

**PACIFIC REGIONAL FORUM  
EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN WITH VISION IMPAIRMENT (EFA-VI)  
STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE PACIFIC REGION  
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**SĀMOA COUNTRY REPORT**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The care of children with disabilities in Sāmoa was and still is primarily the responsibility of parents and family members. Education in Sāmoa for children with disabilities (often referred to in Sāmoa as children with Special Needs) had, since the late 1970s, been primarily the domain of 2 Non-government organizations (NGOs). Although the government of Samoa passed the **Compulsory Education Act** in 1992, the NGOs were seen as the most appropriate way of providing support to children with disabilities (CWD).

From 1993-1994, the government of Sāmoa reviewed all aspects of education in the country and this resulted in the **Western Sāmoa Education Policies and Education Strategies 1995-2005**. This document is very important in the evolution of services to CWD as it contains the first plan to begin to provide educational services to CWD. The new Strategic Policies and Plan for 2006 – 2015 contains strategies to further develop education for CWD.

There have been many positive developments for CWD in Samoa since 1995. This has included a survey conducted in 2000 to identify all children with special needs, the inclusion of a Special Needs Education (SNE) curriculum at National University of Samoa (NUS), teachers graduating as primary school teachers with SNE specialty and the establishment of 6 SNE units in regular primary schools. As well, a teacher's manual was developed in 2002 on including children with disability into village schools. A position called, Special Needs Coordinator was also established within the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESCC) to provide support, monitoring and further development of this area of education. This position is currently part of the Curriculum, Materials and Assessment Unit (CMAD). A **Special Needs Policy** was also developed in 2005 and implemented in schools in 2006.

Sāmoa is also a signatory to or has responded to;

- The Asian & Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons with Disabilities
- The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action
- The Biwako Millennium Framework
- The Basic Education Action Plan (Suva 2002)
- Education For All
- Millenium Development goals

The EFA plan, which acknowledged support from UNESCO Office for Asia Pacific, is another aspect of development in which disability advocates continue to monitor to ensure that children with disabilities and others at risk are truly included in this plan.

## **2. GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL POLICIES ON EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

### **2.1 Legislation**

The Samoan Constitution declares Sāmoa to be a free and sovereign independent state and guarantees equality of all before the law. Section 15 provides: “(1) All persons are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection under the law.”

There can be no laws to subject disability or restriction on anyone, but a disability as such is not a ground of discrimination. (S 15(2)). “(3) Nothing shall: -  
(b) prevent the making of any provision for the protection or advancement of women or children or of any socially or educationally retarded class of persons.

There is still evidence of inappropriate terms and definition of people with disability and in particular the confusion between intellectual disability and mental illness. This is particularly so in the case of offenses against “women with disabilities “and defenses on the grounds of “insanity”. There is an offence to have sexual intercourse with a woman or a girl who is an “idiot or an imbecile if it is known or there is good reason to believe that the victim is an idiot or imbecile”.

The first education legislation was the Education Ordinance 1959. The Village Authority was required to ensure that children are enrolled unless exempted on grounds that the child is "unable to attend school regularly or is unable to be educated by reason of physical or mental handicap."

The Education Amendment Act 1991-1992 is the legislation that mandated compulsory education for all children between 5-14 years of age.

The Attorney General’s Office and the MESC have completed the review of the Education Ordinance to include Early Childhood (including Early Intervention) and Second Chance Learning. These changes have been included in the 2006-2015 Strategic Policies and Plan for education as well as the National EFA plan.

It is widely acknowledged that there is very little enforcement of compulsory education in particular. This can be evidenced by the numbers of children with disability that were identified on the 2000 survey and are not in any educational setting as well as those children “working” in Apia or caregiving in the family home.

### **2.2 Education Policies**

The Sāmoan system provides education in the following areas:

- Early Childhood Education
- Primary Education
- Secondary Education
- Special Education

- Teacher Education & Training
- Post-secondary Education & Training

Education for all children ages 5-14 was made compulsory by the Education Amendment Act 1991-1992. The current education policy document, Strategic Policies and Plan 2006-2015 has 5 “key concepts” which are:

- Equity – the system will treat all individuals fairly and justly in provision of education opportunity
- Quality – exemplified by high standards of academic achievement, cultural understanding and social behaviour
- Relevancy – a system that is meaningful, recognized, applicable and useful to one’s life.
- Efficiency – demonstrated by management practices that optimally utilize all resources (human, financial and material)
- Sustainability – wise utilisation of human, financial and material resources to ensure balanced and continual development in the system.

