

Priorities of the People

HARDSHIP IN SAMOA

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Introduction

In spite of Samoa's tropical abundance and culture of helping one another, some Samoans are living in difficult conditions and facing real hardship. To remedy this situation, the government has undertaken a successful reform program and achieved positive economic growth in recent years. In cooperation with others, the government is striving to understand the nature of hardship in Samoa and develop ways to combat it. The theme of the government's most recent economic strategy, called Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2002–2004 (SDS), is Opportunities for All. This theme highlights the need for all the people of Samoa to share the benefits of national development.

In 2002, the government initiated a "Participatory Assessment on Hardship." Samoans from all walks of life, especially those facing hardship, were asked to describe hardship from their point of view and suggest the most important priority actions to improve their lives. Interviews were held at the household level, and focus group discussions and workshops were held at the community level. The Treasury Department and Ministry of Internal Affairs selected 16 sample sites for the consultations: 10 communities (villages and settlements) on Upolu Island and 6 villages on Savaii

The government is studying hardship and ways to combat it

An interview being conducted in a hut where a family of six sleeps



Island. The assessment was funded by the Asian Development Bank.

The results of the assessment were consistent with the key SDS themes, which when implemented are expected to (i) generate more jobs; (ii) improve poorer people's ability to obtain housing, food, and clothing; and (iii) promote greater access to basic services such as education, health services, and safe water supply.

Is Hardship Really a Problem in Samoa?

The traditional
system is
strained by
modernization

The existence of hardship in Samoa is difficult for some to understand and accept. Communities have always taken care of all their members, sharing food and goods between the richer and poorer members. But this traditional system is strained by modernization—the need for cash, shift away from



Unemployed Single Mother, 29 Years Old

"I left school when I was 17 years old. I made it to Lower 5 but did not pass the School Certificate exam. I decided to look for a job to help my mother. My father passed away two years after I left school, so my mother was struggling a lot to feed us. I worked at the Yazaki factory for three years. It was the only kind of employment I could find because of my education level. The wages were low, but it was something.

"I got pregnant with my first child when I was 22 years old. It was one of those one-time incidents. My mother said I have to come back to Savaii, and it was for the best since I felt I was a burden to our family in Apia. I have not returned to Apia since. I had my second

child when I was 26. I am still unemployed and single. My brother is the breadwinner for our family, but one day he will have his own family. My mother is getting old and I do not want to leave her. I feel I should stay and look after her. I want to look for another job here in Savaii but there is nothing available given my education level. My kids need to go to school and eat. I am still looking for a job but it is not easy.

"I really have to think of the long run—we live in this tiny *faleoo* (native house) and life is already hard. I do not know what will happen with my job search, but hopefully I will get a job soon."

subsistence farming, growing population, and movement of people to towns.

Disadvantaged people suffer from "poverty of opportunity," in which lack of access to jobs, education, and services restricts the opportunities available to them.

Those who do not have jobs, skills, or any way to earn cash are suffering. Their dignity, pride, and in some cases their very survival, are in jeopardy. Some, especially the youth and school drop-outs, have turned to crime, prostitution, and drugs.

The personal stories in this booklet show the very desperate situations some people face. It is important to listen to their stories and strive to understand the nature of hardship in Samoa. Only then can effective strategies be developed to address it and improve the lives of the poor who are facing hardship every day.

Samoans want
jobs and better
access to
services

What is Hardship?

The primary goal of the assessment was to identify the people's perceptions of hardship by talking to key community leaders and people who were identified as suffering from hardship. Most people consulted said that hardship exists in

Lack of cash for
basic needs was
the biggest
concern

their community. *Mativa* (lack of money) was the most common local word used to describe hardship.

Most individuals and families defined hardship as a lack of money. This prevents people from accessing basic services such as education, health care, and water supply. Moreover, the people consulted closely associated hardship with the breakdown of family unity and values.

The people consulted described hardship in terms of income, services, and jobs.

Incomes. Lack of cash for the family's basic needs given the high cost of living was the biggest concern of families and communities consulted. Due to lack of cash, families were having difficulty meeting basic needs such as adequate housing, food, and clothing.

