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This draft for consultations has been prepared by the Samoa UN Resident Coordinator Office (UNRCO) for Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, with contributions and inputs from UN agencies, and in consultations with the Government of Samoa and communities in Upolu and Savaii. The UNRCO expresses deep gratitude for all contributions and comments made.



Photo credit: Oleksiy Ivaschenko.

Common Country Assessments (CCAs) have been developed within the framework of the 2030 Agenda with a focus on key development risks and transformational opportunities. Starting with a country context analysis, with a macroeconomic focus, zooming in on specific sectors, gathering evidence from UN agencies, Government and Development Partners' official documents and a variety of primary and secondary data sources, the CCA provides an SDG progress assessment with a view of key indicators at risk, a financial and partnership landscape and a multidimensional vulnerability analysis. The CCA concludes with the identification of the most likely and damaging risks to the development process, and the discussion of key development challenges and opportunities that stand to have the most catalytic impact in the achievement of the SDGs in the country. This CCA is to be read in conjunction with the regional analysis of the state of sustainable development in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories supported by the United Nations. The CCA is a living document that will be refreshed annually to reflect evolving trends and integrate new data. Subsequent iterations of the CCA will dig deeper into sociological and anthropological connections to the risks and challenges identified and explore further the pathways for green and inclusive growth in the Pacific.

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Acronyms

AAL	Average Annual Loss
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADO	Asian Development Outlook
AFOLU	Agriculture, Forestry and other Land Use
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
ASF	African Swine Fever
BCG	Bacille Calmette-Guérin
BMI	Body Mass Index
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CBFMP	Community-based Fisheries Management Programme
CBEWS	Community-Based Early Warning System
CCRF	Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
CDC	Cabinet Development Committee
CEACR	Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations
CED	Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CERT	Computer Emergency Response Team
CIM	Community Integrated Management
COP	Conference of the Parties
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRPFMR	Climate-Responsive Public Financial Management Review
CSE	Comprehensive Sexual Education
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DAC	Disaster Advisory Committee
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DLD	Disaster Loss Data
DPT3	Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus
DSSI	Debt Service Suspension Initiative
DV	Domestic Violence
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EGDI	E-Government Development Index
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPC	Electric Power Corporation

ERP	Economic Response Plan
ESP	Education Sector Plan
EVAWG	Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls
FAD	Fishing Aggregation Device
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FAST	Faatuatua I le Atua Samoa ua Tasi
FCS	Food Consumption Scores
FLE	Family Life Education
FY	Fiscal Year
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFDRR	Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HFRSAA	Health Facility Readiness and Service Availability Assessment
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	Human Papilloma Virus
HRRP	Human Rights Protection Party
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IBFWS	Impact Based Forecast and Warning Services
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
ICPED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IDA	International Development Association
IESG	Interagency Essential Services Guide
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IHR	International Human Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOC-UNESCO	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
IPPU	Industrial Processes and Product Use
IPU	Inter Parliamentary Union
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
IMF	International Monetary Fund

IXP	Internet Exchange Point
JAWS	Journalist Association of Samoa
JPSP	Joint Programme on Social Protection
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LERA	Labour and Employment Relations Act
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and others
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LMIC	Lower Middle-Income Country
MCIL	Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour
MCO	Multi-Country Office
MCV	Measles-containing Vaccine
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MESC	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture
MHEWS	Multi-Hazard Early Warning System
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MMR	Measles, Mumps, and Rubella
MINRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MP	Member of Parliament
MtCO ₂ e	Metric tons of Carbon Dioxide equivalent
MVI	Multidimensional Vulnerability Index
MWCSD	Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development
MWAM	Mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
NA	Not Available
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NAP	National Action Plan
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NCD	Non-communicable Disease
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NDIDS	National Digital Identification System
NDMP	National Disaster Management Plan
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NOSC	National Ocean Steering Committee
NMIRF	National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up
NSDS	National Strategy for the Development of Statistics
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
NSS	National Statistical System
NYU	New York University
NZ	New Zealand

NZ\$	New Zealand Dollar
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSI	Online Services Index
PACER	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PEFA	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
PFM	Public Finance Management
PHC	Primary Health Care
PICS	Pacific Islands Climate Services
PICTs	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PILNA	Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PM	Prime Minister
PMC	Pacific Meteorological Council
PSDI	Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative
PSET	Post School Education and Training Program
PTI	Pacific Trade Invest
PTWC	Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
Q	Quarter
RCP	Representative Concentration Pathway
RMNCAH	Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health
RSE	Recognized Seasonal Employer
RSMC	Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre
SAMOA	SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action
SBS	Samoa Bureau of Statistics
SCBS	Senior Citizens Benefits Scheme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDS	Strategy for Development of Samoa
SDPP	Samoa Disability Partnership Programme
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEIA	Socio-Economic Impact Assessment
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SKSI	Samoa Knowledge Society Initiative
SOE	State of Emergency
SOHR	State of Human Rights
SP	Social Protection
SPC	Pacific Community
SPELL	Samoa Primary Education Literacy Level
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environmental Program
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SSLC	Samoa School Leaving Certificate
SST	Sea Surface Temperature
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
STI	Sexually-transmitted infection

SVSG	Samoa Victim Support Group
SWFP	Severe Weather Forecast Programme
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
SWP	Seasonal Workers Program
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UMIC	Upper Middle-Income Country
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime
UNPP	New Zealand – United Nations Pacific Partnership
UNPRAC	UN Regional Anti-Corruption (Project)
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USA	United States of America
USD/US\$	United States Dollar
VAWG	Violence against Women and Girls
VCP	Vaisigano Catchment Project
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WST	Samoaan Tala

Country Profile

Samoa is a lower-middle income country with a high level of human development in the Polynesian region of the Pacific Ocean. The country comprises two main islands (Savai'i and Upolu), two smaller inhabited islands (Apolima and Manono), and six uninhabited islets. The Constitution, which came into effect following independence in 1962, is based on the British Westminster framework of a parliamentary democracy, modified to account for the country's chiefly system (fa'amatai), central to the hierarchical organization of the Samoan society.

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Samoa faces unique social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities, exacerbated by its remote geographical location. Most of the terrain in Samoa consists of coastal plains and rocky, volcanic mountains. Due to its geographical location, the country has an equatorial climate (also known as oceanic tropical climate) and experiences frequent tropical cyclones and heavy rainfall, often accompanied by severe flash flooding, high winds, and storm surge. The high incidence and severity of natural disasters has been disruptive to the development trajectory of the country, causing loss of lives and widespread damage to infrastructure and agriculture, disruptions to trade and tourism flows, and increased food insecurity in the country. Climate change remains a major threat to the country, as it will likely impact the frequency and severity of natural disasters in the region and weather patterns. With 70% of the population living across the nation's low-lying coastal areas¹, climate change also brings the prospect of rising sea levels with severe implications for coastal communities and the local economy.

As of 2020, the estimated total population was 198,410 individuals, with nearly 82% residing in rural areas. Dropping mortality rates, associated with better access to health and nutrition, increased Samoans' life expectancy from 66 to 73 years between 1990 and 2019.² Fertility rates have also declined, yet remain amongst the highest in the region. Besides declining mortality and fertility rates, migration, which is closely related to seasonal employment, has significant implications for Samoan demographics, supply of workers in the local economy, and inflow of remittances. Samoa is one of the PICTs with higher out-migration and lower population growth. Accounting for close to 30% of GDP in 2020, remittances have been an important source of financing and resilience against adverse shocks of different nature, especially among poor households who depend more on them.³

More recently, remittances, in addition to foreign grants, have played an important role in supporting the country's rapid response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Samoa, as of November 2021, continues to be free of active cases. With the adoption of strict border control and other emergency measures, the country was able to successfully avoid the spread of the virus within its borders. This strategy, however, resulted in the near complete shutdown of its tourism

¹ COP23 FIJI UN Climate Change Conference Portal. Fiji Country Profile. <https://cop23.com.fj/samoa/>.

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). 2019. 2019 Revision of World Population Prospects.

³ Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals 2020.

sector resulting in loss of foreign income revenue. In this regard, the continued inflow of remittances into the country has been instrumental to finance imports of food and other essentials. However, the country's reliance on remittances is risky as the pandemic is also disrupting neighbouring economies and the ability of migrants to work. As most of the food products consumed in the country are imported, food security, which was not considered critical for Samoa before the pandemic started (FAO 2018), or at the earlier stages of the pandemic (SEIA 2020) when taxes on selected food items were reduced as part of the stimulus package, is now being considered - next to nutrition security - an important risk to the country (Samoa 2040).

Overall, the impact on the local economy from measures to contain the spread of the virus, and the effects of Samoa's measles outbreak in late 2019, have been significant: real GDP dropped by 2.6% in FY 2019/20, and by 9.2% in FY 2020/21. A weaker domestic economy is pushing Samoans to look for opportunities abroad, where the minimum wage can be as much as 12 times higher than the local minimum wage of three Samoan Tala per hour (US\$1.13). In 2021 alone, around 13,000 Samoans – a number that is equivalent to 56% of the total number of people employed in the national formal sector in the first quarter of 2021 – registered for the Australian Seasonal Worker Program (SWP).⁴ That compares to only 800 applicants with the national registry of job seekers. The large number of people of working age looking for work outside Samoa has important implications for the local economy and labour force, and the population demographics.

Moving forward, the country's ability to recover from the economic effects of the border closure will depend in part on the evolution of the pandemic worldwide, and on the country's ability to safely re-open its borders to foreign visitors and labour migration. Vaccination will be a crucial part of recovery efforts. In this regard, as of December 2021, a total of 116,912 people (95.9% of eligible population) had received the 1st dose of the COVID vaccine, and 103,451 people (84.9% of eligible population) have been fully vaccinated.⁵ Uncertainty around the evolution of the pandemic and its continued impact on the tourism and other sectors poses important questions with respect to the country's ability to finance its development and to face existing and new vulnerabilities the pandemic exposed.

The Government's fiscal response has been relatively successful in mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic on household's income in the early days of the emergency (COVID Impact Assessment). However, there are some emerging signs of economic instability, compounded by limited fiscal space, that would hamper the response if the crisis is prolonged. Consumer prices have surged in recent months, with annual inflation reaching 5.4% in the 12-month periods ending in August 2021.⁶ Public sector debt is projected to reach close to 67% of GDP by 2023. As of 2021, the country's debt remains sustainable, but at high risk of external debt distress. Debt pressures could quickly mount, and the fiscal position deteriorate if the sizeable foreign grants expected by the Government fail to materialize.⁷ This risk increases further if the country is hit by a natural disaster, in the likely scenario that the pandemic will continue to impact the economy of

⁴ According to ILO, citing numbers from the Ministry of Labour.

⁵ Samoa Ministry of Health. Accessed 02 December 2021. <https://www.health.gov.ws/>

⁶ Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS) CPI Update for August 2021 and Central Bank T2-Headline-CPI-August21.

⁷ Samoa IMF Article IV Report, 2021.

Samoa and of its economic partners. Samoa has availed itself of the facilities conceded by the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) to help select countries concentrate their resources on fighting the pandemic and safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of millions of the most vulnerable people. Since it took effect on May 1, 2020, the initiative has delivered more than US\$5Bn in relief to more than 40 eligible countries, including Samoa and three other PICTs.

Samoa sees as imperative the need to (1) diversify the economy to create opportunities of decent work and strengthen the sources of development financing while enhancing climate-resilience; (2) promote and enable a higher degree of labour mobility and labour force participation, especially among women and young people; (3) strengthen governance and improve the efficiency and efficacy of social spending and public service management and delivery, and (4) promote the effective use and access of available, affordable, convenient, quality, and sustainable financial services. Since these structural changes will take time to mature, the country will have to continue to rely heavily on international partnerships and cooperation initiatives to weather this period of extreme vulnerability. It is urgent in this context that the country doubles its efforts to leave no one behind. The current crisis impacts different social groups disproportionately and is expected to increase disparities and reverse years of progress in the fight against poverty and other SDGs in the country. As an illustration, the recent surge in food prices, especially of imported food, will likely have a larger impact on the poorest (bottom quintile) who, on average, spend around 54% of their total expenditures on food. This compares to 25% among the households on the top quintile.⁸ The confluence of recent political and economic crises heightens concerns about the country's fragility.

Key Statistics for Samoa

Population & Demographics	Value	Year
Total population ⁹	198,410	2020
Population, children 0-17	89,620 (45%)	2021
Life expectancy at birth (years)	73.3	2019
Poverty & Inequality		
Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.9/day ¹⁰	0.5%	2021
Poverty headcount ratio, national poverty line	22.7%	2018
Gini Index (0-100)	38.7	2013
Economy		
GDP per capita, US\$ (projection for FY 2020-21) ¹¹	3,672	FY 2020-21
Real GDP growth	-9.2%	2020
Human Development		
Human Development Index ranking (out of 189 countries) ¹²	111	2019
Human Development Index value	0.715	2019

⁸ Samoa Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2018 (HIES 2018).

⁹ Source: World Development Indicators (2021). World Bank Group.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ IMF 2021 Article IV Consultation Report.

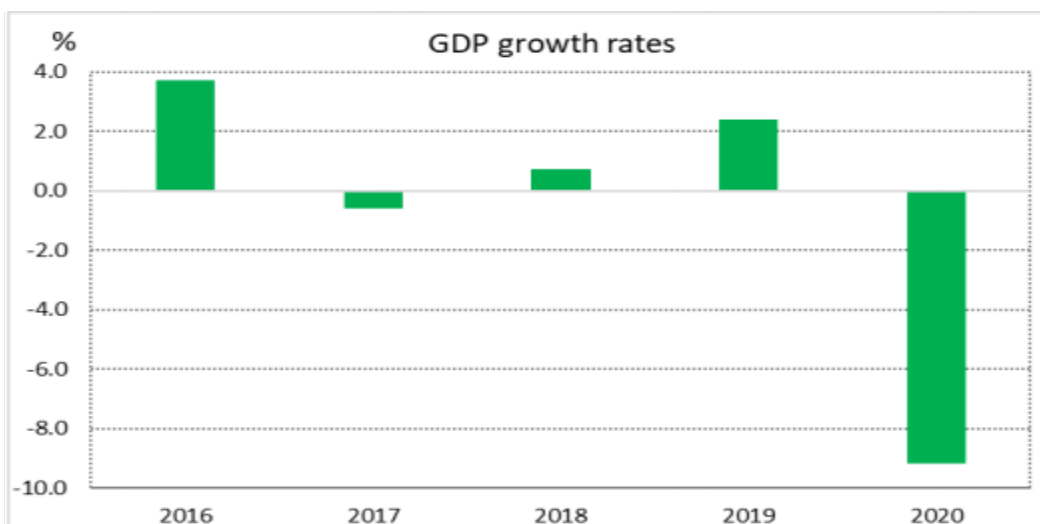
¹² United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report 2020.

1. Country Context

1.1 Economic Situation Analysis

Samoa's GDP shrank in real terms by 9.2% during 2020, the largest annual drop ever recorded since the start of the GDP data series (Figure 1.1). GDP for 2020 at current market prices was WST 2,053.7 million (US\$766.8 million), decreasing in nominal terms by 8.3% compared to the WST 2,244.2 million (US\$838 million) recorded in 2019.¹³ At this level, GDP per capita was WST 10,157 (US\$3,793). By the end of 2020 the economy has been in decline for five consecutive quarters (starting from Q4, 2019).

Figure 1.1: Samoa's Real GDP growth rates, 2016-2020



Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS)

Real GDP contracted by 8.1% in FY 2020/21 (July 2020 to June 2021). Remittance inflows also dropped recently but have proven resilient and helped moderate adverse impacts of the crisis and weak domestic demand under the State of Emergency (SOE). Severe floods around the time of the festive season (December 2020) have dealt another blow to the economy costing (based on the authorities' estimate) at least 1½ percent of GDP.¹⁴ However, most social restrictions were lifted in December 2020, stimulating household consumption. A supplementary budget in December 2020 extended some of the stimulus measures.

Economic recovery is forecast for 2022, only after full vaccine coverage is achieved and international travellers return in significant numbers. By then, Samoa will have had no international tourists for 2 years in a row (since March 2020). At present Samoan economy is

¹³ Q4 2020 GDP Report, SBS.

¹⁴ IMF Samoa Article IV Report 2021 (March 2021).

expected to grow at 3.1% in 2022.¹⁵ Given the scarring effects of the pandemic, it will take several years for the economy to reach the pre-COVID level of real GDP. The trajectory to full recovery will depend significantly on the pace of tourism restoration and the capacity of local tourism operators to re-establish pre-COVID-19 hospitality services, transport and infrastructure.¹⁶ The competition for tourists is expected to be intense and will largely depend on the tourism sector situation in other competing Pacific countries. For instance, Fiji plans to open borders to tourists starting December 1, 2021, Cook Islands will be opening borders on January 13, 2022. To note that Samoa with 7.8%, is the fourth touristic market of the Pacific, after Fiji (42% of the market share) French Polynesia (10%) and Cook Islands (8.1%).

Despite significant loss of economic output, Samoa has done remarkably well in terms of fiscal and current account positions. It recorded a fiscal surplus of 6.2% of GDP in FY 2020 as international grant assistance complemented domestic tax receipts that exceeded expectations, and as underspending of the capital budget saw capital expenditure plunge by 47.2%. The resulting avoidance of debt financing reduced outstanding Government debt to the equivalent of 46.3% of GDP by the end of FY 2020.¹⁷ A fiscal deficit equal to 3.1% of GDP in FY 2021 due to continued stimulus measures and weakness in tax receipts was offset by a rapid increase in grant financing from development partners.

The current account surplus narrowed to 1.2% of GDP in FY 2020 as a 20.4% fall in tourism receipts and other service exports dwarfed a 6.7% decline in goods imports. Despite robust remittances in FY 2021, the current account is forecast to fall into a deficit equal to 6.4% of GDP because of increased imports to supply construction and a complete absence of tourism receipts. Remittances are expected to moderate from recent highs in FY 2022,¹⁸ with the current account deficit projected widening to 10.4% of GDP.

Economic decline is likely to disproportionately affect the youth sub-population that significantly contributes to the labour workforce primarily engaging in agriculture and informal economic activities that alone employ 68% of the total labour force. The Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS 2016/17 – 19/20) and the SNAP (Samoa National Action Plan on youth employment) detailed the inclusion of vulnerable groups in broadened economic opportunities and resilience through private sector investments, enhanced employability amongst young people (defined as the cohorts between 15 and 29 years) through better alignment of skills and labour market demands and promotion of youth employment opportunities through the development of village economies.

¹⁵ ADB Asian Development Outlook (April 2021).

¹⁶ Most resorts have closed for most of the last two years, and many have not been able to retain trained staff. The state of beach fale* on the south coast is poor and not maintained, main in-bound tour operators have closed and sold their fleet of tour buses.

¹⁷ ADB Asian Economic Outlook (April 2021).

¹⁸ Remittances so far remain strong in 2021, with remittances in Q1, 2021 amounting to \$133 million, compared to \$135.7 million in Q1, 2020 (the year of 2020 saw a record volume of remittances).

* A beach fale is a simple thatched hut in Samoa. Beach fale are also common in other parts of Polynesia. They have become popular in tourism as a low budget accommodation situated by the coast, built with a few posts, no walls and a thatched roof with a round or oval shape.

Downside risks to the economic outlook remain. As mentioned in the ADB April 2021 Asian Development Outlook (ADO) Report, under-execution and premature withdrawal of the already limited economic stimulus measures to the private sector could impede the pace and durability of the economic recovery and strain financial stability. The recovery path depends on the effective rollout of the vaccines and resumption of private sector activities. Premature opening of the border poses the threat of a potential domestic outbreak of COVID-19, particularly in the context of the recent Delta variant outbreak in New Zealand, affecting Pacific Islanders of Samoan descent in the city of Auckland.¹⁹ High vulnerability to natural disasters (such as seasonal cyclones) continues to threaten the economy, potentially causing widespread damage to an economy already weakened by Covid-19 impacts. However, Samoa enjoys the business-friendliest environment and most transparent private sector operation scene in the PICTs, with several studies showing that economic activity is less cumbersome in Samoa because of the facility of accessing credit, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, dealing with construction permits or contracting electricity.

¹⁹ With few weeks remaining in 2021 at the time of drafting this Assessment, it appears that the borders will not open to any significant degree until 2022. The variant Omicron has posed yet another concern on the health horizon.

1.2 Political and Institutional Analysis

Samoa was the first country in the Pacific region to become independent in 1962. Its political system is based on the Westminster model of a parliamentary democracy, which exists alongside the fa'amatai or the chiefly system of traditional governance. The Head of State has ceremonial powers and exercises duties on the advice of the Head of Government, i.e., the Prime Minister (PM), and/or the Cabinet. The Head of State is appointed by the Legislative Assembly on the recommendation of the parties in Government for a maximum of two 5-year terms. The Prime Minister derives his/her legitimacy from the confidence of the majority of the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly is a unicameral legislature consisting of 51 seats representing each constituency and has a 5-year parliamentary term. A PM and 8-12 Cabinet Ministers lead the Government. Cabinet Ministers are responsible for governing 15 Government ministries and 19 Government corporations.

Local government is based on village councils (fono) made up of chiefs (matai), women's committees (Komiti o Tina ma Tamaita'i) and associations of untitled men (aumaga). Samoa has more than 275 local governments, of which 192 are traditional villages (nu'u), 48 are sub-villages (pitonu'u) of traditional villages, and 35 are non-traditional villages. There is no devolution of fiscal and administrative power from the Government to the village councils. Built on the principles of mutuality, reciprocity, communal social protection, and security, the fa'amatai system of governance is seen as important for the country's peace and stability.²⁰ Samoa has a plural legal system with the coexistence of the body of common law exercised in the civil and criminal courts, and customary law exercised in the Lands and Titles Courts and fono. Chapter 4 provides a human rights-based analysis of the parallel legal system and its implications.

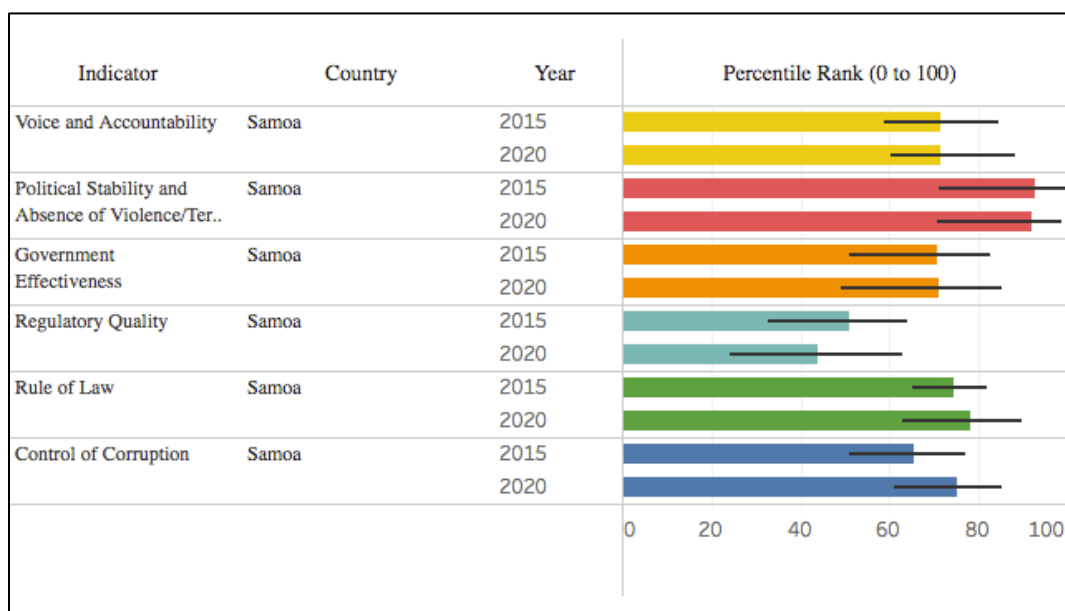
According to the 2020 Samoa Voluntary National Review (VNR), 22% of registered matai in Samoa are women, but a lower percentage are actively involved in decision making at the village level. Although strong women leadership exists in some villages, the traditional village system including the local government councils, church leadership, school management and community-based organizations present significant barriers to women's access and participation in decision-making. Within the traditional village setting, a woman's status and her access to and control over resources are mostly determined by birth order and marital status in the family. High status and respect are given to the eldest female of the family, with the status of the male family member's wife much lower than that of his sister or their daughter.

