

NGO CEDAW SHADOW REPORT

FOR SAMOA

6th Periodic Report

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This CEDAW Shadow Report for Samoa was coordinated by the Samoa Umbrella Organisation for NGOs or SUNGO.

The Shadow Report is endorsed by the following NGOs:

YWCA of SAMOA – Young Women’s Christian Association

Clarence Sebastian Foundation (Support for those with Albinism)

Faataua Le OLA (Suicide Prevention)

FAMSI – Faalapotopotoga Autalavou Saina Methodist INC –Methodist Youth

NOLA – Support of Persons with Disabilities

Samoa AIDS Foundation

Samoa ALA MAI

Samoa Conservation Society

Samoa Family Health Association

Samoa Social Welfare Fesoasoani Trust

SUNGO – Samoa Umbrella NGO Organisation

Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG)

SENESE – Education of persons with Special needs

SOUL TALK SAMOA Inc – Pastoral Counseling

Vailele Learning Support

Wellbeing and Community Solutions Inc

PART 1

BACKGROUND

Samoa celebrated 56 years of independence this year and has maintained stable and peaceful Government during this period. Its customs, traditions and village governance system greatly contribute to the continued peace and stability of the country.

Government by the Human Rights Protection Party has continued for over 25 years and no official opposition party is recognised since the 2016 election results failed to return the requisite number of opposition members to form an opposition party in Parliament.

In 2017, Samoa declared itself to be a Christian nation by Constitutional Amendment. Over 90% of the population attend Church regularly.

The recognition of Samoa's obligations as a State Party to the CEDAW, demands a reconciliation of Christian faith principles, cultural practices that enhance equality and respect of women's rights and human rights principles.

Article 1 Definition of Discrimination

Incorporation of Definition of Discrimination against Women

GoS has still not adopted and incorporated a definition of discrimination against women as defined in Article 1 of CEDAW. The 2/3rds majority required to change the Constitution has existed for two consecutive five year Parliamentary terms.

Therefore, there are technically no barriers for amending the constitution as recommended in the past CEDAW concluding comments.

The 2017 constitutional amendment of article 1 (3), states that "Samoa is a Christian Nation founded on God, The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit."

There is a sufficient biblical basis to validate the required change against discrimination Against Women Biblical ref... Galatians 3:28 New International Version (NIV)

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The incorporation of this amendment defining discrimination against women into the Constitution would legitimize the other positive steps already taken by the GoS to protect women and improve their lives.

Matrimonial Property Legislation

No matrimonial property law has been considered and women still resort to the common law and must institute legal proceedings to recover their share of matrimonial property. Many women have no means to pay for a lawyer and there is no civil legal aid available to them.

Abortion

Rape and incest statistics continue to rise, however abortion is not available to victims of rape or incest cases.

Recommended Measures:

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

The 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 CEDAW into local laws.

GoS 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 advisers, to ensure that personnel in every sector of Government are cognisant of the effectiveness of the CEDAW in promoting the equality and advancement of women and girls in Samoa.

Government to include an amendment of the Crimes Act 2013 to include abortion on specific grounds such as rape and incest.

Article 2: Obligations to Eliminate Discrimination

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

Recognition of CEDAW by Courts

The CEDAW is applicable in Samoa’s Courts and is recognised and acknowledged as is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Customary Rights

The Land and Titles Court has confirmed that Article 15 of the Constitution prevents it from concluding that “males or male lines have prior rights to females or female lines of inheritance”

One of the barriers for women taking up matai titles in certain villages is the ban not allowing women to take up titles within their families, or recognizing women as matai but not allowing them to sit on village Councils.

Recommended Measures

GoS to incorporate substantive equality, non discrimination and gender equality defined under CEDAW into all its domestic laws, including the Land and Titles Act 1981.

GoS to review legal and policy documents with a view to repealing remaining discriminatory provisions and ensuring that women occupy an explicit and central place and are not simply treated as another vulnerable group.

Review village by laws within the framework of the constitutional guarantee of non-discrimination;

Government (per MWSCD) to provide training in CEDAW for Judges lawyers advocates and stakeholders in the Supreme Court, District Court, the Family Court and Land and Titles Court.

