



2014

Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue 2014

THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF SAMOA

“THE STABLE ROCK OF THE PACIFIC”

- Why and How?

Samoa Study Tour 2014

Acknowledgements

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1 Executive Summary

It is no easy feat to walk into a country for only five days and be expected to fully understand the complexities of its intrinsic makeup, nor the reasons for their preference in leadership values. It is certainly not easy to walk into a country as proud as the Independent State of Samoa and attain a fast tracked meaning to their somewhat 'strange' yet so familiar building blocks of existence, pathways and principles.

This report is however expected to be a synopsis of why Samoa is deserving of the title the 'The Stable Rock of the Pacific' and how Samoa managed to attain this status.

There is no doubt Samoa has earned the privilege of being referred to as the 'The Stable Rock of the Pacific' due to its stable government over the past 3 decades, but more so on its **strong foundation of putting God first in all things, and its solid value and incorporation of the Samoan culture.**

Despite all efforts to assist our study tour group in engaging with key members of Samoan society, there is only so much a 'foreigner' can understand of the culture, tradition, religious orientation, and priorities; put simply, the way of decision making of the Samoan in Samoa.

There is much the rest of the Pacific can look to Samoa for guidance in finding solutions for cross cutting regional, national and household issues. This is of course if one is brave enough to open the mind to consider solutions from Pacific indigenous knowledge and ways.

As such this report is by no means exhaustive, though hopefully provides a surface level insight to what a 'foreigner' might view as Samoa's successes in strong hold leadership, and possible considerations for continuing leadership going forward in key thematic areas seemingly important to the Samoan.

Through this report we consider the key thematic areas of

1. Politics and Government
2. Law and Justice
3. Equality
4. Economic Potential
5. Partnerships and Capacity
6. Climate Change
7. Information Communication Technology (ICT)

As such, the notion of 'weaving culture and governance – solutions from traditional practice' seems most fitting as the cross cutting theme to resound through the various thematic areas of this report.

2 Thematic areas and Analysis

2.1 God and culture

Religion and culture are the two main pillars of Samoan life. The nation's constitution states that *'Samoa is founded on God'*, with traditional customs influencing almost every aspect of life for its inhabitants. The mix of these Western and traditional ideals through its constitution is the perfect example of how Samoa keeps what it deems relevant from the outside world, while maintaining strong cultural roots.

Most Samoans attend a church of some description, and most remain connected to their customary land and village systems. The strength and influence of the Church and the *Fa'a Matai* system are a major factor underpinning Samoa's stability.



Photo: The Immaculate Conception of Mary Cathedral at Mulivai, inset Mura depicting the integration of culture and faith in Samoa.

The combined influence of the Church and the *Fa'a Matai* system provide a channel for rapid collective influence on communities. Although occasionally, religious and cultural messages may conflict with progressive social, economic and political strategies, such as the conflict between the need for sex education and the stance of the Church.

While this connection with the Church and the *Matai* system seems to be overwhelmingly positive for Samoa, it can impose a financial burden on families. Samoans are very proud of the many very

large and beautiful churches in Samoa, which are built and maintained with funds from the community.

2.2 Politics and Government

Samoa is touted as 'The Stable Rock of the Pacific' for being the most politically stable country in the Pacific over the last three decades led by the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP). Over the last 32 years Samoa has only had three Prime Ministers, a notion unheard of in any other part of the Pacific.

The current government controls 37 of the 49 seats of the House of Representatives, so with more than a two thirds majority they can pass any law they wish (this majority is sufficient to amend the Constitution). The mantra of HRPP is 'what is good for the Apia is also good for the village'. The combination of might and popularity has largely led to political stability.

The current prime minister, Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi has held this position for the last 16 years. In addition, every elected member of HRPP has a role as either a Minister or Associate Minister, which is believed to have created harmony within the party by providing status to each member. The success of HRPP on the other hand has been detrimental to the existence of a strong opposition in Parliament and there is a conscious awareness of this by the Prime Minister who acknowledges value in an active opposition for democracy.

Samoa has a western-style (Westminster) political system interwoven with the traditional *Fa'a Matai* chiefly system, and through the council of chiefs, maintains law and order in the village setting. To be elected to Parliament, a person must hold a *Matai* (chiefly) title and once elected to Parliament a *Matai's* obligations to his (or her) village are likely to increase.

