

A civil society review of progress
towards the Millennium Development
Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report:

Samoa



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A civil society review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report: Samoa

This project aims to encourage and articulate civil society analysis of: progress towards the MDGs; the usefulness of the MDG framework for civil society; the contribution of civil society to the attainment of the MDGs; issues for a post-2015 agenda to consider.

This report documents the outputs of a two-stage process: desk research to review UN, government, civil society and other multilateral reports on national progress towards achieving the MDGs; and a national consultation workshop with civil society, which tested the findings of the desk research and enabled a deeper discussion on MDG progress, utility and post-2015 agenda setting.

This project was undertaken as part of a programme with the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC), which supported country-level research by civil society organisations in 20 countries.

The Commonwealth Foundation led this process for the following 14 countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Malawi, New Zealand, Pakistan, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zambia. The UNMC led in the following six countries: India, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines and The Gambia.

Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is a development organisation with an international remit and reach, uniquely situated at the interface between government and civil society. We develop the capacity of civil society to act together and learn from each other to engage with the institutions that shape people's lives. We strive for more effective, responsive and accountable governance with civil society participation, which contributes to improved development outcomes.

UN Millennium Campaign

The UN Millennium Campaign was established by the UN Secretary General in 2002. The Campaign supports citizens' efforts to hold their governments to account for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 world leaders from rich and poor countries, as part of the Millennium Declaration which was signed in 2000. These leaders agreed to achieve the Goals by 2015. Our premise is simple: we are the first generation that can end poverty and we refuse to miss this opportunity.

Executive Summary

Project rationale and process

This summary presents perspectives from civil society in Samoa on progress made and challenges experienced in relation to the national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. Based on their reflections, Samoan civil society organisations (CSOs) made a number of recommendations to accelerate progress on the MDGs and improve future development frameworks.

The first phase of the review, conducted in the first half of 2012 by a researcher from the University of the South Pacific, entailed an analysis of current literature, semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions. Interviews were held with 38 key informants from CSOs, government, donors and the United Nations, while four interviews were conducted with families in a poor and vulnerable community and six with school principals in rural and peri-urban areas. Four national focus groups were then convened by the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO) and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation in January 2013 to follow up on key issues arising from the research: gender-based violence, inequality, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the role of tradition.

Civil society review of the MDGs in Samoa

CSOs assess Goals 2 and 4 as on track, see mixed results on Goals 3, 6, 7 and 8, and view Goal 5 as off track. On Goal 1 they believe much progress has been made, but that there is recent regression, with a growing number of people living below the poverty line. While Samoa is acknowledged to be performing better than most Pacific island nations, it remains vulnerable to external shocks, such as those caused by recent natural disasters. Other continuing challenges identified include sizeable school drop-out rates for male students, high rates of gender-based violence and heavy prevalence of some sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Unemployment, including youth unemployment, has risen and food prices are high. CSOs see evidence of an emerging pattern of disparities in development outcomes across the population.

CSOs believe that the MDGs provide a useful framework for lobbying. They believe the MDGs have encouraged the government to pay greater attention to micro-level development experiences and their impact on national development, and acknowledge that government planning draws heavily on the MDGs, which are often cited by government as

a reason for the introduction of policies. MDGs are reflected in national planning frameworks and ministry plans, policy documents and reports, while CSOs reference the MDGs in many of their plans and feel that donors have also taken the MDGs seriously.

CSOs believe that development collaboration has improved between themselves and government, donors and UN agencies, although there are still disagreements on some strategies and practices. However, the MDG process was compared unfavourably with the preparation of the Samoa Development Strategy, which is seen as being more consultative and participatory. In comparison, the MDGs are viewed as more of an externally imposed framework, with a clear distinction between government as the lead agency and all other actors. On that basis, and given a lack of mechanisms for citizen monitoring, CSOs feel that the MDGs fall short of offering a participatory framework for citizen involvement.

Collaboration with government on the MDGs is assessed by CSOs as strong at the level of formal consultation, but less so at the implementation and monitoring stages. Partnerships vary across different ministries. There is concern that consultation is superficial and implies co-option, and on some projects there are worries about trust levels and competition to claim ownership of projects and space. Lack of communication is assessed as a challenge, as is CSOs working in isolation without making connections with government and other CSOs. A further challenge is that the circle of consultation may be quite small, with low CSO capacities meaning that a small number of CSO representatives are frequently involved in development consultations.

CSOs suggest that some MDGs are not entirely relevant to Samoa as a lower middle-income country, and that standards set by the MDGs could be too low in areas such as education and child health, raising the danger of creating complacency. A significant deficit identified in the MDG framework is its failure to take account of culture and tradition, important and complex social forces in Samoa. CSOs also identified inequality as an omission to be addressed in a post-2015 framework: combating poverty should focus not only on increasing income, but should also acknowledge that the most vulnerable are enduring victims of unequal systems of access to resources and services. CSOs suggest that the links between poverty and issues such as gender-based violence also need to be better understood, and that continuing attention should be paid to NCDs. Other gaps identified by CSOs include climate change, which has a particularly strong influence on Samoa and other small island developing states (SIDS); the related issue of disaster risk reduction; how it can make a gendered analysis and serve the most vulnerable; and access to land, a rising area of contention.

