



SEN youth completed a Leadership Training

2024 CIVIL SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON SDG 4

I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Samoa is a small Pacific country vulnerable to disasters and climate change. The population residing in Samoa stands at 205,000 people, whilst the ethnic Samoan population now living in New Zealand is 183,000. The country relies heavily on a few sources of export income, development assistance, and remittances from Samoans working overseas.

Most of the population 15 years and above have left the school system with either a School Certificate or lower (36%) as their highest qualification.¹ The population is young (over 60% are under age 29). Participation in formal employment is relatively low yet Samoan businesses report skills shortages as a significant barrier to further growth.²

The Samoa government's education budget stands at 4.8% of the GDP. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) data reports government expenditure on education as 13.7% in 2023, well below international benchmarks,³ especially of its Pacific neighbours. Samoa performs well on access when compared to other GPE partner countries, despite a lack of attention on pre-primary education. However, more boys than girls are dropping out, with 55% of the secondary school population now female.⁴ There is also a concern for the high percentage of students leaving the education system, especially in Years 11 and 13. In leaving examinations 71% of females achieved the target standard or above, compared to only 47% of males.

Samoa is suffering a substantial decline in literacy and numeracy across all levels.⁵ There is a long-running teacher shortage with many teachers leaving for seasonal work abroad, reflecting issues of brain drain reported in neighbouring countries in the Pacific.⁶

1 Census-2021-Final-Report_221122_051222.pdf (sbs.gov.ws)
 2 Samoa Education Sector Support Program Design Document (dfat.gov.au)
 3 GPE Samoa Results framework, 2025
 4 Educational Statistical Digest 2023
 5 Samoa Observer | Samoa struggling with "poor" education outcomes
 6 Samoa Observer | Teacher shortage still impacting schools

People with disabilities in Samoa face several challenges, including a lack of access to education, employment, health care, and social life. They are less likely to attend school due to inaccessible school buildings, lack of specialised education programs, and negative attitudes towards them.⁷ In 2023, only 17 students with a disability were enrolled in secondary school.⁸

The 2023 Samoa Poverty Assessment found that 20% of children in Samoa live in poverty. Marginalised youth find it difficult to participate fully in society. They cannot afford necessities and are more likely to drop out of school than their non-marginalised peers leading to unemployment, low wages, and social exclusion.⁹

II. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SDG 4

Samoa's Commitment. Samoa's commitment to SDG 4 is evident in its national development plans, Pathway for the Development of Samoa (PDS) and their allocation of the national budget in which the Ministry of Education received the second highest amount. However, addressing economic vulnerabilities and the growing threat of climate change is critical for ensuring inclusive and quality education for all.

Primary education is compulsory and free, resulting in high enrolment rates. Challenges remain in achieving equitable access to quality education across all levels, particularly secondary education as well as the drop in numeracy and literacy levels. In this area, the country is going backwards, with equitable access to quality education a challenge, especially for students with special needs and those in rural areas. Investing in teacher training and providing sufficient learning materials are critical to address these disparities.

Policy and Curriculum. Samoa has national policies that promote environmental education, which can

7 The State of Human Rights Report 2022
 8 Education Statistical Digest 2023
 9 ESCAP-2021-PB-Informal-Traditional-Social-Protection-Samoa.pdf (unesap.org)

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES	
Population:	228,966 (2024)
GNI per Capita (PPP\$)	6,600 (2017 PPP \$),
Income Group	Lower-Middle Income
HDI: Value/Rank	0.702 / 116th out of 193 (2023)
Education Expenditure (% GDP)	4.48% (2020)
Upper Secondary Completion Rate Female / Male	59.0 (2023) 69.8 / 48.6
Literacy Rate (15-64 Yrs.) Female / Male	99.1 (2021) 99.3 / 99.0
SDG 4 Trend	Significant challenges remain
SDG 4 Dashboard	Stagnating
Climate-related disasters:	
Total No. of disasters* Regional Mean/Median	0 (2020-22) 9.3 / 4
Risk Management Index:	
Climate-driven Hazard & Exposure	1.9 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.6
Lack of coping capacity	4.2 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.3
Vulnerability	4.4 (2022) Regional Mean: 3.4 3.4 (2022) Regional Mean: 3.4
*Drought, Extreme temperature, Flood, Landslide, Storm, Wildfire	

encompass climate change. However, the extent to which climate change is explicitly addressed in the curriculum across all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) requires further investigation. There are initiatives like the "Guardians – Tausi lou Fa'asinomaga" program that incorporate climate change themes, but a more systematic mainstreaming is needed. Samoa shows glimpses of a commitment to environmental education, and some climate change integration.

Clearly, there is a need for strong policy specifically for climate change education (CCE), increased budgetary transparency regarding CCE, and scaling up good civil society models.

Budgetary Allocation. Information on the specific budget allocated for CCE implementation is limited. Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review (VNR) on SDGs mentions progress on various education goals but does not detail CCE funding. Given the importance of CCE, advocating for increased budgetary allocation for teacher training, resource development, and infrastructure improvements in this area would be beneficial.