All of these concepts implicitly support the inclusion of all children in the Samoan education system.

Sāmoa participated in the 1990 EFA Jomtien Conference in Thailand and completed the EFA Assessment 2000. Sāmoa has responded to the Dakar World Declaration Forum by developing an EFA National Plan of Action to achieve EFA goals by 2015.

Key themes of Samoa’s EFA National Plan of Action are:

- Review and amend existing Education Acts and policies to reflect inclusion of ECE and SNE and with emphasis on free education
- Inclusion of adult education programs and continuing education
- Data collection and research for all goals with an emphasis on curriculum review and teacher training
- Setting of educational standards for access, quality and management.

CWD are mentioned specifically in the Samoa EFA Action Plan. It identifies and/or recommends the following:

- Need for standardised curriculum for SNE teachers
- the lack of awareness and the importance of Early Intervention services for CWD. It recommends that the SNE Coordinator help set up Parent to Parent Support groups for children with disabilities. This has been started via the UNV project, Supporting PWD in Rural Samoa and is currently being monitored and supported by the Loto Taumafai Early Intervention Service.
- Teacher training in specific disability areas
- The right of children, including those with disabilities, to have access to affordable educational programs and activities

The development of the EFA National Plan of Action was a consultative process and is based on information and data from the Education Policies and Strategies 1995-2005,

Strategic Policies 2006-2015, the Corporate Plan (July 2006 - 2009) the Strategy for Development of Samoa (DSDS 2005-2007), the Statistical Digest 2006 and a number of projects run by the MESC.

In regard to the Special Education component of the current Strategic Policies and Plan for Education, MESC will move to put into place systems of support that will accommodate all children including those with disabilities. This involves changes and modifications in policy, structures, content approaches and strategies, teacher training and professional development.

The Special Needs Education Advisory Committee (SNEAC) was established in 1999 as per the Strategic Plan and has representation from Education, Health, SNE NGOs, parents, DPO, and other relevant ministries and individuals and groups. This committee meets on a regular basis and is consulted on policies and practices that affect the current SNE activities.

### 3. COUNTRY WIDE DATA

The Samoan Population and Census 2001 was the first census taken in 10 years. This census is now taking place every 5 years and results for this year's census which was conducted in December has not been released. The census is conducted from the Department of Statistics within the Ministry of Finance. The population interview schedule has a couple of disability related questions which are ***Please indicate whether this person has a disability and if yes, what kind of disability?***

There is a School Census undertaken each year that assists in determining the numbers of children attending primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, this census does not include the identification of those CWD who should be at school or have dropped out of school. The School Review Officer (SRO) is responsible for the collation of this information and the enforcement of policies.

All preschools and early childhood centers are registered within the National Early Childhood Education Council. The Council has the record of children attending preschools but again there is not indication of how many of these children have disabilities. The new Early Interventions service from Loto Taumafai is currently working to identify CWD in ECE centers.

In 2000, UNDP and the Sāmoa Ministry of Education jointly funded the Special Needs Education Survey Project. The aim of this project was to identify all children between ages of 0-14 with special needs. Individual interviews were done over a 6 month period by a team trained and coordinated by the Project Coordinator. Identification of these children included age, gender, location, type & severity of disability, level of education and support needs. All information was entered into a database to be shared and utilised by all concerned. A total of 1188 CWD was identified in this survey. This database is regularly up-dated and in 2006, a total of 1200 CWD have been registered.

In 1999, Dr. Frank Smith conducted a disability survey commissioned by UNESCO. He identified 578 CWD under 12 years old. In 1995, Ms. Naoko Kuba, JOVC volunteer conducted a survey where she identified 302 CWD less than 14 years of age.

An Adult Disability survey was conducted in 2002. This survey was initiated by Inclusion International with funding support from NZAID. The Department of Statistics provided all data entry of the Adult Survey. The Chief Statistician, in conjunction with the Inclusion International in-country representative provided analysis and co-wrote the statistical part of the report. The support from this department was very much appreciated by those involved with the Adult Survey and was a very positive and strong message of the worth of this survey as the directive for the Department of Statistics to be involved was issued by the Prime Minister. The Adult Disability Census would be updated every 5 years in the year following the national population survey. The next Adult Disability Census will be conducted in 2007. A further analysis of the adult survey has resulted in a report on Women with Disability by Donna Lene.

The Loto Taumafai Early Intervention Program is collecting data and looking to link with the Ministry of Health (MoH), MESC and other relevant organisations and government departments. The birth registration process does not identify any children born with a disability or 'at risk.'