Women representation in Parliament is also low by any standard. Only matai title holders are eligible to run for elections, thus the lower share of female to male matais presents a significant barrier to closing the gender gap in political participation. A 2013 Constitutional Amendment introduced a 10% quota for women Members of Parliament (MPs). After the results of the November 2021 by-elections, and subsequent decisions to nominate two women, there are currently six female MPs in Parliament, or 11.3% of the total fifty-three members, of which three are members of the Government (one as Prime Minister and two as Cabinet Ministers: the first female Minister of Finance and Minister of Justice).

²⁰ Samoa Voluntary National Review 2020.

Among the six dimensions of governance reported by Worldwide Governance Indicators, Samoa ranked the lowest in regulatory quality and the highest in political stability and absence of violence/terrorism in 2020 (Figure 1.2). The 2021 election dispute following the controversial constitutional amendments in late 2020 are challenging the perception of political stability in the country.

Figure 1.2: Samoa's Worldwide Governance Indicators



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators.

Indeed, in 2020, the passage of three constitutional amendments - the Land and Titles Act, the Judicature Act, and the Constitutional Amendment Act - generated significant opposition and gave rise to the establishment of the Faatuatua I le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST) party that stood in opposition to the Human Rights Protection Party (HRRP), which had been the governing power for close to four decades until then.

On April 9, 2021, Samoa held general elections in line with the 5-year electoral cycle of Parliament. The initial results of the election provided no clear electoral majority. The events that unfolded since election day and after July 23, 2021, when the Court of Appeal declared FAST to be the new Government, have highlighted opportunities for the country to strengthen the observance of the rule of law.

First, the contested interpretation of Article 44 of the Constitution which provides for a Temporary Special Measure of a floating 10% of seats for female parliamentarians highlighted the need for a more robust legislative drafting process and suggested the need to conduct a thorough constitutional review in eliminating legal uncertainties (and inequities). Second, controversial declarations by the country's Head of State to void election results and call for a snap election

following an electoral deadlock, and to postpone the first parliamentary meeting beyond the timeframe prescribed by the Constitution brought into light questions regarding the scope and source of the Head of State's legal authority. There is a need to clarify relevant constitutional provisions or applicable conventions in this regard.

The number and complexity of the cases arising from the election significantly delayed the formation of the Government and the sitting of Parliament. A court ruling in July 2021 enabled the FAST party to form a government. However, delays in opening the new Parliament prevented the country from passing a national budget before the previous budget had elapsed. This forced the Government to operate on emergency provisions until September 2021 when the full new Parliament was finally sworn in, and a new national budget could be voted.

In response to the global coronavirus pandemic, the country has a State of Emergency (SOE) in operation since March 21, 2020. The key provision has been to significantly restrict entry into Samoa, with some restrictions also placed on local activities. The provisions of the SoE have been periodically revised and renewed by Cabinet upon the advice of the Disaster Advisory Committee (DAC). The SoE aims to give the Government additional flexibility in managing the budget to effectively respond to the socio-economic impact of the crisis.

According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators, Samoa ranked in the 75th percentile in control of corruption among all countries in 2020 (see [Figure 1.2](#)). In absolute terms, the indicator for control of corruption, which varies between -2.5 to +2.5 (with higher values corresponding to better governance), was 0.69 to Samoa in 2020. This means that Samoa has room for improving its control of corruption.

Samoa was the first Small Island Developing State to accede to the United Nations Convention against corruption (UNCAC). Having ratified the Convention in 2018, Samoa was in the process of completing its first review cycle of the Convention in 2019/2020 according to the 2019 Secretariat report. According to the VNR 2020, the fact that Samoa does not currently monitor data on public sector corruption including incidences of official bribery constitutes an important breach of the UNCAC. In general, Small Island States encounter difficulties with the lack of staff and resources dedicated to anti-corruption matters that tend to lead to ad hoc handling of these issues. Capacity building workshops for Parliamentarians and the Office of the Legislative Assembly staff have been conducted under the UNDP-UNODC "UN Regional Anti-Corruption" (UNPRAC) Project through the Strengthening Legislatures in the Pacific Project.²¹ Samoa has also established the Samoa Integrity Organisation Network (SION) co-led by the country's NHRI and the Samoa Audit Office. SION is mandated to strengthen integrity and prevent and control corruption and related improprieties or irregularities (UPR Report 2020).

The National Digital Identification System (NDIDS), which was first announced in 2018, aims at providing a unique and digital legal identity to the citizens/residents of Samoa, and will replace the existing civil registration system. The development of a Population Registry will centralize data and become a source for integrated E-Systems. Furthermore, the implementation of the

²¹ UNODC's 2021 Country Report on Samoa, page 15.

NDIDS would also contribute to address risks of corruption and money laundering and to safeguard financial stability.²² In late 2020, the Government endorsed a 3-year Strategic implementation plan for the NDIDS. However, it is still at its initial stages as the Government has faced difficulties in procuring technical assistance to upgrade existing civil registration systems and satisfy other requirements established by the World Bank. Capacity building and awareness programs have commenced in preparation for the establishment of the NDIDS but the measles outbreak and the COVID crisis, coupled with the political situation arising from the election, are likely to bring further delays to the implementation process.

Samoa ranks 21 out 180 countries in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index. As is the case in many SIDs, Samoa's media landscape is limited: with the Samoa Observer being the only daily news periodical, and Radio Polynesia running a sizable proportion of local radio stations, the news-consuming public has few choices of formal media sources and is not exposed to a broad diversity of opinions.²³ A significant constraint on reporting standards in Samoa is the lack of access to formal professional and specialised training for journalists; the understanding of what constitutes a fair and balanced story departs from best practice in the industry.²⁴ A Media Council was established under the Media Council Act 2015 and is overseen by the Journalists Association of Samoa (JAWS). It has issued a new Code of Conduct that guides the work of the local media industry, a welcome step that should be followed by many more to improve the ethical standards, capacities and specialisation of journalists in Samoa.

The irruption of social media has offered opportunities but also challenges with respect to the dissemination of information to the public. On the one hand, it has been a useful vehicle to inform the public and spread community outreach messages during the pandemic (e.g., the Spotlight Initiative - 16 days of healing campaign to Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and helplines via Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG) and Faataua Le Ola (FLO)). On the other hand, the use of social media platforms to spread misinformation and increase "information pollution", especially around the 2021 election, the COVID pandemic, and the measles outbreak, has undermined the country's ability to build consensus and respond effectively to these matters.

Following the first Client Satisfaction Survey carried out by the Public Service Commission in 2014, the Public Administration Sector Coordination Division conducted the second Government Service Delivery Survey in 2017. Both reports noted the lack of funding, low participation and engagement from respondents, and personnel's limited capacity as a challenge in conducting the survey and handling and analysing data collected. They also both noted as a challenge in evaluating service delivery, the limited knowledge/understanding of government services among respondents, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of public services. Indeed, strengthening mechanisms for public service information dissemination and feedback had been among the recommendations of the 2014 survey report. The 2017 survey indicated a low level of satisfaction among beneficiaries in accessing quality public service in relation to the competency of staff and

²² Samoa IMF Article IV Report, 2021.

²³ Samoa Law Reform Commission, Media Regulation Report 2010-2012, at 2.6.

²⁴ Ibid, at 2.7.

receiving correct information. Indeed, the report noted an average of 37% positive feedback versus 44% negative feedback in all five areas – phone, in person, website, mail, and email - of service delivery for competency of staff and receiving the correct information.

Digitalization provides opportunities to improve access to and quality of public service delivery. According to the UN E-Government survey 2020, Samoa's E-government Development Index (EGDI) positions the country in 149 out of 190 countries worldwide, among the EGDI middle group, below Kiribati and above Tuvalu in Oceania. The Online Services Index (OSI) places the country among the lowest levels of the middle OSI group, below countries like Belize, Palau, and Madagascar and just above countries like Cuba and Myanmar. The report notes that Samoa belongs to a group of countries that underperform in online services delivery despite having high-level human development, and that this could be the result of unevenly developed telecommunications infrastructure.

While the installation of a submarine fibre-optic cable (Manatua Consortium) connecting Samoa, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, and Niue should improve broadband connectivity in the country, the report notes the need to further address damage and disruption risks associated the likelihood of natural disasters in the region. Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are used to deliver some services to residents in Samoa.²⁵ Sound ICT infrastructure (specifically, Internet Exchange Point (IXP) and datacentre) will also be instrumental for the functioning of the NDIDS, which requires the exchange of data in real time in a secure and reliable way. The country has introduced measures and policies aimed at encouraging a greater competition in the ICT sector to improve options and affordability of services, but the small size of the Samoa's market remains a structural obstacle.

In October 2021, Samoa launched the Digital Readiness Assessment tool to assist the Government with taking stock of their digital transformation pathway and to identify priorities and gaps across Government, business ecosystem, infrastructure, the regulatory environment, and human capacity. At the same time, the country has kickstarted the ICT Policy Development to strengthen capacity of Government Information Technology experts and policy makers in the country. This is in addition to the digital related initiatives, the Digital Government Platform, Digital Transformation Authority Project, and the National Computer Emergency Response Term for Samoa (SAM CERT) currently in progress.

Samoa has made ongoing progress in reforming its Public Finance Management (PFM) systems in the last 15 years. The 2019 IMF Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment of the national PFM indicates a varied performance across the seven pillars of the 2016 PEFA framework but overall, a visible and continued improvement in PFM processes. In recent years, PFM reforms have concentrated on introducing consistent standards to all line ministries to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in managing the collection and expenditure of funds, and in ensuring policy cohesion between planning and budgetary processes.

²⁵ An example is the Online Samoa Company Registry, which provides information to the public on companies operating in Samoa on the webpage of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labour.

In October 2020, the IMF, as requested by local authorities, undertook the first pilot Climate Responsive PFM Review (CRPFMR) by using the newly developed Climate Responsive Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Framework.²⁶ The goal was to assess the country's PFM capacity to implement its programs and achieve its objectives for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increasing resiliency to climate-change, in accordance with the country's ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement. The report notes among other aspects, the absence of the use of a methodology to identify climate-change related expenditure, making it difficult to target and focus on climate-change activities across Government when budget development processes are being undertaken. The report further indicates that the budget circular does not provide guidance to budgetary units on how to identify climate-change expenditure and set climate-change expenditure targets. Without the proper identification of expenditure and targets, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms cannot be properly implemented in assessing the impact of climate-change programs.

As Samoa looks at adopting gender responsive budget practices and improving efficiency in social spending, the CRPFMR provides valuable lessons on how to improve Samoa's PFM systems and processes to support the country in efficiently achieving its gender targets and other sustainable development goals. A sounder PFM system, which can better allocate and prioritize spending to result-based programmes, would also contribute to widen the potential sources of development finance to the country associated, for instance, with thematic financing (e.g., blue bonds). Increasing resources to support quality data collection and analysis will be instrumental to this process.

Indeed, while Samoa recognizes the importance of gender equality for achieving goals of sustainable economic and social development, the Samoa National Policy for Gender Equality 2016-2020 notes that there are still gaps in accountability mechanisms, limited technical capacity to do gender analysis, gender mainstreaming and prepare gender responsive budgets, neither are there clear strategies to address gender issues can be addressed within the different sectors.²⁷

The Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) has made commitments to integrate gender across sectors through institutional mechanisms. These commitments are linked to changes in legislation and policy that require central and line ministries to implement gender-responsive development actions. This has been translated into systems strengthening processes and the development of new policies such as the National Policy on Gender Equality and Rights of Women and Girls, the National Policy on Family Safety - Elimination of Family violence, and the National policy on Inclusive Governance.

Although Samoa is considered a peaceful, stable, and secure society, there are alarming levels of violence, especially within the domestic realm, impacting mostly women and children. Violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and against persons with disabilities has also been recorded. Over 90% of children aged 1 to 14 experience some form of

²⁶ Samoa PEFA Assessment of Climate Responsive Public Financial Management, February 2021.

²⁷ Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2016), Samoa National Policy for Gender Equality, 2016-2020 <https://www.mwcsd.gov.ws/images/2017/Documents/DFSD/Samoa-gender-policy.pdf>.

violent discipline, with 82% experiencing physical punishment and 20% severe physical punishment.²⁸ According to the 2018 State of Human Rights Report “National Public Inquiry into Family Violence”, based on village consultations, most Samoans see physical violence/discipline as a common approach to raise children that it is commonly justified by the Fa'asamoa.

The report further points that intimate partner violence is significant with 86% of women reported to have been subjected to kicking, punching, slapping, causing bodily harm using a hard object (rock, stick, tree trunk, hose, etc.). Other groups also identified as being particularly vulnerable and at risk of family violence included persons with disabilities, fa'afafine²⁹ and persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, with reports that young boys showing feminine traits are often subjected to severe violence at the hands of their own families. Whereas a number of PICTs have recently decriminalized same-sex relationships among consenting adults and introduced new laws to counter discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people in employment and education, Samoa is among those that still criminalize consenting relationships between adults of the same sex – a fundamental human rights violation.³⁰

The national inquiry into family violence also reports that sexual abuse of children has reached ‘epidemic’ proportions in Samoa.³¹ The rate of homicide reported by the Samoa Ministry of Police was at 6.5 per 100,000 in 2018 and close to double the rate in 2017 (3.5 per 100,000). Since the start of the SOE, overall crime rates have gone up sharply by 64%, according to the latest report by the Ministry, also noting a sharp increase in reports of domestic violence (33%) and of crimes against a person such as assault and insulting words (36%). Indeed, data from the Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG) shows an increase of 48% of domestic violence cases reported for the months of March and April between 2019 and 2020.

In 2020, Samoa’s first National Child Care and Protection Policy and the accompanying multi-sectoral National Action Plan 2020-2030 was finalized and endorsed by the Cabinet. The Policy outlines the mandate of the MWCSO in leading the development of child protection, violence prevention, early intervention, and response services, and emphasises a multi-sectoral approach with clear roles and responsibilities for the social welfare, health, education, and justice sectors. The MWCSO's sector plan 2021-2026 includes childcare and protection as a priority under social development and the MWCSO's ministerial strategic plan 2021-2026 indicates childcare and protection as a key outcome area. Children are also a priority group in the National Policy on Family Safety: Elimination of Family Violence 2021-2031, as well as the National Policy on Gender Equality and Rights of Women and Girls 2021-2031, while the National Disability Policy

²⁸ Samoa Demographic and Health Survey- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (DHS-MICS) 2019-20.

²⁹Fa'afafine is a traditional third-gender or non-binary role in Samoa, American Samoa, and the Samoan diaspora. It is a recognized gender role in traditional Samoan society, and an integral part of Samoan culture. Fa'afafine are assigned male at birth and embody both masculine and feminine gender traits in a way unique to Polynesia. The traditional role of a fa'afafine is to act like a mother, helping with cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc. https://lgta.fandom.com/wiki/LGBTQA_Wiki

³⁰ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). 10 February 2018. Human Rights in the Pacific: Navigating New Challenges with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lecture by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein).

³¹ Ombudsman & NHRI (2018) National Inquiry Report into Family Violence.

2021-2031 asks Government and civil society actors to prioritize the welfare of children with disabilities.

With the start of the Samoa Spotlight Initiative Country Programme in January 2020, Samoa put forward a roadmap to advance ending violence against women and girls' interventions alongside existing work underway by service providers, civil society, government partners and regional programmes such as the Pacific Partnership to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG). The Spotlight Initiative also elevated resource support for the NHRI's Village Family Safety Committee pilot project, which establishes a Village Safety Committee in six villages and promotes favourable social norms in response to the 2018 NHRI recommendations. The Pacific Partnership to EVAWG has enabled the development and launch in February 2021 of the Samoa Interagency Essential Services Guide (IESG)³² for Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Child protection cases under the MWCSD, a critical step towards the delivery of safe and quality services to adults and children violence survivors.³³

According to the VNR 2020, the Government of Samoa has introduced and established legislation, institutions, programmes, and initiatives to address human rights violations in particular violence against women. Chapter 4 provides an overview of Samoa's human rights commitments under international normal and standards.

³² The IESG primarily focuses on the inter-agency aspects of the response process and provides front-line workers with guidance on their roles and responsibilities in reporting and responding to cases of victims in need of protection.

³³ Samoa Spotlight Initiative Interim Annual Report 2020.

1.3 Samoa's Multi-dimensional Vulnerability

Samoa's economic and social developments should not be viewed outside of the development context faced by Small Island Development States (SIDS), including Pacific SIDS to which the country belongs. As highlighted in the recent work by SDSN, "SIDS face a unique set of vulnerabilities which impede their ability to achieve sustainable development. Structural factors, including their size, remoteness, limited resource base, market size, very high exposure to climate risks and natural disasters which impact socio economic outcomes and their ability to achieve the SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified those vulnerabilities with many SIDS countries³⁴ being particularly affected by the drop in international tourism and travels and international remittances."³⁵

The vulnerabilities of SIDS, including those faced by Samoa, affect their ability to achieve the SDGs. Those vulnerabilities encompass economic vulnerabilities, structural/geographical development vulnerabilities and exposure to climate risks and natural disasters (i.e., environmental vulnerabilities). The recent SDSN analysis has clearly shown that countries with high structural vulnerabilities (shown by a high Multi-dimensional Vulnerability Index [MVI]) tend to perform worse on the SDG Index and other SDG outcomes, including extreme poverty, life expectancy and subjective well-being. According to the World Risk Report 2020, Samoa has a high vulnerability coupled with limited coping and adaptive capacity.

Small Island Developing States include some of the world's most remote countries that share a similar set of challenges, including susceptibility to natural disasters, limited resources and dependence on international trade. Four of the 10 most environmentally vulnerable countries are SIDS, according to the 2020 Environmental Vulnerability Index. On average, 13% of Pacific SIDS' land lies below 5 meters above sea level, highlighting their vulnerability to rising seas. In Kiribati and Tuvalu, 99% of land lies below 5 meters above sea level.

Many SIDS have built strong service economies. The service sector accounted for over 70% of SIDS' GDP in 2019, compared with 66% in 2005. On average, two in three people work in services in the island economies, and three in four women, often in jobs related to tourism.³⁶ In the agriculture sector, women represent 52% of the labour force in SIDS, contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation and are agents of change for climate-resilient food systems. However, inequalities exist in SIDS' labour markets, as women are more likely to be unemployed than men, and women's labour force participation is significantly lower, on average 53%, compared with

³⁴ Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a distinct group of 38 countries and 20 territories (non-UN Members) characterized by certain common inherent characteristics. The list of SIDS is the one reported by the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN- OHRLLS) and is available at <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-sids>.

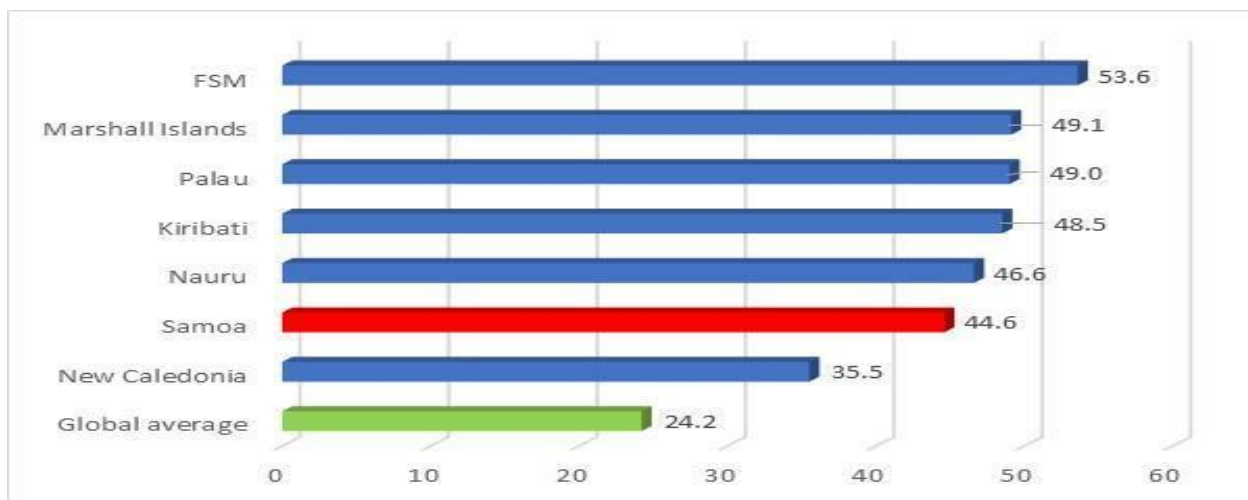
³⁵ SDSN Working Paper "The Decade of Action and Small Island Development States: Measuring and Addressing SIDS' Vulnerabilities to Accelerate SDG Progress" (July 12, 2021).

³⁶ This landscape may have changed for many SIDS, in large part due to the impact of COVID 19 where tourism sector has collapsed.

72% for men. In businesses, female participation in ownership exceeds the world average in most SIDS.³⁷

The Gender Inequality Index for 2019 ranked most SIDS better than the world average and all of them better than Least Developed Countries' average. However, many inequalities remain. Inequalities exist in SIDS' labour markets, as women are more likely to be unemployed than men, and women's labour force participation is significantly lower, on average 53%, compared with 72% for men. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), by January 2021, SIDS had not yet achieved a representation of women according to international standards in their national parliaments. Only 7.5% women are national legislators. In addition, cases of gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls has been high in several SIDS, particularly in the Pacific.³⁸ According to the SDSN analysis, Samoa is one of the 30 most vulnerable countries in the MVI *economic* dimension, among the 195 countries for which the index is computed. Samoa's economic MVI score of 44.6 is almost double that of the global average value of 24.2 and is not far from the scores of other Pacific SIDS which are in the Top-30 most economically vulnerable countries in the world, with the Federated States of Micronesia having the highest score of 53.6 (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Samoa's Economic MVI score vs. global average and selected Pacific SIDS



Source: Prepared by the UN RCO based on the SDSN data.

Samoa is also among the Top-30 most vulnerable countries in the MVI *environmental* dimension.³⁹ Its MVI environmental score is 3 times the global average, and among other Pacific SIDS in the

³⁷ UNCTAD. Small island developing states face uphill battle in COVID-19 recovery.