Government has a paid representative in each village, the *Pulenu'u*, who is elected by the village and holds the responsibility to implement Government's policies in the village. In addition, Government delegates the implementation of most social policies through the Women's' committees in the village. Samoa's political stability is often attributed to this mix of traditional and Western government.

Samoans generally vote along family lines and largely vote for whoever their *Matai* tells them to vote for. The Electoral Commission has an uphill battle to change this mindset and empower citizens with the knowledge that their vote is their right as an individual that should not be 'sold' or influenced by others. As such the Electoral Commission has developed relevant media targeting youth voters.

2.3 Law and Justice

The rule of law is an extremely important pillar of any nation's economic, social and political growth and governance. The importance of a robust law and justice sector cannot be understated as it underpins all aspects of stability. It determines and captures the perceptions (and reality) of the extent to which people (both internationally and in Samoa) have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular issues such as the police, the courts, the quality of contract

enforcement and crime and violence. For these reasons it is a key factor in the economic growth of any country.

From our observations, Samoa is a safe and peaceful country where the rule of law is accepted. That said, there are some challenges that Samoa faces, for example: a heavy backlog of cases in their courts; interaction between traditional and formal justice systems; access to justice; and the lack of independence of some of its judicial and legal institutions.

Despite these challenges, Samoa is taking a proactive approach and is leading many of its Pacific neighbours in the implementation of initiatives to improve its law and justice sector, including: improving access to justice by developing the first community legal centre; recognising and integrating customary-based justice with the formal justice system; and having a Land and Titles Court which addresses disputes over customary land and which does not permit the presence of lawyers thus making it less costly and more accessible to the needs of everyday Samoans.

Samoa's stable political climate and law and justice sector are key factors that contribute to its standing in the Pacific region. Underpinning Samoa's approach is the ever present recognition of their traditions – a theme that is incorporated throughout all sectors of Samoa.

2.4 Economic Potential

Samoa's economy is driven by the public sector, recently through large Government construction projects funded through concessional loans, most of which are now complete. The four main contributors to economic growth are tourism, construction, transport and remittances. The Reserve Bank of Samoa forecasted +0.7% growth and -1.0% deflation for the 2013-2014 financial year.

Like most other smaller Pacific island countries Samoa relies heavily on imported fuel and food. Receipts from tourism and remittances absorb the trade deficit, and while there is huge potential for growth in the tourism sector, this reliance means the economy is susceptible to external factors such as the state of the New Zealand economy (being the main source of tourists and remittances). The goals are to promote growth, increase exports and substitute domestic products for imports. There was also acknowledgement that given the state of reserves, fiscal consolidation is likely in the near future once growth improves.

One of the challenges faced by local businesses is access to affordable finance, which is exacerbated by uncertainty around collateral over customary land (83% of the land in Samoa) – the Government has indicated that it is going to pass legislation which permits mortgages over the leasehold interest in customary land but the relatively short tenure of the leases (20 plus a 20-year right of renewal) may hinder investment. Access to land may also pose a barrier to attracting foreign investment.

Small enterprise, such as the Women In Business partnership in agriculture with the Body Shop manufacturing virgin coconut oil for export has produced extraordinary results. In addition to diversifying the base of the economy and providing employment in rural areas, this scheme now accounts for over 1% of Samoa's GDP.

Tourism, agriculture and the development of SMEs are seen as the key opportunities for future economic growth.

2.5 Equality

For centuries, Samoa has prided itself as a country that promotes the role of women as leaders in every aspect of society. Culturally, women are considered the keepers of all that is known as Samoan treasures, its artefacts, culture in entertainment forms and history. Women have always been considered as the peacemakers, the lifeline of every Samoan, the provider for their families, and the right hand of any denomination. Women are able to hold *Matai* titles and to stand for Parliament, yet not all villages will accept female *Matai*.

Women in leadership has been a focus for gender equality advocacy work in Samoa. Despite certain political and sociocultural pressures, Samoa has experienced an increase of women in decision-making positions within Government. This is especially with the key financial institutions of the country - Samoa now has several women in CEO positions including the (Governor of) Reserve Bank, Samoa National Provident Fund, the Samoa Development Bank, and now boasts more female CEO's than any country in the world.

In an effort to increase the representation of women in Parliament the Samoan Government has made constitutional amendments to create special seats for women. Under the changes, at least five seats (or ten percent of the members) of Parliament will be female after the next general election in 2016.

While women are encouraged to participate in all sectors of life in Samoa including Government, business and the *Matai* system, women also maintain all of their traditional responsibilities (nurturing family and household duties).