Services. Those facing hardship do not have access to adequate health services, education, and clean water. Lack of reliable transport and communication services further minimizes their ability to market agricultural goods.

Jobs. Lack of jobs, few opportunities to establish businesses, small/limited local markets for goods and services, lack of credit, and lack of access to external markets were the main areas cited as contributing to hardship.

Perceived Trends Over the Last 5 Years	
Area	Aspects of Hardship
Upolu (urban and rural)	More people are jobless Increased school fees and drop-out rates Increased drug use (marijuana), alcohol, robberies Increased domestic violence, child abuse, teenage pregnancies, and suicides Lack or limited access to basic services (such as schools, drinking water, transport) Less respect for village authorities and parents Increased number of families
Savaii (rural)	Limited land cultivation due to lack of able-bodied men to work on the plantation (farm) Continued land disputes Limited market for agricultural crops Poor access to basic services Increased teenage pregnancy

Farmer, 45-Year-Old Male

"I married a girl from another village. We have four children. I completed school in Form 5, and was unemployed for a short while. Then I worked at the YMCA as a carpenter for five years. I left this job as the money was not enough to take care of my new family, and I had to help look after our children because my wife's father was getting very sick and she had to care for him. My wife is also very sickly and at times she needs all the help she can get with running our family.

"We now look after my wife's family's land, as my wife is an only child. The lands have been idle for a very long time and I am now developing them to ensure that my wife's family and our own family are looked after.

"Of our four children, three are in school. They go to our village primary school, which is about a 40-minute walk away. When I go to the market to sell taro and *taamu* I have to make several trips down to where we catch the bus, as no bus comes to where we are. I hope, with the new road, a bus will come soon.

"I am trying to ensure my family survives from day to day. It would have been okay if it were not for some of the village activities we contribute to. For instance, we have to contribute ST100 to the village every week to help pay for the water supply source and the new school building. I don't mind giving for the school, but for the water I don't quite agree. We do not have access to

piped water; we fetch water from a spring nearby. To make things worse, if you do not pay they put a penalty fee on your contribution during the next meeting. I want to voice this concern with the village council, but somehow I am afraid they may punish my family and me. We have to contribute to the *Aumaga*, the general village activities, the women's committee, and our church. This leaves us with very little and sometimes nothing to pay for my children's school fees or just some new clothes or nice food.

"I am very sad when I see my children eating just banana in coconut cream and a cup of tea many times. At times I have some money, but my wife and I keep this for when the children are sick. We always take our children to the private doctor, because I don't trust our district hospital.

"When my wife is sick I am fearful that I may not be able to provide for all that we need. I pray hard to God to help me when this happens. My children keep me going from day to day. I am always thinking of what they will become. I don't want them to come through the path like I did, so I will always make sure that I have money for their education, so they will not face these hardships that we are facing at the moment.

"Maybe someday I will have a *fale palagi* (modern house) but for now, my children's education and food for my family is most important."

Most communities consulted perceived that hardship has worsened over the last five years.

During the consultations, it was not difficult for people to define hardship and identify people suffering from hardship, indicating that hardship is not an uncommon term or concept for ordinary Samoans, as previously believed.

Who is Facing Hardship?

People are
facing hardship
in both rural
and urban
areas

The groups of people who are considered in hardship in their communities are those who

- are jobless
- are disabled
- are single mothers
- are beggars/homeless
- are lazy
- have poor spiritual lives

Also, families perceived to be experiencing hardship include those who

- are landless or living on leased land
- are living in a *faleo* (traditional house made of native materials)
- have large families
- have only one (or no) family member with a job
- are young families
- are unskilled with no hope of getting a job

Larger family
size is creating
more demand for
jobs and
education



People are facing hardship in both rural and urban areas. In the rural areas, they are generally the people who live inland, who have very limited or no access to markets for plantation (farm) crops, safe water supply, communication facilities, and other basic services. In the urban areas, they are the people who live on leased land without enough space to grow crops, on flood-prone areas, or on traditional lands but with very little or no access to services such as transport, communication facilities, and water supply.

What Causes Hardship?

Hardship is a complex problem with many different direct and indirect causes. Overall, people cited lack of jobs, low levels of education, health problems, and numerous church and village obligations as causing hardship. Specific causes were cited for three groups especially affected: children, the youth, and women.