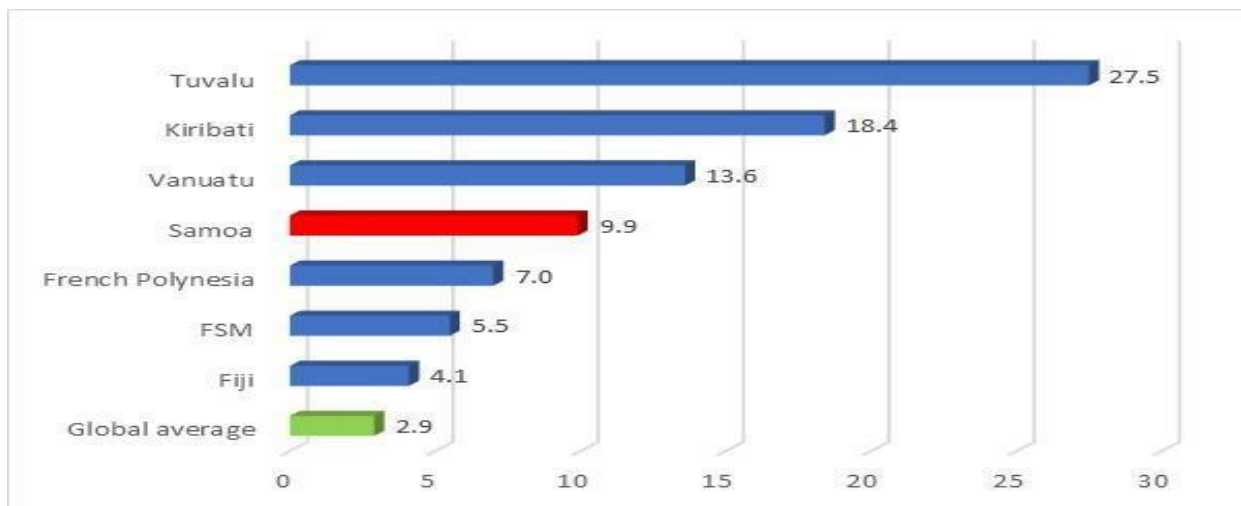
<https://unctad.org/news/small-island-developing-states-face-uphill-battle-covid-19-recovery> .

³⁸ <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/pacific-support/news/detail/12-12-2017-who-supports-the-end-of-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-pacific>.

³⁹ The environmental dimension includes six factors related to a country's vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change. Both the frequency and severity of natural disasters are considered. The index factors distinguish between hydrometeorological disasters (e.g., drought, flood, storm, and extreme temperature, among others) and seismic

top-30 country list it exceeds that of Fiji (4.1), FSM (5.5) and French Polynesia (7.0). However, several Pacific SIDS have even higher environmental vulnerability scores (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4: Samoa's Environmental MVI score vs. global average and selected Pacific SIDS



Source: Prepared by the UN RCO based on the SDSN data.

The only MVI dimension where Samoa has barely escaped the top-30 most vulnerable country list is structural development/geographical dimension. However, that does equate to a strong performance on this front. In fact, Samoa's MVI structural vulnerability score of 57.3 is 18.4% above the global average of 48.4, and only 7.6% lower than the score for Kiribati (62.0), which is the 30th country in the world on this dimension.

This MVI analysis for Samoa should not be interpreted as meaning that the country is facing an irreversible situation. It only places more emphasis on the fact that Samoa as a Pacific SIDS shares many vulnerabilities with its neighbouring Pacific countries, and that in this context the right policy choices and prioritization of development objectives are even more important for the nation to make progress towards achieving the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs. It also means that the country needs to be part of a conversation on global technical and financial solutions needed by the Pacific region, even more so now, in the context of the COVID-19 recovery.⁴⁰

disasters (e.g., earthquakes and volcanic activity). As a proxy of vulnerability to sea-level rise the percentage of land areas where elevation is below 5 meters is included. More detail can be found in the SDSN paper.

⁴⁰ As the SDSN paper rightly puts it, "Traditional as well as innovative financing mechanisms and solutions, insurance and guarantee mechanisms, Official development Assistance (ODA), debt relief and compensation schemes (among others) can be leveraged to address different types of vulnerabilities. International financing institutions, including the IMF and Multilateral Development Banks can play a key role in supporting SDG investments and infrastructure in SIDS. Government capacities, long-term development pathways, universal access to digital technologies and sound management of the global commons, including oceans, are key for long-term sustainable development of SIDS."

2. Samoa’s Progress towards 2030 Agenda

2.1 Overview of Samoa SDG Performance

Samoa’s progress towards achieving SDG targets has been unequal across SDG areas. Samoa’s SDG Dashboard shows uneven performances (see [Figure 2.1](#)). While the country has already achieved or is on track of achieving several goals (e.g., on access to education and climate action), it faces significant challenges in attaining others, where progress is stagnant. In some areas the measurement of progress itself faces major challenges for lack of reliable data.

[Figure 2.1](#): Samoa SDG Dashboard – Levels and Trends



Source: 2021 Sustainable Development Report

The interpretation of the progress becomes more complex for specific indicators *within* a given Sustainable Development Goal. For instance, in the SDG 2 “Zero hunger” the country has done remarkably well tackling undernourishment and improving anthropometric indicators (wasting and stunting) for children under age 5 (see [Figure 2.2](#)). At the same time, the prevalence of obesity remains at an extremely high level of 47.3%, and no progress has been made in improving the situation as shown by this indicator. As a result, the entire SDG 2 is marked as an area with “major challenges”, as per the previous Figure.

Figure 2.2: Samoa’s Progress in Achieving Targets under SDG 2 “Zero Hunger”

Prevalence of undernourishment (%)	2.5	2018	●	↑
Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age (%)	4.9	2014	●	↑
Prevalence of wasting in children under 5 years of age (%)	3.9	2014	●	↑
Prevalence of obesity, BMI ≥ 30 (% of adult population)	47.3	2016	●	↓
Human Trophic Level (best 2–3 worst)	2.3	2017	●	→
Cereal yield (tonnes per hectare of harvested land)	NA	NA	●	●
Sustainable Nitrogen Management Index (best 0–1.41 worst)	1.0	2015	●	→
Exports of hazardous pesticides (tonnes per million population)	0.0	2018	●	●

Source: 2021 Sustainable Development Report

Keeping these complexities in mind, a brief summary of the evolution of each SDG is offered below. Samoa has benefited from the 2nd Voluntary National Review (VNR) process that took place in summer 2020. The main messages from the 2nd Samoa VNR Report relate to progress and challenges in achieving the goals. The COVID-19 context may have since significantly undermined or put on hold progress in many areas of work. At present, the evidence base is insufficient to determine the impacts. Wherever possible, potential effects have been factored in, with the assistance of analytics like the findings from the recent 2021 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA).

SDG 1: No Poverty



As highlighted in the 2nd VNR report, Samoa's progress on SDG1 has been mixed. While data shows lack of progress on the poverty targets between 2013 and 2018,⁴¹ there is good progress on access to basic and essential services. Samoa has also embarked, under the UN Joint Program on Social Protection (JPSP) since 2020, to strengthen social protection floors for the most vulnerable. To date Samoa registers a low formal SP coverage rate of 21.1% and lags behind other Pacific countries, including Cook Islands (86.3%), Fiji (58.9%) and Vanuatu (57.4%).⁴² Samoa has also achieved progress as shown by indicators related to disaster resilience and risk reduction (1.5.3 and 1.5.4). Vulnerability to the negative impacts of more frequent disaster events remains a structural challenge. According to the Samoa Hardship and Poverty Study, women working in the subsistence agriculture sector (particularly in North West Upolu) are the most vulnerable societal group in the country. Poverty and hardship are exceptionally high among the unemployed and those working in the informal sector (including unpaid family and community work, subsistence production and other household duties) and are considerably lower amongst the self-employed. Interestingly, those in the informal sector in Savai'i are significantly better off than their counterparts in the informal sector in other regions. This possibly reflects greater sustainability in families and communities reliant on agriculture for livelihoods in rural areas.

The progress on wellbeing is being threatened by the COVID-19 context, given the evaporation of tourism and the overall economic downturn. According to the SEIA for Samoa, based on the data collected between August and October 2020, nearly 11% of the households across Samoa had at least one member who lost their job due to measures related to COVID-19.⁴³ The job losses were distributed uniformly across the formal and informal sector and had varying impact on household income. However, most of the households only witnessed a slight or moderate decrease in income thanks to the Government's stimulus measures in combination with the population's reliance on remittances and subsistence agriculture – and its general resilience. As a result of COVID-19, household resources are dwindling affecting all family members, but with gender differentials. Since the SOE, both women and men in Samoa are experiencing changes in household resources, but not equally. For instance, more women than men noted a drop in income from jobs, other family businesses, farming and fishing, and support from family and friends. Men, on the other hand, noted larger drops on food from farming or fishing, income from properties and savings, and remittances.

⁴¹ In Samoa, it has always been recognized that extreme poverty and hunger do not exist in the form envisaged in the MDGs and SDGs. Hence, in addressing SDG1, Samoa in its national development strategy is looking at accelerating sustainable development and broadening opportunities for all through delivering on all its key priority economic, social, infrastructure and environment outcomes.

⁴² ILO World Social Protection Report 2020-2022.

⁴³ Samoa SEIA Report, July 2021. Nearly one in every five households was headed by a female (20% of all households); in Apia Urban Area, 23% of households were headed by women, compared to 19% in Savai'i and 20% in North-West Upolu.

SDG 2: Zero Hunger



Extreme hunger and undernourishment are seldom found in Samoa, but nutrition security and food quality are nonetheless a concern. One in five people are considered moderately food insecure with 3.4% of people considered severely food insecure.⁴⁴ WHO reports register low levels of stunting and wasting compared to other Pacific countries. Agriculture productivity is improving, including a growing proportion of small-scale farmers engaging in sustainable organic commercial farming, often led by women farmer organizations.⁴⁵ However, agriculture and fisheries sectors remain vulnerable due to the impact from adverse effects of climate change, limited access to credit, tools and supplies.

Access to affordable nutritious food is a challenge in Samoa. 25% of the population lack access to nutritious food, and more than 30% of average dietary energy (calories) comes from fats. Vegetables are 18 times more expensive (per calorie) than cereals, oils and sugar. All these factors contribute to very high obesity rates and related morbidities (such as hypertension).⁴⁶

The Samoa SEIA analysis indicates that border closures starting in March 2020 have not triggered major food insecurity or disruption in the food supply and production chains. Between August and October 2020, most households reported being able to purchase food items when needed.⁴⁷ Approximately 70% of the households reported no change in their consumption despite the economic crisis. Even among the households consuming less food over financial concerns, the incidence of extreme hunger was relatively rare.⁴⁸ However, rising food prices in 2021 could potentially lead to a deteriorated food security situation. WFP's MVAM data⁴⁹ highlights that the share of households resorting to stress, crisis and emergency level crisis strategies increased from 23% in September 2020 to 55% in April-May 2021.⁵⁰ The main livelihood coping strategies reported were borrowing food, selling of animals and spending savings.

⁴⁴ Source: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021: Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all. Rome: FAO; 2021. p.139.

⁴⁵ The FAO 2019 Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Samoa is available at this link: <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CA6156EN/>.

⁴⁶ Further details on nutrition status can be found in the FAO's Samoa Food Security Profile: <http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/resources/pacific-publications/en/>.

⁴⁷ It is also important to note that significant share of total food consumption is home-grown food, since more than 95% of Samoan households are engaged in some level of agriculture activity primarily for subsistence.

⁴⁸ Samoa SEIA Report (July 2021).

⁴⁹ MVAM is a cross-sectional mobile-based household survey designed for rapid data collection on the impact of shocks on food insecurity. For more information on the methodology please see: <https://mvam.org/info/methodology>.

⁵⁰ In 2020 WFP deployed Mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (MVAM) in Samoa to monitor the effects of COVID-19 and climate shocks on food security and livelihood coping strategies. Based on six rounds of mobile data collection between September 2020 and May 2021, food consumption scores (FCS) have remained relatively steady and by April-May 2021, with 95 percent of respondents having an acceptable food consumption score (FCS). Overall,

Inequalities related to food security and nutrition at the household level have their causes in age, gender, disability and geographic location, highlighting the importance of social protection measures for vulnerable groups. Based on the MVAM data, the Apia urban area had lower scores on food-security and consumption indicators than other geographic areas and higher levels of education are correlated with better (and better quality) food consumption. In Samoa, households with a PWD, female-headed households, and households with children under five years of age, are at higher risk of poorer diets. On average, these households consume Vitamin A rich foods, protein rich foods, and iron rich foods less often than other households. Among all households' profiles, people in Samoa consume pulses, fats, dairy, and fruits less frequently; and consume sugars, vegetables, proteins, and staples more often (more than 3 days in a week on average).

Reduced use of agrochemicals has limited the risk of non-communicable diseases related to the cumulative effect of chemical residues in food while protecting the rural population from pesticide spray hazards. The Government of Samoa provides financial support to organic family farmers for obtaining organic certification. Samoa has now policies to restrict marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children. Samoa has also established restrictions on the marketing of breast milk substitutes.

the main concerns reported by all respondents remained consistent across the monitoring period and include increase in food prices, lack of work and disruption to livelihoods.

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing



As remarked upon in the 2nd VNR Report 2020, the vision for the Samoa health sector is to ensure a healthy Samoa in order to improve the quality of life for its population. Some of the key challenges the health sector sought to address in its 2008 – 2018 Plan were the rapidly increasing levels of NCDs; the importance of reproductive, maternal and child health; the emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases and injuries as significant causes of death and disability. The responses to these challenges included emphasis on lifestyle behaviours to tackle the risk factors of NCDs, improving primary health care, raising the quality of healthcare services and managing and responding effectively to natural disasters, disease outbreaks and other emergencies.

Before the measles and COVID-19 crises, Samoa was on track to achieve most of its health targets and indicators. An early achievement of targets for maternal and child health allowed for optimism. The saddening balance was of 83 measles-related deaths (87% under five-years of age) during this outbreak. Over 5,700 cases were recorded, with over 3% of the population infected.⁵¹ The measles epidemic (September 2019 - January 2020) revealed the poor vaccination rate among Samoan children, from a not optimal 74% in 2017 to a staggering 31–34% in 2018, and 31% at the height of the epidemic in November 2019. The lowering of coverage was the apparent result of a vaccine tragedy on 6 July 2018, when two infants died within minutes of being administered MMR (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella) vaccine. The health authorities had lost public confidence and therapeutic trust which is the mainstay of children immunization programs.⁵²

Progress on health behaviour targets for NCDs' prevention is shown by increasing levels of physical exercise (28.5%) and reduction in tobacco use (13.3%) and alcohol use (12.4%).⁵³ Access to antenatal care has increased and total fertility and adolescent fertility rates have decreased from 5.1 in 2014 to 3.6 in 2020. While the adolescent fertility rate slightly decreased from 56 births per number of women aged 15-19 in 2014 to 55 births recorded in 2020, it remains higher than most other Pacific Island Countries. The achievement of universal access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services (SDG 3.7) will require the access of adolescents and youth to SRH information and to these services by making them youth and user-friendly. It will also need to address the low percentage (29.4%) of the met need for family planning among women of reproductive age.

⁵¹ Measles Outbreak in the Pacific – Situation Report No. 11, Joint WHO/UNICEF Measles Outbreak Response and Preparedness in the Pacific, 22 January 2020.

⁵² Isaacs, David, 2020, Lessons from the tragic measles outbreak in Samoa, *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, Vol. 56 (1), page 175.

⁵³ Samoa 2nd VNR Report (June 2020), page 20.

Samoa has achieved the SDG for maternal mortality which is estimated at 5.1 deaths per 10,000 people.⁵⁴ Antenatal coverage for 4 visits is estimated at 69.8%, while 88.9% of deliveries are attended by a skilled midwife, with coverage gaps remaining, especially in rural areas.⁵⁵ While Samoa has good coverage for BCG estimated at 90%, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus (DPT3) was only 58% and measles containing vaccine (MCV 2) was estimated at 44% in 2019. Disparities in coverage also exist with some sub national levels showing much lower coverage rates. Samoa is one of a growing number of PICTs that have introduced the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Rota and PCV vaccines.

Samoaan children do not suffer significant levels of undernutrition; however, anaemia represents a severe public health issue. Samoa has a low childhood stunting rate at 7.3% and a low prevalence of childhood wasting at 3.1%.⁵⁶ Overweight in children under five is moderate and estimated at 8.7%. Within the adolescent population (10-19 years) overweight is estimated at 51%. Anaemia is estimated to affect 44.1% of under-five year olds, 32.5% of women of reproductive age, and 43.9% of pregnant women, and is more prevalent in urban areas.⁵⁷ 51% of children receive exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months after birth, while early initiation of breastfeeding is estimated at 53%.⁵⁸ Other infant and young child feeding practices and overall dietary practices are weak; for example, the proportion of children receiving a minimum acceptable diet is estimated at 11.8% and 12.3% for breastfed and non-breastfed children aged 6–23 months, respectively.

Results for communicable diseases are generally positive, with overall declining incidence and rates for HIV, Tuberculosis and Hepatitis B. Access to antenatal services and contraceptive services has increased as well. As noted in Samoa's final MDGs report, the biggest health challenge for Samoa remains the high levels of premature deaths, illnesses and increasingly, disabilities from NCDs. Within the adult population, NCDs account for 75% of the total disease burden (2016 estimate) and more than half of all premature deaths in the country (the fourth highest rate of premature death in the PICTs).⁵⁹ Dietary risk factors are a major contributor, with around 62% of adults regularly consuming processed foods high in salt. Within the adult female population, overweight and obesity is estimated at 85.2%,⁶⁰ with the majority of women classified as obese.⁶¹

Findings from the 2013 STEP survey indicate that only 8% of adults aged 18–64 years consume the recommended 5+ servings of fruit and vegetables per day in a typical week.⁶² Further details on gender differences in health can be found in Samoa Gender Dynamics Monograph 2020.⁶³

⁵⁴ Samoa Bureau of Statistics and the Samoa Ministry of Health, 2015. Samoa Demographic and Health Survey 2014.

⁵⁵ Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS) and Samoa Ministry of Health (MoH). 2021. Samoa Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019-20, Survey Findings Report.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ SBS and MoH, 2015. DHS 2014.

⁵⁸ SBS & MoH, MICS Op. Cit.

⁵⁹ World Bank, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Roadmap Report, World Bank Group, July 10, 2014.

⁶⁰ SBS & MoH, MICS Op. Cit.

⁶¹ SBS & MoH, DHS Op. Cit.

⁶² SBS, 2014.

⁶³ SBS and UNFPA. 2020. Samoa Gender Dynamics Monograph 2020. Gender & Health. Facts and Implications. Policy Brief 3.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new formidable challenges – how to keep the virus from entering Samoa, and how to vaccinate the population fast and achieve almost universal vaccination coverage. The Government of Samoa, working hand-in-hand with its development partners, has done remarkably well on both tasks. The country remains COVID-free through a combination of very strict border control measures, COVID-testing and quarantine measures. Since April 2021 Samoa has also embarked on the vaccination campaign for adult population utilizing vaccines procured through the COVAX facility. As of December 2021, the figures of vaccination show the success of this campaign (see Country Profile).⁶⁴

The Samoa 2021 SEIA Report reveals that despite the initial strict lockdown and continuation of the SOE, the number of Samoans facing difficulty in accessing health services or buying medicines has been extremely small – only 3% of households faced a challenge seeking health services and 2% in buying medicines, indicating no disruption in healthcare and medicine provision as the SOE continues. Among the few households that faced difficulty in seeking healthcare, the main reasons were due to lack of cash, increase in drug prices and several pharmacies simultaneously running out of medicines. Limited transportation was also a factor for some households, particularly in Savai'i. The Samoa 2018 Health Facility Readiness and Service Availability Assessment (HFRSAA) noted however some the challenges with access to SRH services. Adolescent girls and boys in Samoa frequently lack access to SRH information and education that can inform their decisions. This situation is exacerbated by limited access to youth-friendly SRH services. Further, teenagers are often not well informed about the challenges of transitioning through adolescence, making it difficult to break down the social and culturally harmful practices that limit their access to information and services. Adolescent girls who become pregnant often do not complete school, face social and familial exclusion, and are at increased risk of poverty, and sexual and gender-based violence. Being a mother while still a child impacts their overall health and well-being and compromises their opportunities to achieve their full potential. Preventing unintended pregnancies is not only a reproductive right. It also makes common and public health sense and is good for society and the economy.

The 2018 HFRSAA also highlighted that while sexual and reproductive Health services in Samoa are technically accessible to people with disabilities, many women and young people with disabilities experience barriers to accessing services independently. Further investment is required to ensure comprehensive access to SRH services for people with diverse disabilities.⁶⁵ In Samoa, while there are no legal barriers for young people and adolescents in accessing family planning supplies and information, HIV and STI testing remain restricted to people aged 18 and over. Parental consent is required for people under 18.⁶⁶ The SRH Policy 2017-22 identified chlamydia trachomatis as the sexually transmitted infection (STI) with the highest prevalence in Samoa at 26%, including in pregnant women who are supposed to be a low-risk group. The SRH Policy cited a population-based study which found that 37% of women aged between 18 to 29 years had chlamydia, most of them residing in rural areas.

⁶⁴ <https://www.health.gov.ws/>

⁶⁵ Women Enabled International, Samoa – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender Based Violence Needs Assessment (validated by Samoa and forthcoming).

⁶⁶ United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Samoa. 2021. Joint Submission to the 3rd Universal Periodic Review of Samoa.

SDG 4: Quality Education



Compulsory and fee-free primary and secondary education (up to year 11) has increased access to and enrolment in primary and secondary schools. For primary level in particular, there is universal access. For secondary the level of enrolment may be considered high. While still developing, inclusiveness of the education system is improving with persons with disability being increasingly able to receive an education in integrated modalities.

As of 2020, there were 5,605 students enrolled in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Samoa between 3-4 years of age. A decrease over the immediate years prior is probably due to parental concerns over the measles epidemic in 2019 and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The majority (79) of Samoa's 126 preschools are overseen by different church missions and the remainder (47) are private.⁶⁷ In 2019, 35% of children in the first year of primary education had participated in a pre-primary programme the year before.

Primary education covers year 1 to year 8. In 2020, 42,081 students were enrolled in primary education with a net enrolment rate (NER) of 99%. Secondary education covers year 9 to year 13. In year 12, students complete internal assessments and a national examination for the Samoa School Certificate (SSC). Students who meet expected levels of achievement in the SSC examination can progress to year 13 and take the Samoa School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examination. In 2020, 14,400 students were enrolled in secondary education. Based on 2019 enrolment data, the NER for secondary education was 93%, with the enrolment rate for upper secondary of 90%, suggesting that most students continue to the final years of secondary education.⁶⁸

School attendance peaks (above 90%) for both sexes between 7 and 13 years. At the age of 14, school attendance starts declining, at a quicker rate for males than females between the ages of 14 to 20 years. The 2016 census results indicates that about 2% of children aged 6–14 years were out of school, of which 60% never attended school and 40% dropped out of school in the last reference year. Most (80%) of the out-of-school children reside in rural areas. There is an increasing number of young men not completing secondary education. Many are unemployed because they do not have relevant qualifications and skills for further study or employment. Over the next five years the TVET curriculum for secondary schools will be repackaged and rolled out. This will extend the options available to students.⁶⁹

High adolescent birth rates in Samoa directly impact on the ability of adolescent girls to complete their primary education and successfully transition to secondary level. Comprehensive Sexuality

⁶⁷ Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2019-24 p.25 (2018 data).

⁶⁸ The Status of Pacific Education, SPC, 2021, pages 15-22.

⁶⁹ ESP Op. Cit, page 26.

Education, also referred to as Family Life Education in Samoa is key to empowering adolescents through the knowledge and skills required to make informed decisions regarding their sexuality, life goals and easily navigate complex gender relations and dynamics which if not addressed, threaten the attainment of individual and national educational outcomes.