#### **4. ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SUPPORT AND SERVICES**

The main providers of education to CWD are still primarily within the NGO sector. The MESC has begun over the past 5 years to provide grants to the NGOs, and begin the development and establishment of Special Needs Units within the primary sector. Private schools and mission schools are also providers of education to some CWD. There has been sporadic cooperation and coordination between the various schools over the years. The Special Needs Education Advisory Committee is currently the forum where most of the following are represented. It is understood that information about the participation of CWD in non-formal education is not known.

The main NGO providers in Samoa are:

- ***Loto Taumafai Education Centre for the Disabled & Loto Taumafai Early Intervention Program – established in 1981***

The Education Centre part of this NGO was established 1981 and caters primarily to students who are deaf or hearing impaired and students who are physically disabled. It has operated primarily as a "special school" conducting education programs, life skills programs and vocational programs. Over the years, it has undergone many changes which include the use of Individual Education Plans, utilising the media for advocacy issues and promoting and supporting its students to participate in the community. Loto Taumafai has a school bus which assists with transportation for most students. Loto Taumafai receives a grant from the government (as per current policy) and from NZAID. There are school fees of \$50.00 per term and this covers transportation and a meal which is provided for all students each day. There are 5 teachers and currently 90+ students which indicates an increase in roll.

Loto Taumafai sees its long-term goals as including the closure of the school as students are mainstreamed appropriately into government schools and the development of a specialist resource and support service that can be utilised throughout the country.

The Early Intervention Program was established in 2004 with a 5-year funding grant from UNDP. A significant part of the first year was spent on training and development of the field workers. Mulifanua and Apia were selected as the 2 focus areas in which to work. This was based both on the 2000 Survey and on staffing resources. Staffing consists of 1 Coordinator (who is a nurse and physiotherapist), 2 Fieldworker Coordinators, 7 Fieldworkers and 2 deaf Fieldworkers. (The deaf Fieldworkers are funded by International Deaf Children Association). In the third year of operation they have seen more than 80 children between the ages of 0-7years. Besides providing a community based program (the Fieldworkers go to where the families are living), they also provide public awareness and training to community health nurses and some schools. They run courses for parents and support the local parents groups as possible. They have recently employed 2 Fieldworkers who will be based in Savaii, thus providing initial coverage on the other island. Their long-term goal is for MESC & MOH to accept and fund this as a government supported program.

- ***Senese Junior Preparatory School – established 1992***

This NGO was established in 1992 by a group of parents whose children had special education needs. It aims to assist children with specific learning disabilities so that they can be mainstreamed into the regular school. This NGO is considered a “private” school and as such has high school fees that enable it to have a trained teacher, teacher aides and excellent resources. There are 7 children attending at present. This NGO is now merged with a private school, Robert Louis Stevenson School, in order to ensure a natural transition for students into the mainstream and to share their resources and skills.

- ***Samoa Society for the Blind – Prevention, Rehabilitation & Education for the Blind (PREB)-established 1991***

PREB was established in 1991 and combines advocacy with some service provision for children and adults who are visually impaired or blind. It has run workshops and supports some students who are visually impaired or blind by translating materials into Braille. PREB has supported some 275+ people over the years.

In the past, PREB assisted the MESC with the translation of materials into Braille for visually impaired and blind students who sat the National Examinations using their own resources. For the last two years with government’s commitment to promoting inclusive education, the MESC has taken on the responsibility of brailleing the examination papers.

- ***Special Education Unit for Savaii (SEUS) – established 2001***

SEUS was the first NGO centre for CWD established in Savaii. It was supported and funded by the other disability NGOs as well as a small grant from the MESC. The unit has had a troubled time getting established and clarifying its roles and functions. In 2004, a newly elected committee, consisting of many parents, retook control of SEUS. This new committee has worked hard to clarify the

purpose and function of SEUS and to work cooperatively with other NGOs and government groups. There is 1 full-time teacher, volunteers and approximately 15 pre-school CWD and 15 school age CWD. Initially, many of the children were very young so it operated more as a day-care. It is now developing more educational programs for those who attend.

- **Ulimasao Marist Centre for Special Learning (UMCSL) – established 2003**

UMCSL is also based in Savaii and is supported by the Marist Brothers and receives a grant from government as well as other donors. It provides a “second chance learning” opportunity for those who have failed in the regular education system or those who have never attended. In 2004, there were 109 full time and 30 part time students of whom many were students with disabilities. UMCSL runs a number of programs in Life Skills, Basic Literacy & Numeracy and Vocational Skills.