Government Funded Shelters

A local NGO, Samoa Victims Support Group, continues to provide shelter for children who are victims of abuse. A shelter specifically for women and children who are victims of violence requiring short to medium term refuge is unavailable.

The latest National Public Inquiry into Family Violence 2017 reveals 86% women and children suffering violence within the family.

Recommended Measure:

GoS must accept responsibility to provide fully funded shelters and rehabilitation services such as Counseling for women victims of violence as recommended in the 2017 National Public Inquiry conducted by the National Human Rights Institute office (NHRI).

Discrimination on the Basis of Sex

There are no legal sanctions in the law against discrimination against women as defined by the CEDAW.

A woman suffering discrimination in the private sector must bring a civil action against the perpetrator. Civil actions are costly and beyond the means of the average woman. The least expensive avenue is to lodge a complaint with the newly established National Human Rights Institution that is part of the Ombudsman's Office.

The establishment of a civil legal aid programme would assist women who have been discriminated against to bring a civil claim against a perpetrator.

Recommended Measures:

GoS to legislate anti- sex discrimination law to protect women from discriminatory acts in the public and private sector. This will provide a basis for legal action and recovery of damages. Compensation, appointment or reinstatement.

GoS to establish a civil Legal Aid scheme implemented by the Ministry of Justice for women claimants who do not have financial means to bring a claim for discrimination.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse

Two studies in 2017, by the Ministry of Women Community and Social Development and the NHRI (Ombudsman's office) reveal the enormity of the scourge of domestic, gender based violence within the Samoan family and society.

86% of women (sample 1,880 persons) have been subjected to kicking punching, slapping, causing bodily harm using a hard object. 87% of the women surveyed had experienced threats of physical violence or bodily harm and been subjected to yelling and harsh verbal violence.

Women on women violence was noted at 63% by a 2005 World Health Organisation survey which involves violence against married women ("referred to as "nofotane") living with their husband's family. This type of violence was confirmed by the recent public inquiry as a breach of human rights and an undermining of cultural principles of mutual respect within a family.

A recent UN funded project facilitated by the Samoa Victim Support Group promoted the economic empowerment of the "nofotane" and raised debate among traditionalists on the

veracity of the view that “nofotane” are mistreated. Similar projects would go far to diminish the deeply ingrained attitudes that wives are outsiders and preference priority within the husband’s family should be given to a husband’s sister and mother or parents.

Culturally, the wives of matai perform parallel roles to their husbands matai status but this does not preclude the abuse of wives of matai within their husband’s family. They too, are subject to abuse by their sisters and mother in law.

The inquiry has made far reaching recommendations regarding national family violence prevention and protection systems including legislative provisions.

Recommended Measures:

GoS to implement the recommendations of the 2017 Public Inquiry by the NHRI and the MWSCD Samoa Family Safety Study which urges a multi sector and multi level approach.

GoS to enact the Child Care and Protection Bill and amend the Family Safety Act 2013 to include financial abuse as a type of violence.

Government to establish a Community Law Centre by implementing without further delay the Community Law Centre Act 2015

Government to recognise the “nofotane” or “ mauapaolo “as a group of women requiring special attention and assistance while also strengthening positive cultural values of mutual respect for women from outside the family.

GoS to allocate increased budgetary resources to the MWSCD and the NHRI for the facilitation of programmes for the elimination of Gender based violence which has reached epic proportions, resulting in the urgent need for the protection of women’s lives.

GoS to appoint Gender specialists to key Government entities including MWSCD, NHRI, Samoa Law Reform Commission, Ministries of Finance, Justice and Health, to ensure that CEDAW and gender mainstreaming are “mainstreamed” into policy and planning initiatives.

Government to implement a national campaign to raise awareness of human rights and women’s rights to equality throughout the country, aimed at changing mindsets.

Government to engage Church leaders to undertake an active role in combating gender based violence including joint initiatives between State and Churches.

Article 3: Development and Advancement of Women

Village Representatives (VR) and Village Women Representatives (VWR)

There is still pay disparity between male and female salaries for these roles which should be equally recognised and shared.