While school attendance is largely not an issue, Samoa struggles with poor quality of education and low education outcomes at all levels, with poor proficiencies in literacy, mathematics, and science subjects, especially for boys. The proportion of students in Grade 2 or 3 who achieved at least minimum proficiency level was 11.7% in reading, and 21.6% in math (indicator 4.1.1 both sexes, 2019).⁷⁰ Samoa also participates in the regional Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA). In the 2018 assessment, 61% of students achieved at or above the expected standard in literacy, and 76% did so in numeracy, placing Samoan students on par with the region for literacy but below the regional averages for numeracy.⁷¹ Although the NER for primary schools is impressively high at over 90%, poor academic performance contributes to high dropout rates and lower enrolment and completion rates at secondary level,⁷² significantly impacting enrolment in secondary schools and completion rates thereof. There is an increasing level of transition to and enrolment in Post School Education and Training Program (PSET), though offering versatile learning pathways for youth and adults remains an important task ahead in support of lifelong learning and continuous development of skills. Access to tertiary education remains low, with gross enrolment rate for females at 18.5% and for males at 10% in 2020 (indicator 4.3.2).

Despite low education outcomes, overall literacy is very high in Samoa, at 96.8%, with 98.5% in urban areas and 96.3% in rural areas. There are no major gendered differences. Age-disaggregation indicates that literacy levels decrease with higher age, most significantly for both women and men aged 70 and above. Youth literacy is nearly universal, at 99.1%, with some minor gendered discrepancies between males (98.9%) and females (99.3%), and between urban areas (99.7%) and rural areas (98.9%).⁷³

As Samoa remains COVID-free, its education system has avoided the main problem faced by many countries – school closures and children not being in classrooms and not learning. Samoa only had a very brief period of school closures during the early days of the SOE (end of March 2020), although schools had also closed in late 2019 due to the measles outbreak. The 2021 SEIA Report reveals that during that short period of school closures, nearly one in five Samoan children were not able to receive any education at home. Online learning platforms were available to 24% of the school-going children, even though a larger share of children (48%) had access to electronic devices such as computers, smartphones or tablets.⁷⁴ These results indicate that if more prolonged school closures were to happen, the learning outcomes would have been severely affected. Continuing access to quality education is even more challenging for vulnerable populations, those in remote areas, low socio-economic communities, and persons with disabilities.

⁷⁰ SDG 4 Data. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2021.

⁷¹ The Status of Pacific Education, SPC, 2021, pages 20-21.

⁷² Samoa, Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, Education Statistical Digest 2019, MESC, 2020, p. 13.

⁷³ SBS, 2014.

⁷⁴ According to UNDP's Human Development Report (HDR) 2020 (Samoa Country Profile), 33.6% of the Samoan population uses internet. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/WSM>.

SDG 5: Gender equality



Some progress has been made on gender equality, although there is ample room for further action. The presence of women in national governance and policy making is increasing, although more rapidly in managerial positions than in Parliament.⁷⁵ The country has for the first time a women leader as its Prime Minister. However, the restriction of access to governance positions to matai title-holders, the vast majority of which are men (with some villages placing a ban on female matai holders), constrains women's greater participation in national Office. The CEDAW Committee has called for the modification of the matai system (Concluding Comments 2018, paragraph 27).

Women's economic empowerment is improving (too) slowly with increasing levels of participation in the labour force. According to the 2020 VNR, women's labour force participation rate has increased from 32.2% in 2012 to 36% in 2017. At the same time, the gender gap in the labour force participation remains at 10%, since the labour force participation for men stands at 55%. Unemployment rate among women was twice the rate of men in 2017, according to the labour force survey. Young women saw the highest levels of unemployment at 43.4%. Women are more likely to be actively engaged in subsistence farming. The gender gap in labour participation and employment dynamics do not seem to result from differences in education attainment, since the numbers indicate that education levels are higher among women of working-age than men of the same age groups.⁷⁶ As per the ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (Convention 190), Samoa has recently prepared the introduction of a grievance mechanism to address sexual harassment in the workplace in the Labour and Employment Relations Act, and a clear definition of harassment was inserted in the Public Service Act, to provide more legal certainty.

The issue of persistently high levels of violence against women and girls, particularly by intimate partners and family members, remains largely unresolved. The CEDAW Committee has noted "deep-rooted discriminatory stereotypes, harmful practices and patriarchal attitudes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society" (Concluding Comments 2018, paragraph 21). The absence of any national strategy and measures in the education system through curricula and textbooks, to combat these negative stereotypes is accompanied by limited popular understanding of women's rights and the unhelpful role on non-state institutions in perpetuating negative gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. The Committee recommended a comprehensive strategy and public dialogues to address these problems, with a particular effort to eradicate gender-based violence. This would involve, among other issues, strengthening the capacity of all agencies (police, health services, village fono, churches and others) to respond effectively to gender-based violence.

⁷⁵ According to calculations after the by-elections, 11% of MPs in Samoa are women. While this is above the Pacific average, it is well below the global average of 25.7%.

⁷⁶ Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2017.

The existing crisis of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is likely to have worsened in the context of COVID-19. Recent data shows that since the outbreak, reports of violence against women, and particularly domestic violence, have increased in several countries as security, health, and money worries create tensions and strains accentuated by the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown – especially in low-income households. The continued collaboration between the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) and the Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS) is pivotal to the Government’s commitment to obtain the required sex-disaggregated data to assess the progress of the SDG5 by 2022 and develop a Samoa inequality adjusted Human Development Index (HDI).⁷⁷

As recognized in the VNR 2020, addressing gender gaps in Samoa through evidence-based policies and interventions requires a better understanding of what these gaps and their drivers actually are. Tackling gender inequality in a systematic way requires improving capacities to collect data and conduct analysis disaggregated by sex, designing policies and interventions that take gender into consideration, and building capacity and institutional mechanisms that can better monitor and evaluate the impact of public policies and budget allocation.

⁷⁷ Samoa National Policy on Gender Equality and Rights of Women and Girls 2021 – 2031.

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation



Overall, Samoa is making good progress in meeting the majority of the SDG 6 targets. Government and DPs' extensive investment in water and sanitation infrastructure and services over the past 15 years has resulted in very high levels of population access to clean water (97%) and sanitation (98%) (see [Figure 2.3](#)). Investment in initiatives and policies to ensure water-use efficiency and to monitor levels of water, continues. Despite this, there are pockets of poorer population which rely on rainwater tanks and/or untreated independent water supplies. Further, poor quality septic tanks are impacting the quality of ground water. Thus, there still remain challenges related to the quality of water and sanitation facilities.

[Figure 2.3: Selected Indicators in SDG 6](#)

Population using at least basic drinking water services (%)	97.4	2017	●	↑
Population using at least basic sanitation services (%)	98.2	2017	●	↑
Freshwater withdrawal (% of available freshwater resources)	NA	NA	●	●
Anthropogenic wastewater that receives treatment (%)	0.3	2018	●	●
Scarce water consumption embodied in imports (m ³ /capita)	4.7	2013	●	↑

Source: 2021 Sustainable Development Report

While Samoa's basic levels of *access* to water and sanitation are comparable to those of developed countries, it still lags behind in terms of the *quality* standards, as evident in the rates of waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea and typhoid. A recent biosecurity assessment of freshwater and inshore salt water for Upolu⁷⁸ had disturbing results on its water quality with high concentrations of metals connected to widespread herbicide and pesticide chemical use on the island, which influence endocrine activity that may contribute to endemic obesity but are also toxic to aquatic life. There is also a prevalence and wide distribution of pathogenic bacteria, such as E. coli, Klebsiella and Salmonella that pose severe health hazards to people if freshwater is ingested.

While progress has been achieved on access to improved and reliable water supply, the focus has shifted to improving the quality of water, efficiencies of service, reducing water wastage and pumping costs and improving cost recovery are maintained. This will also require further investment in conservation and restoration of priority watersheds and degraded water catchments, particularly on Upolu, by developing and implementing Payment-for-Ecosystems schemes that would benefit both the utilities and the local communities. Such a scheme is currently under development as part of the Vaisigano Catchment Project and will be completed in 2023.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Biosecurity of Upolu Fresh and Salt Environmental Water Resources, Final Report, 16 June 2020, New York University, UNDP, NUS and MNRE.

⁷⁹ GCF VCP Payment-for-Ecosystems Pilot Projects – Full Feasibility Report, 1 April 2021.

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy



Samoa has achieved almost universal access to electricity at 99.8% coverage, according to the Electric Power Corporation. Moreover, there is a continuous decrease in the amount of electricity generated from diesel and a steady increase in the use of various sources of renewable energy. Latest 2019 figures show that Samoa generates 40.9% of its electricity from renewable energy.⁸⁰ There is a marked increase in households that rely on clean fuels and technologies for cooking and lighting.⁸¹ Major projects and key initiatives are underway to improve access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for all. For example, the IMPRESS project invests in additional renewable energy such as biomass, wind turbine and solar systems. The project also involves the development of the draft Energy Management Bill with provisions for transport and energy efficiency.⁸² Electric vehicles have been introduced such as the six (6) e-scooters used by the Lands Transport Authority. There are also efforts to establish a Model Green Building for Samoa using the Pacific Climate Change Centre as an example. Distribution of solar street lights and energy efficiency light bulbs is ongoing to churches schools and local communities as demonstrations of energy efficiency and alternative energy sources to fossil fuels.

Samoa has an inspirational goal to produce 100% of electricity from renewable sources by 2025. This should be achievable given the existing and planned production capacity in solar, wind, hydro and biomass energy. The use of bioenergy in Samoa has the potential to be the dominant source of renewable energy, surpassing all other renewable sources. The transition to renewable energy would also reduce the country's dependence on the imported fuels, which traditionally account for 17% of total imports.

Samoa contributes 0.0025% to the global population, and only 0.0006% to the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In other words, Samoa contributes 5 times fewer GHG than what would be proportional to its population size.⁸³ Samoa emitted a total of 352.03 Gg carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂ e) in 2007.⁸⁴ The energy sector accounted for 50% of this total, the agriculture forestry and other land use (AFOLU) sector accounted for 38%, the waste sector accounted for 9%, and the industrial processes and product use (IPPU) sector accounted for 3%. In the energy sector, land transport contributed 54%, electricity production 25%, and manufacturing and construction 9%.

⁸⁰ Samoa 2nd VNR Report (June 2020), page 41. Note though that according to The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the share of renewable electricity is only 14%.

⁸¹ According to the Energy Portal, even though the access to clean cooking fuels is increasing, it was only 36% in 2019. Universal access by 2030 would require very serious efforts and investments.

⁸² According to the Energy Portal, energy intensity has actually increased from 3.7 MJ/\$ in 2010 to 4.2 MJ/\$ in 2018.

⁸³ China contributes 18% of the global population and 27% of the global GHG emission. China, USA, Indonesia and Russia combined account for 51% of global GHG.

⁸⁴ Most recent data as per the 2nd Samoa Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) document (July 2021).

For Samoa to significantly reduce emissions towards carbon neutrality will require not only the generation of all electricity through renewable sources, but also the production of enough renewable energy for all electric cars, with a target of 100% electric cars. As noted in the 2nd Samoa Nationally Determined Contribution, the country would require substantial external financial support and technical assistance to promote electrification of vehicles and shared electric micro mobility. The potential for economy-wide emissions reduction is conditional on assistance provided to other sectors such as transport, agriculture, forestry and waste management. These sectors have set in place plans and strategies to reduce emissions; however, implementation is a common problem across all sectors due to limited human, financial and technical resources.

Climate-proofing of renewable energy production capacities is highly important. This is demonstrated by the tropical cyclone (TC) Evan impact in 2012. Before the cyclone, renewable energy contributed 48% of total electricity requirements. However, in 2014 renewable energy sources including solar photovoltaic, wind and hydropower contributed only 26% of total electricity generation. This drop in renewable energy contribution was due to the reduction in hydropower contribution when 3 (out of 5) hydropower plants were destroyed by Cyclone Evan in December 2012.

Samoa's National Climate Change Policy 2020 – 2030 provides the framework for both national adaptation and mitigation actions through a whole-of-country approach to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. At the community level, Samoa has developed Community Integrated Management (CIM) Plans which identify prioritized adaptation actions by all of Samoa's 368 villages to enhance their climate resilience.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Samoa was making mixed progress in terms of decent work and economic growth. Economic growth trends were moderate (an average of 2% annual GDP growth), supported by strong income receipts in tourism and remittances. The Government has also achieved progress on national compliance with labour rights and has an active and functioning Tripartite Forum. However, the number of NEET (not in education, employment or training) youth remained stubbornly high (above 35%). Unemployment rates remain high (14.5%), especially for youth (31.9%) and women (21.3%).

Even well before the pandemic, approximately 62,900 people (or more than 50% of the adult population) had been identified as economically inactive, or outside the labour force. Out of these, 59% were females. Women with the highest level of economic inactivity were those aged 15–19 years (94.8%), followed by those with only primary or no education (87%), women from the lowest wealth quintile (83.5%), women with 5 or more children (78.2%), and those living in rural areas (77.5%).⁸⁵ The economic *inactivity* of men mirrors the above profile.

COVID had a major negative effect on the economy, mostly through the impact of closed borders on tourism-related sectors, as well as a suppressed domestic demand due to the SOE. Real GDP declined by more than 9% during 2020. Employment in accommodation and restaurants declined by 40% between September 2019 and September 2020.⁸⁶ A survey by the International Labour Organization (ILO) showed that 56% of the workers reported a reduction in their income of up to 50%. According to the 2021 SEIA, 17% of the respondents signalled a decrease in their personal income due to the continuation of the SOE, with a slightly higher share among those with higher education. To cope with the financial stress, a considerable proportion of affected households relied on domestic farming and remittances from friends and family members (remittances have increased by 14% during 2020).

The prospects for restoration of employment losses and resumption of economic growth in 2022 remain highly uncertain and will depend on global COVID-19 developments. As highlighted in the IMF Samoa Article IV 2021 Report “the pandemic shock has worsened Samoa’s long-term challenges of high levels of informality and gender disparities in employment, leaving limited options for the young generations.” On the positive side, the COVID-free status has allowed Samoa to maintain a (limited) participation in seasonal worker schemes with New Zealand and Australia.

⁸⁵ Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2014.

⁸⁶ IMF Samoa Article IV Report (March 2021), Box 2, page 61.

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure



The last ten years has seen significant investment and improvement in infrastructure in alignment with the National Infrastructure Strategic Plan, which sets out an investment strategy for upgrading the main economic corridor for the country, connecting Faleolo Airport and all ports including the Apia wharf. Submarine cables have been launched, the national airline rebranding and launched, and investments made in clean energy technologies. Road networks throughout the country are now more climate proofed. Overall, 86% of the transport network system is considered to be climate resilient.⁸⁷ 98% of the population have direct road access.

Infrastructure development remains one of the four key priority outcomes of the Samoa Development Strategy (SDS) as it continues to invest in its manufacturing industry which provided for 7.5% of all employment in 2017. The manufacturing sector is dominated by food and beverage industries and contributed on average about 10% to the GDP in the recent past. Its contribution declined to 7% in 2018 due to the closure of Yazaki Samoa. As noted in Samoa VNR document, focusing on improving manufacturing industry and investment in research and development especially through the Scientific Research Organization of Samoa will be critical for innovation and progress on SDG 9.

Samoa has experienced a rapid uptake of ICTs in the recent years, yet the country has a long way to go in playing a significant role in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) landscape. Concerted effort to tailor digital and data policies and processes in Samoa can help a sustainable uptake of AI powered technologies and assess volume, variety, veracity, and openness of data. While ongoing Samoa Knowledge Societies Initiative⁸⁸ has made some progress in opening science, technology and innovation processes, it is important that a national policy on openness is developed and capacities are developed at all levels.

⁸⁷ Samoa 2nd VNR Report (June 2020), page 41.

⁸⁸ <https://samoaksi.ws/>.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities



Overall, Samoa's progress on reducing inequality is uneven. Several national surveys and reports highlight aspects of inequality and vulnerability in Samoa. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) data highlighted that poverty and hardship were higher among the unemployed and individuals working in the informal sector (including unpaid family and community work, household duties and subsistence production). The Gini coefficient of income inequality remains very high, at 38.7%.⁸⁹ The gap between the household incomes and expenditures of the lowest and highest quintile households is significant. According to the VNR, the top 10% of the population earn more than the combined earnings of the bottom 30%.

There is a substantial risk that COVID-19 and its uneven impacts on economic sectors and jobs will further exacerbate existing inequalities. While the Government's stimulus measures may help counterbalance these negative trends, the longer-term battle with inequality can only be won through a more extensive system of social protection that targets most vulnerable population groups. There is extensive empirical evidence from around the world that formal social protection interventions help reduce inequality. Samoa's engagement on the Joint Program of Social Protection would be a crucial step in the right direction if it results in the Government's endorsement of the first National Social Protection Policy in Samoa.

⁸⁹ UNDP HDR 2020.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities



80% of Samoa's population lives in villages, supported by strong community networks which share access to resources, such as land and sea. Generally, there are no slums in Samoa, with a few informal settlements mainly in small pockets of urban and semi-urban areas. Housing, house ownership and land tenure in Samoa is very secure. The majority (94%) of the households own their dwelling/home, and the road network provides good access for communities in terms of connectivity with 58% of households using public transportation.⁹⁰

Nearly all households (96.4%) use electricity as their main source for lighting, with no major rural-urban discrepancies. The 2016 census results indicate that nearly half (44%) of Samoan households own a vehicle, whereas households in rural areas more commonly use public transportation. Mobile phone use is widespread, with over 90% of all households owning a mobile phone (2016 Census).

The proportion of urban area covered by waste collection contractors stands at 67%. There are ongoing plans for waste recycling and proper disposal of problematic waste streams such as plastic, chemical and hazardous waste. Key examples that contribute to making Apia and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable are: (i) the 'City' Development Strategy; (ii) existing community level development and environment plans with stakeholder consultations; (iii) the eight nature reserves located in and surrounding Apia (township) which are open to the public; (iv) a climate resilient building code that facilitates access for persons with disabilities.

SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption



Samoa has the objective of decoupling economic growth from unsustainable resource use. The improvement of the waste management is one of the policies towards this end. The legislation and policies in this area include the Environment Impact Assessment Regulations, the National Integrated Waste Management Strategy 2018 - 2023 which also addresses chemicals and hazardous waste, and a number of other related forest, fisheries, water, biodiversity and land management legislation strategies or policies. These efforts, together with Samoa's efforts to meet its commitments to multilateral environmental agreements especially on hazardous waste and other chemicals, contribute to improving consumption and production patterns that do not exacerbate stresses on the natural environment.

⁹⁰ Samoa 2nd VNR Report (June 2020), page 43.

SDG 13: Climate Action



Sadly, the Pacific region ranks high on the World Risk Index and is increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including devastating cyclones and droughts, as well as to other hazards. In the current scenario, the estimated Average Annual Loss (AAL) due to natural and biological hazards is estimated at US\$41.5 million or 5% of the country's GDP. The highest losses are recorded for droughts and tropical cyclones. In the moderate climate change scenario (RCP 4.5), the AAL is projected to increase to US\$49 million or 5.9% of GDP while in the worst-case climate change scenario (RCP 8.5), this estimate rises to US\$54.8 million or 6.6% of GDP.

Based on data collected by the World Bank, an overwhelming majority of natural hazard occurrences in Samoa between 1900-2018 are climate-related, and most of them are storms (cyclones). Cyclones also account for 98% of the affected people by natural hazards between 1985-2018.⁹¹ Disasters have been very costly to Samoa. An IMF Working Paper showed that the average damage that occurred between 1980 to 2016 in Samoa was 47.8% of its GDP, with the largest one costing 161.8% of its GDP.⁹² The Global Climate Risk Index places Samoa 15th out of 180 countries in average losses per unit of GDP between 2000 to 2019. In terms of population affected by natural disasters, the average number was 2.8% of the total population, with the highest recorded at 6.7% in one disaster event.

An IMF Working Paper that studied the impact of natural disasters in 12 Pacific countries, including Samoa, calculated that the country has a 27% likelihood of such a disaster occurring in any given year and 18.9% for a severe disaster.⁹³ Samoa's National Disaster Management Plan (2017-2020) listed cyclone, volcanic eruption, tsunami, urban fire, public health crisis and environmental crisis-invasive species as extreme risks while flood, earthquake, landslide and forest fires are among the high risks.⁹⁴

Samoa's proximity to a subduction zone capable of generating tsunamigenic earthquakes exposes it particularly to tsunami impacts. The Samoa 2009 tsunami event caused direct damages and economic losses estimated at US\$124 million (more than a fifth of the country's GDP).⁹⁵ Samoa's National Tsunami Plan drafted in 2008 under the Disaster and Emergency Management Act 2006 outlines the national tsunami warning, preparedness, risk reduction, response and recovery

⁹¹ <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/samoa/impacts-agriculture>.

⁹² <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2018/05/10/The-Economic-Impact-of-Natural-Disasters-in-Pacific-Island-Countries-Adaptation-and-45826>.

⁹³ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2018/05/10/The-Economic-Impact-of-Natural-Disasters-in-Pacific-Island-Countries-Adaptation-and-45826>.

⁹⁴ <https://www.mnre.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Samoa-national-disaster-management-plan-2017-2020-final-web.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Samoa Post Tsunami Reconstruction Project.

arrangements.⁹⁶ The Samoa tsunami early warning system includes local networks of sirens, seismic and sea level stations that are critical for strengthening the national and local tsunami warning and mitigation systems. This system is aligned with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO Decision A-31/3.4.1,⁹⁷ specifically the Ocean Decade Tsunami Programme endorsed at the IOC-UNESCO 31st Assembly in June 2021.

Like other PICs, Samoa has made significant progress on reporting on global targets in the Sendai Framework Monitor. This includes validating targets A (deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters), B (people directly affected by disasters) and E (countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020). Samoa has also made progress on reporting on targets C (direct economic loss attributed to disasters), D (damage to critical infrastructure and disruptions to basic services), and G (multi-hazard early warning systems).⁹⁸ Progress towards achieving Priority for Action 1 of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, understanding disaster risk, has been made by setting up and maintaining (geo) databases covering historic disaster events, hazards, exposure, and physical as well as socio-economic aspects of vulnerability. The Government and local scientific and academic institutions have actively conducted risk assessments. However, the national governmental human and technical capacities for disaster risk analysis are not well developed yet and need improvement, especially in the field of systemic (cascading) risk analysis.

Building climate resilience has remained a high priority in Samoa, given the ongoing vulnerability of the country to the adverse impacts of climate change and the continuous setbacks to socio-economic development due to the impacts of external shocks. Decades of committed climate action and investment in adaptive capacity for planning, response and recovery has helped strengthen resilience against risks and occurrences of climate-induced and natural disaster events. As mentioned above, Samoa is aiming to meet its nationally determined contribution (NDC) for 100% electricity generation from renewable energy in 2025. With significant investments in major renewable energy projects on solar energy, hydro and biogas, Samoa is confident it can meet the target.

Marked improvements in climate proofing of all infrastructure and improved early warning systems have helped build adaptive capacity. Samoa has a comprehensive national disaster and risk management planning system in place and has successfully embedded disaster risk management into local governance. There are 94 Community/Village Disaster and Climate Management Response Plans. Climate resilience has been mainstreamed across all sectors including having it as part of the school curriculum from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to secondary level, a Disaster and Energy climate change course is being imparted at the National University Samoa, with certificates on sustainable energy and climate change and disaster risk management. Climate Change Report cards are a fixed item on the Cabinet Development Committee (CDC) meetings chaired by the Prime Minister.

⁹⁶ [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/60548_samoanationaltsunamiplanupdated2008\[1\].pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/60548_samoanationaltsunamiplanupdated2008[1].pdf).