Samoa has been in the forefront in signing international conventions aimed at protecting women. However, cultural perceptions still need to change to allow people and families to report all cases of abuse and violence to the Police. We understand that the Police may also benefit from capacity building training to improve their assistance to victims of domestic violence or abuse when it is reported.

Samoa has also signed a international convention on the rights of peoples living with disabilities and its reflective policies are being implemented in Samoa. New buildings must provide facilities for people with disabilities and there is some public transport that can accommodate wheelchair access. Work is also being done to change people's perceptions. Much of this work is being undertaken in the village through the traditional village systems that are already in place and deemed the most effective way to approach mind-set change in the village setting.

2.6 Partnerships

The Samoan Government prides itself on having a holistic and inclusive approach to development in all sectors of society. It builds durable partnerships with NGO's, development partners, the private sector, as well as community villages.

The theme of the 3rd International Conference on Small Island Developing States 2014 hosted by Samoa is testament to this, being '*the sustainable development of small island developing States through genuine and durable partnerships*'.

There were various useful examples of partnerships. Sectoral planning in Education enthusiastically led by the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture. The aspirations of Samoa For Real (Tourism) to improve the quality and value add of the visitor experience in all aspects from arrival to departure brings in all service providers from start to finish. Microeconomies circulating incomes across the village of Poutasi. The traditional system/village council is used by various government and NGO organisations in partnership to disseminate information and relevant policies to communities.

A recurrent theme in these partnerships is the interplay between traditional values, practices and new ideas and forming effective strategies and implementing dynamic development plans.

There were many challenges in this sector, including the technical language barrier between Government, development partners and those at the grassroots or village level. However, the overwhelming impression was the appropriateness of the partnership approach for collective ownership, given the traditional community approach to problem solving.

2.7 Natural Disasters and Climate Change

Samoans are a strong, resilient people.

This is evident from the last two major natural disasters that ravaged the country; the 2009 tsunami, and 2012's Cyclone Evan. Following both, the country was overwhelmed with a desire from Samoans both in-country and from overseas to get involved with the rehabilitation efforts. These sentiments have been dually echoed by relevant agencies, such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), as well as the SUNGO.

Samoa is considered a country proactively involved in disaster preparedness and has a robust National Disaster Risk Management Plan (NDRMP) that is supported on a strong ICT platform. In addition, authorities utilize the *Faa' Matai* (village) system where the village social structure ensures awareness prior to an event, whilst also providing leadership and compliance during and after a disaster.

The impact and management of the most recent disasters provided a reference point for review of existing preparedness systems and strengthen future management efforts through the NDRMP.

Such preparedness is appropriate considering the factors that exacerbate Samoa's susceptibility to such natural disasters. These include the increasing frequency of the natural events arising through the broader phenomenon of climate change (such as higher storm/cyclone frequency). Moreover, the geographical location of Samoa isolates it from other nations in the Pacific, as well as Australia and New Zealand (where a large proportion of the Samoan community resides). Finally, the remoteness of the outer islands within Samoa further elevates their susceptibility to natural disasters.

In the words of the Head of State, His Highness Hon. Tuiaua Tupua Tamasese Efi, Samoans believe that there is a sacred covenant between human beings, the environment and the cosmos. There is clear evidence of a traditional body of knowledge where Pacific peoples observed nature carefully and learnt from it including with regard to warning systems for natural disasters.

In ancient Samoa, there were protocols to ensure that the environment was preserved long enough for it to replenish itself. For instance, during times of re-growth certain trees and plants were prohibited from being cut or picked. These protocols and the *tapu* or sanctions associated with them provided a conservation plan that dictated what humans could extract from the environment and in sustainable amounts and periods. Such a plan placed needs over profit, thus ensuring natural resources were harvested on a needs basis, rather than the excess. Today this philosophy is being promoted under the banner of “sustainable development”.

If the rest of the world followed Samoa’s example in embracing these traditional practices, the effects of climate change may be further mitigated.

2.8 ICT

For centuries the Pacific was the forgotten puzzle piece in a connected world. However In recent times, the introduction of ICT and the internet has brought about ‘the death of isolation’ connecting Samoa and the rest of the Pacific across oceans and opening up markets and relationships to the globalised world.

With the deregulation of the mobile and internet industry, Samoa now enjoys 96% population coverage for mobile and internet connectivity although at a cost that is prohibitive for Samoans to fully leverage the vast benefits of ICT. In addition, the limited pool of highly skilled ICT graduates compounds the digital divide faced by Samoa.