Civil Society Efforts. Civil society organisations (CSOs) like the Conservation Society and Samoa Voyaging Society play an important role, with programmes providing hands-on environmental education focused on climate change for students and communities. These initiatives complement government efforts and showcase successful models for integrating CCE.

Worsening Climate Change-Related Impacts. Climate change poses significant threats to Samoa's education sector. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and disruptions to agriculture can damage infrastructure, displace communities, and lead to food insecurity, all of which can negatively impact learners' participation in schools and educational institutions, as well as their quality of learning.

III. CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SDG 4 IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP, AND MONITORING

Civil society in Samoa is made up of a diverse range of organisations committed to working with a wide range of people and groups, including women, youth, people with disabilities, and marginalised communities. However, there are several challenges facing civil society in Samoa.

Public institutions have a mixed capacity to include civil society voices and there seems a lack of awareness among some government officials about the work of CSOs or a clear and consistent policy on how to engage with CSOs. Worse, in some cases, the government has referred CSOs to the courts when their views have differed. This indicates a shrinking of civic space and is a threat to democracy and human rights in the country.

The only place the Samoa Education Network (SEN) dialogues with the government is in the Education Sector Advisory Committee (ESAC). SEN is also representing the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Government Organisations (SUNGO) when consulting with the MESC.

Initially, there were some communication problems with the perceptions of SUNGO and SEN's role, but more recently there have been good and open communications with officers and officials in the Ministry of Education. There needs to be more civil society representatives in ESAC, especially for organisations representing those with a disability and the diverse genders of other marginalised dimensions.

Recent improvements in relationships in the MESC indicate that meaningful civic engagement with the Samoa government on education issues is now possible, but requires the continuing of SEN's strategy, the offer of joint reviews and partnership in improving the quality of education services. SEN has recently been described as an important resource by the Ministry as they make moves to involve the organisation more.

A new National Gender Policy will be finalised in 2024. SEN will be advocating for an Education Gender Policy to be included in the Education Sector Plan 2025-30 (ESP) which should be finalised in the coming period. SEN will also contribute to the final ESP review in 2024.



Inclusion and gender equity as the focus of Samoa Education Network's (SEN) workshop

An inclusive education policy was adopted in 2014. This is being reviewed and is expected to be finalised in 2024. SEN will ensure active engagement in this review so policy can address several challenges, including the lack of access to inclusive education for children with disabilities, the lack of training for teachers on inclusive education, and the lack of resources for inclusive education. SEN and the MESC will ensure marginalised groups' awareness and engagement in all education policy reviews and dialogues.

Governance Mechanisms and Challenges. Samoa recognises the importance of CSO engagement in achieving the SDGs. Here are the existing mechanisms for participation and the challenges faced:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAFT) is the focal point for SDGs. CSOs can participate in sector-specific steering committees, but challenges include limited access to information and a lack of clear guidelines for engagement.
- The UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and UN agencies like UNESCO hold meetings with CSOs, but ensuring consistent participation across all UN entities can be difficult.

Challenges for CSOs. Samoa lacks a legal framework and clear guidelines specifically for CSO engagement in the SDGs, creating ambiguity about roles and responsibilities. Many CSOs have limited resources and expertise for data collection, analysis, and effective advocacy. There is a need for increased awareness about the SDGs and how CSOs can contribute, both within civil society and the broader public.

Openness and Inclusivity. Samoa acknowledges the need for CSO participation, but there's room for improvement: Samoa's VNR reports highlight CSO engagement, but the extent of their actual involvement in data collection, analysis, and report writing is unclear. Information on CSO involvement in this process is limited.

While consultations occur, ensuring participation from diverse CSOs, particularly those representing marginalised groups, can be challenging. CSOs sometimes face difficulties accessing information and data on SDG progress. What's more, participating in important SDG processes such as the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) proves difficult, with funding constraints and visa issues hampering civil society participation.