⁹⁷ http://legacy.ioc-unesco.org/index.php?option=com_oe&task=viewDocumentRecord&docID=28647

⁹⁸ <https://sendaimonitor.undrr.org/>

Samoa has passed in Parliament the Meteorology, Geo-Sciences and Ozone Act (2020) that establishes the Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) to generate and disseminate timely and meaningful information on response and impact to enable communities and organizations to reduce the risk of harm to people’s lives, damages to property and the environment. An operational plan in alignment with the Act is in the works. Samoa is also attempting to integrate traditional knowledge and language in the Community-Based Early Warning System (CBEWS) information products and materials through the CDCRM. It is also investing in Impact Based Forecast and Warning Services (IBFWS) to better equip the communities and people to respond during extreme events and natural disasters.

Samoa’s National Disaster Management Plan 2017-2020 (NDMP) provides a policy framework that promotes a whole-of-country and multi-sectoral approach to disaster risk management at a local, national and regional level, representing a major contribution to the achievement of Target (E) of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which seeks a substantial increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies. The Samoa National Action Plan (NAP) for Disaster Risk Management is an operational document for the NDMP 2017-20, reflecting global and regional priorities such as the Sendai Framework, the Samoa Pathway Agreement, and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, as well as SDGs more broadly. The NAP mainstreams Disaster Risk Management across 14 sectors, including education, health, finance, trade and commerce, tourism, water, energy, among others. Its main goal is to have risk considerations continuously factored into the planning, implementation, and M&E of these sectors.

Samoa has endorsed a National Climate Change Policy and passed a Climate Change Bill which are critical to ongoing efforts to address the adverse impacts of climate change. The country is now preparing its Third National Communication and First Biennial Update Report, which are key to the fulfilment of its obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The key challenge remains climate vulnerability in the context of the global causes of climate change and its adverse impacts.

SDG 14: Life Below Water (Ocean)



Samoa has the smallest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) among all the Pacific Islands at 130,480 km². The fisheries sector's contribution to the GDP is 3.5%, with the value of fisheries and aquaculture reaching US\$ 33.4 million (2014).⁹⁹ Samoa has limited marine protected areas, which cover less than 1% of its total EEZ, although the EEZ was declared a whales, shark and turtle sanctuary in 2009. A study of key marine biodiversity areas identified and mapped 23% of Samoa's total inshore reef area as marine Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA), providing a first assessment of priority areas for marine conservation.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the KBAs capture key habitats for 6 of the 17 vertebrates, and 6 of the 48 coral species currently classified as globally threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

The pressure from human induced activities is adding stress to Samoa's coral reef ecosystems, especially on Upolu. Research shows a high rate of degradation of coral reefs from crown-of-thorns starfish, coral bleaching and land-based pollution. There is limited data on the volume of sand being mined or the lagoon area being reclaimed. Climate change is expected to exacerbate the threat to Samoa's reefs in future.¹⁰¹

The country recently adopted its Samoa Ocean strategy (2020-2030) with 6 strategic priorities. Maritime boundaries have not yet been formalized with any neighbouring countries or territory, and this forms part of targets in the implementation of the strategy. This roadmap for ocean management forms the core of the Government's commitment to the implementation of SDG 14. While the focus has been mainly on conservation, and sustainable use of ocean, marine and fisheries resources, recent engagement with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) in Samoa, shows a keen interest in valuing of marine resources and marine spatial planning. The Government established a National Ocean Steering Committee (NOSC) and a technical advisory group to pursue these strategic priorities. On ocean acidification, Samoa continues to call for urgent global climate action. Capacity building and technology transfer is being pursued to allow marine ocean acidification measurement with the help of DPs and international organizations.

Reducing marine pollution is effectively being addressed through several waste management efforts directly linked to SDGs 11 and 12. River health monitoring carried out by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and clean-up projects all contribute. Opportunities from recent studies for example by the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), New York University (NYU), visiting research vessels and other regional and international

⁹⁹ Gillet, R., SPC, Fisheries in the Economies of Pacific Island Countries and Territories, Chapter 15 (Samoa).

¹⁰⁰ Priority Sites for Conservation in Samoa: Key Biodiversity Areas, 2010, Conservation International.

¹⁰¹ Samoa's 6th National Report 2018 to the Convention of Biological Diversity – Assessment for Target of NBSAP (2015-2020) on reducing the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs and other vulnerable ecosystems.

organizations will help further the work on this target and across SDG 14, including links to Samoa's first Ocean Strategy (2020-2030).

In relation to sustainably managing and protecting marine and coastal ecosystems, Samoa has recently agreed to partner with the Blue Prosperity Coalition (Waait Foundation) and Conservation International to protect 30% of its ocean area and support the implementation of the Samoa Ocean Strategy.¹⁰² The partnership was formed to create a plan to help sustainably manage ocean resources, support a Blue Economy for community livelihoods, and improve fisheries management. In addition, marine spatial planning is now underway for 100% of the EEZ which includes several seamounts and should be completed by 2023; it is important to note that 41 District-wide Community Integrated Management Plans were completed, are active, and contribute to encouraging and supporting healthy and resilient marine and coastal ecosystems.

Over 100 villages that have established community-based fish reserves with management plans show positive impacts with improved catch rates recorded compared to villages without fish reserves.¹⁰³ This is an important contribution to nutrition security and improving livelihoods. Samoa's community-based fisheries management programme (CBFMP) also provides alternative livelihood opportunities for communities, such as farming of seafood commodities (e.g., giant clams, sea grapes) and deployment of fish aggregating devices (FADs). The main commercial tuna fishing activities in Samoa's EEZ are managed under the Samoa Tuna Management and Development Plan 2017-2021, and in accordance with the conservation and management measures adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission that has adopted a precautionary approach and ecosystem considerations. In terms of fish stocks, the status of the Pacific bluefin tuna and striped marlin are of concern; however, the rest of tuna resources and other pelagic species important to Samoa are within biological sustainable levels. On Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing Samoa remains committed through national, regional and global initiatives to tackle the issue. Samoa is also keen to implement effectively the Ports States Measure Agreement it has ratified.

Samoa has reported positive progress towards the implementation of a number of SDG 14 indicators,¹⁰⁴ including: under 14.b.1, a "very high" level of implementation of specific initiatives that support improved management of small-scale or coastal fisheries resources and access to markets; and under 14.6.1 a "medium" level of implementation of applicable measures from global instruments such as UNCLOS and UN Fish Stocks Agreement. To date, Samoa has developed coastal fisheries and aquaculture policies and plans to ensure the sustainable management and development of the sub-sector, and measures were adopted towards combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and coastal state responsibilities in fisheries management.

¹⁰² <https://www.blueprosperity.org/post/samoa-ocean-strategy>.

¹⁰³ Samoa 2nd VNR Report (June 2020), page 45.

¹⁰⁴ FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) Survey.

SDG 15: Life on Land



Overall, for the “Life on Land” goal, the progress and current situation is best assessed through the status of achieving the Global Aichi Biodiversity targets for terrestrial ecosystems based on the review of Samoa’s latest National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2015-2020. It shows a mixed level of progress for each target, with most targets unlikely to be achieved. However, Samoa’s ecological footprint is considered to generally be within sustainable levels, in spite of limited investment in reforestation programs.

Commercial logging is no longer a major threat to forest resources, and there is a ban on timber exports from Samoa. Deforestation rate is low, but loss of forest cover mainly through land conversion on Upolu Island remains an issue. The total forest cover has been reduced to 57.1% in 2020 (from 62.2% in 1990)¹⁰⁵ showing a deforestation rate of 0.3% per annum.¹⁰⁶ Upland habitats remain largely intact and undisturbed by human activities.

Samoa is continuing work on increasing reforestation and landscape restoration through a just completed “2 Million Tree Planting” campaign and engaging in some critical water catchment restoration. However, poor progress has been made towards protection of mangrove and wetland forest ecosystems, and despite the many climate-change related projects investing in ecosystem resilience, only some have achieved their objectives.¹⁰⁷ The main threat to forests comes from the invasive merremia vine, with the estimates showing 24% of all forests, including upland forests, affected.

Regrettably, despite substantial efforts, there is a decline in Samoa’s red list index indicating the worsening loss of biodiversity. The Government continues to address the issue of invasive species as a follow-up to multi-sectoral management of critical landscape activities initiated in 2014. Key achievements include increasing assessments and improving management of Protected Areas and the completion of management plans for 3 national parks within Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) as well as the preparation of plans for two additional KBA sites. The 8 terrestrial KBAs cover a total of 940 km² or approximately 33% of the total land area of Samoa. The area of terrestrial KBAs with some form of existing protection is approximately 173km², or 18% of the area of all KBAs.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020 Samoa – Report, FAO.

¹⁰⁶ Global Database: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>.

¹⁰⁷ Samoa’s 6th National Report 2018 to the Convention of Biological Diversity – Assessment for Target of NBSAP (2015-2020) on reducing loss of all-natural ecosystems, including forests and building ecosystem resilience.

¹⁰⁸ Priority Sites for Conservation in Samoa: Key Biodiversity Areas, 2010, Conservation International.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions



Chapter 1.2 presents at length an overview of the country's standing on Goal 16 and Chapter 2.2 highlights key pressing challenges in achieving its associated targets. Chapter 4 further provides an overview of Samoa's human rights commitments under international normal and standards.

Ongoing efforts through Samoa Knowledge Societies Initiative are geared to help Samoa progress on the SDG 16.10.2 on the access to information by creating an enabling environment for enhanced digital development. Ensuring additional capacities to implement the outcomes on the ongoing initiative and empowering the participation of citizens in decision-making are still needed to accelerate the progress.¹⁰⁹

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals



The 2030 Agenda and the 2014 SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A) Pathway emphasize the necessity for a transformational approach to development if prosperity, equality for all and a protected environment are to be achieved. This includes strengthening policy and financing coherence, forming and strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships, more effective access to and use of public and private finance, stronger trading relationships, effectively harnessing and adopting science and technology and investing in improved data collection, analysis and utilization for informed policy making.

Acknowledging the structural, geographic, economy of scale and limited capacity issues that are inherent to SIDS, partnerships for development and strengthening national ownership, leadership, and institutions have underpinned Samoa's development approach for the past two decades. A key ingredient of strong and sustainable partnerships is ensuring credible, strong, accountable and sustained capacities and systems are in place to enable mutually respectful and equal partnerships based on trust and robust public financial management systems. Strengthening such systems and capacities has been a key objective of Samoa's ongoing structural and public sector reforms since the 1990s. Samoa has also played a strong leadership role globally and regionally in strengthening country systems, sustainable development and development effectiveness efforts, as highlighted extensively in the Samoa 2020 VNR document.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.samoagovt.ws/2021/10/high-level-dialogue-on-access-to-information-in-the-public-administration-context/>.

Ensuring the availability of high-quality data for SDG monitoring by use of traditional and emerging technology and sources to produce timely and high-quality data, and encouraging its utilization, has been recognized as an accelerator for change. The Government of Samoa has developed a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) which provides a long-term vision for developing statistical capacity across the entire national statistical system (NSS), including population and social sector data which traditionally is not well-resourced.¹¹⁰

2.2 Analytical Overview of Select SDG Challenges

The overview of the SDGs above has highlighted some areas where the country has achieved progress, but also signalled other areas where more emphasis is needed for the progress on targets and indicators to accelerate. Below, focus is placed on some of the most challenging SDG areas, especially in relation to human development, a backbone for the country's sustainable progress moving forward. Some of these challenges have been directly linked to or further amplified by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

SDG 1: No Poverty

The negative economic and health impacts of the Measles outbreak and the current COVID-19 pandemic will likely undo the past decade of progress including that on SDG 1. In that context, serious consideration needs to be given to *boosting the system of formal social protection*. Samoa is currently working on expanding the coverage of its social protection measures, in collaboration with the UN system. Strengthening this system and its responsiveness to shocks related to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters, global shocks, and the measles and COVID-19 impacts, is particularly important for the most vulnerable, and for ensuring no one is left behind. The adoption of the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) by the newly elected Government would be a positive step forward.

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

Despite there being low levels of extreme hunger and undernourishment, *access to and affordability of locally produced healthy foods is a glaring challenge to food security and nutrition in Samoa*. With the COVID-19 situation disrupting imports, Samoa is in a position to carefully examine and implement solutions that will boost resilient local supply of healthy foods. With this in mind, recent national dialogues addressing bottlenecks and solutions to food systems development in Samoa identified the nation's need to transform the agriculture sector to boost local production focusing on resilient and sustainable production practices that take into consideration the vulnerabilities to natural disasters and climate change; provide an enabling environment through strengthened policies and evidence base that support enhanced local production of healthy foods; and promote consumption of healthy local traditional foods through enhanced education and promotion of consumption of healthy foods. Supporting the operation of

¹¹⁰ Samoa Strategy for the Development of Statistics 2011-2021, Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2012.

agricultural markets can assist in the supply of locally produced healthy foods, while also supporting market vendors, the majority of whom are women.

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing

In the COVID context, achieving almost *universal rate of COVID-19 vaccination coverage* of the target population remains the top priority for 2021. Samoa is also in the process of vaccinating children between the ages of 12-17 with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. While COVID-19 preparedness remains the top priority, maintaining vaccination coverage of children with *all* required vaccines needs to proceed on parallel tracks. After the nation-wide mass Measles vaccinations program in November-December 2019, with significant support from the international community, measles immunization rates for infants were at 95% as of February 2020. However, as reported in the 2020 VNR Matrix of indicators, about two thirds (66%) of the target population have been covered by all vaccines in national vaccines program. A substantial gap still needs to be covered, with progress continuously monitored.

Many of Samoa's policy and strategic plans have not been revised, including SRH and NCD strategic plans which ended in 2016 and 2018 respectively. As successor plans have yet to be developed, this provides opportunities for addressing the adverse impacts of climate change and NCDs on health service delivery, as well as broadening the focus to better reflect child health and nutrition interventions. Samoa does not have a role delineation policy but has committed to defining and costing a standard service delivery package at the levels of village, health centres and district hospitals.¹¹¹

Samoa has not enacted domestically the International Code on Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, nor has it regulated marketing of unhealthy foods for children or front of pack nutrition labelling. But it has endorsed fiscal policies to deter unhealthy foods, food based dietary guidelines, and policies and standards for school health and nutrition, including standards for food and beverages available in schools and a ban on vending machines in schools. Growth monitoring, nutrition counselling and deworming services are offered.

Samoa depends on a substantially higher share of external DP financing for the health sector than would be expected for a country with its income level. As of 2017, 14.8% of health expenditure was attributed to international aid, while total Government health expenditure was estimated at 16.5% of the GDP, which is one of the highest in the PICTs.¹¹²

Samoa continues to struggle with addressing NCDs. The country has one of the highest mortality rates (81%) and morbidity rates from NCDs in the world.¹¹³ An estimated 89.1% of Samoans are overweight, and 63.1% are obese. Key factors in the high rates of NCDs are poor quality and

¹¹¹ Update on the regional analysis of the role delineation policy with country profiles. Sixth Heads of Health meeting April 2018.

¹¹² Secretariat for the Pacific Community, 2017 indicator estimates.

¹¹³ WHO Samoa NCDs Country Profile, 2018 and Samoa Health Sector Plan FY2019/20- FY2029/30.

unhealthy diet, over-nutrition, and sedentary lifestyles. A concerted effort is required at the individual, community and general public effort to gradually start changing the status quo.

Samoa's health workforce density, estimated at 2.3,¹¹⁴ is below the SDG index threshold of 4.5 doctors, nurses and midwives per 1000 population.¹¹⁵ Doctors are concentrated in the main referral hospital in Apia. The other health facilities are staffed by nurses with physicians from the main referral hospital visiting once a week, or less, in district hospitals. Basic infrastructure, diagnostic equipment, and competencies are limited in rural health facilities.

Similar to other PICTs, Samoa used to have a strong focus on health prevention, community empowerment, and primary health care (PHC). Village Women's Committees were a key structure for community engagement as well as outreach programs to villages, schools, and workplaces. However, this model, known as "Fa'a Samoa", has evolved into a mainly hospital-centric system. There has also been out-migration of medical professionals to countries such as Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia due to a lack of career path for PHC doctors and general practitioners, nurses, and nutritionists working at primary care settings.¹¹⁶

There is no regular or systematic review of health system performance by the Government of Samoa, and in general, data and information derived from the health system are under-utilised. At PHC facility level, service statistics are paper based, and automation remains fragmented, unstandardized, and lacking in connectivity between different information systems across health facilities. Service data is not collected and analysed systematically at the program level, and there remain data quality issues. Investment has been made in periodic surveys, the most recent being the 2019/2020 MICS. There is a need for a robust system to monitor, evaluate, and report on health results.

The achievement of universal access to sexual and reproductive health (SDG 3.7) in Samoa, particularly to bring to zero percent the unmet need for family planning, and ensure 95% maternal health intervention coverage by 2030, will require an additional US\$ 2.1 million investment between 2020 and 2030 (21% additional).¹¹⁷

SDG 4: Quality Education

The most significant challenge for the education sector is the *declining quality of education outcomes* in terms of literacy, numeracy and also in the Science, Technology, English and Math

¹¹⁴ Secretariat for the Pacific Community, 2017 indicator estimates.

¹¹⁵ Scheffler, R, Cometto, G, Tulenko, K, Bruckner, T, Liu, J, Keuffel, EL, Preker, A, Stilwell, B, Brasileiro, J and J Campbell, 2016. Health workforce requirements for universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals – Background paper N.1 to the WHO Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030. Human Resources for Health Observer Series No 17. World Health Organization, 2016.

¹¹⁶ World Bank, 2019. Samoa Health Systems Strengthening Program for Results Project: Program Appraisal Document. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/465671575860741445/pdf/Samoa-Health-System-Strengthening-Program-for-Results-Project.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health in Pacific Small Islands Developing States, 2021.

(STEM) subjects, with overall sharp declines in literacy for Samoan, English and Numeracy across all levels between 2012 and 2017. There is also an increasing gender gap in education, with boys doing worse than girls. The Samoa Primary Education Literacy Level (SPELL) test shows that girls are outperforming boys in all areas. Another challenge is the declining transition rate from secondary to tertiary. There are also limited opportunities for adult continuous learning.

The measles and COVID19 pandemics, while disrupting the school year for the students, provided an opportunity to better *test and invest in the use of ICT*. Investing in the delivery of school lessons online and the use of e-learning materials is timely, and must be pursued actively, with particular attention to narrowing the digital divide providing inclusive access to ICT for those in remote areas and persons with disabilities. While Samoa continues to be COVID-free, it should not be taken for granted that this will always be the case, or that there is no other pandemic that could represent a threat in the future. Hence, the country needs to be ready to provide options for multimedia teaching and learning with online and offline resources. This would require concerted efforts to prepare and support teachers, students, education administration, parent and caretakers, and communities.

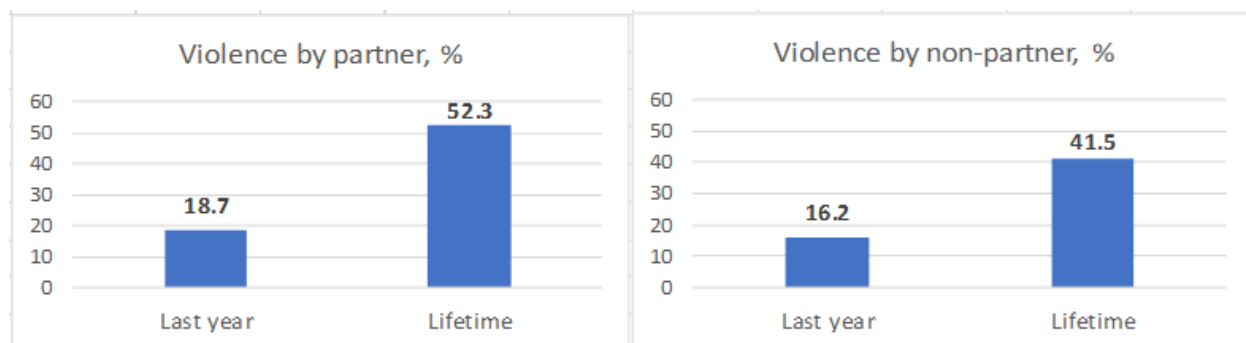
Following the impact and legacy of COVID-19, the principal equity issues within the basic education sector relate to the large proportion of primary and secondary students enduring financial hardship, especially for families whose remittances from extended family members in New Zealand and Australia have been affected. The Ministry has increased school grants in order to reduce the financial demand on parents for their child's participation in school.

Social and emotional wellbeing has also been identified as an area to address as an impact of COVID. Anecdotally, during the school closures of March-June 2020, there was an increase in bullying, consumption of alcohol by minors and other risk-taking behaviours by young people left without the structure of day-to-day school. The Education Ministry has seen this reflected in behaviours when students have returned. Training for all teachers is being provided so they can better respond to students with behaviours relating to stress and anxieties in different ways.

SDG 5: Gender equality

Violence against women remains a pervasive problem with nearly half of women in Samoa experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Among women ages 15-49 y., 52.3% report being ever subject to physical violence by an intimate partner, and 41.5% mention physical violence by a non-partner. The incidence of recent (last 12 months) violence is also high, at around 20% (see [Figure 2.4](#)). Only 40% of women who have been subject to physical or sexual abuse report seeking help. Since physical abuse is often imparted by intimate partners or parents/relatives, this likely limits the propensity to report cases.

Figure 2.4: Reported violence against women, last 12 months



Source: MICS 2019-20 Survey

The principal reasons for the low reporting of gender-based violence (GBV) to the police, health and social services are the stigma, fear, shame, tolerance of violence, inadequate responses from protection and legislative services, and the lack of access to services in some rural areas and smaller communities that survivors experience, with limited options or support to escape the violence. In relation to attitudes towards domestic violence, the Samoa 2019-20 MICS/DHS Fact Sheet indicates that approximately one in three women and 1 in 4 men consider that a husband is justified in committing physical violence under certain circumstances. Addressing harmful social norms and attitudes is an important component of GBV prevention, which is in turn a precondition for the achievement of gender equality. The new Samoa Inter-Agency Essential Services Guide for responding to Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection (January 2021) together with systems strengthening, including improved access to health care for GBV survivors, will help address these issues.

Samoa has made significant strides in its national commitment and support to the implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education/Family Life Education (CSE/FLE) as a strategy to challenge social norms that have for ages enabled gender inequality and fuelled violence against women and girls. CSE/FLE provides the opportunity for young people to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills to better plan for their adulthood. However, to successfully transition through adolescence, they need knowledge and skills on human sexuality, including growth and development, values and culture, equality and gender, sexual and reproductive health, family life and inter-personal relationships.

Comprehensive sexuality education has been found to reduce sexual abuse and gender-based violence amongst young people and encourage them to assume responsibility for their own behaviour and to respect the rights of others. A national multi-stakeholder committee has been established to oversee implementation of CSE/FLE for both in and out of school young people and there's ongoing design of resources aligned to international standards within the formal curriculum and informal settings.

Women's under-representation in leadership and decision-making positions and their lower levels of labour force participation are two further significant issues that must be addressed in order to

achieve gender equality in Samoa. These issues are further elaborated on in the LNOB chapter below.

SDG 13: Climate Action

Samoa, like other Pacific SIDS, suffers disproportionately from the effects of global warming. It is at the frontline, bearing the brunt of the climate crisis, including the impacts of unsustainable industrial policies of larger polluting countries, while its own contribution to global warming is negligible at best. The total annual cost of adaptation is calculated for Samoa as US\$21.5 million or 2.6% of GDP. Out of this total cost, US\$21.4 million is attributed for adapting to climate related hazards, while US\$0.1 million is meant for biological hazards. Given the geographical and socio-economic risk profile, key adaptation priorities for Samoa include protecting mangroves, making water resources management more resilient and improving dryland agriculture crop production as top measures for policy action followed by the need for strengthening early warning systems and making new infrastructure resilient.