Non-Traditional villages should also have the opportunity to appoint a VWR, currently the Government provides only a male VR for Non-Traditional villages.

The Strategy for the Development of Samoa does not adequately incorporate the CEDAW principles in all sectors and particularly the development of macro economic policy.

The establishment of the NHRI has demonstrated the Government's support of the protection of Human Rights and the word "aia tatau" is more palatable to citizens. The recent inquiry garnered 1,500 village consultations involving 1,880 respondents (54% women), further demonstrating that the problem is nationally recognised by Samoans.

Now is a most opportune time to move forward with comprehensive national strategies for the promotion of human rights, women's rights and the elimination of GBV.

Recommended Measures:

GoS to develop a comprehensive strategy on gender based violence in line with the CEDAW general recommendation No.35 (2017) encompassing measures in all fields, including the executive, judicial and legislative levels and the regular collection and analysis and publication of disaggregated data from the justice, social and health sectors as well as effective cooperation among institutions (NRHI, Law Reform Commission, NGOs) involved in prevention, protection and remedies;

Church leaders, National Council of Churches and Churches outside of NCC to be invited by Government to facilitate their positive contribution to combat gender based violence and practices within the Church, that discriminate against women.

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

Government to utilize the CEDAW definition of discrimination against women in its planning and the SDS (Samoa Development Strategy) and ensure that all policies and plans include specific provisions for inclusion of rural women, women with disabilities, marginalised and vulnerable women.

Article 5 Sex Roles and Stereotyping

Women in Religion

Women continue to be denied equal access to training in Theological Education and cannot be ordained as Ministers of Religion. Only The Anglican Church has three ordained Priests.

The Methodist Church previously allowed women lay preachers but these roles are no longer made available. The Assemblies of God Church allow women lay preachers but not women Ministers of Religion.

The wives of theological students are trained predominantly in domestic duties and encouraged to take a subservient role in their role as wives of future clergy.

Domestic violence within theological colleges, and among Church membership is assumed to be high given the statistics from the recent national inquiry. 86% of abused women includes women of the Church and considering that 90% of the population attend Church there is no doubt that family violence exists within Christian homes, Churches and theological colleges.

Unless Church leaders take seriously the call for their involvement in the elimination of violence within the family, they will become passive bystanders to the continued scourge of violence and abuse within Samoa.

Clergy and theological students are accorded tremendous respect as God's messengers and it is essential that they lead by example and preach the gospel of God's love through the elimination of all forms of violence in society and through personal example.

The cornerstone of Samoan society is the Church and Christian faith. Therefore, Christian principles and Bible teachings will be most influential in eliminating family violence, if believers Adhere to the Gospel of love which is the basis of Christianity.

The National Council of Churches has been involved in public education programmes to initiate changes in attitudes towards violence. It is crucial that training in the principles of human rights, women's rights and CEDAW vis a vis Culture and Religion is held for Ministers of Religion and Pastors to ensure that advocates are consistent in the message that is given to the participants of anti violence awareness programmes.

Cultural Vulnerability

Recent programmes by MWCSD and SVSG focused on economic empowerment of “Nofotane” (women married to untitled men and residing in their husbands' village) and also to facilitating the changing attitudes towards them.

“Nofotane” women are seen as having “no voice” or right to express an opinion within the family that she is an intricate part of and may have children to. If her husband dies, the nofotane remains in her husband’s home by the grace of her children or, if the family accepts her remaining among them. Otherwise, she is free to return to her village. This can be difficult when she has spent most of her married life living in her husband’s village and contributing to the establishment of a family business and standing within the village.

The status of the “nofotane” is precarious, particularly where the “nofotane” does not have children.

Village banishment

Arbitrary banishment of village law breakers continues to impact women and children negatively if they are also required to leave the village. If a man is penalised by banishment this will negatively affect his wife and children who are forced to leave their home, their school and the environment they are familiar with. Banishment is regulated by the Land and Titles Act 1981 and an order for banishment should be referred to the Land and Titles Court for decision. The routine practice is that the village council makes the decision to banish without a fair hearing, Families may be asked to leave within 12 hours and the children and wife must relocate to another village, when they may not have been party to the husband’s misbehavior.