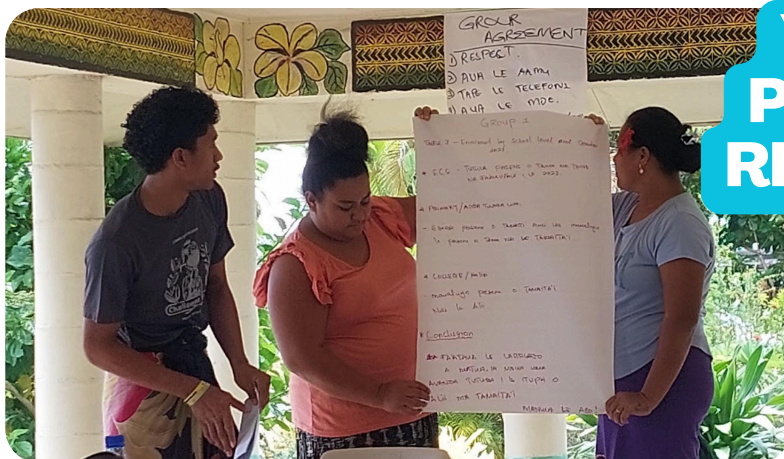
IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improved Data Collection and Sharing.** The recent 2024 VNR data validation exercise has shown that the government is willing, but the machinery is weak. Much information is out of date or is fragmented ministry by ministry. The government needs to ensure transparent access to data, in particular on the progress of SDGs. This will enable CSOs to effectively monitor and advocate for improvements
- Inclusivity data.** Whilst we applaud the Ministry of Education for making information readily available through its Annual Reports and the Statistics Digest, we request the Ministry to urgently implement a system for collecting data on inclusive education and ECCE programs. This data should be disaggregated using the GAPSED+ equity dimensions (Gender, Age, Place, socioeconomic, Ethnicity, Disability and Special needs to identify and address any existing inequalities in access and participation.
- Inclusive Education Budget.** We are concerned about the recent cuts to the inclusive education budget. We strongly request the Ministry to re-evaluate this decision and consider increasing the budget allocation for inclusive education programs. If there are issues with processing and disbursement of funds, we urge the government to solve these issues rather than reduce the budget. Good research into the extent of disability and more resources for trained teacher's assistants and assistive materials will increase access for children with disabilities.
- One Government Grant and Access.** Clearly, schools are struggling with the current grant levels. We propose an increase in the One Government Grant to schools. This would alleviate the financial burden placed on school committees by eliminating the need to impose registration fees on families. Fees disadvantage those least able to pay, by excluding them. Reducing financial barriers will promote increased access to education for all children.
- Develop CSO Guidelines for SDG Engagement.** The MESC, MFAFT, and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) should collaborate with CSO to establish clear guidelines outlining roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms for CSO participation in SDG 4 and all SDG implementation, follow-up, and monitoring.

- Teacher Training.** Provide training programs for teachers to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively deliver CCE. This training can address pedagogy for climate change education, integrating Samoan cultural values, and utilising local case studies.
- Increase Budgetary Allocation for CCE.** The MESC should advocate for increased budgetary allocation dedicated to CCE initiatives. This includes funding for teacher training, resource development, and infrastructure improvements in schools most vulnerable to climate impacts.
- Develop a Resource Mobilisation Strategy.** Collaborate with UN agencies, donors, and the private sector to secure additional funding for CCE programs. The MESC should also establish formal partnerships with CSOs like the Samoa Voyaging Society to scale up successful CCE programs like "Guardians." This can involve joint training programs, resource sharing, and wider outreach to schools.
- Increase Awareness about SDGs.** Raise public awareness about the SDGs, particularly SDG 4, and how CSOs contribute to achieving these goals. This can be done through public awareness campaigns and community outreach programs.



Reading program for young rural learners



YOUTH in SAMOA: PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Samoa, several barriers prevent marginalised youth from achieving their right to education, hindering progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. SEN has held multiple events, workshops, training and consultations to collect views of the community and the youth themselves.

Many Samoan families struggle financially, forcing some children to leave school early to contribute to household income. Affording school supplies, uniforms, and transportation costs is a significant burden, especially for those in remote areas.

Traditional gender roles restrict girls' educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy further disrupt schooling. Additionally, some mindsets may not value formal education as highly as vocational skills or cultural knowledge.

Distance to schools is also a challenge, especially in remote villages. The lack of safe and reliable transportation makes long commutes difficult, discouraging students from attending regularly. Students with disabilities face additional obstacles, as schools lack the necessary infrastructure or support staff to accommodate their needs.

Samoa's education system itself may pose challenges. Large class sizes can limit teachers' ability to provide individualised attention, and teaching methods may not cater to diverse learning styles. A lack of qualified teachers, particularly in specialised subjects, can further disadvantage students in marginalised communities.

Youth Demands

Youths in Samoa are calling for a more accessible and inclusive education system. This means making schools affordable and ensuring they have proper facilities for students with disabilities. Youths also want a more equitable curriculum that provides equal opportunities for all students, regardless of background. They believe this can be achieved through additional support for struggling students and improvements in teacher training and resources.

Another area of focus for Samoan youths is gender transformation in education. They want to see an end to gender stereotypes and encourage girls to participate fully in all subjects, including traditionally male-dominated fields like science. Youths believe this will empower girls and allow them to pursue leadership roles.

Finally, youths are calling for a curriculum that is relevant to Samoa's current and future needs. They want to see an education system that equips them with the skills they need to succeed in the job market or continue their education. This could involve incorporating vocational training, financial literacy, and digital literacy into the curriculum. By making these changes, Samoa's education system can better serve the needs of all its young people.



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The Samoa Education Network (SEN) focuses on working towards the achievement of SDG 4, "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," by engaging with the government on policy dialogues as well as policy reviews, and putting through recommendations created from working with marginalised groups in the Samoa communities, including youth and SEN members. SEN advocates for better education policies and programs in Samoa. This program is funded by Global Partnership for Education (GPE) through the Education Out Loud program. SEN is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).