The effects of climate change in Samoa by the end of this century are expected to include continued El Niño and La Niña events, rising annual mean temperatures and maximum daily temperatures, little change in mean annual rainfall but more extreme annual rainfall events, a slight decrease or no change in the incidence of drought, continued ocean acidification and increased coral bleaching, continued sea level rise, and slightly decreased frequency of cyclone formation but increased maximum wind speeds.¹¹⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic and 2019 measles outbreak, coupled with the ongoing exposure to natural hazards, have highlighted the risk of *consecutive and compound disasters* that Samoa faces, and reinforced the need for a *multidimensional approach to risk analysis and management*. While Samoa has thus far avoided community transmission of COVID-19, an IMF study estimates (based on EM-DAT data) that Samoa has a 27% chance of suffering a disaster related to natural hazards each year, causing a mean level of damage of 47.7% in GDP.¹¹⁹ Adding a health crisis to a climate-related disaster event could have a devastating long-term impact on the country's economy. Furthermore, nature-based tourism and agriculture are key sources of livelihoods as well as revenue for Samoa and are also directly impacted by such disasters. While Samoa is ranked only as the 98th most hazardous country by the World Risk Index,¹²⁰ the combined impact of its remote

¹¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO. (2014). Climate Variability, Extremes and Change in the Western Tropical Pacific: New Science and Updated Country Reports. Australian Bureau of Meteorology and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

<https://www.pacificclimatechangescience.org/publications/reports/climate-variability-extremes-and-change-in-the-western-tropical-pacific-2014/>

¹¹⁹ Lee, D., Zhang, H., & Nguyen, C. (2018). The Economic Impact of Natural Disasters in Pacific Island Countries: Adaptation and Preparedness (IMF Working Paper WP/18/108),

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2018/05/10/The-Economic-Impact-of-Natural-Disasters-in-Pacific-Island-Countries-Adaptation-and-45826>.

¹²⁰ World Risk Report 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WorldRiskReport-2020.pdf>

location, small economy, and exposure to multiple climate-related hazards,¹²¹ as well as health risks, require further analyses and abundant action.

In Samoa, like other Pacific Island Countries, during the past years there has been significant investment in weather, climate, water, hydrological and oceans related capacity. However, fundamental issues are to be addressed including governance, mandates, strategic planning, institutional support, observation networks, forecasting and prediction systems used in variable approaches and forms, as well as the limited number of meteorological, hydrological, oceanography and technical personnel. These create challenges for the provision of weather, climate, hydrological and oceans forecasts and predictions including warnings needed by the government, communities and industries to better prepare for climate variability, extremes, change and natural hazards.¹²² Disaggregated data is critical to understanding all dimensions of climate and disaster risk from vulnerability and capacity to exposure and hazard characteristics, and to ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups in decision-making around disaster risk management. While disaster loss data (DLD) in Samoa, as in other Pacific SIDS, is supported by different systems, the utilisation of DLD information to enable better disaster risk management is constrained by technology as well as institutional challenges linked to governance, frameworks, processes and coordination of DLD information.¹²³

SDG 14: Life below water

The vulnerability of the fisheries sector to climate change continues to be an emerging critical issue for Samoa and the region. Examples of major impacts projected include shifting of main tuna stocks from the West to Eastern Pacific, frequent and severe tropical cyclones, warmer oceans with ocean acidification that damage and threaten reef fisheries and seafood resources.¹²⁴ These impacts are worsened by the ongoing COVID pandemic, threatening livelihoods and economic benefits from the fisheries sector and posing additional challenges to fisheries management. Samoa faces challenges in reporting progress towards SDG 14.4.1 and SDG 14.7.1.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

While the country is a party to several international conventions, limited capacities, access to resources, and technical assistance as well as a lack of quality statistics and monitoring

¹²¹ The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery's (GFDRR) Think Hazard tool lists Samoa at high risk of cyclones and tsunamis, at medium risk of coastal floods, earthquakes and extreme heat, and at low risk of landslides and volcanoes. More info here: <https://thinkhazard.org/en/report/212-samoa>

¹²² [https://www.pacificmet.net/sites/default/files/inline-files/documents/Weather percent20Ready percent20Pacific percent20Decadal percent20Program percent20of percent20Investment percent20Executive percent20Summary_0.pdf](https://www.pacificmet.net/sites/default/files/inline-files/documents/Weather%20Ready%20Pacific%20Decadal%20Program%20of%20Investment%20Executive%20Summary_0.pdf)

¹²³ Findings from UNDRR's survey and consultancy report on Strengthening Disaster Loss Data (DLD) Management in Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS), July 2021.

¹²⁴ FAO, Impacts of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture, 2018 <http://www.fao.org/3/i9705en/i9705en.pdf> Chapter 14.

mechanisms are often cited as significant challenges for processes that would aid the country in successfully achieving several targets of Goal 16. A consensual resolution of the 2021 election dispute and of the controversial constitutional amendments in late 2020 that tackles the necessary reforms will create a solid basis for the country to navigate through the current global health and economic crisis. Violence especially within the domestic space and based on gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and against children and persons with disabilities ought to be treated as an urgent public matter as it undermines peace and security in the country. Women's underrepresentation in the political and economic sphere, aside from being a human rights issue, implies large social-economic costs. Indeed, the Women Peace and Security Summit hosted in Samoa in 2019 reinforced women's transformational and critical roles in addressing non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, human security, and food security especially at the community level.

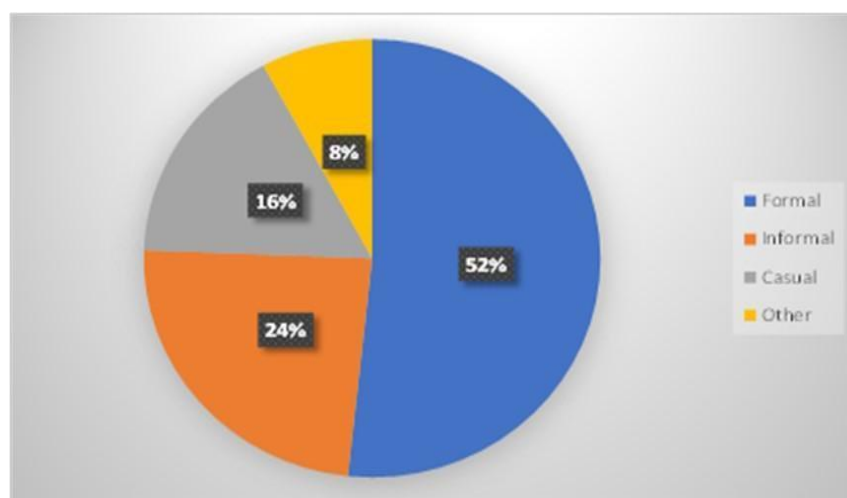
3. Leaving No One Behind

Specific population groups have been left behind or are at risk of being left behind in Samoa. Progress on SDGs cannot be viewed as averages, in isolation to what affects the most vulnerable segments of a society. The overview below specifically focuses on persons most affected by the economic downturn, children, youth, women and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

3.1. People Affected by the Economic Downturn

Labour market conditions have worsened significantly since the introduction of the SOE and border closures in March 2020, as reflected at both household and individual level. According to the Rapid Online Survey conducted in June 2020, 47.9% of households reported at least one member of the household becoming unemployed during the SOE.¹²⁵ The formal (wage) employment sector was most affected, accounting for 51.7% of the total job loss (see [Figure 3.1](#)). 2 out of each 3 respondents reported a decline in the main source of income during the SOE. The job loss was most profound in tourism-related businesses (hotels, restaurants and transportation), and disproportionately impacted women (due to their higher representation in the services sector). According to the IMF, the hospitality sector has lost more than 40% of jobs.¹²⁶

[Figure 3.1](#): Composition of the job loss, by type of job, percent



Source: UN RCO Rapid Online Survey, June 2021

¹²⁵ UN RCO Rapid Online Survey of Socio-Economic Impact, June 2020.

¹²⁶ IMF Samoa Article IV Report (March 2021), page 67.

3.2. Children

Poverty particularly affects children and young people. The 2013–2014 HIES found that children were disproportionately more likely to live in poor households. Around 22% of children were living below the basic needs poverty line (compared to 18.8% of the general population) and around 25% were living in households that were vulnerable to poverty (compared to 10.2% of the general population). The impacts of poverty are more significant for children, and there is growing evidence that children experience poverty more acutely than adults: the negative impacts of poverty on their development can have profound and irreversible effects into adulthood.

Samoa children continue to be exposed to significant levels of family violence in their homes. The 2019-2020 MICS survey found that over 90% of children ages 1 to 14 experience some form of violent disciplining, with 82% experiencing physical punishment and 20% severe physical punishment.¹²⁷ Emotional abuse is also a significant concern, with 82% of children experiencing psychological aggression. An overwhelming majority of Samoans believe that physical violence against children is required in order to instil an understanding of right from wrong, and corporal punishment is commonly justified by the Fa'asamoa and religious texts. Traditional views around the status of children in the family, village and society has also contributed to some community resistance to the idea that children have rights and should be allowed a voice in matters that affect them.¹²⁸

The recent MICS survey found that 13.9% of Samoan children aged 5 to 17 years were involved in child labour. The survey also found that 14.3% of children aged 5 to 17 years were engaged in hazardous work. Child marriage is another grave concern, although Samoa has made some progress in tackling this issue. The percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who married before the age of 18 dropped from 10.8% in 2014 to 7.4% in 2019, however the percentage of women married by age of 15 increased slightly from 0.7% to 0.9%. Of the girls aged 15 to 19 surveyed in the 2019-20 DHS-MICS, 7.8% were currently married, with 0.1% married before the age of 15, as compared to 0.4% in 2014. Girls were more likely to be married before the age of 18 than boys.

A significant number of Samoan children continue to live separated from their biological parents. Almost one in 10 (9.4%) of children in 2020 do not live with either of their biological parents (down from 13.6% in 2014), 7% had at least one biological parent living abroad, and 8.9% were living with adopted, foster or step parents.¹²⁹

The decreasing budget allocations to social services and challenges associated with reaching children and caregivers affect the wellbeing of children. The Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, which focuses on promoting the child's rights to protection, and NGOs, such as SVSG, remain under-resourced from both a financial and human resource perspective. Services to respond to children in need of protection remain under-developed. The majority of child protection cases are managed by SVSG, which operates shelter services and is the main child

¹²⁷ Samoa Demographic and Health Survey- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (DHS-MICS) 2019-20.

¹²⁸ National Child Care and Protection Policy Annex: Situational Analysis.

¹²⁹ Samoa DHS-MICS 2019-20, Op. Cit.

protection service provider. The SVSG team provides child protection case management, counselling, mediation, legal advice, assistance with court cases, and residential care. Between 2018 and 2021, SVSG provided case management services to 369 children, including 130 cases of physical abuse and 139 cases of sexual abuse.¹³⁰ The SVSG community team also undertakes a range of prevention and early intervention activities in villages. Adolescent peer support groups have also been set up to strengthen social networks for young people in the community.

3.3. Youth

Samoa has a very young population. Whilst this factor brings some benefits, the country faces a persistent challenge of integrating youth into the labour force. 48.9% of Samoans are under 24 years of age, and the median age is 25.6 years. Yet, as mentioned previously, 38% of Samoan youth are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The level of youth unemployment remains elevated, at 22%.¹³¹ While the young labour force presents a ready pool of people available for seasonal labour schemes in Australia and New Zealand, the overall size of these schemes remains limited, and COVID-19 has produced new challenges for labour mobility.

The Samoa 2040 Development Plan puts a strong emphasis on labour mobility (with youth at its core) as a major source of economic opportunity for the country and its young people. It is especially so “given that the opportunities generated by Samoa’s relatively small domestic market may not be sufficient to absorb all those looking for work”. The 2040 Plan recognizes that “over the longer term, Samoa has the potential to realize substantial additional benefits from labour mobility by increasing the number of Samoans participating in overseas employment, and by maximizing the development impact of these opportunities for participants and their communities.” Clearly, equipping the youth with the necessary education and skills to participate in those opportunities will be an important part of promoting this development path.

The seasonal labour scheme could however become a double-edge sword. It was designed to provide opportunities for unskilled workers from rural areas of Samoa and has now been extended to skilled workers as well (e.g., hospitality sector). Because of the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) scheme, young Samoans can now study various trades and graduate with certificates recognized in New Zealand and Australia. Although there are clear economic benefits, there is currently no study of the impact of the scheme on rural Samoa (subsistence agriculture/family life/tourism sector) as most workers are young married males. While promoting seasonal employment is part of the 2040 Plan, some caution needs to be raised with respect to its potential negative social impact on rural Samoa’s fabric, families with young children and the subsistence agriculture sector.

¹³⁰ SVSG Casework Database.

¹³¹ 2020-21 MICS survey. The 2020 Samoa Youth Monograph puts unemployment rate in the 15-24 age group at 18.4%. https://www.sbs.gov.ws/images/sbs-documents/info-graphics/SYM/youthmonograph_FINAL_web_19aug.pdf.

An important challenge affecting all labour market participants, including youth, is the paucity of formal sector jobs in Samoa. The current economic downturn will aggravate this problem. Annual growth of formal employment between 2007 and 2014 was only 0.9% (ILO, 2017), reinforcing the decent work challenge. More than 37% of workforce has been compelled to work in low-paid low productivity informal sector.¹³² Without effective interventions through strategic youth-oriented policies (i.e., including education, health, employment and social protection) it would be impossible to break these negative trends and patterns.¹³³

There are differences in outcomes for young males and females across all major development issues. In most areas, in particular employment, male youth have an advantage, while in one matter, educational attainment, female youth have proven more effective.¹³⁴ The fact that girls do well at school is an indicator that their relative exclusion in later years (i.e., job market) is due to external barriers rather than limitations of their own capabilities. Determinants of youth transition impact youth differently depending on their age. For example, teenage fertility has a more negative impact on future school completion and employment than giving birth at older ages. Teenage fertility is an ongoing priority area for policy in Samoa.

3.4. Women

Widespread discriminatory cultural norms and attitudes are the principal causal factors underlying the disadvantages that women experience relative to men in Samoa. These norms lead to decisions and behaviours that cause assets, resources and services to be distributed unequally between women and men. The fact that girls and young women generally have equal or better educational achievement compared to boys is an indication that as adults they are fully capable of achieving and contributing equally with men, but social and economic barriers prevent them from doing so. As a result, women are left behind in employment, self-employment and participation in governance, and are excluded from the full enjoyment of the rights and services to which they are entitled.

Women's low rates of labour force participation has also been a persistent problem. According to the MICS 2019-20 survey, 62.5% of women ages 15-49 were *not employed* (vs. 30.9% of men in the same age group). Outside of not allowing women to reap additional economic benefits, this also leads to a diminished power status of women at home, more stress at the family level (which has escalated by loss of income during the COVID crisis), and gender-based violence. As recognized in the recent UNDP report on social protection¹³⁵, lack of access to childcare facilities is among the factors that constrain the ability of young mothers to enter and remain in the labour force.

¹³² Labour Force Survey, 2017.

¹³³ UNDP Report "Review and Development of Social Protection Systems in Samoa", Bazlul Khondker (January 2021).

¹³⁴ This means Samoa, like many other countries, has not been able to capitalize on its investment in closing gender gaps in education.

¹³⁵ UNDP and Khondker 2021, Op. Cit

According to the Samoa VNR (2020), women's participation in the labour force increased from 32.2% in 2012 to 36% in 2017. However, women's *unemployment* level is double that of men, and they represent the majority in the informal sector, and are likely to be more vulnerable to hardship than those in paid employment. There are also significant gender disparities in political representation and in managerial positions. The representation of women in Parliament is an example of this low comparator with other countries in the region and the world.

Due to the economic stresses caused by COVID in Samoa, more previously employed women are turning to micro-business ventures in the informal space. Pop-up markets, new market spaces that are available on Saturdays (as Sunday markets are still not allowed), roadside vendors, and increased activity on the online market platforms has helped support struggling families and female-headed households. It is estimated 70% of stalls are managed and staffed by women, which is consistent with regional figures as 75-90% of vendors working at Pacific marketplaces being women and their earnings often making up a significant portion of the incomes of many lower income households.

Lockdowns and social distancing have also resulted in sharp increases in domestic and care work needs within the household. Results shows that in Samoa women carry the burden of such needs disproportionately -- 87% and 71% of women reported an increase in time spent in activities related to unpaid domestic and care work, respectively. Since the spread of COVID-19, both women and men in Samoa are experiencing changes in household resources, but not equally.

As recognized in the VNR 2020, addressing gender gaps in Samoa through evidence-based policies and interventions requires a better understanding of what these gaps and their drivers actually are. Equally important is to analyse issues with a gender lens -- to understand gender-based causes and gender-differentiated results and consequences. Tackling gender inequality in a systematic way requires improving capacity to collect data and conduct analysis disaggregated by sex, designing policies and interventions that take gender into consideration, and building capacity and institutional mechanisms that can better monitor and evaluate the impact of public policies and budget allocation.

3.5. Persons with Disabilities

Even in less troubled times, persons with disabilities (PWDs) are more likely to experience adverse socio-economic outcomes such as less education, poorer health outcomes, lower levels of employment, and higher poverty rates. As COVID-19 continues to have wide-reaching impacts across the globe, including in the Pacific region, persons with disabilities are uniquely impacted by the pandemic (or related containment measures), including health, education, and transport. Barriers to full social and economic inclusion of PWDs include inaccessible physical environments and transportation, the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted means of communication, gaps in service delivery, and discriminatory prejudice and stigma in society. These barriers have become even more pronounced during the pandemic.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ For further discussion, see: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>.

Samoa is estimated to have about 3,400 persons with severe disability, which amounts to 1.7% of the population.¹³⁷ About 3% of the Savaii and rural residents report having severe difficulties, proportionately to the people in the Apia Urban Area where only 1.5% report severe disabilities. Approximately 7.6% of the population above the age of 50 years reported having severe disabilities.¹³⁸

Individuals with severe disabilities are five times more likely to have never attended school than persons without disabilities. In the absence of special and/or inclusive education, children lose the opportunity to go to school.¹³⁹ For example, due to lack of special education in the rural areas (where 85% of children with disabilities reside), children were being “kept at home” (UNICEF, 2017). Among those attending school, only 38% and 35% of persons with disabilities could read and write freely, as compared to 68% and 66% of persons without disabilities, respectively.¹⁴⁰

Addressing the needs and rights of persons with disabilities needs to extend to the social inclusion of women and young persons with disabilities, the promotion of their human rights (including access to general health services and vaccination), and their empowerment to make informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights and to live free of discrimination and violence. The Samoa National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2031) commits to strengthen SRH education for persons with disabilities and to improve access to SRH and justice services.

Persons with disabilities also face severe biases and barriers when it comes to employment. About 85% of the persons with disabilities (aged 15 years and above) were not in the labour force, compared to 52% for persons without disabilities. Of those PWDs who participate in the labour force, 60% were in unpaid work, 37% were in paid work, and the remaining 3% were unemployed (actively looking for work but could not obtain employment).¹⁴¹

The current social protection system in Samoa is not geared in any specific way towards supporting PWDs. The Senior Citizens Benefits Scheme (SCBS) is provided to all older persons, aged 65 years of age or older, and does not differentiate its benefit size and services because of the elderly person’s disability status. The new Government has an opportunity to make significant inroads into better addressing the needs of PWDs, including through the implementation of the new National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2031) and the potential adoption of the

¹³⁷ The 2018 Samoa Disability Monograph based on the 2016 Population and Housing Census in Samoa (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, MWCSO, SPC & UNICEF, 2018) uses the Washington Group Questions. The reference group is population 5 years and older, and the definition of disability is based on reporting at least “a lot of difficulties” in at least one of the domains (seeing, hearing, mobility, memory, self-care and communication). Note that globally about 1.5% to 3% of population are estimated to have severe disabilities (World Report on Disabilities, 2011).

¹³⁸ Further details on the disability profile in Samoa are available in the 2018 Samoa Disability Monograph, which can be found here: https://www.sbs.gov.ws/digi/2018_Samoa_Disability_Monograph.pdf.

¹³⁹ In general terms, the 2030 SDG Agenda calls for inclusive education and views special education as segregated.

¹⁴⁰ Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018.

¹⁴¹ Revised Baseline Report “Research on Fiscal Space for Social Protection for Persons with Disabilities in Niue, Tokelau, Cook Islands and Samoa”, EPRI and UNESCO, March 2021.

National Social Protection Policy, which, among its many proposed interventions, has specific programmes for persons with disabilities.¹⁴²

Finally, in the COVID-19 context, it is absolutely crucial that all PWDs are fully vaccinated. In the area of health, many PWDs have additional underlying health needs that make them particularly vulnerable to severe symptoms of COVID-19, if they contract it. Yet very often PWDs would not be able to come to the designated vaccination sites on their own. It is important that families, communities and Government organise specially arranged transportation services, mobile vaccination sites, and other means.

¹⁴² The cash benefit for PWDs is also envisaged in the FY 2021 budget, but its parameters still need to be decided upon.

4. Human Rights Commitments

4.1. Acceptance of International Human Rights Norms

Samoa adheres to the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and is a party to six out of the nine core international human rights treaties, namely: ICCPR,¹⁴³ CEDAW,¹⁴⁴ CRC,¹⁴⁵ CED,¹⁴⁶ CRPD,¹⁴⁷ and CAT.¹⁴⁸ Samoa is also the first Pacific Island State to accede to all three Optional Protocols (OP) to the CRC: (a) Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, (b) Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; and (c) Protocol on Communications Procedure. The 84th Session of the Committee of the Rights of the Child was held in Samoa in March 2020. Other UN Human Rights and related treaties that Samoa is a party to include the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the eight fundamental conventions of ILO,¹⁴⁹ and the Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).¹⁵⁰

Accession and ratification remain outstanding for (i) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); (ii) The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and (iii) The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW), as well as their optional protocols, though the Government of Samoa is actively considering the possible accession to these conventions in the future.¹⁵¹

Samoa's compliance with its ratified international human rights (IHR) treaties has been reviewed by two treaty bodies: the CRC (2016) and the CEDAW (2018). Samoa has yet to submit its initial reports to four treaty bodies: ICCPR (due 2009), CED (due 2014), CRPD (due 2019), and CAT (due 2020). The Government is currently finalising drafts of the ICCPR, CED and CRPD reports, and has begun consultations for the CAT report, with the aim of submitting all overdue reports by the first quarter of 2022.¹⁵² The Third Universal Periodic Review of Samoa by the Human Rights Council took place in November 2021.

¹⁴³ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, acceded to on February 15, 2008.

¹⁴⁴ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, acceded to on Sep. 25, 1992.

¹⁴⁵ The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified on November 29, 1994.

¹⁴⁶ The Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, ratified on November 27, 2012.

¹⁴⁷ The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified on December 2, 2016.

¹⁴⁸ The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, acceded to on March 28, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ International Labour Organisation (ILO) Forced or Compulsory Labour Convention 1930 (No.29), Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention 1948 (No.87), Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949 (No.98), Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 (No.100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958 (No.111), Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138), Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182).

¹⁵⁰ Acceded to in 2018.

¹⁵¹ Samoa Universal Periodic Review Cycle 3 National Report.

¹⁵² Samoa UPR Cycle 3 National Report.