Women are required to set up house in a new environment and the children do not continue school if the family cannot afford to furnish them with new uniforms and school fees.

Selective presumed cultural and religious norms continue to be used to justify deep rooted stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes violating the role and status of women and thus preventing gender equality.

Recommended Measures:

Government to identify concrete measures to ensure that the programmes, strategies and interventions provide adequate protection of women's rights and children without stereotyping and coercion and re victimisation of women.

Trainers and facilitators of programmes addressing GBV, counselling CEDAW, Human Rights should be accredited through Samoa Qualifications Authorities. (SQA) to avoid reinforcement of stereotyping and practices which prevent the advancement of women.

GoS to garner the participation of Churches and religious leaders in training for the promotion of prevention and protection of GBV and family violence through the application of Christian principles which recognises the equality of men and women before God and the honouring of the marriage relationship and the equal and dual role of spouses in maintaining peace and harmony within the family.

Government to amend the Land and Titles Act 1981 to protect women and children who are indirectly affected by the banishment of husbands and fathers from their village of residence.

Government to recognise the precarious position of “nofotane” as a distinct group requiring protection within the family arena.

Article 6 Exploitation of Women

Suppression of Prostitution No in depth studies on Trafficking of persons and prostitution has been undertaken or identified. Samoan cultural and religious norms prevent the recognition that such a problem exists in Samoa.

The only instance of trafficking young girls to American Samoa undercover of waitressing work was stemmed about 5 years ago. Currently, the local news and social media posts have warned locals of the sighting of a van which was kidnapping young children in urban villages.

It would be foolhardy to assume that trafficking and prostitution is not an increasing problem.

Female sex workers was a topic of Parliamentary debate as recently as September 2017, when an opposition MP raised an objection to a Ministry of Health proposal to counsel the young women sex workers and provide them with contraceptives to promote safe sex.

The number of female sex workers in Samoa was recently estimated by the Samoa Observer newspaper at around 400 whose ages range between 13 to 21 years of age. It is thought that economic hardship is one of the reasons for the large number involved.

The Samoa Law Reform Commission CEDAW 2016 compliance report made recommendations to Government which are supported by NGOs below.

Recommended Measures

Government to initiate an inquiry into trafficking of women and girls and prostitution in Samoa in collaboration with the MWCSD, Ministry of Health and NHRI.

Data should be regularly collected on the prevalence of trafficking and sexual exploitation of women, disaggregated by age and region, and relationship between victim and perpetrator.

Review the Crimes Act 2013 so that women involved in prostitution are not criminalized and make prostitution and solicitation provisions under the Crimes Act 2013 gender-neutral.

Article 7 Participation in Political and Public Life

The Government of Samoa passed a temporary special measure through the amendment of the Constitution Amendment Act 2013, allowing a quota of 10% for the 50 member Parliament. Four women entered Parliament by vote and 1 by the special measure. Two Ministers of Cabinet are women.

The 10 % quota has been widely accepted by the general public. The concern is that unless a 30% quota is implemented the achievement of equality or breaking the “glass ceiling” of entry into Parliament will never be achieved.

Women are still banned in some villages (estimates of 21 – 36 villages) from either holding matai titles or not being allowed to participate in village governance.

Appointments to Public Boards are made by the Government and should be made on the basis of ensuring gender equality and equal numbers of equally qualified women.

The NGO “Samoa Ala Mai” was formed to address the issues of political participation of women in politics and decision making. Prior to the last election the SAM organized voter education training in villages and for Urban Youth, including the staging of the first “Youth Rally for Voters” in Upolu. Training was also conducted in Savaii to educate voters on the importance of voting for women candidates and for providing support for women candidates.

Recommended Measures:

Government to implement legislation establishing public boards should include a provision to ensure gender equity of female members.

Government to improve women's representation in diplomatic services through the adoption of affirmative action measures and transparent processes

Government to seriously address the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions by implementing concerted effort on public awareness, education campaigns and programs focused on leadership empowerment and encouraging participation by women in national and village governance and partner with NGOs working on these issues such as Samoa ALA Mai.

These programs should also educate and emphasize the value attached to the contribution of women to village and national decision making.