Despite these challenges, entrepreneurs and innovators, such as Vaimasenu’u Zita Martel are still able to harness the power of ICT and developed a mobile app called Samoa with the potential to put Samoa in the hands of millions of visitors where they can view Samoa’s attractions, make hotel bookings, interactive Augmented Reality and detail reviews ohotels, attractions and restaurants.

With the rapid social change as a result of new technology such as social media, there is a challenge of the younger generation disconnecting from the community, the very community that shapes and guides the lives of young adults that teaches and instils in them the living culture that is *faa’Samoa*. This is a delicate balancing act that Samoa has to navigate to ensure the benefits of ICT is realised but not at the cost of its core pillars, its culture and traditions.

3 Conclusions

As a tour group, we have been challenged with piecing apart and putting back together the reasons of why and how Samoa is referred to as the ‘Stable Rock of the Pacific’. As we have referred to, there is no doubt in our minds that Samoa is the rock of the Pacific, and is so because of its integration of culture and faith into all levels of society.

Again, although not exhaustive, we offer the following considerations to support the prosperity of the Samoan people going forward as well as ensuring they maintain the status of ‘The Stable Rock of the Pacific’ founded on culture and God:

- Appoint a Champion of Change responsible for empowering voters to own their vote and to ensure that people vote on the basis of their personal choice over affiliations
- Develop a policy that looks to reforming the economy from one driven by the public sector to one driven by an efficient diversified private sector
- Greater independence of legal and judicial bodies, such as the Law Reform Commission
- Replicating Poutasi community initiative concepts across rural Samoa
- Encourage the development of a focused strategy for sustainable funding sources for the House of Hope, as well as improving support to those counsellors and social workers in the field to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

EPLD Samoa Study Group 2014



APPENDIX 1 : LIST OF ENGAGEMENTS

1. Seumanuula Moana Clarke, President - SUNGO
2. Vitilevu Simati, Acting Electoral Commissioner and Manager Corporate Services OEC
3. Mathew Lemisio, Manager Legals Division, OEC
4. Maiava Atalina Ainuu Enari, Governor Central Bank of Samoa
5. Susana Laulu, CEO Development Bank of Samoa
6. Faumuina Esther Lameko-Poutoa, CEO Samoa National Provident Fund
7. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, Head of State of Samoa
8. Suisala Mele Maualaivao, Country Coordinator UNWomen Samoa
9. Aumua Ming Leung Wai, Attorney General, Office of Attorney General
10. Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe-Tago, CEO Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development.
11. Nofovaleane Mapusua, President - Samoa Council of Disabilities
12. Gabriella Tuatagaloa, Operations Manager - Le Lagoto Resort
13. Mataia Seti Sa, Food and Beverage Manager - Le Lagoto Resort
14. Faumuina Felolini Tafunai, Media Specialist - Women in Business Inc
15. Pauline Schwalger - Managing Director Leonard Plantation, Patamea
16. Matuau'u Peti and Au Seepapa Patamea
16. Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Fatialofa Aiono Dr Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of Samoa and also Minister of Tourism, Minister of Finance.
17. Vaimasenuu Zita Martel, Managing Director Polynesian Xplorer, Marketing and Operations Manager and App Developer and owner of Samoa Smart Guide App
18. Tuatagaloa Joe Annandale, Owner Sinalei Reef Resort and Spa, Matai Poutasi Village.
19. Sose Annadale, General Manager Sinalei Reef Resort and Spa, President of Samoa For Real Association
20. Lina Chang, President of Samoa Victim Support Group
21. Suluimalo Amataga Penaia, CEO Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
22. Muliagatele Filomena Nelson, ACEO Disaster Management Office, MNRE
23. HE Jackie Frizelle, NZ High Commissioner of NZ to Samoa
24. Leusa Toleafoa Dr Take Naseri, CEO Ministry of Health (MOH)
25. Sosefina Tualualelei, ACEO MOH
26. Matafeo Falanaipupu Tanielu Aiafi, CEO Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture.
27. Peseta Dr Desmond Mene Lee Hang, Chairman Leadership Samoa Board of Trustee
28. Seumanu Douglas Ngau Chun, CEO Leadership Samoa
29. Lemalu Sina Retzlaff, Country Representative Pacific Leadership Program
30. Fui Leapai Dr Asofou Soo, VC National University of Samoa
31. HE Sue Langford, Australia High Commissioner to Samoa.