services. Women with disabilities in Samoa experience lower socio economic status, higher rate of poverty, lower employment rate, have less education and are less likely to access quality health care compared to women without disabilities. This is additionally compacted by the lack of accessibility of information (interpreters, sign language, accessible print formats plain Samoan language), venues, access to

⁹ Lene, D. (2004), Status of Women with Disabilities in Samoa

¹⁰ World Health Organisation World report on Disability (2011)

¹¹ <http://www.sbs.gov.ws/Portals/138/PDF/census%20survey/Census%202011/Preliminary%20Count.pdf>

affordable public transport and affordable technical and assistive devices to empower women with disabilities.

Women with disabilities are often excluded from opportunities in general health and reproductive education. There is the perception that they do not need to be told as they should not be capable of reproducing. Yet sexual abuse is common with women with disabilities particularly among women with intellectual disabilities and women who are deaf¹². It should also be recognized that, all women, including women with disabilities have both sexual and reproductive rights. These include the right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence as well as the right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education, and means to do so.

Recommended Measures:

We call for the Government of Samoa to establish the following without further delay;

1. Initiatives in Health and Reproductive Treatment and Awareness Programmes to specifically address the unmet needs of women with disabilities in accessing all relevant services and programmes. All services must be presented using accessible strategies, for e.g. with information in simple Samoan with visual support, Braille and sign language. Additionally the sites on which services and programmes are presented must be physically accessible for women with mobility issues.
2. Early detection, diagnosis and rehabilitation services in mainstream health organizations for different disabilities.
3. Quality, affordable technical and assistive devices available through mainstream health systems.
4. An integrated public transport system improves access for women with disabilities by adopting universal design and sensitizing drivers and other staff.
5. As 80% of people with disabilities live in rural areas and the cost and inaccessibility of public transport prevent them from seeking health to address their health needs, we call for government to implement accessible rural health initiatives.
6. Community Awareness programs on the rights of women with disabilities and the laws that protect them from abuse.

¹² Pacific sisters with disabilities: at the intersection of discrimination / Daniel Stubbs and Sainimili Tawake. – Suva, Fiji : UNDP Pacific Centre, 2009.

Article 14: Women in Rural Areas

The Micro-Finance Schemes, executed by government in partnership with funders, was a good source of funding for women to establish their own micro business and become self employed. However, with very little monitoring or business training, many borrowers have incurred large debts and in some cases, have mismanaged funds.

Recommended Measures:

Government could alternatively disburse funds through a State-owned entity with regular and strict monitoring, as well as providing budget counseling, for borrowers.

Rural Women & Water

The Independent Water Schemes Association (IWSA) is a rural village-based utilities governance project. This is funded by the EU and executed by the State, and, ideally, promotes grassroots representation and input on developing a water delivery infrastructure. The success and validity of this project, however, is challenged by a number of issues.

First, the State's Samoa Water Authority (SWA), essentially, undermines the IWSA because it strips local communities of the opportunity to design and develop their own local water schemes. Instead, water consumption is controlled and metered by the SWA.

Second, the quality of water delivered through the IWSA is not treated and therefore could increase incidence of disease and infection.

Third, it is unclear how much of the overall budget actually goes towards upkeep and maintenance of the IWSA projects.

Women have little involvement in the decision as to whether a village opts to remain independent with IWSA or SWA.

Recommended Measures:

Government support the IWSA, and projects like this, that encourage the buy-in of local communities as stake holders and allows women to participate in the decision making at all levels of IWSA implementation.

Government to provide training programs, such as basic plumbing skills, for women to learn how to maintain their water facilities under the IWSA scheme.

Government through MWSCD to ensure that water is properly treated and quality controls are put in place to ensure that IWSA water is fit for human consumption.

ICT Access for Rural Women

Government is to be commended for this initiative which improved access and knowledge of ICT by the establishment of Tele-centres /"Feso'ota'i" centres. These centres were run by women's' village committees and provided revenue from users of the services in rural areas. Computers, phones internet access and equipment were funded by the International Telecommunication Unit. Most of the 13 centres have closed due to poor management and lack of proper training of women in management and governance of small centres.

Recommended Measures:

Government to provide proper training in basic business management and governance. The Tele – centre initiative should be revived as an essential and relevant project for women in rural areas and allows schoolgirls to network and use the centres for educational purposes.

Government Monitoring of projects is essential to ensure the success of such centres.

Rural Women & Gambling

Bingo and other forms of gambling have become a regular pastime in rural areas. Bingo is held for several hours throughout the day and also in the evenings. This is an alarming because it means that women are increasingly absent from home, particularly in the evenings and children are left unsupervised and vulnerable to abuse.

Recommended Measures:

Government to enforce and monitor the licensing of bingo games and regulate the hours of operation of bingo and gambling.