Adequate funding, resourcing and capacity building should be made available to carry out these public awareness programs.

That Government institute/pass legislation to eliminate barriers imposed by certain villages that prevent women from holding matai titles and / or participating in village governance.

That GoS increase the current Parliamentary quota for women from 10% to 30%, even if this is done incrementally.

Government to expand the MWCSOs pilot district planning initiative with a view to reaching the rest of the country

Government to support the participation of professional and working women who hold chiefly titles in village councils, including flexible working arrangements.

Article 10 Equality in Education

Expulsion of pregnant school girls or lack of encouragement to continue their education continues to prevent them from continuing their education. Although there is no legislation to prevent them continuing their education, it is cultural norms and stigmatization that discourages them from continuing their education.

The Samoa National Youth Council 2017 Report found 2.4% of Young men and women between the ages of 14-19 are currently in de facto or marriage relationships.

Although the statistic is small, 27.22% of the female sample were currently married or in a de facto. The same report indicated that these young women were not of the age of consent but needed parental consent to marry. The collected data reflects a rising number of sexually active youth.

Family planning and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Education are still not taught in schools. The organisation YWCA of Samoa has held peer education training for over 300 single and married women in villages, in the past two years, some of whom have birthed children and only learned about their bodies and their SRHR at the YWCA training.

Samoa Family Health Association also provides education in villages on SRHR, ante natal care and contraception.

Recommended Measures:

Government to provide additional funding for the collection of data for dropout rates under the National Safe Schools Policy to determine the number of teenage girls affected by teenage pregnancy who have had to drop out and discontinue studies.

Include specific provisions in the Safe School Policy for the protection of girls against sexual violence harassment and physical abuse in schools under the National Safe School Policy and ensure country wide dissemination and implementation of the policy with an effective monitoring mechanism in place.

MESC to develop Re-entry Policies allowing Young pregnant girls to continue their education whether they are pregnant or in marital relationships.

MESC to develop an age appropriate comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education based on scientific evidence and human rights for girls and boys before entering puberty, as part of mandatory school programmes.

MESC to consider the introduction of Family Planning and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights topics in school curriculum, to encourage prevention of teenage pregnancy and ensure women have basic knowledge about their bodies and how to prevent early teenage pregnancy.

MESC to recognise and have policy geared towards a comprehensive holistic sexual health curriculum that covers “body autonomy”, safe sexual practises, sexuality, STI transmission and what a healthy relationship is comprised of, as it relates to violence experienced by women and children.

MESC to institute a policy encouraging young women and girls to continue their education to tertiary level and non traditional female fields of study, such as science and math.

MESC to conduct awareness campaigns and programmes to encourage equality of treatment between girls and boys in schools.

MESC to encourage teachers to evolve from transmitters of knowledge to enablers for learning and transform expectations and stereotypes of female achievements and to ensure the aspirations that young women's aspirations are not limited by cultural and societal norms.

Government to review the recent MESC policy allowing teachers to use reasonable force against students to prevent fighting amongst themselves. The measure appears to give teachers the role of Police Officers within schools. The ban on corporal punishment is still in force, however this recent measure may easily be misinterpreted and misused by teachers.

Article 11 Employment

Working mothers continue to be disadvantaged when they are at child bearing age, and are commonly unable to afford child care facilities for their babies and toddlers. Child care costs are prohibitive and would result in the loss of 50% or more of their income.

Maternity leave provisions - Private sector businesses do not provide for maternity leave due to financial and resources constraints. Government relies on the development of private sector as an integral part of Samoa's economy. Government should consider subsidized maternity leave for women in the private sector to protect them from loss of employment opportunities and discontinued employment due to maternity.

The Public Service Code of Conduct has a provision only against "harassment" in the workplace and this provision should be strengthened to include sexual harassment in the workplace.

Recommended Measures:

Government to ensure equal legal protection of maternity leave for all women employed in the public and private sectors and introduce paternity leave to encourage the sharing of care responsibilities and overcoming stereotypes about childcare primarily being only a woman's role.

Government to consider the establishment and subsidising of commercial childcare centers in business districts for the care of children of working mothers.