Recommendations

Recommendations from CSOs to improve the participation of civil society include:

- The research capacity of CSOs should be improved to enable better evidence-based advocacy and informed contributions to public debate.

Recommendations made by CSOs for future development goals include:

- A new development framework should include the creation of a multi-stakeholder committee, involving civil society and the private sector, to oversee the process, monitor and report on progress, and offer resources and technical advice.
- Any new framework must better understand the relationship between development and democracy. Improving governance is a key to making progress and improving equity, yet this was a major omission from the MDGs.
- There needs to be a stronger human rights approach: Samoa still lacks a national human rights commission.
- Indicators should be localised to enable the setting of country-specific targets and ambitious indicators. This would enable indicators to look beyond material measures, including setting indicators to measure aspects of human happiness. New development frameworks should also take better account of positive and negative aspects of culture.

1. Introduction

This report presents perspectives from civil society in Samoa on progress made and challenges experienced with the MDGs, and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. The first phase of the review, conducted in the first half of 2012 by a researcher from the University of the South Pacific, entailed an analysis of current literature, semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions. Interviews were held with 38 key informants from CSOs, government, donors and the United Nations, while four interviews were held with families in a poor and vulnerable community and six with school principals in rural and peri-urban areas. Four further national level focus groups were then convened by the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO) and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation in January 2013 to follow up on key issues arising from the research: gender-based violence, inequality, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the role of tradition.

Samoa was the first island nation in the South Pacific to gain independence – from New Zealand in 1962. It is a small island developing state, with a heavily rural population.¹ It is scheduled to graduate from least developed to developing country status in 2014.² In 2011 Samoa was assessed as only one of four Pacific island countries broadly on track to achieve the MDGs, together with Cook Islands, Niue and Palau.³ In May 2012, following 13 years of negotiations, Samoa officially joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The government's development strategies consistently prioritise economic development and social progress. Its Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2008–2012⁴ states that strong economic growth should enhance social development.⁵

Samoa remains vulnerable to global economic shocks and natural disasters, which include the tsunami that affected Samoa in September 2009 and Severe Tropical Cyclone Evan in 2012.⁶ Another important factor in Samoa is migration. According to the Migration and Remittances Factbook, Samoa is one of the top ten countries in the world for emigration, with an emigration rate of 67.3 per cent of the population.⁷ Accordingly, remittances play a vital economic role, estimated at 22.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009,⁸ and have increased dramatically, rising from US\$45 million in 2000 to US\$143 million in 2010.⁹ The Samoan diaspora is important not just for its remittances; CSOs consulted in this review believe Samoans overseas retain a strong attachment to Samoa, and are important as a source of resilience and solidarity at essential moments, such as in response to disasters.

2. Civil society perspectives on progress towards the MDGs

Following strong progress, reports of recent downward trends in some MDG targets offer fresh cause for concern. Among these, discussed further below, are a growing proportion of the population under the Basic Needs Poverty Line (BNPL),¹⁰ high rates of some sexually transmitted infections, higher drop-out rates among male students, youth unemployment, gender inequality and poor

¹ The rural population is 78 per cent, according to the Bureau of Statistics, 2010 http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resource/s/743A0C3D19946F9349257645005D46A6-Full_Report.pdf

² Samoa was scheduled for graduation out of least developed country status in December 2010, but because of the 2009 tsunami it was decided to postpone its graduation to January 2014. Source: The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS), <http://www.unohrls.org/en/lac/164>

³ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat MDGs Tracking Report, 2011

⁴ Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2008–2012, Ministry of Finance, 2008

⁵ This has been succeeded by the next four year plan, the Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2012–2016, 'Boosting Productivity for Sustainable Development', published by the Ministry of Finance, which draws upon reviews of the 2008–2012 report

⁶ A tsunami in September 2009 caused an estimated 135 deaths and an estimated US\$147.54 million damage. Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Report, 4 October 2009, posted at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/743A0C3D19946F9349257645005D46A6-Full_Report.pdf. Cyclone Evan caused a number of deaths and may have a similar economic impact to the 2009 tsunami. Source: 'Samoa Counts Cyclone Cost', Radio Australia, 17 December 2012, <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2012-12-15/samoa-counts-cyclone-cost/1061370>

⁷ Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011, World Bank, 2011

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Remittances Profile: Samoa, Migration Policy Institute, 2011

¹⁰ The Basic Needs Poverty Line is calculated as the Food Poverty Line plus the basic needs of households such as education, water and electricity bills, and transportation. It is the total value of both food and non-food needs expenditure

quality of drinking water. These problems interact and particularly affect the rural population and poor urban communities, who tend to work in subsistence farming or the informal economy,¹¹ exposing the relative lack of policy attention that has been paid to the informal sector and the development of agriculture beyond subsistence level. Unemployment is also felt to be a driver of rural to urban migration.