- **Government Schools**

In 2001, the first Primary School teachers with Special Needs Education specialty graduated from the National University of Samoa. Along with this was the establishment of 6 Special Needs Units – 4 in Upolu (Magaigi Primary School, Falefitu Primary School, Saleimoa Primary School and Lalomanu Primary School) and 2 in Savaii (Tutaga Primary School & Sataua Primary School). There is no specific provision or preference to rural areas although the establishment of 2 SNE in Savaii does address this to a degree. These 6 SNE Units represents the less than 3% of schools that have a designated program for SNE meaning that approximately 97% of the schools have no provision for any type of SNE support.

The aim of the units was to provide a ‘resource room’ approach where specialised teaching and curriculum adaptation could be provided to CWD and where their learning needs might be met in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. As well, the SNE teacher was to assist and support classroom teachers to ensure that the students with special needs could participate as much as possible and ultimately totally, in the regular classroom.

With the government’s commitment to inclusive education, these special units no longer exist and the CWD are now included in regular classes.

- **The National University of Sāmoa (NUS)**

The Faculty of Education (FOE) within the National University offers a Diploma of Primary Education which is a 3 year course in which students must complete 24 courses. Since 2000, students could elect to take the SNE component which gave them a ‘specialty’ area in Special Needs Education. Students must have satisfactorily completed high school before they may enroll at NUS. Once accepted and enrolled students choose their own areas of interest. The elective Special Needs Education courses are:

- Introduction and Understanding Education for Special Needs
- The Individual Education Program
- Assessment Techniques and Teaching Strategies

- Special Education: Barriers to Learning
- People with Special Needs in Samoa

In 2005, a new course has been developed called “Inclusive Education” and this is now a compulsory course for all teacher trainees.

The FOE began developing curriculum for Special Needs Education to support the Samoa Ministry of Education Policy and Strategy document.

- **Nuanua o le Alofa**

Nuanua o le Alofa (NOLA) is the NGO for people with disability. They are represented at SNEAC and at the Disability Action Task Force (DATF) and are now being consulted on a more regular basis for issues to do with disability including education.

- **Disability Action Task Force**

The most recent development is the agreement of the Prime Minister to incorporate a Disability Action Task Force under the auspice of the Prime Minister’s Department.

#### **4. Resources**

At the moment, PREB is the only center providing the necessary resources and support for children and adults with vision impairments. However, their resources are very limited which affects the quality of the services they provide for the visually impaired. Government provides PREB with a grant annually but this is not enough to get all the required resources to run the center.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Inclusive Education**

Government’s current emphasis on inclusive education should be encouraged to ensure all CWD including the visually impaired are included in schools.

- **Public Education**

The awareness and understanding of civil society, those within government ministries and departments, church communities and all other influential groups must be addressed so that “inclusion” is well understood and not seen as a threat or something that only affect a few children. The education and development of a society and culture that appreciates and supports the human rights for all will contribute greatly to the development of Inclusive Education policies and practices. This must be acknowledged and methods for assisting in attitudinal change be part of any set of guidelines.

- **Coordinated Systems**

A method of ensuring that key stakeholders are well networked and collaborative is crucial. The use of databases, hospital birth registrations, PDOs, parent groups, early

intervention programs, school census', community health workers visits, etc. must be coordinated so that all are sharing information in order to plan, develop and monitor support and services. When these groups are linked and taught how to share information, how to problem-solve together, how to plan together, the outcomes are realistic, creative, practical and one of the best ways to safeguard the practices of "inclusion." Models for networks should be presented to promote the cross-sectoral affects of disability issues and the need for all stakeholders to work cooperatively and collaboratively.

- Inclusive Education Policy & Strategy models

An understanding of the concepts of "inclusive education" needs to be more fully explored so that the misconceptions are not accidentally promoted. Examples of what Inclusive Education Policies might look like may assist those who are supportive but possibly uninformed. This should include ways that Inclusive Education can be funded.

- Inclusive Education Teacher training

Inclusive Education training should incorporate principles and practices that begin with Early Intervention and proceed through to tertiary level education. Methodologies for assessment, curriculum adaptation, realistic programs, cooperative teaching and learning techniques are some of the key skills that need to be taught to all teachers. The practical component of teacher training should be a major part of their learning experience. This reinforces the concept of learning as an "active" pursuit that involves a wide range of activities and skills. The "teacher rote" model needs to be replaced with a much broader range of methods and skills that teachers can use to include all children within the school setting. This should include opportunities for teachers to "specialise". However, specialization does not mean segregation and it must be shown how "specialist" teachers can be utilised to assist the CWD as well as their classmate, their teachers and even the wider community.