Government to review (per Ministry of Commerce Industry and Labor) and consider a gradual and incremental increase of maternity leave provisions in the private sector (6 weeks paid leave) to be comparative to maternity leave entitlements of the public sector

(12 weeks).

GoS to revise and increase paternity leave to reduce barriers to women remaining or returning early to the workplace after childbirth and enable men to take on the role of primary caregiver. In the alternative, implementing a parental leave policy which can be taken by either male or female or shared between both parents.

Government to consider subsidising maternity leave for women employed in the private sector to support the continued employment of women in the private sector.

Government to undertake a review the Public Service Act 2004 and the provision on “Harassment” to include specifically, sexual harassment and to prohibit direct and indirect discrimination and the right to equality.

Article 12 Health

Teenage pregnancy continues to remain high (94/1000 teenage mothers, 13-19 years) and medical support needs to be accessible and user friendly. The Samoa Family Health Clinic provides ante natal services for women in central Apia.

STIs also remain high at 38% to 40 % of women attending antenatal clinics are found to have an STI. These commonly ignored and treated as not serious. This high prevalence of STIs in a low risk but vulnerable population can mean that the prevalence in high risk groups would be even higher.

The presence of other STIs can markedly increase the risk of getting infected with HIV. The Samoa AIDS Foundation (SAF) was established in 2004 with the primary goals of providing information, education and communication for prevention; advocacy for non-discrimination, care and protection of people living with HIV (PLHIV); and to help empower them economically where needed. SAF works collaboratively towards the above goals with the Ministry of Health, Samoa Fa’afafine Association and other national and international partners.

Recently the deaths of two babies consecutively after immunization in a clinic on the island of Savaii (rural) caused an uproar and immunizations for MMR have been withheld until further notice. The nurses who administered the vaccinations have been criminally charged and appear to have become “scapegoats” for the incident.

Diabetes, obesity rates for both men and women also continue to be dangerously higher on a worldwide scale per ratio of population. A 2004 National Guidelines for the prevention and

management of Diabetes indicated that women are more obese than men and have higher rates of diabetes. Amputation of limbs is commonplace.

Samoans have a preconceived notion that eating well and being “large” are signs of good living and prosperity. The importation of turkey tails was banned 4 years ago and then reinstated due to public demand. Mutton flaps, corned beef and corned brisket are considered a delicacy.

The NGO Samoa Cancer Society (SCS) provides education on early detection and reporting of cancers in Samoa for both women and men. The S.C.S emphasizes early detection to combat cancers. The society has dedicated the month of “Pinktober”/ October to increase public awareness which is well supported by local businesses.

The organization METI / “ Matuaileoo Environment Trust” has been provided space within the local hospital to operate its clinic. A July 2017 news report stated that “The group has realised that treating the underlying causes of obesity plays a significant part in curing related diseases and healing a person. M.E.T.I. has researched and done some field work based on this holistic approach of whole food and plant based nutrition since 2012 and have incorporated life skills coaching to the mix to promote a more healthy lifestyle for Samoans. Since they began, Dr. Vermeulen said they have been able to reverse many long standing causes of diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, gout and arthritis just to name a few in an already long list of preventable diseases”

YWCA of Samoa has partnered with the Ministry of Health in holding an Annual Forum on World Aids HIV Day in December to increase awareness and encourage young women to use the services of the Ministry of Health for the detection of STIs and HIV / Aids.

Faataua Le Ola (FLO) is the only organization established to prevent suicide in Samoa. It advocates for research on the issue of suicide and it’s causes including depression and mental health issues. Depression is not widely recognised in Samoa and women tend to be “high functioning” and cope with depression by masking the symptoms. This can lead to mental illness and contemplation of suicide.

Recommended Measures:

Government to increase the health resources for the implementation of education on the most serious health threats for women, from Teenage pregnancy, STIs, Diabetes and health and nutrition.

GoS to implement urgent review of vaccination of infants given recent deaths of two babies and world debate on the issue of vaccination and side effects.

GoS to introduce a vaccine monitoring program to ensure fair and balanced education to all medical professionals and parents alike on the risk vs. reward of vaccination.