People are concerned about the quality of education in rural areas

Children

Lack of health and education support for children was the overwhelming concern among communities consulted. In rural areas, diminishing markets and falling prices of traditional produce (coconut and copra) have largely reduced the cash available to pay for children's education. Also, meeting numerous church and village obligations (*faalavelave*) has further reduced the cash available for education, health, and other children's needs, which often become secondary to *faalavelave*. Thus, schools may be available, but parents' inability to pay for school fees, lunch money, and bus fares hindered access to education. In other instances, the quality of education was an issue. Communities in remote parts of the country without local teachers experience frequent absenteeism of teachers who need to travel long distances to get to their village schools.

Poor nutrition
and health care
lead to disease

Improper nutrition, lack of health facilities, and poor hygiene cause children to suffer from treatable diseases like scabies and skin fungus. Lack of clothing and good food was also mentioned, especially for school-aged children. In some disadvantaged communities, children must walk long distances to school due to the absence of transport and poor roads. Modernization, particularly the increased exposure of children to TV, radio, and newspapers, was also seen as causing increased disobedience to village authorities and parents.

Youth

Lack of jobs and appropriate schooling in rural and urban communities were cited as two major causes of hardship among the youth. There is an emerging trend of rising school drop-out rates in both rural and urban areas resulting in an increasing number of jobless



youth with little prospect of securing good paying jobs. This is particularly true for rural youths who go to school in urban areas. If they fail or drop out of school, most do not wish to return to their rural homes because they are ashamed or prefer the urban lifestyle. Peer pressure, seen as directly related to alcohol and drug abuse, was cited as leading youths to commit crimes to support these vices.

In rural areas, migration of young people to the urban areas has left vast tracts of plantation lands idle.

School drop-out
rates are rising

Women

Lack of education, jobs, and cash were identified as the main causes of hardship for women. They need cash for *faalavelave* and do not have enough left to take care of their families' basic needs. Also, low levels of education and skills prevent many women from finding jobs or starting businesses. However, the women consulted believe their overall situation has improved, mainly due to increased access to education and consequently, improved job opportunities.

Perceived Causes of Hardship		
Group	Aspects	Causes
Children	Poor nutrition	Parents have little understanding of nutrition and lack cash
	Low level and poor quality of education	<i>Faalavelave</i> sometimes reduce the money available for children's educational expenses Lack of access to reliable transport, particularly among isolated villages (Uafato, Upolu)
	Physically abused	Poor parenting
Youth	Lack jobs	Unskilled, low educational level, lazy
	Criminal activities, alcohol and drug abuse	No jobs
	Disobedience of authorities	Poor parental guidance, modernization
	Urban drift	No jobs
Women	Lack of jobs	Lack of skills
	Limited education	Lack of cash
	Lack of cash	No jobs



Most communities consulted said that family decision-making is equal between husband and wife, including how to spend money and the number of children to have. Women's representation in church organizations is perceived to be equal, but less than equal in the village council and Parliament. However, the women consulted indicated that current arrangements are generally acceptable.

Poor Service Delivery

Lack of markets
in rural areas
causes 81% to
give away
excess produce

Throughout the consultations, people said the poor quality of services has significantly contributed to hardship in the communities. These services include water supply, education, health, power, transportation, sealed roads, access to markets, and communication facilities. They believed the government's low level of commitment is the primary reason for the non-delivery and/or deterioration of services and facilities.

All eight services mentioned above were perceived to be available in most sample communities except Uafato, Manunu, and Matafaa villages. However, most people considered the services to be poor quality, except the provision of power in most areas. There are some differences between rural and urban provisions and quality of service. On Upolu, people were most dissatisfied with the

poor state of health facilities and services as well as the state of most school facilities. On Savaii, the lack of markets for agricultural produce and lack of communication facilities were the primary sources of dissatisfaction. But overall, the poor state of health services and facilities were the most common concern for both islands.

Water. Lack of accessible and clean water was a major concern during consultations in both urban and rural communities. Rural residents said they still depend on springs, rainwater, and rivers for drinking water. Sixty percent said they boil their drinking water.