Unemployment rates rose from an average of 1.3 per cent in the middle of the last decade to 3.5 per cent between 2006 and 2010,¹² while food prices have increased dramatically in a short period of time. For example, the price of bread increased by 70.5 per cent from 2006 to 2009, while the price of flour increased by 76.8 per cent and that of rice by 103.9 per cent over the same period.¹³ While they acknowledge growth in some economic areas, CSOs in their work on the ground and through their closeness to communities also see that poor and vulnerable communities are experiencing hardship. CSOs also believe there is growing evidence of an emerging pattern of disparities and inequality of development outcomes across the population.

As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Deputy Representative Georgina Bonin commented in an interview in June 2012, *'At the macroeconomic level, Samoa is doing well. But at the micro level there are critical problems.'*¹⁴ When one moves from the summary to the detailed information on each MDG, as presented in the government's 2010 MDGs Second Progress Report, there is a recognisable downward trend for many of the MDG targets.

Table 1: Civil society assessment of progress towards the MDGs

Goals, targets and indicators ¹⁵	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: 1a. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day 1b. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people 1c. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	Much progress has been made, but recent regression threatens the possibility of achieving this goal	On track with a low level of food poverty, but off track to reduce basic needs poverty	The level of serious poverty as measured by the proportion of people falling below the food poverty line is very low: the 2008 Household and Income Expenditure Survey shows that about 5 per cent of the population falls into this category, a drop from 10.6 per cent recorded in 2002.¹⁶ However, according to the 2010 progress report, the proportion of the population living below the basic needs poverty line increased from 22.9 per cent in 2002 to 26.9 per cent in 2008. While hunger has not generally been a problem in Samoa, with subsistence farming playing a crucial role as a buffer for food security, CSOs believe there are indications in the expenditure patterns of the poorest households that many may be getting inadequate nutrition, with some households switching to cheaper, less nutritious food sources.

¹¹ About 60 per cent of the workforce is estimated to be in informal employment. Source: International Labour Organisation, 2012

¹² Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2008

¹³ Figures based on average retail prices of selected items, 2006–2009. Source: Statistical Abstract, Issue No. 40, Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2009

¹⁴ Interview with Georgina Bonin, 21 June 2012

¹⁵ Unless otherwise stated, government assessments, targets, indicators and quantitative data in this table are drawn from the Government of Samoa MDG Progress Report 2010. Unless otherwise stated the deadline for targets to be achieved is 2015

¹⁶ Report on The Estimation of Basic Needs Poverty Lines, and The Incidence and Characteristics of Hardship and Poverty, Samoa Bureau of Statistics and UNDP Pacific Centre, 2010

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Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education: 2a. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	Effectively achieved	Generally on track, but with concerns about literacy	Samoa has effectively achieved the target of universal primary education, with net enrolment recorded at 96 per cent in 2009. The challenge now is to maintain this level of achievement. Before the launch of the Samoa School Fee Grant Scheme in 2010, a donor-supported initiative that covers school fees in almost all primary schools,¹⁷ retention rates at primary school had dropped from 85.28 per cent in 2001 to 80.51 per cent in 2009. These have increased again in 2010 to 83.3 per cent, showing that the scheme is helping to encourage parents to keep children in school. The drop-out of boys is still an issue; the government established a special task force in 2010 to investigate implementing compulsory education legislation. Other civil society concerns include the quality of education, with reports of teacher shortages, high attrition rates of teachers and large classes. To counter this, the government has focused on fast tracking programmes under the National Teacher Development Framework, which aims to make teachers' terms and conditions more attractive.
Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women: 3a. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	Results are mixed	On track with education targets for girls, but off track with education targets for boys and the global empowerment of women target	Samoa is doing well in terms of meeting indicators for female participation in education and the workforce. According to the 2010 progress report, girls now outperform boys in education. Women also make up 54.8 per cent of the workforce in the private sector. As Samoa is not included in studies such as the World Bank's Global Gender Gap Report, it is difficult to assess where it is in terms of empowerment of women, but it is certainly one of the countries with the lowest proportion of women in parliament. In the 2011 elections, women took only two seats (4.1%) in the 49-member parliament. This is down from 2008, when women held twice as many seats.¹⁸ Discussions about introducing a quota system have not reached any conclusion. Gender-based violence is a major concern. A 2005 World Health Organisation (WHO) multi-country study reported that Samoa had one of the highest levels of physical and sexual violence by non-partners on women above the age of 15, with a prevalence rate of 65 per cent.¹⁹ CSOs believe violence against women by partners is also a problem that goes substantially under-reported.

