

# Drawing on evidence to design effective support for women's leadership

Samoa [Leadership And Decision-Making](#)

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Project name: Women in Leadership in Samoa

Project partners: UNDP and UN Women

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Funding timeframe: 2018–2022

The pathway for women to political leadership in Samoa is through a unique governance system that incorporates modern democratic principles and the fa'amatai system of community organisation. The Women in Leadership in Samoa (WILS) project is building on lessons learned in a previous project phase to progress women's leadership in the Samoan context.



Papalii Mele Mauala, of UNWomen, Simona Marinescu, UN Resident Coordinator, Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa, the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mataafa, the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, Honourable Dr Sharman Stone, and Her Excellency Australian High Commissioner, Sara Moriarty, at the launch of the project. Photo credit: C. Fruean, UNDP.

Supported by Pacific Women and coordinated by UNDP and UN Women, WILS is the second phase of the Increasing Political Participation of Women in Samoa (IPPWS) project that Pacific Women funded during 2015–2016. The IPPWS project contributed to a record 24 women standing in the 2016 general election, three times as many as the previous poll. Four women were elected in open seats, with a fifth woman appointed under the special measure introduced to ensure a minimum of 10 per cent women’s representation in parliament.

A key lesson from the project’s first phase was that increasing women’s representation in leadership roles requires sustained and long-term investment and support. The WILS project aims to support a long-term process to address women’s representation issues in Samoa.

The first phase also demonstrated the impact of providing formal training for women in campaigning, electoral laws and the workings of parliament.

However, women candidates in the 2016 election reported that women voters did not support them automatically. The project found the key to increasing the number of women in leadership roles across all levels is through strengthening women's civic engagement so that they have the ongoing support of their aiga (extended family), villages, churches and districts.

This learning has been incorporated into the WILS design. 'It is fundamental that we take a long-term view to strengthening women leadership in Samoa or anywhere else,' said Muliagatele Dr Potoae Roberts Aiafi, WILS Project Manager. 'Because of the blending of our fa'a Samoa and national government system, the advancement of women's roles in political decision making levels requires building women's pathways through their civic engagement. This thinking is behind the whole approach of the WILS project.'

Mr Nicolas Burniat, UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office Acting Representative, said strong partnerships play an important role in strengthening women's leadership. 'By continuing to build on the established partnerships and networks with community groups, civil society organisations, media and other organisations, we can help ensure women have the tools and opportunities needed to take on leadership roles in their communities and at the national level.'

Challenges for women's leadership in Samoa include limited pathways into political leadership, community perceptions about women's roles, financial constraints, gaps in civic education and the need for broader support. WILS seeks to address these barriers to support increased women's representation at all levels.