As the only international agreement binding Parties to the integration of culture in their development policies, the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions actively works toward promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Samoa is one of two PICs to have ratified this Convention. Samoa is also a State Party to the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

4.2. Cooperation with International Human Rights Mechanisms

The National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF) Taskforce was established in 2016, with the Pacific Principles of Practice for NMIRFs endorsed in 2020. The NMIRF is a state mechanism responsible for tracking the implementation of the IHR treaty obligations and for coordinating reports to international and regional human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Special Procedures to the UN Human Rights Council. The Taskforce comprises of CEOs of the key government ministries with human rights mandates.¹⁵³ Since Samoa's second UPR in 2016, the Taskforce together with the SDG Taskforce developed a roadmap for the review and reporting on SDGs and IHR treaty obligations. NMIRF is supported by SADATA (Samoan data), a digital tool introduced in 2017 that helps track human rights implementation through clustering recommendations and identifying implementation gaps.

The Office of the Ombudsman was mandated via the Ombudsman (Komesina O Sulufaiga) Act 2013 to assume the functions of Samoa's independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), which has in 2016 become the first in the Pacific to be accredited the "A" status by the Global Alliance for NHRIs. The NHRI/Ombudsman produces annual State of Human Rights (SOHR) Reports for the Legislative Assembly, providing important opportunities for national and community dialogue on the protection of human rights. Previous reports focused on topics such as persons with disabilities, climate change, and family violence. In particular, the 2019 SOHR report evaluated Government efforts in addressing the recommendations made in the 2015-2017 SOHR reports and awarded Samoa with a 'B', meaning that the Government efforts have been "reasonable and sufficient".

Human resource and financial support for NHRI's functions, however, remain inadequate, despite the marginal increase in its budget in 2020/21 compared to 2016/17, as well as the addition of a permanent senior staff. The CEDAW Committee in 2018 also recommended an increase in the capacity and resources of the NHRI to carry out and monitor its work effectively in accordance with the Paris Principles.

¹⁵³ MWCSO, MJCA, OAG, MPPCS, MOH, MPMC, PSC, MESC, SLRC, MCIL, MCIT, OCLA, OEC, MNRE, MOF. Consultative members include SBS, NHRI, SCCI (private sector), SUNGO (CSOs), and the UNRC.

4.3. Compliance with IHR Conventions

4.3.1. ICCPR Compliance

While Samoa has yet to submit its initial report to the Human Rights Council, due since 2009, certain key principles under the ICCPR have been incorporated into national laws. The Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa (1960) is the supreme law of the land. Part II of the Constitution provides for the protection of fundamental rights including the right to life, personal liberty, freedom from inhumane treatment, freedom from forced labour, right to a fair trial, presumption of innocence, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, assembly, association, movement and residence, and rights regarding property. Crucially, article 15 establishes equality for all, and freedom from discriminatory legislation on the basis of descent, sex, language, religion, opinion, social origin, place of birth, and family status. Considering the growing use of emerging technologies and data potentially impacting the promotion and protection of fundamental rights¹⁵⁴, there may be a need to revise Part II of the Constitution to safeguard the enjoyment of human rights, such as the right to privacy, under the digital age.

Three controversial constitutional amendments were passed in 2020 amidst reservations of the Samoa Law Society, members of the own Samoan judiciary and international legal organisations, including the South Pacific Lawyers' Association and the New Zealand Law Society: (i) The Land and Titles Act; (ii) The Constitution Amendment Act; and (iii) The Judicature Act. The Land and Titles Act created a separate lands and titles court hierarchy outside the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, with exclusive jurisdiction over customary matters, thus establishing a special and parallel justice system. It removes the Supreme Court's right to review potential breaches of fundamental rights in customary decisions pursuant to article 14 of the ICCPR. It divides *de jure* the judicial system into two parallel courts of equal standing, one to deal with criminal and civil matters, the other with customary land and titles. The Judicature Act allows the PM to suspend the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, without involvement of an independent judicial body, and could thus undermine the independence of the judiciary. These three bills were passed despite a recommendation from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers for the Government of Samoa to reconsider the three bills, as they fell "short of international standards relating to the independence of the judiciary and the separation of powers."

Human rights bodies such as the CEDAW Committee have long advocated to ensure that traditional and customary justice systems harmonize their norms, procedures, and practices with human rights standards¹⁵⁵ enshrined in IHR instruments, as the failure to do so may lead to conflict of laws and limit the enjoyment of fundamental human rights such as access to justice. Such a process, however, requires a careful and painstaking collection of customs and usages, a prerequisite of which is a written record of customary jurisprudence.

¹⁵⁴ A/HRC/RES/41/11, New and emerging digital technologies and human rights.

¹⁵⁵ General Recommendation 33.

Regarding the conditions of detention (article 10 ICCPR), the Samoa Prisons and Corrections Services had been moved under the Ministry of Police, leading to a shift of focus of the criminal justice system from merely punitive to incorporating rehabilitative elements. The Prisons and Corrections Act 2013 includes reference to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners as a guiding principle. The penitentiary system suffers from prison overcrowding and poor physical infrastructure and conditions for detainees. Samoa has recently improved these conditions with the new Tanumalala prison, which affords separate cellblocks for male and female inmates, and persons in provisional custody, a facility to hold high-risk detainees, a medical clinic, and a chapel. Better physical conditions (ventilation, lighting, and sanitation, food and water) are coupled with greater respect for rights (prisoners and detainees can submit complaints to judicial authorities and request investigation on issues), buttressed by external oversight (monitoring visits by independent human rights observers, including the NHRI, and the Judiciary).¹⁵⁶ These are steps towards meeting the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners¹⁵⁷ in line with article 10 (3) of the ICCPR. The new Police Academy currently being constructed will also provide formal training, including on prisoners' rights, to Police Officers and Prison Wardens.

The right to freedom of expression (article 19 ICCPR) is protected under the Constitution,¹⁵⁸ though it does not explicitly provide for the right to seek, receive, and impart information. A freedom for information policy and legislation is currently in development under the UNESCO-UNDP Samoa Knowledge Society Initiative (SKSI). As noted in Chapter 1.2, the Media Council Act 2014 was adopted to promote professional journalism and integrity in news media. Significantly, criminal libel, which was previously repealed in 2013, was reintroduced in 2017, a move seen as politically motivated with the goal to silence critical journalism.¹⁵⁹ In response to the rising popularity of anonymous bloggers posting allegations of corruption and misconduct against prominent public figures, the former PM in 2018 warned that Facebook and other social media platforms may be banned if these bloggers did not start revealing their identities.¹⁶⁰

With respect to the freedom of association (article 22 ICCPR), the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) in 2018 noted that public servants are not protected under the Labour and Employment Relations Act (LERA) 2013. Government workers should enjoy the right to join and establish organisations of their own choosing. The CEACR also recommended amending the Public Service Act 2004 to ensure public servants' right to unionise and participate in strike actions.

Regarding the right to vote (article 25(b) ICCPR), provisions have been made by the Electoral Commission for the 2021 general election to enhance inclusiveness of elections, for example, the Electoral Act, voter handbooks and ballot papers are translated into Braille, with sign language

¹⁵⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). October 2019. Access to Justice and Rule of Law Mapping in Pacific Island Countries. Justice Needs and Satisfaction in Fiji. Access to Justice Project Fiji. Quoted in UN Pacific CCA, 2020, 64-65.

¹⁵⁷ UPR Cycle 3 National Report, p.11.

¹⁵⁸ Article 13.

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/sampodders/>.

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/353729/samoa-pm-threatens-to-ban-social-media>.

interpreters available, and pre-polling mechanisms are put in place for PWDs. However, there remain concerns of village councils and campaign committees using their authority to coerce or influence voters' choices.¹⁶¹ It is also noted that absentee and postal voting is not available in Samoa for diaspora. Further, the Electoral Act 2019 disqualifies a persons detained in the hospital, prisons, or other place of security under the Mental Health Act 2007 from voting.¹⁶²

4.3.2. CEDAW Compliance

The CEDAW Committee in 2018 recommended adopting and adhering to a clear timetable for the completion of the legislative review to ensure that legislation complies with the Convention. The Committee raised concerns that article 15 of the Constitution does not include a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women, which should cover all prohibited grounds of discrimination encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in both public and private spheres, in line with article 1 of the CEDAW.¹⁶³ The Committee also expressed concerns that, despite the above Constitutional provisions, some villages still maintain prohibition on women's matai (chiefly) title and restrict women's participation in village fono (council).¹⁶⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 1.2, the Constitutional Amendment Act 2013 established a minimum quota of 10% for female parliamentarians (article 44), which was a significant and positive development for increasing women's participation in political and public life, regardless of other efforts still needed in many areas,¹⁶⁵ and of the fact that the percentage falls short from the 30% quota recommended by CEDAW or from the ambition of SDG 5 which demands women's "full participation in leadership and decision-making". The post-election events in 2021 also demonstrated that the drafting of constitutional provisions, including Article 44, leaves uncertainty under the CCPR. The CEDAW Committee in 2018 further noted concerns that holding a matai title is still a condition to be eligible to run for general elections, despite the small number of women matais and the restrictions on women matais by some villages - and recommended removing such a requirement.¹⁶⁶

There is no express constitutional safeguard for non-discrimination based on age, disability, sexual orientation, and HIV status, though some degree of protection is offered through specific legislation, for instance, the Labour and Employment Relations Act (LERA) 2013, which prohibits employment discrimination based, *inter alia*, on sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital status, real or perceived HIV status and disability.¹⁶⁷ It is critical to ensure that such policies are translated into regulations and procedures, and monitored systematically, as recommended by the ILO.

¹⁶¹ Media statement, NHRI: "Citizen's right to free and fair elections," 1 March 2021, at:

https://ombudsman.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/OMB-PR_-Free-and-Fair-Elections_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁶² Section 17(1).

¹⁶³ CEDAW/C/WSM/CO/4-5, paras 11-12.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, para. 9.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, para 19-20.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, para. 27-28.

¹⁶⁷ LERA 2013, section 20(2).

The principle of non-discrimination in the workplace has been the object of recommendations by ILO in December 2020 for the ratification of C190 “Violence and Harassment in the World of Work” in Samoa. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) also advised Samoa on the implementation of the Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958 (No.111). As such, an amendment bill to the LERA 2013 introduced a grievance mechanism to address sexual harassment in the workplace and is awaiting passage through Parliament.

As highlighted under SDG5 “Gender Equality” and Chapter 3, domestic violence (DV) and gender-based violence (GBV) in Samoa is a persistent problem, which was exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic crisis. The 2018 NHRI SOHR conducted a national inquiry on family safety, on which the Spotlight Initiative was designed. In response to the high rates of GBV, a specialised Family Court was established in 2014. The Family Safety Act 2013 provides protection for women and children from domestic violence. However, as noted by the CEDAW Committee in 2018, economic abuse should be included in the Act’s definition of violence in accordance with the Convention. Both the CEDAW and CRC Committees further recommended to strengthen the capacity of the police Domestic Violence Division in the provision of support to victims of violence.¹⁶⁸

There remains strong opposition in legalising abortion even in cases of rape and incest. Under the Crimes Act 2013, procuring abortion is punishable for up to 7 years imprisonment,¹⁶⁹ and is only permissible where the pregnancy presents “a serious danger” to the health of the mother and if the gestation period is less than 20 weeks.¹⁷⁰ The CEDAW Committee recommended to legalise abortion at least in the case of rape, incest, and severe foetal impairment in addition to risk to the health or life of the pregnant women, and to decriminalise abortion in all other cases.¹⁷¹

Access to justice and the rule of law was furthered by the Community Law Centre Act, passed in 2015 for the provision of accessible legal aid, especially for women and disadvantaged groups.¹⁷² However, due to limited human resources, the Act has not been enforced. Legal aid is currently only available for criminal cases. The right to access to justice for PWDs in particular is limited due to the lack of reasonable accommodation. The significant backlog and delays in the Samoa courts due to inefficient court case management and lack of personnel is another impediment to the administration of justice.

In terms of access to property and credit which are crucial for women’s economic empowerment, the Personal Property Securities Act 2013 recognises the equal right of men and women to own property and use them for business transactions, however, the CEDAW Committee in 2018 noted with concern the persistent discrimination of women in terms of ownership and inheritance of land

¹⁶⁸ CEDAW/C/WSM/CO/4-5, para 24; CRC/C/WSM/CO/2-4, para. 33(f).

¹⁶⁹ Crimes Act, sections 112-3.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, s.116.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, para 33(e).

¹⁷² Including PWDs, persons living in rural areas, *nofotane* (women living in the village of their spouses) and *mauapaolo* women (women who are married into a family).

notwithstanding the enactment of legislation in this area.¹⁷³ Individual usage ownership of customary land often requires unanimous approval of the village council, and customary land accounts for more than 80% of all land in Samoa. The relatively low number of women with matai titles and sitting on village councils restrict their right to private property, in the absence of which, access to credit for women, especially in rural areas, is also limited.

4.3.3. CRC Compliance

The CRC Committee in 2016 noted that certain legislation, in particular the Infants Ordinance 1961 and the Young Offenders Act 2007, still has to be harmonized with the Convention.¹⁷⁴ Samoa's minimum age of criminal responsibility of 10 years (with *doli incapax*¹⁷⁵ provision for children aged 10-12) is not in accordance with the CRC standard of 14 years old. Further, the Committee noted that birth registration coverage continues to be low and not free,¹⁷⁶ and corporal punishment, despite being outlawed in the state school setting pursuant to the Education Act 2009, is not prohibited in other settings, and recommended to explicitly repeal the "right to administer reasonable punishment" provided in the Infants Ordinance 1961.¹⁷⁷

In 2020, the Government endorsed the Child Care and Protection Policy and Implementation Plan. However, the finalisation of the Child Care and Protection Bill, an important legislative development in addressing child abuse, neglect and exploitation, has been delayed for 7 years. The CRC Committee in 2016 recommended to criminalise all sexual acts involving children as a separate crime.¹⁷⁸ The Crimes Amendment Bill 2020 proposed to criminalise, *inter alia*: (i) child abuse materials under a new stand-alone provision capturing both online and offline activity, (ii) grooming or procuring children, and (iii) sexual activity with children using an electronic system.

The Education Act 2009 and LERA 2013 prohibit children under 15 from engaging in labour, except for light work, although the "hazardous child labour list" has not yet been adopted. Children continue to work as street vendors, which is often forced by parents.¹⁷⁹ Regarding Samoa's application of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182), the Committee urged the Government to ensure that the use or procuring of children between the ages of 16-18 to produce indecent materials is prohibited. Addressing the 2016 UPR and CRC Committee recommendation to make the legal age of marriage for girls equal to boys, the Immigration Act 2020 introduced consequential amendments to the Marriage Ordinance 1961: the minimum age of

¹⁷³ CEDAW/C/WSM/CO/4-5, para. 43.

¹⁷⁴ CRC/C/WSM/CO/2-4, para. 8. The Young Offenders Act applies only to persons between 10-17 years of age and is inconsistent with the definition of the child under the Convention, i.e., those under 18 years of age.

¹⁷⁵ Deemed incapable of forming the intent to commit a crime or tort, especially by reason of age (under ten years old).

¹⁷⁶ CRC/C/WSM/CO/2-4, para 28-29.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, para 30-31.

¹⁷⁸ CRC/C/WSM/CO/2-4, para. 33(c).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, para 52.

marriage for girls was increased from 16 to 18,¹⁸⁰ and the minimum age of consent to marriage for girls was increased from 18 to 21.¹⁸¹

4.3.4. CRPD Compliance

Samoa has yet to submit its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), due since 2019. Nevertheless, the Government has put in place policies to further the rights of PWDs, including the Samoa Disability Partnership Programme (SDPP) 2018-2022, the establishment of the Disability Taskforce, and the recent launch of the 2nd National Disability Policy which was informed by an analysis of disabilities undertaken by the SBS (Samoa Disability Monograph, 2018). A legislative review was conducted in 2015-16 to support CRPD ratification, however, the recommendations of that review are yet to be implemented.

The NHRI also focused on the rights of PWDs in its 2016 SOHR report, which stated that a disability legislation for Samoa in line with the CRPD would be crucial to apply a right-based approach to disability. In the same report, gaps were identified in the Mental Health Act 2007 regarding its compliance with the CRPD. Further, the language used in some domestic legislation was deemed not disability-sensitive, referring to PWDs as “persons of unsound mind”¹⁸² and “socially and educationally retarded class of persons”,¹⁸³ an outdated kind of language which can have the effect of perpetuating pre-existing discrimination and stigma across society.

State provision of social protection, access to justice and access to health for PWDs is limited. Except for those injured in the workplace (addressed through the Accident Compensation Corporation), PWDs do not have access to specialized benefits or services. NOLA, the national disability advocacy organisation, noted that the processes within the justice system are too complex for PWDs to navigate and lack reasonable accommodations to cater for the broad spectrum of disabilities. Under the Samoa Disability Partnership Programme (SDPP), a Mobility Services Unit was set up at the Ministry of Health. However, PWDs suffer from limited access to specific health services and support, health specialists and disability diagnostics resources in the country.¹⁸⁴ People with disabilities also report experiencing discriminatory attitudes from health workers and their own families, and decisions being made for them regarding their sexual and reproductive health. Overall, these limitations hinder the potential for full realisation of human rights for PWDs safeguarded under the CRPD.

¹⁸⁰ Marriage Ordinance 1961, section 8.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, section 10.

¹⁸² Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1962, Article 13(4); Electoral Act 2019, ss. 8(2)(e), 141(2)(j).

¹⁸³ Ibid, article 15(b)(ii).

¹⁸⁴ Amnesty International, Submission for the UPR, 39th Session of the UPR Working Group, 1-12 November 2021.

5. Cross-boundary, Regional and Subregional Perspectives

The Samoa Multi-Country Office (MCO) framework is guided by the United Nations Pacific Strategy (UNPS) 2018-2022 that covers 14 Pacific countries. It is grounded by six outcomes with a specific results framework for measurement of improvements against the SDGs. Samoa MCO covers Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau for its contribution to the UNPS. This document guides the contributions made towards the SDGs and in a regional context to ensure no one is left behind. Regionally, the New Zealand – United Nations (NZ/UN) Pacific Partnership (UNPP) will contribute NZ\$ 24.7 million (US\$ 16.8 million) towards the achievement of development goals in priority areas.¹⁸⁵ It will cover thirteen Pacific SIDS (including Samoa) and will contribute to the attainment of the SDGs.

Samoa has contributed to cross-boundary related crime and human rights legislation. The Government of Samoa has introduced and established numerous laws, institutions, programmes and initiatives to address human rights violations. With a human rights approach to SDG implementation, Samoa interprets SDG 16 implementation in line with its human rights obligations under conventions it is a party to, including CEDAW, CRC, CRPD, UNCAT, CED and ICCPR. While Samoa has no recorded cases of human trafficking and people smuggling, the existence of the multi-agency Transnational Crime Unit, the National Security Policy and Committee, and the Guidelines for the Management of the Transnational Crimes of Trafficking and Smuggling indicates that the concern exists, has been taken seriously, and that Samoa wishes to contribute significantly to advancing the global counter trafficking agenda in its territory.

Strict border control has been a key to reducing the risk COVID-19 entering Samoa. Other Pacific countries have taken similar steps to ensure protection from COVID-19. Tokelau, which does not have an international airport, relies on transport of goods from Samoa for its food security; therefore, protecting Samoa's boarder also has a regional impact to the security of other Pacific States.

Entry risk, exposure and consequence of transboundary pests and animal diseases is a concern, with African Swine Fever (ASF) identified as a priority animal disease of concern for livestock in Samoa. Samoa conducted an ASF risk assessment in 2020, which provided information on high-risk areas and recommendations to assist in preventing ASF incursion. Some recommendations have been implemented, such as banning the import of all pork meat and products from infected countries, and Samoa has strengthened its laboratory testing capacity.

¹⁸⁵ <https://samoa.un.org/en/53775-new-nzun-partnership-will-assist-samoa-and-13-other-pacific-nations>.

Samoa has also benefited from the freight assistance offered by Australia to the Pacific Island Forum countries.¹⁸⁶ The Pacific Trade Invest (PTI) Australia COVID-19 Freight Assistance Package offers eligible businesses assistance towards freight costs incurred in 2021.¹⁸⁷ Grants of up to a maximum of A\$ 2,500 (US\$ 1,750) per enterprise on a 50/50 cost share basis are awarded to successful applicants. Effective and sustainable trade will support Samoa and other Pacific countries to achieve the SDGs. Samoa is one of eight PIF members to have ratified the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) “Plus”, since its entry into force on 13 December 2020.

As climate change affects Samoa and other Pacific islands, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), representing 39 islands and archipelagos in the Pacific (including Samoa) and Indian Oceans and the Caribbean, called on the large countries (and main polluters) to stop using fossil fuels. With rising temperatures, even if the emissions disappear immediately, the sea level will still rise by between 10 and 25 centimetres by 2050. The combined effect of rising waters, their acidification and the increase in extreme weather events could turn 267 million people globally into refugees at the end of the century. Climate adaptation work is important for mitigating climate change impact in Samoa and other countries. Samoa’s pledge of 0.16 MtCO₂e GHG emissions reduction between 2019 and 2030 is noteworthy. The country has also committed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. However, the modalities still need to be determined.¹⁸⁸

Samoa ocean management efforts are advancing with continued work on environmental databases and improvement in understanding of the connection between waste flows and coastal and marine environments. UNESCAP is working with the Samoan government and SPREP to advance these objectives through “ocean accounting” that integrates environmental and economic statistics to support equitable and inclusive ocean management.

The country’s participation in the global COVAX initiative has been instrumental in vaccinating Samoa’s population with COVID-19 vaccines. The Samoa National Vaccination Plan has achieved its objectives of quasi-universal vaccination of the eligible adult population. Through COVAX, the country has been offered a sufficient supply of additional vaccines and is in the process of organising the vaccination of children 12 to 17 years old.

Samoa has benefited from regional agreements for migrant/seasonal workers, including New Zealand’s Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) Scheme, the Canterbury Trade Employment Initiative (for the Meat Processing Industry) and the Australian Seasonal Workers Program (SWP). While COVID-19 has impacted the number of seasonal workers travelling out of Samoa, the programmes have continued, even if at a reduced capacity, thanks largely to Samoa being COVID-free.¹⁸⁹ These schemes have been important for providing employment opportunities to Samoa’s

¹⁸⁶ These countries include Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, FSM, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

¹⁸⁷ <https://pacifictradeinvest.com/about/what-we-do>

¹⁸⁸ “Assessment of the Ambition and Potential of NDC Pledges of the Asia-Pacific Countries, 2021: Is 1.5 degrees within Reach for the Asia-Pacific Region?” Regional report prepared by a joint team from UNESCAP, UNEP, UN Women, UNFCCC [forthcoming].

¹⁸⁹ According to the MCIL data, 13,000 individuals have applied for seasonal employment in 2021.



youth, improving household incomes and reducing vulnerability. Samoa has also entered into the agreement on a one-way travel bubble with New Zealand, which would make it easier to send seasonal workers there.