¹⁷ This Scheme was implemented in 2010, and is supported by AusAID and NZAID, Australia and New Zealand's bilateral aid agencies. Source: Action on the ground: The Samoa School Fees Scheme, <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/pacific/samoa/Pages/education-int2.aspx>

¹⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union Women in National Parliaments database, December 2012 statistics, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif311212.htm> and December 2009 statistics <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif311209.htm>. It should be noted that to run for a seat in parliament, one has to be a holder of a chiefly title, a complex issue for women in Samoa. In 2006, a larger contingent of women ran for parliament than normal. This was seen as a direct result of intensive advocacy, lobbying and awareness raising efforts of CSOs. Source: MDC Progress Report, 2010

¹⁹ The combined prevalence of physical and sexual violence by a non-partner after the age of 15 years was 65 per cent. Higher levels of non-partner violence were reported in urban settings than in rural settings. In Samoa non-partner violence constitutes the largest part of the violence experienced by women. Source: World Health Organisation (WHO) Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women, WHO, 2005

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 4. Reduce child mortality: 4a. Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	Likely to be achieved	On track with infant and under fives mortality rate targets, but off track with immunisation targets.	Mortality rates of under fives have been decreasing slowly over time, from 27 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 20 per 1,000 in 2010. The infant mortality rate declined from 23 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 17 per 1,000 in 2010.²⁰ According to the World Bank, immunisation against measles for children aged between 12 and 23 months has increased in the past few years, from 45 per cent in 2008 to 67 per cent in 2011,²¹ but there is some dispute about the reality on the ground. It was reported that a proposal by the Samoa Family Health Association to assist with the child immunisation programme was not accepted.
Goal 5. Improve maternal health: 5a. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio 5b. Achieve universal access to reproductive health	Unlikely to be achieved	On track with maternal mortality rate but off track with reproductive health targets	According to the 2010 progress report, maternal mortality rates for Samoa have been declining steadily, dropping from 74 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 46 per 100,000 live births in 2002. More up to date data was not available from this source, and it should be noted that another source, the UN MDG indicators modelled data, puts the figure higher but also falling, from 150 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 100 per 100,000 in 2010.²² UNICEF estimates that the percentage of skilled attendants at birth was on average 81 per cent between 2006 and 2010.²³ It is recognised however that there are still significant rural/urban divides: 93 per cent of urban women had the care of a skilled birth attendant, but only 78 per cent of women in rural areas. There is conflicting evidence available about the use of modern family planning methods. Strict cultural norms and a perceived lack of confidentiality are suggested by civil society as factors preventing more widespread contraceptive use.

²⁰ Samoa statistics, UNICEF, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/samoa_statistics.html

²¹ Immunisation, measles (percentage of children aged 12-23 months). The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.IMM.MEAS>

²² Samoa, Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births, UN Millennium Development Goals Indicators, <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/SeriesDetail.aspx?srid=553&crd=882>.

²³ Samoa statistics, UNICEF (ibid)

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Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases: 6a. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS 6b. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it 6c. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	Mixed results	On track with universal access to treatment, but off track in reducing NCDs	Little data is available on the true extent of HIV infection rates, but overall rates are low in Samoa.²⁴ However, worrying trends are reported about other STIs, with chlamydia prevalence in women under 25 years now calculated at an alarming 40.7 per cent. NCDs such as diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity are now a pressing issue, including for children, and have been recognised as a 'major disease', included in this goal in Samoa. A critical question for civil society is how trust can be built for more effective partnerships between civil society and the government, and how sometimes difficult questions of ownership of projects and programmes can be negotiated so that collaboration on major health issues, such as NCDs and sexual health, can be maximised.
Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability: 7a. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources 7b. Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss 7c. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation 7d. Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers	Mixed results	Some data gaps, but mostly on track	UNICEF estimated that by 2008, 100 per cent of the urban population was using improved sanitation facilities,²⁵ while the World Bank found in the same year that 96 per cent of the rural population was able to access improved water sources.²⁶ Access to safe drinking water is however harder to assess, as during the last decade new national drinking water standards were introduced, in order to meet World Health Organisation international water standards.²⁷ The findings from initial surveys show that most water supply systems in Samoa do not currently meet these standards. Only 30 to 40 per cent of the population is assessed as being able to access water that meets the standards. Samoa is understood to be very vulnerable to climate change, an awareness that can only be expected to influence future development policies and actions, and that calls for a multi-sectoral response.

²⁴ As of 2009 (the latest figures that seem to be available), there were 12 people reported living with HIV+ status in Samoa. Source: Country Progress Report: Samoa, United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS): Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, 2010

²⁵ Samoa statistics, UNICEF, <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2012/Snapshots/WSM.pdf>

²⁶ Samoa statistics, The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/samoa>

²⁷ Samoa: Country Briefing Paper, Pacific regional consultation on water in small island countries: papers and proceedings, South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission and Asian Development Bank, February 2003

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development 8a. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system 8b. Address the special needs of least developed countries 8c. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states 8d. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries 8e. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries 8f. In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications	Mixed results	Some data gaps, but mostly on track	Samoa's largest donor is AusAID, which committed to spend AU\$43.5 million²⁸ as of 2012, focusing on increasing access to quality health and education services, building a stronger and more accountable public sector, improving access to justice and building safer communities, and improving economic stability.²⁹ Samoa has expressed the hope that it will benefit from increased access to WTO member markets, but some CSOs had concerns about WTO entry, and do not believe there have been any benefits from membership as yet. Samoa's narrow and fragile resource base and small domestic market are crucial challenges to development. The relatively high cost of doing business is a disincentive to investors.

