

Samoan Women Shaping Development

Samoa Enhancing Agency

November 25, 2016

Project: Samoan Women Shaping Development Program

Outcome areas: Enhancing agency

Project partner: Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development

Total funding: \$3,800,000*

Funding timeframe: 2015–2020

The Pacific Women-funded Samoan Women Shaping Development program is implemented by the Samoan Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development with civil society, government and private sector partners. The program's approach to improving gender equality in Samoa is holistic and grounded in respect for Samoan culture.

Program activities over the past year have been diverse, including promoting women's economic empowerment with traditional mat weaving, supporting the National Council of Women's pre-election advocacy campaign and working with male volunteers to speak out against violence.

The program also supported grassroots sharing of positive gender equality messages through 'community conversations,' incorporating traditional learning methods like songs, poems, drama, comedy, and dancing.

Community conversations create a safe environment where everyone in the community has a voice to address important issues, so they can build a better future, together.

Samoan Women Shaping Development hosted national symposia in Upolu and Savaii where 200 National Council of Women advocates were trained in conducting community conversations. The National Council of Women advocates have since held community conversations in 41 villages, focusing on increasing the participation of women in the 2016 national election and ending violence against women. In total, about 7,000 women, 3,800 men, 4,300 youth and 1,000 children have performed for an audience of about 15,300 women, 9,000 men, 10,700 youth and 9,000 children.

Ms Falenaoti Mulitalo June Kolotita Ailuai led a community conversation in her village, Vavau: ‘The whole village came together. We noticed that no one was at home as every house in the village was empty, and the Malae (meeting place) was packed. Even neighbouring villages came to watch. Conversations were made! The village council [was] in full force, merely as supporters, while the women coordinated, led and implemented all aspects of the program; including the oratory role, which is usually and traditionally reserved for a male chief. It was empowerment in its purest form.’

Monitoring and evaluation of the community conversations showed a change in people’s mindsets about women becoming involved in politics.

In Vavau, there was also a significant attitude change with respect to ending violence against women. ‘As a result of the community conversation process,’ Ms Ailuai explained, ‘I am very proud to announce that the Village Council passed its first bylaw on adopting a zero tolerance on violence. This is a reflection of the power of engaging men in these conversations from the beginning, where they are also thinking about solutions for the protection of the whole village’.



‘Community conversations’ in Samoa incorporates traditional learning methods like songs, poems, drama, comedy and dancing to discuss gender equality issues. Photo: Mema Motusaga.

This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2015-2016](#). All values are consisted with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).

*This activity is part of a larger program.