GoS to ensure that the predominantly female nursing staff are not made to be scapegoats in any future incidents involving vaccinations or the administering of medicine to patients.

Government to encourage joint initiatives and partnerships between the Ministry of Health and NGOs such as the Samoa Cancer Society, METI, Samoa Aids Foundation, YWCA of Samoa, Samoa Faafafine Association, which have proven to be effective in reaching out to the public for the prevention and early detection of STIS, and other serious diseases like HIV, cancers, diabetes and other non communicable disease.

GoS to work with FLO and similar organisations to support initiatives for addressing issues identified as causes for suicide, mental health and depression.

Government to improve access to health care particularly for women in rural areas and provide resident Doctors in highly attended areas.

Government to invest in comprehensive prevention strategies including data collection and monitoring of women's health issues, such as prevalence of breast and cervical cancers in collaboration with Samoa Cancer Society.

Government to prioritise the health needs of women with disabilities and develop in country professional capacity for mental health and counseling services.

Government to demonstrate at all levels including for civil society organizations (Samoa Family Health, YWCA Samoa, Samoa Aids Foundation, Samoa Faafafine Association) to break the taboo on SRHR

Rural Women and Health

Rural Health clinics continue to be under resourced, staffed by nurses and often operating under basic conditions without basic medicine such as antibiotics. As a result, women in rural areas are faced with a dilemma of attending an under resourced clinic or relying on traditional medicine which is freely available to them but could be dangerous.

For these reasons, rural women still rely on traditional healers to massage them during pregnancy, traditional midwives for home deliveries and other traditional healers are sought out for mental problems which are diagnosed and treated through methods some of which border on sorcery.

Medically qualified doctors were formally allocated to rural clinics where they resided for lengthy periods, living within the community. When rural women cannot afford to travel to the main hospital or to travel by boat from Savaii island to the main hospital in Apia, they are severely disadvantaged.

Recommended Measures:

Government to increase the budget for Ministry of Health and the provision of competitive salaries of Doctors and Health Professionals to prevent emigration to neighbouring first world countries.

Government to resource rural clinics and provide Doctors to care for rural communities on a level at par with the main hospital.

Government to consider remunerating rural Doctors extra salary or “hardship” allowances for working in rural Health clinics.

Government to commit to the provision, free of charge of health services and medicine in rural areas.

Government should ban the use of questionable medicine and healing methods utilized by traditional healers and require that they are licensed as alternative healers or under the Allied Health Professionals Act 2016.

Women with Disabilities and Special Needs

The non existence of any consistent measures to address the health needs of women with disabilities remain almost nonexistent and ignored.

NOLA and other organizations receive negligible assistance from Government in the promotion of their causes for people with special needs.

Women with disabilities continue to 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 their able bodied sisters.

There is lack of accessibility to information, venues, affordable public transport and assistive devices to empower women with disabilities.

Sexual abuse, rape and sexual connection against women with special needs are common and evidenced by perpetrators being charged with criminal offences.

Women with disabilities should be provided the opportunity to decide free and responsibly about their sexual health SRHR and should be well informed and educated on their rights.

There has been little change in this area since the last periodic report and the same recommendations are repeated here.

Recommended Measures:

We call for the Government of Samoa to establish with urgency:

Initiatives in Health and Reproductive Treatment and Awareness Programmes to specifically address the needs of women with disabilities in accessing all relevant health services and programmes.

All such strategies must be presented using accessible strategies (e.g. Braille, sign language, information in simple Samoan and visual support.

Early detection, diagnosis and rehabilitation services in the mainstream health organisations for different disabilities.

Quality and affordable technical and assistive devices available through mainstream health systems free of charge or minimal cost.

An integrated public transport system improving access for women with disabilities by adopting universal design and sensitizing drivers and other staff.

Accessible rural health initiatives should be made available for the 80% of persons with disabilities residing in rural areas.

Government to implement a social welfare benefit for persons with special needs similar to the old age pension Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and impoverished and should be eligible for Government subsidies for health care, public transport and other health services which would ensure equal and affordable access to health services.

Implement community awareness programmes to inform the public on the rights of women with disabilities and the laws that protect them from abuse.