As can be seen from the above, government assessments present a mixed picture, and there seems to be a high degree of consensus between the government and civil society on progress towards targets. The largest gap in consensus is around Goals 7 and 8, where civil society paints a gloomier picture than the government. One omission seems to be that there is no particular indicator, and therefore focus, in the government's progress report on the development of young people or youth employment. Given that 54.7 per cent of the Samoan population are aged 24 or under,³⁰ this seems a neglected issue.

For a full list of the MDGs, along with the targets and indicators, see: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/host.aspx?Content=indicators/officiallist.htm>

²⁸ Approximately US\$47.1 million at rates as of February 2013

²⁹ Samoa, How we are helping, AusAID 2011/2013 commitment, <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/pacific/samoa/Pages/home.aspx>

³⁰ Samoa: The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ws.html>

3. Usefulness and challenges of the MDG framework to civil society

CSOs consulted during this review consider that the MDGs have provided a useful framework for lobbying on particular topics. The MDGs are also seen as a mechanism that has encouraged the government to pay greater attention to micro-level development experiences and their impact on national development.

Since government planning draws heavily on issues arising from the MDG framework, this has created good opportunities for interaction. The MDGs are often cited by the government as one of the reasons for the introduction of particular laws or policies. For example, legislation was introduced that mandates education for all, in order to support the achievement of Goal 2, and the government established the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to institute environmental protection policies, in pursuit of Goal 7.³¹ The government has taken steps to integrate the MDGs into national planning frameworks, including the most recent four-year plan (2012–2016). At the level of individual ministries, plans, policy documents and intersectoral programme reports show a consistent focus on meeting the MDGs.

The MDGs have also been internalised as pillars of many CSO plans, and as such can be seen to have offered a useful benchmark to help analyse what CSOs are doing and how they are contributing to development.

Over the last decade, CSOs believe that collaboration between themselves and the government, donors and UN agencies on various development issues has improved and become more visible; they feel that this is based on a shared understanding of the importance of enhancing national and community welfare through the MDGs, although sometimes there is disagreement at the level of implementation strategies and practices.

Donors, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), AusAID, NZAID and the European Union (EU) have taken the MDGs seriously, and have engaged with both the government and CSOs in financing and advising on community-focused programmes. NZAID funding, for example, has enabled the civil society umbrella body, Samoan Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO), to sustain itself, grow and expand its focus on the MDGs. As of 2012, SUNGO had over 130 members, drawn from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs).³²

However, some CSOs consulted assessed the MDGs as lacking when compared to their previous experience of the processes for the preparation of the national Samoa Development Strategy (SDS). The SDS was seen as having a more consultative process in its design, which had helped to energise people to participate in implementation of the plan. In comparison, the MDGs were seen as more of an externally imposed framework, and this had carried through into the implementation of the MDGs, with a clear distinction between government as the implementing agency and everyone else. The MDGs could not be seen as

³¹ The Samoan MDGs: International expert group meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, Indigenous participation and good governance, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, January 2006

³² For a full list of SUNGO member organisations, see: http://www.sungo.ws/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=140

a participatory framework for citizen involvement. This was compounded by the lack of mechanisms for citizen monitoring.

Most CSOs did not explicitly acknowledge making a link between their activities and the MDGs per se, partly because their work on long-term development issues such as poverty, unemployment and health services preceded the instigation of the MDGs. To them, the MDGs were typically characterised as a contemporary initiative to boost efforts in eradicating problems that have existed for decades.

Since Samoa is now classified as a lower middle-income country,³³ and is making the transition from being a least developed country, the MDGs were felt not to be, in their entirety, always relevant. CSOs assessed the standards set by the MDGs as quite low on some fronts, for instance on education and child health, which raised the danger of creating a sense of complacency. A decent performance on the MDGs should not necessarily be considered a good enough national benchmark or an indication of a sufficiently high rate of progress.

The Prime Minister makes himself available for regular meetings with civil society, and on paper, CSOs' collaboration with government is strong at the level of formal consultation, but there are also challenges, with less collaboration at the implementation and monitoring stages of projects. Lack of communication between government ministries and CSOs on project implementation is assessed as a difficulty. This applies also to CSOs working in isolation and failing to make connections with government and other CSOs.

CSOs believe that goals and objectives in strategic development plans are often developed by government officials with little consideration of feedback from CSOs. Some respondents believe that consultation on development issues implies an unspoken expectation by the government that CSOs will support it, which naturally conflicts with the independence of CSOs and their right to advocate for views which may be unpopular with political office holders and government officials. Samoan CSOs continue to grapple with the challenge of maintaining a respectful and effective dialogue with the government and its leaders, while also trying to stay faithful to and adequately channel the voices of the communities they are close to.