Transport. Access to transport was rated as poor and/or deteriorating by almost half of the villages consulted. Seventy-six percent of the people consulted said they have no access to transportation from their homes, so they must walk about 30 minutes to an hour to get to markets and access other services. This impacts access to basic education, health services, and markets, and the ability to earn cash and buy basic food provisions.

Health. Health facilities were rated as poor in 12 out of the 16 sample villages. Most village facilities have a medical kit and are administered by the local women's committee (*komite tumama*), but unavailability of medicines is common. Therefore, 86% said they walk to another location or go to town for treatment. They also cited the far distance of the nearest hospital from the village as a suggested area for improvement in the government's health service delivery system.

Markets. Because they cannot access a market, 81% of the rural respondents said they must give away the excess produce from their plantations. Five out of six communities on Savaii rated market access as poor while most communities on Upolu rated market access as good.

Schools. Poor school facilities were mentioned as a problem during most village consultations.

Communications. Communication facilities were rated as poor. People without telephones go to neighbors' homes and pay an average of ST2.00 per call. Extension of

Many people
are concerned
about the poor
state of health
services

Elderly Woman, 62 Years Old

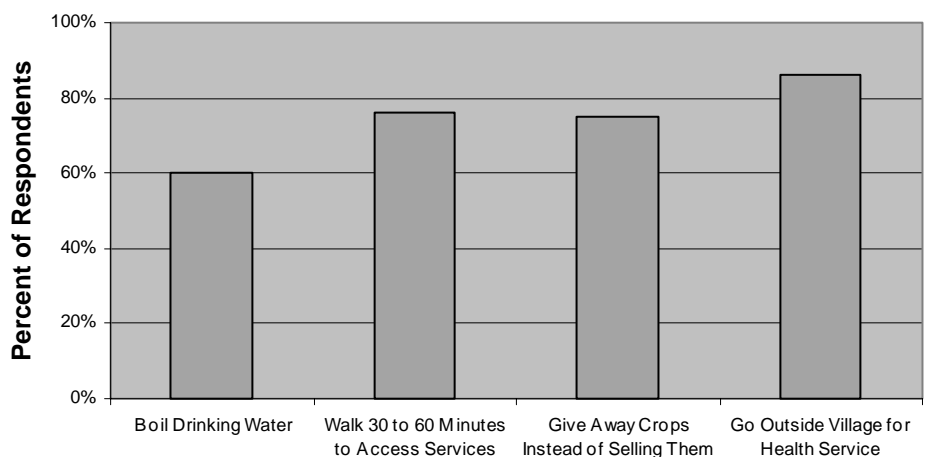
"I was born in another village and got married to my husband who was from this village on Savaii. I used to work as a housewife for a *palagi* (foreign) couple and that was how we survived. My husband passed away when he was 75 years old and I now live with my daughters.

"My daughter's husband is the breadwinner of the family. We have never had a water tap since the connection fee is expensive. Also, we do not have electricity. My daughter and her husband are struggling to keep our family going. They have children and they are also struggling to look after me. Our house is so tiny and the floor is still covered with stones. We fetch water from our neighbor's tap and they do not mind, but I feel ashamed about it.

"This family is poor in everything and I wish we had money to just get the things we need."

telephone facilities to villages was a common request of those consulted.

The Impact of Poor Service Delivery



A man begging outside a store



What Can Be Done?

After listening to the stories of the poor and understanding the nature and causes of hardship, the next question is, what can be done to address it? Working together with those facing hardship to plan, prioritize, and implement solutions has a good chance of leading to successful, lasting initiatives. During the consultations, people prioritized the most important actions that government can take to alleviate hardship. The government has identified a number of strategies in the SDS to address the people's priorities.

People's Priorities

When asked to prioritize the most important actions that the government can consider to reduce the level of hardship in Samoa, people in the communities developed the following list, in order of priority:

1. Reduce the cost of living;
2. Provide access to loan assistance;
3. Support agricultural development;

Work with
those facing
hardship to
plan and
prioritize
action

Loan
assistance
is needed
to start and
expand
small
businesses



People are

willing to pro-

vide free labor,

land, and

materials.