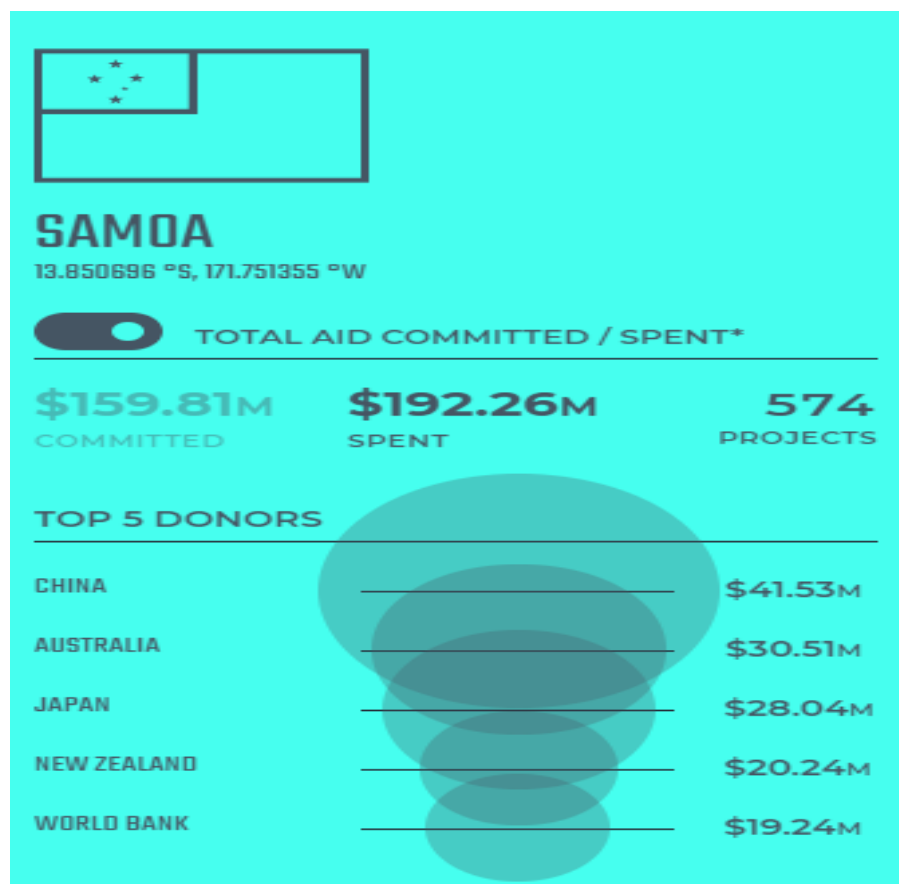
Samoa has been part of the regional SDG Fund Joint Program on Social Protection (JPSP) that started in 2020. This is a US\$3 million multi-year project that aims to enhance the formal social protection in Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau. As part of this project, the Samoa National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) has been developed and could potentially become an important part of promoting social agenda in the country, if adopted by the Government.

6. Financing Landscape and Opportunities

The Pacific region received a total of US\$ 2.2 billion official development assistance (ODA) in 2019. Samoa received around US\$ 124 million, or 6% of total ODA disbursements, making it the 5th largest recipient of donor funding in the region.¹⁹⁰

Samoa's ODA represents a third of total Government financing or almost 15% of the country's Gross National Income in 2018.¹⁹¹ Samoa's development assistance ecosystem includes a diverse number of bilateral donors and DPs. China, Australia, Japan and New Zealand are the four main bilateral donors (see Figure 6.1). In addition, significant financial assistance (loans and grants) is provided by the World Bank, IMF, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the United Nations.

Figure 6.1: Samoa's main ODA donors in terms of funds spent, 2018 (US\$)



Source: Lowy Institute

¹⁹⁰

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Oceania-Development-Aid-at-a-Glance-2021.pdf>

¹⁹¹ Aligning development co-operation to the SDGs in small island developing states: A case study of Samoa, OECD (2021).

The United Nations reported a collective investment in Samoa of US\$ 23 million in 2020, focusing on six outcome areas within the UN Pacific Strategy.¹⁹² These priority areas are climate change, disaster resilience and environmental protection; gender equality; economic empowerment; basic health and education services; governance and community engagement; and human rights (see [Table 6.1](#) for a breakdown of total financial allocation by outcome area).¹⁹³

The UN System has committed almost 55% or US\$ 12.5 million of this investment to combatting the effects of climate change through climate adaptation and mitigation interventions, increasing disaster resilience and environmental protection. The volume of support targeted towards this area indicates the UN and Samoa's urgent response to protect the country from the increasingly devastating impacts of global warming.

A total of US\$ 4.4 million or 19% of UN support in 2020 was targeted towards improving basic health and education services. More than US\$3.1 million of this support was allocated to the national COVID-19 response. The UN system continues to prioritize programming towards gender equality with around 15% or US\$ 3.5 million of total UN support dedicated to this priority area in 2020. The compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women will continue to drive the UN system to invest in this area, and allocation for this development area will continue to represent a large proportion of the UN system's total investment in Samoa. US\$1.8 million or 8% of the UN support in 2020 was dedicated to developing and strengthening social protection systems, with a specific focus on enhanced social assistance for women.

Table 6.1: UN Total Financial Allocation to Samoa, by Outcome Area (2020)

SDS Priority Area / UNPS Priority Area	Outputs	Agencies	National Partners	Total Support 2020
UNPS Outcome 1: Climate Change, Resilience and Environmental Protection / SDS Priority Area 4: Environment	Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation Disaster Risk Management & Disaster Risk Reduction Environmental Protection & Sustainability	UNDP, ILO, FAO, UNICEF, UNESCO, WMO/SPREP	MNRE, SNTF, WBI, MWCS, DMO, USP, MAF, Samoa Recycle and Waste Management	\$ 12,008,638.43 \$ 137,250.00 \$ 285,056.00 \$ 2,835,390.00
UNPS Outcome 2: Gender Equality / SDS Priority Area 2: Social	EVAWG Womens leadership & political participation Womens economic empowerment Normative Support	UNWOMEN, UNDP, ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA	MWCS, FLO, SVS, SNTF, CSOs and Govt, NHRI, SFHA, MESC, MOH, NOLA, Samoa Red Cross, SNTA, Fatafulu Consults, Society of Private Nurses	\$ 672,674.00 \$ - \$ - \$ -
UNPS Outcome 3: Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Empowerment / SDS Priority Area 2: Social	National Policies and Plans Economic Empowerment Social Inclusion & Community Wellbeing	ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNESCAP, FAO	CO, MNRE, SPREP, MCIL, SNTF, RCO SAMOA, MWCS, SRC, MWCS, MOH, MESC, SVS, ADRA,	\$ - \$ 271,000.00 \$ 1,594,311.00 \$ 4,132,722.60 \$ 240,101.00 \$ 20,000.00
UNPS Outcome 4: Equitable Basic Services / SDS Priority Area 2: Social; Priority Area 3: Infrastructure	Health Education WASH	UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNDP GF, UNOPS	UNFPA, SBS, SP, MFAT, SBCL, JAWS, MJCA	\$ 340,678.00 \$ - \$ -
UNPS Outcome 5: Governance and Community Engagement / UNPS Priority Area 2: Social	Data Support Continuous support for women's political participation Support to build effective and responsible institutions	UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO	NUS, MESC, MCIT, SNTF	\$ 114,000.00 \$ 340,491.00 \$ -
UNPS Outcome 6: Human Rights / SDS Priority Area 2: Social	Continuous support to Treaty Bodies, UPR and Special Procedures Support integration and use of human rights approach to mitigate climate change	ILO, UNDP, UNESCO		\$ - \$ 22,992,312.03
Total UN Support 2020				\$ 22,992,312.03

Note: IFAD approved US\$ 3.6 million for a 6-year project (SAFPROM) in 2019; about US\$ 0.2 million was utilised in 2020 towards outcome 3, an amount which is not included here.

¹⁹² This allocation consists of both financial and technical assistance commitments.

¹⁹³ Source: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/cf-documents/1ee5b8a2-8f0d-4b2e-bc89-2276ee3b07f9_UNCT_results_report_9_Samoa_6_April_2021.pdf

7. SWOT Analysis

This section aims to further highlight the country profile in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). The three angles are economic, human and social, and environmental dimensions of development.

7.1. Economic SWOT

Strengths

Samoa's strong reliance on remittances lends resilience to the economy and livelihoods. Remittances account for about 25-30% of GDP and have held up well so far since the commencement of the COVID-19 outbreak. In fact, the total volume of remittances in 2020 (Samoan Tala 600 million or US\$ 227.1 million) represents a 14% increase over the 2019 (pre-pandemic) volume. Remittances also remained strong in 2021, on the pace to reach or even surpass the 2020 levels. Any drop in remittances could turn into the source of potential vulnerability.

High reliance on subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture and fisheries helps buffer the impact of economic contraction and provides food security. 78% of total population lives in rural areas and have access to communal agricultural resources and fisheries. It is noteworthy that agricultural land per capita in Samoa is 1,744 m² (about half an acre), which is about the median level observed among Pacific SIDS (1,735 m²).

Weaknesses

The country has substantial exposure to the tourism sector, which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis, with no immediate recovery in sight. Samoa had about 180,000 international visitors in 2019 (or about one per capita), generating NZ\$ 413 million (Tala \$ 711 million, US\$ 269 million) in tourism revenues (equivalent to about 35% of GDP); tourism employment (at 5,150 people) accounted for 12.5% of the total number of jobs.

There is a significant reliance on imports, which represent 40% of GDP (while exports are only equivalent to 5%). Samoa's imports in 2020 declined by 20% compared to 2019 (from Tala \$1 billion [US\$380 million] to T\$ 828.6 million [US\$ 314 million]),¹⁹⁴ likely indicating the impact of SOE restrictions and lack of demand from the tourism sector. In the context of global price increases and given the structure of imports (with 25% of total imports accounted by food products, and 17% by fuel), any global price increase will augment the costs of imports and be felt immediately by consumers through rising domestic prices. This has effectively happened in Samoa during 2021.

¹⁹⁴ SBS Overseas Merchandise Trade Report, April 2021.

Opportunities

Labour mobility schemes have the potential for expansion in the longer term. The number of workers participating in seasonal labour mobility schemes was 3,404 in 2019 (an increase of almost 1,000 from 2,512 in 2018); this still represents less than 10% of the total domestic employment;¹⁹⁵ while demand for overseas seasonal work is rising, any expansion will be subject to country's quotas and the COVID-19 situation (the country's COVID-free status is a significant plus as it has allowed the seasonal scheme to continue).

Samoa has access to grants and concessional financing from multilateral development banks and an IDA borrowing status with the World Bank, plus an equivalent with ADB; in 2020 the Asian Development Bank approved a US\$ 20 million grant to assist Samoa cope with COVID-19. Additional financing was received from the IMF. New Zealand's ODA allocation for 2020/21 is of NZ\$ 26.7 million (US\$ 18 million). ODA has allowed Samoa to avoid the rise of public debt. Any additional financing needs will have to be weighed carefully against the risk of debt accumulation.

Threats

There is a real risk that the economic downturn caused by the pandemic will deepen and take years to overcome, affecting the already disadvantaged most severely. GDP has declined by 9.2% in 2020, and by 7.8% during FY 2021 (ended in July 2021). Slow historic rates of annual economic growth (around 2-3%) and slow future recovery of the tourism sector would delay the return to pre-crisis GDP levels.

7.2. Social SWOT

Strengths

Samoa has a very young population, even by Pacific standards. 48.9% of Samoans are under age 24, and the median age is 25.6 years. With a dependency ratio of 66.2 young (0-14) people per 100 people ages 15-54, the country has the potential to enjoy *demographic dividends* to growth.¹⁹⁶ However, given rather limited domestic labour opportunities in the formal sector, and expected slow recovery of the tourism sector, a growing participation in seasonal labour schemes with

¹⁹⁵ Samoan Observer, October 19, 2020, page 6. The schemes that Samoa is part of, include the Australia Seasonal Workers Program (S.W.P); the New Zealand's Recognized Seasonal Employment (R.S.E.); and the Pacific Labour Scheme (which allows work periods of more than 3 years).

¹⁹⁶ Demographic dividend, as defined by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is "the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older)". In other words, it is "a boost in economic productivity that occurs when there are growing numbers of people in the workforce relative to the number of dependents".

Australia and New Zealand will be increasingly important to offer employment to the young generations and realize these dividends.

The population structure of Samoa presents a demographic window of opportunity when the young population cohorts transition into the productive labour force age group. While the just ended National Youth Policy and Samoa Development Strategy 2016-2020 both recognize the importance of investing in education and skills development to match the labour force to labour market needs, there have to be more targeted efforts to harness the demographic dividend premised on investing in young people.

The country continues to have a strong communal culture and traditional social safety nets. While these mechanisms are under increasing pressure due to new global challenges (such as COVID), they continue to play a prominent role as support mechanism. Supplementing these traditional systems with more formal targeted social protection will make them even stronger. Conversely, care must be taken to address the widespread culture of discrimination against women and girls, which tends to distort service provision and access to economic and social resources, whether provided by the community or by the State.

Extreme poverty is almost non-existent. The incidence of extreme and food poverty was estimated at 6% based on the 2018 HIES data.¹⁹⁷ Applying the international poverty line of PPP US\$ 1.90 per day, it is found that only 0.5% of Samoan population fall below it. However, the ongoing economic crisis and the impact on the employment sector is expected to increase extreme poverty and vulnerability.

South-South Cooperation partnerships help accelerate development and humanitarian responses and results. The Government of Samoa leveraged the South-South Cooperation modality with the Fijian Government to achieve key results such as the continuity of essential lifesaving obstetrics care services by Fijian Midwives during the Measles outbreak. Mainstreaming South-South Cooperation in the UN humanitarian and development programming and in the COVID-19 and Climate Change context is an opportunity to accelerate the achievement of SDGs.

Weaknesses

Nutritional value and quality of diet is inadequate for 25% of the population. The analysis of the food data collected in the 2018 HIES shows that access to food is generally good, and undernourishment is low; however, about one person in four does not have access to safe and nutritious food. The dietary variety is poor, with 13 food products contributing 80% of the total dietary energy consumed.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Samoa Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report (June 2020).

¹⁹⁸ Troubat, N., Faaola, E. and Aliyeva, R. 2020. Food security and food consumption in Samoa – Based on the analysis of the 2018 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. FAO and SBS. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb0613en>

The incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is extremely high. The adult obesity rate of 47.3% (2016) ranks the country as the eight most affected in the world.¹⁹⁹ The related morbidities and pre-mature mortality exert both social and economic toll. High obesity and NCD rates are expected to increase health expenditures significantly, thereby overburdening the healthcare system.

The realization of universal health coverage (UHC) requires adequate measures to reduce maternal, neonatal, infant and child mortality and morbidity and increase access to quality health-care services for new-borns, infants, children as well as all women before, during and after pregnancy and childbirth, including in the area of SRH. According to the 2019 State of the Pacific's Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) Workforce report, approximately 22% of Samoa's RMNCAH workforce staff and 44% of nurse-midwives were aged fifty years or above. In 2019, it was estimated that a quarter of potential RMNCAH needs in Samoa is not met based on existing workforce numbers. To cope with this challenge, some service delivery points in Samoa resorted to restricted opening hours and to the temporary closure of some service delivery points.²⁰⁰

The remaining gender gaps (especially in participation in the labour market, access to quality healthcare, leadership and decision making), and the prevalence of GBV, have resulted in economic burdens and impeded inclusive economic growth.

Opportunities

The country has a significant scope to further enhance human capital. The Samoa *Human Capital Index* (HCI) 2020 value of 0.55 is slightly higher than Fiji's (0.51) and Tonga's (0.53), but still much lower than that of New Zealand (0.78) and Australia (0.77).²⁰¹ Samoa's 2018 *Human Development Index* (HDI) positions it at #111 out of 189 countries and territories. To further build human capital, it would be necessary to empower women and strengthen gender equality.

Harnessing the demographic dividend is an essential component of economic, social and gender transformation for Samoa to recover from the effects of COVID-19, sustain domestically generated revenue and achieve high-income status in the future. Conversely, failure to capitalize in the current demographic window of opportunity will in the future certainly increase the drop in GDP, multiply the missed opportunities for economic reforms that require human capital, augment the burden on the environment and ultimately threaten peace and security. The demographic dividend provides strong incentives for the Samoan Government and its DPs to invest in human capital, from education, to health, decent work and governance.

¹⁹⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/obesity-adult-prevalence-rate/country-comparison/>

²⁰⁰ UNFPA (2019). The State of the Pacific's Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) Workforce report.

²⁰¹ Note that the value of 1 is a benchmark for complete education and full health. Source of HCI: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34432>.

More could be done to eliminate gaps in vaccination coverage. While the rates of measles vaccination have been boosted significantly (to 95%) since the outbreak in late 2019, the immunization coverage of children by various other vaccines remains highly uneven. Samoa also strives to achieve almost universal coverage of adults (and children ages 12-17) with a COVID vaccine.

There is a great opportunity to expand the formal social protection system to offer stronger social protection floors and better coverage in support of traditional community mechanisms, in a context of frequent external shocks due to natural hazards. Adopting a Samoa National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) would be the first step in that direction. This is particularly relevant and timely in the ongoing COVID context, as globally an increasing number of countries are using social protection measures as part of the COVID response packages to cushion the adverse economic impact of the pandemic and strengthen the resilience of the households.

Threats

The loss of the current COVID-19 free status would be a significant setback. The country is currently among the very few infection-free places remaining in the world. Allowing the virus to enter the country would be a major shock, as neighbouring countries' situation has demonstrated. Resurgence and new variants of COVID-19 globally, and especially in New Zealand and Australia, would put a further strain on Samoa's economic and social fabric, and would delay the potential opening of Samoa's two-way travel bubble with those countries. A one-way travel bubble currently facilitates travel *from* Samoa for work (including seasonal labour schemes) and education but prevents tourists from entering the country.

7.3. Environmental SWOT

Strengths

The country is undertaking significant conservation efforts. Samoa has participated in international and regional efforts to address key issues related to environmental conservation and sustainable development. Domestically the Government has also implemented conservation programs in an integrated manner with its economic and governance reforms.²⁰²

Weaknesses

Samoa faces a high frequency of natural hazards, such as earthquakes (given its location in the Pacific "Ring of Fire") and devastating cyclones. In September 2009, an earthquake and the

²⁰² See further discussion in Sustainable Development Report:
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1285samoaNSDS.pdf>

resulting tsunami caused about 200 deaths and severely damaged Samoa. In December 2012, extensive flooding and wind damage from Tropical Cyclone Evan killed four people, displaced over 6,000, and damaged or destroyed an estimated 1,500 homes on Samoa's Upolu Island. Flooding also occurs frequently.²⁰³ In February 2018, the Government of Samoa confirmed a Declaration of Disaster for 48 hours as TC Gita approached at Category 2 strength.²⁰⁴ As discussed under SDG 13 (Climate Action), it is critical to ensure that the National Disaster Management Plan is an effective instrument, and for that purpose, includes attention to the needs and contributions of women and girls to disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Opportunities

Samoa needs to focus on developing a future Blue Economy and preserving its assets, which will help guard the community's long-term use of the nation's fisheries resources. This must be done in consultation with the men and women most involved in the industry, including its subsistence and inshore components. The implementation of the Samoa Ocean Strategy (adopted in October 2020) will help plan and manage the country's ocean, marine inland waters, territorial sea, and seabed for the coming decade.²⁰⁵

Samoa has one of the most cyclone-resistant trees in the world, the endemic *malili* (*Terminalia richii*) which produces a multi-purpose timber. There are opportunities for Samoa's smallholder farmers to grow *malili* together with *poumuli* in agroforestry configurations that will be highly cyclone resistant and provide building timbers and durable poles. There is also potential to plant sandalwood in the dry zones around Asau on Savai'i and provide a long-term source of income to some of the poorest farmers and their families in Samoa.

Threats

Increased intensity of natural hazards, including high intensity cyclones, have the potential to devastate agricultural and tree crops. There is also a risk of overexploitation and depletion of marine resources. Because women are disproportionately engaged in subsistence and small-scale production in these areas, the threat extends to increased care-related and other burdens on women and a widening of gender gaps, undermining overall resilience and recovery unless specifically addressed. Both women and men must be involved in consultations on resilience.

²⁰³ Tropical cyclone outlook can be found at the Samoa Meteorology Division website: <http://www.samet.gov.ws/>

²⁰⁴ https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/WSM/TC_Gita_Emergency_Response_IP.pdf

²⁰⁵ This initiative is a partnership between the Government and the Blue Prosperity Coalition.

8. Conclusion

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Samoa faces many challenges and vulnerabilities that are inherent to the group of countries it belongs to and affect their ability to achieve the SDGs. Those exposures encompass economic vulnerabilities, structural and geographical vulnerabilities and vulnerability to climate risks and natural hazards. According to the recent Multi-Dimensional Vulnerability Analysis (MVI) led by the UN RC Offices and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), Samoa is one of the 30 most vulnerable countries in the MVI economic and environmental dimensions, among the 195 countries for which the index is computed. It is also in the top-50 countries on the MVI structural/geographic vulnerability.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and the policy measures to prevent the virus entering the country have had a significant economic toll on Samoa. As a result of a 9.2% decline in real GDP during 2020, Samoa has been downgraded in 2021 to Lower-Middle Income Country (LMIC) from the Upper-Middle Income Country (UMIC) status. According to the updated (as of July 1, 2021) World Bank country income classification, Samoa's 2020 Gross National Income (GNI) per capita stood at US\$ 4,070, while the lower threshold for the upper-middle income status is US\$ 4,096. The restoration of growth would be required for the country to attain the UMIC status again.

Economic recovery is forecast for 2022, only after full vaccine coverage is achieved and international travellers return in significant numbers. It will take several years for the economy to reach the pre-COVID level of real GDP. The trajectory to full recovery will depend significantly on the pace of tourism restoration. The return to growth is by no means guaranteed for 2022, as significant downside risks to the economic outlook remain.

On the positive side, the country has performed well in responding to the economic and social impacts of economic recession. Most importantly, the country remains COVID-free, and is near to achieving almost universal COVID-19 vaccination of adults (age 18+) and children ages 12-17. The combination of stimulus measures and a strong continued flow of remittances (which have reached a peak in 2020) have helped mitigate impacts on welfare of the economic downturn. Also, the ODA contributions allowed Samoa to avoid a dangerous path of borrowing in excess and accumulating public debt.

Samoa's overall progress towards achieving SDG targets has been mixed. While the country has already attained or is on track of reaching some goals (e.g., extreme poverty, maternal and infant mortality, access to education), it faces significant challenges in others, such as gender equality and an end to violence against women, with progress in many areas being stagnant. In some areas, the measurement of progress (or lack thereof) has not been possible. There is a stringent need to further develop national statistical capacity. A prolonged COVID-19 global crisis would further undermine progress in many SDG areas in Samoa.

This assessment has identified several specific population groups that are at risk of being left behind if no enhanced policy effort is made both immediately and in through the long term. These groups include the persons affected by the ongoing economic crisis; children and women who are

subject to domestic violence; persons with disabilities (PWDs); youth not in employment, education and training (NEET); and persons with inadequate diet, obesity and related NCDs.

Keeping a strong, continued focus on human development needs to be at the core of the country's development strategy in the years to come. Samoa's HDI value for 2019 is 0.715, which puts the country in the high human development category. Building on achievements to date, it is necessary to improve the quality of education, strengthen the employability of youth, eliminate discriminatory cultural stereotypes and violence against women and girls, and invest in adult health as crucial intervention areas. Moreover, in further promoting human development, the newly elected Government of Samoa might wish to give serious consideration to the adoption of a National Social Protection Policy (whose draft has already been developed under the Joint Program on Social Protection), which would provide a much-needed formal social protection mechanism to the most vulnerable groups of Samoan society.

Finally, while enhancing investments in human capital and addressing the outstanding issues in relation to human rights and gender inequality, Samoa's transformational path would need to be centred around climate and environmental sustainability, with a focus on promoting green growth, the Blue Economy, innovation and a circular economy. The United Nations and Development Partners stand ready to support Samoa in the achievement and measurement of the SDG results.

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