A related issue is the concern expressed by some CSOs in this review that the government seeks to capture CSOs and civil society space. For example, CSOs reported that the government had tried to deliver gender training activities that CSOs felt they were better placed to offer, and that the training had been provided in a one off and unsustainable manner, rather than through sustained engagement and consultation to help build the capacity of communities, of the kind that CSOs feel they can maintain.

Some CSOs assess the circle of consultation as fairly small, with low CSO capacities meaning that the same small number of civil society representatives are frequently involved in development consultation opportunities. This may mean that messages and chances to influence do not always spread further. A question remains of how to broaden the representation to more civil society personnel.

³³ World Bank status, <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups>

CSOs see a lack of awareness about the MDGs, particularly in rural Samoa. This hinders citizen mobilisation, and hence stronger advocacy and the exercise of accountability.

4. In focus: the potential for civil society response to the rise of non-communicable diseases

The rise of non-communicable diseases was something that was much discussed in the consultations. NCDs such as diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity were seen to have been a problem for a long time in Samoa and the Pacific, but only to have been recognised as an emergency in the last few years, stimulated by changes in diet and lifestyles.

In discussion, it was considered that despite this being a growing problem that is beyond the ability of government alone to tackle, there were only a few CSOs currently active on NCDs, suggesting that slow recognition of the importance of an issue had led to a sluggish donor and civil society response. The Cancer Society was however mentioned as one CSO with a track record on this topic. CSOs also felt there was little co-operation between government and those CSOs that are active on this issue, although one project encouraging pre-school children to consume more vegetables was identified as a successful example of collaboration between village women's health committees (komiti tumama) and the Ministry of Health.

The komiti tumama were formed for the delivery of health services to women and children and for the improvement of hygiene and sanitation in communities. For example, in 2005, komiti tumama pre-schools started an early childhood education nutrition programme, to improve school food and the health and nutrition of children.³⁴ In 2008, there were 68 branches of the komiti tumama registered as working within communities.³⁵ Due to their success at carrying out village projects, they have begun to collaborate more with government departments on extension work. For instance, in 2008 they worked with the Ministry of Health Nutrition Centre on a pilot school nutrition programme in seven schools. The komitis are now affiliated to national women's organisations such as the National Council of Women, the Samoa Women's Development Committee Association and national church organisations.

However, participants in the consultation also felt that the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development was effectively supplanting or seeking to take over civil society activities and occupying space that civil society had previously found room to work in. This suggests a need for closer collaboration and discussion of what should be the most efficient division of labour, given that the government's budget must be insufficient to tackle the problem on its own and that CBOs in particular might be supposed to enjoy a strategic advantage in delivering community-level services. It was suggested that donors and UN agencies have a role to play in encouraging the government to partner more with

³⁴ Samoa: a situation analysis of children, women and youth, Government of Samoa and UNICEF, 2006

³⁵ A Healthy Samoa: Samoa Health Sector Plan 2008-2018, Ministry of Health, Government of Samoa

civil society in activities they provide funding for and to encourage recognition of the added value that CSOs could offer.

Stronger inclusion and targeting of NCDs in new development goals would, it was felt, also help stimulate further civil society action.

5. Contribution of CSOs to the MDGs and their delivery

SUNGO estimates that there are around 120 registered NGOs and over 150 CBOs in Samoa. As informal non-registered groups, CBOs have a long history, with traditional village and church groups serving communities, as in the example of the komiti tumama described above.

CSOs in Samoa consider that they have played a critical and significant role in helping the country make progress on the MDGs. Many are active in service delivery. For example, in response to unemployment and underemployment, a number of CSOs have led income-generation projects, such as in organic farming or handicrafts, including the traditional woven mats for which Samoa is famed. CSOs active in this area include Women in Business and Development, Small Business Enterprises and SUNGO, which also provides training in good governance and the management of finance to CBOs, such as those involved in the management of local water supplies, which is relevant to Goal 7. On Goal 6, CSOs such as the Samoa Family Health Association (SFHA), and the komiti tumama also fill a gap in providing sexual health counselling services.

In addition, CSOs have taken on an advocacy role on development issues. Examples of specific CSO advocacy initiatives cited by participants in this review include advocacy for getting women into parliament, and for securing changes to bills on casino regulation and police powers before they were passed by parliament. Civil society has also undertaken considerable advocacy over the adoption of a Family Safety Bill, but this reached a certain level before stalling without being passed into law, suggesting a certain lack of political will that it was hard for civil society alone to overcome.

One example given of an advocacy campaign that brought different CSOs together, related to Goal 3, was the '16 days of activism' campaign against gender-based violence.³⁶ Many CSOs joined this, and government funding was not required. It was suggested that one reason the collaboration was regarded as having worked was that it had come out of and built on an existing civil society committee formed to work on issues related to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as being able to tap into international practice and solidarity.