4. Improve access to basic services, particularly water supply, schools, markets, and roads for disadvantaged communities; and
5. Provide access to housing assistance.

Most groups recommended that the government reduce the cost of living by reducing taxation of goods sold locally. They asked for the creation of jobs in the urban areas and support for agricultural development in the rural areas (including access to markets, know-how, and lower cost of inputs). They also suggested that information on health and education be disseminated more widely, and funding for community projects be provided. However, they said there is also a need for families to prioritize their spending, i.e., for education instead of *faalavelave*.

Most communities expressed willingness to provide free labor, land, food, and materials as their contribution to support government community development programs.

Capacity Building

The people consulted identified the following capacity building needs to strengthen community efforts in addressing hardship.

Unemployed Man, 58 Years Old

"I was born here in Sili and have lived here all my life. I have never worked in terms of paid employment. I got married at a very young age; life was full of changes, some for the best and some for the worst.

"I have four children and six grandchildren living with me. My wife passed away 10 years ago and she was the breadwinner of the family. So life then was not so bad. Two of my daughters have moved away and one of them left her three kids with me 2 years ago (she just took off). I heard she is living with somebody else now in Apia and she has not seen her kids ever since she left. I still think of her and wonder whether she will ever come back. It is hard having many kids to feed without any

employed person in our family.

"I have a plantation and when there is transport, I take some produce to the market for cash to buy small things that we need. Two of my grandsons went looking for jobs at the Yazaki factory. They did not pass the test so they are still unemployed. They left school at the secondary level because there was no money to pay for their school fees. I still have grandchildren who have only started primary school. Sometimes, there is no food at all. Some of the families and the *faifeau* (pastor) help out, but I know I cannot depend on them forever. I am getting old and I am afraid of what will happen to my children and grandchildren when I am gone."



Business management, cattle farming, and fundraising skills are needed to support the development of local entrepreneurs. Knowledge of school improvement activities is needed to raise the quality of education, while better understanding of nutrition and water quality issues would reduce preventable illnesses and promote overall health standards for families in the villages. Knowing how to use computers would facilitate access to opportunities provided by information technology. Improved road maintenance skills are needed for securing and maintaining village access to markets and services. Lastly, improved management skills for village councils, particularly the village mayors (*pulenu'us*), would improve living conditions for families in the communities.

Although the people consulted are seeking outside assistance, they do not see their situation as hopeless. They believe there is always hope that support will come from relatives in town or overseas, donors, and government.

Roles

Everyone has a role to play in alleviating the hardship faced by some Samoans. By working together to agree on priorities, establish roles, and monitor progress, real improvements can be made in the people's daily lives.

The quality of
education
needs to be im-
proved

Everyone has a
role to play in
reducing hard-
ship

In addition to the priorities for government action listed above, the people consulted suggested the following roles for the communities and nongovernment organizations (NGOs).

Communities can participate in plantation development, particularly among the unemployed youth, improvement of the village mayors' performance, and establishment of youth councils to provide representation for the youth both at the village and national level to help address causes of community hardship.

NGOs can form partnerships with village leaders and government to provide youth program development, better access to loans, and services for women, children, elders, and pregnant women.

Participation of the community in development is important to insure that all sectors of society have a voice in decision making and a stake in the success of the initiatives.

- Community consultations should be a regular part of the government's planning, implementation, and monitoring processes, particularly during the review of SDS implementation in 2004.
- Community participation should be part of every development project, such as providing land, labor, or cash.

Learning from the Past

Before planning new initiatives, it is useful to consider how people perceive what has been done in the past. Most people in the communities were aware of programs to alleviate hardship, including those run by the government, NGOs, and international donors. They were also aware of whom to ask for assistance to access needed services, except for transport. However, they indicated a high level of frustration due to non-delivery of key services needed for development, such as sealed roads. Most said they receive no help from the local or national government authorities, so they depend mainly on relatives and friends.

Most people view their family, the Village Council, Women's Committee, and Youth Committee as the most important institutions in the community that they depend on during crises. Elected government officials such as Members of Parliament were seen as least important since the people in the communities have little contact with them and see them as distant. The government may want to take these concerns into account when developing new initiatives.



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