Given that it has been identified as a significant problem, CSOs as part of this review spent time discussing gender-based violence. Here CSOs were felt to be doing valuable human rights work, and to have made some headway in tackling taboo issues that were previously unchallenged. Participants considered that there had been increased reporting of abuses and greater awareness of the

³⁶ The '16 Days of Activism' campaign is an international advocacy campaign to stop gender-based violence. It runs from 25 November – International Day Against Violence Against Women – to 10 December – International Human Rights Day. In 2012, Samoan civil society, including the Samoan Victim Support Group, ran the 'Calling It Enough' campaign over the 16 days. Torch of Peace, Samoan Victim Support Group, <http://www.victimsupport.ws/16-days-of-activism.html>

rights of women. CSOs were also seen to be playing a valuable role in providing counselling and holding training sessions about violence. CSOs were felt to be doing work that the government would not cover in this area because of lack of political priority. For example, a shelter for women who experience violence, which the government was supposed to set up, had instead been delivered by a CSO, the Samoan Victim Support Group.

CSOs also have continuing involvement on a number of committees and thematic working groups, through which they believe gradual, incremental influence is being asserted. Often SUNGO participates in such bodies, and the biannual CSO forums hosted by SUNGO are seen as a valuable forum where CSOs can exchange on and develop advocacy positions.

Partnerships with ministries, however, show considerable variance, depending largely on the leadership and vision of the ministry concerned. CSOs acknowledge that some ministries have opted for transparent processes, with SUNGO playing a role in helping to co-ordinate this. Others seem to lack understanding of CSOs' roles in development and how they could receive useful information and feedback from them.

One example is the Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) addressing health issues, which provides a strong mandate for the Ministry of Health and CSOs to collaborate. There is collaboration between the Ministry of Health and CBOs such as the komiti tumama and youth groups, although there are communication gaps and breaks in activities. There have also been issues here about ownership of projects and levels of trust, for example over sexual health initiatives.

Sustainability of funding for projects remains critical for CSOs. A positive recent development is the establishment in 2010 of the Civil Society Support Programme, with funding from AusAID, the Government of Samoa and the EU, which provides small grants to CSOs to improve their skills and implement sustainable projects. In 2011 57 CSOs received financial support and training from this programme, towards MDG-related activities in areas such as education, health and gender.³⁷

Relatively little collaboration with the private sector was reported, and there is some suspicion of private sector attempts to take part in consultative and lobbying processes, for example in the health sector, where tobacco companies had sought to join a health committee.

6. Lessons learned and recommendations

One significant deficit for the MDG framework in the context of Samoa is the failure of the MDGs to take account of culture and tradition, important social forces in Samoa. The interaction between culture, tradition and development, and with democracy and human rights, is of course complex.³⁸ Many of those involved in the consultations for this review were suspicious of references to 'tradition', seeing it sometimes as an artificial construct used to justify continuing imbalances of power, particularly with regard to village level governance. Participants called attention to the need to pay more attention

³⁷ Programme description on AusAID website, 16 November 2012, <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/pacific/samoa/Pages/economic-growth.aspx>

³⁸ For a fuller discussion of the interaction between culture and development in a Commonwealth context and a conceptual framework for understanding the different levels of interaction, see Putting Culture First: Commonwealth Perspectives on Culture and Development, Commonwealth Foundation, 2008

to reforming village level governance, where there are some long-entrenched power bases and examples of corruption and patronage in the control and distribution of resources, including the emergency supplies provided in response to Cyclone Evan. They also questioned whether established patterns of giving high proportions of income to the church cut across the potential to mobilise funds for development.

The point remains that by, in effect, being culture blind, the MDGs cannot take full account of powerful social forces and sources of social capital in Samoa. Particularly in rural Samoa, family, village and church remain central organising principles in people's daily lives. There is a need to take this into account in designing interventions, even if this does not always comfortably fit with notions of development derived from other contexts. For example, in Samoa there are traditional practices of good environmental stewardship, while the concept of 'le va' involves the notion of putting one's family and village first. New development frameworks would benefit from understanding these aspects of culture better and trying to use them as sources of mobilisation and engagement.

As an example of working with the grain of culture, a simple monitoring and accountability idea that won wide support in the consultations was to have village level notice boards that reported on a village's progress towards the MDGs. This would help to stimulate local pride in, and therefore ownership of, progress, and take advantage of the tradition of competitiveness that exists between different villages. Such a measure would be a step towards addressing the larger challenge of insufficient outreach.

The suspicion that some of the MDG targets, such as the target on primary school enrolment, were set too low suggests a need for more national level contextualisation to help set sufficiently ambitious targets. Too easily achievable targets may encourage a lack of budget allocation to meet real development needs.

CSOs recognise that they need to do more to undertake their own research and speak from a position of strength, for example, when trying to speak authoritatively on nutritional issues in health debates. A challenge here is the lack of national research capacity, including at university level.

CSOs suggested that there is a need to make reference to and apply the Pacific Plan,³⁹ which had stated clearly that governments should partner with civil society.

7. Post-2015 development framework

Samoa CSOs identified inequality as a gap in the current MDG framework that should be addressed in a post-2015 framework. As part of this, it was considered that combating poverty should focus not just on responses to increase income – which may be unsustainable in the long term – but should also acknowledge that the most vulnerable in society are enduring victims of unequal systems of access to resources and services. Inequality means that the poorest and vulnerable disproportionately experience the effects of any reversals in development

³⁹ The Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration was agreed by the member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum, including Samoa, in 2005. Available at <http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/about-us/the-pacific-plan>

progress, as at present, and the impacts of natural disasters. The links between poverty and issues such as gender-based violence also needed to be better understood. CSOs involved in this review suggested that there needs to be a focus on real empowerment of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised, that takes a rights-based approach and focuses on changing mindsets – including among the government and the public – to recognise that everyone should have a right to social protection and an economically secure life.

Other gaps identified by CSOs in this review process are:

- Climate change, which has a particularly strong influence on Samoa and other SIDS
- Disaster risk reduction, and the need to make a gendered analysis of this and to serve the most vulnerable
- Access to land as a rising issue

This review suggests that any new framework must also better capture the relationship between development and democracy. Improving governance is a key to making progress and improving equity, yet this was recognised by CSOs involved in this process as another major omission from the MDGs. As part of this there needs to be a stronger human rights approach. It was noted, for example, that Samoa lacks a national human rights commission.

As suggested above, CSOs stated that indicators should be localised to enable the setting of more country-specific targets and ambitious indicators, and to go beyond material measures. One question arising from this is how indicators can be set to measure more components of human happiness.

Any new development framework, in the opinion of many of the CSOs consulted, must include the creation of a multi-stakeholder committee to oversee it. This committee, similar to the temporary formations that are sometimes set up in Samoa in the aftermath of a disaster, involving civil society and the private sector, would have a similar multi-stakeholder composition and be responsible for monitoring and reporting back regularly; they could also provide resources and technical advice. Such a mechanism would help democratise people's ownership of development processes in Samoa, broadening it out from the government, and help to energise citizens to become more involved.

8. Conclusion

A Samoan cultural expression often used by CSO leaders is ‘*O le va’a o Samoa e fau tele*’, which means that Samoa’s development involves the efforts of all its people, families and friends. CSOs, from national level NGOs to the informal structures that quietly work at village level, should be considered an essential part of the people, family and friends in development, particularly in the light of the recent acknowledgement from Samoa’s Prime Minister that meeting the MDGs is about partnerships, and that partnerships have played a role in Samoa’s progress.⁴⁰

Samoa’s CSOs believe they have never been busier, more active and more vocal on development issues. Future development frameworks must build on, and make more of, this mobilisation of civil society and its willingness to contribute to Samoa’s development.

Participating organisations

Original research partner:

- The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji Islands

Research interviews:

- AusAID
- Catholic Education
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (Division for Women)
- Mulifanua Village Women’s Committee
- Sagafili Village Women’s Committee
- Samoa Family Health Association
- Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO)
- Sogi Village (resident)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Women in Business Development
- well as a representative from Catholic Education

⁴⁰ “Meeting the MDGs is about primacy and the importance of partnerships. That has effected Samoa’s progress.” Prime Minister Sailele, quoted in, PM calls for action, Samoa Observer, 2 July 2012

Consultation participants:

- **NGOs:**
 - Malua Theological College Pre-School
 - Samoa Association of Women Graduates
 - Samoa Chamber of Commerce
 - Samoa Fa'afafine Association
 - Samoa Family Health Association
 - Samoa Registered Nurses Association (SRNA)
 - Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO)
 - Samoa Victim Support Group
 - Small Business Enterprises
 - Tavana Nurses on Wheels
 - Women in Business Development
- **CBOs:**
 - Apia-Uta EFKS Youth Group
 - Falelatai Village Water's Committee
 - Lefaga Village Water Committee
 - Lotofaga EFKS Women's Committee
 - Mulifanua Village Women's Committee
 - Nuusuatia Village Water's Committee
 - Sagafili Village Women's Committee
- **Development partners:**
 - AusAID
 - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- **Government:**
 - Aeale fou Primary School
 - Afega Primary School
 - MESC (Curriculum and Examination Division)
 - Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture
 - Ministry of Finance (State-Owned Enterprise Monitoring Division)
 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 - Ministry of Health
 - Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
 - Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD)
 - Moataa Primary School
 - Mulifanua Primary School
 - National University of Samoa
 - Samoa Bureau of Statistics (Division of Census and Survey and Demography Section)
 - Siumu Primary School
 - Unit Trust of Samoa
 - Vaitele-Uta Primary School

In addition, individuals from Sogi village participated in consultations, as well as a representative from Catholic Education.

January 2013 focus groups partners:

- Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO)
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

January 2013 focus groups participants:

- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Men Against Violence
- Ministry of Health (Health Promotion)
- Ministry of Health (Nutrition)
- Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (Division for Women)
- National Council of People Living with Disabilities (NOLA)
- Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA)
- Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO)
- Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC)
- Solar Connect Samoa
- UN Women



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