**Samoa Brief Report:**

**A. Older Persons and Development**

The Old population of 65 years and above in Samoa, makes up 4.9 (9,284) percent of the total population of 187,820 (2011 Population and Housing Census). The social and economic contribution of older persons reaches far beyond their economic activities and this is also the case for Samoa. For the traditional Samoa, the high status of the elderly or older persons is deeply rooted in the family hierarchy due to their age and wisdom. The elderly are the most respected individuals in the family structure given their crucial roles as advisors, holders of wisdom, traditional knowledge and protectors of family genealogy. The contribution made by older persons in all developmental stages of life is acknowledged, encouraged and supported right from the outset of the cultural structure. The traditional belief and practice for Samoans is that respect and care for your elders is the prerequisite for earning physical and spiritual rewards or blessings. Basically, if you do not look after your elders, you will not have a prosperous and happy future. Therefore, it is within the Samoan context, that it is every families’ obligation to care for their ‘elders’ no matter the circumstances.

The most important social and cultural unit of the Samoan way of life or faasamoa is the extended family or aiga. With all extended families, it is headed by a matai or person with a paramount chiefly title. It is the duty of the chief to make decisions on behalf of the family during large family and village gatherings. This chiefly system is the highest platform of decision making that occurs within the family and village setting. The selection of paramount chiefs for each family is also dependent upon the seniority or age of the family members. Therefore, with Samoan families and within the village setting the paramount chiefs are usually the elderly men ranging from their late 60s – 90’s).

Efforts have been concentrated on the realization of Government’s institutional reform towards improving service delivery as well as enhanced collaboration with development partners to facilitate an enabling environment to include older persons which has occurred over the last decade. Some of these developments have included:

- Government taking on a more strategic approach for its development strategies such as the Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2012 – 2016 with its long term vision to ‘improve the quality of life for all’. Under
Priority Area 2: Social Policies. The focus on older persons is also within the context of Gender and Disability.

- The Policies for Women, and Persons with Disabilities which provides protection for all women and men despite their age and disability. These separate policies have been endorsed by Cabinet and provide the direction for law reform, service delivery and program intervention. It will also inform the direction for development assistance to Samoa.

- In 2011, Cabinet endorsed the conduct of a legislative compliance review for Persons with Disability which will complement the Legislative compliance reviews for both CEDAW and CRC which have informed and will continue to influence the development and amendment of certain legislations and Bills in Samoa.

- The National NCD Prevention and Control Policy 2011 which has been endorsed by Cabinet and administered by the Ministry of Health. This policy aims to ensure the rights of all people, including older persons access quality and affordable medical/heath treatment for prevention and those affected by non communicable diseases. The policy also focuses on facilitating a supportive environment for access of all persons. For example, strengthening of health screening programs out in the urban and rural villages and medical clinics conducted by private doctors and community health nurses which is subsided by Government.

In terms of older person’s contribution to village development, this is also facilitated through the network of government liaison officers who are based in the villages. These community based focal points are government liaison officers known as village representatives (both female and male) and are the contact points between central government and the villages. These individuals are nominated by their own village women committees and village councils, and are contracted on a three yearly basis and are paid a fortnightly allowance. In terms of the selection criteria, age is no barrier and representatives are elected based on their capability and recognition/status of their service rendered in the village. Village representatives benefit in terms of getting involved in the country’s development process with government and that there contribution is made on behalf of their village. Furthermore, their knowledge and skills gained and built from these consultations and capacity buildings are used to facilitate
village level workshops, activities and meetings within their community groups. There are a total of 437 representatives within the ages ranging from 55 to 75 years old.

Samoa’s current retirement age is 55 years. At present, Government has in place the Retirement Pension which targets employees who have reached the retirement age of 55. Citizens are given the choice of either withdrawing all or a portion of their contributions made to the National Provident Fund since becoming a part of a workforce. The majority of applicants usually prefer to continue working and opt to take out portions of their retirement funds while the remainder is left to accumulate considering interest rates applied by the NPF on an annual basis as well as their ongoing contributions made during the resumption of duties as an employee/employer.¹ For those who have reached the age of 55 years, it is mandatory for the employee to apply for the extension of his/her services. As per normal protocol, an assessment is conducted by the employer to assess whether the employee is fit to continue his/her duties. These contracts are renewed on average on an annual basis depending on the employee’s contract details. To date, those with specialized skills and maturity in experience who are both in the public and private sector happen to be older persons.

Under the different Micro-Finance Facility Schemes coordinated through a joint initiative between the private sector financial institutions and government, opportunities are facilitated for women living in the rural areas to access credit for the establishment of small businesses which leads to income earned for women and their families. Loan Applicants and recipients also include women between the ages of 55 to 65 years. Projects that have been supported under these schemes include: agricultural production, farming, food and catering, garment/fabric production and so forth.

The Ministry of Women, Community & Social Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Health also initiated a national wide program to improve nutrition, under the Sector Wide approach project – small grants scheme. This scheme facilitated support for village women and men with vegetable seedlings and farming equipment for the production of small scale vegetable gardens for family sustenance.

¹ Comments made during interview with NPF Senior Staff: Mrs. Rexona Salima; 3rd August 2012.
In terms of addressing violence including violence against older persons, there is the Family Safety Bill 2011 which also addresses physical, sexual, and emotional/psychological within the context of the family. It is hoped that this bill will be passed in parliament before the end of 2012. Under the Gender Based Violence program which is a joint initiative between UNFPA and the Government of Samoa, violence in all its forms are addressed through national programs and outreach programs at village level. There is also ongoing community engagement implemented by the Ministry of Police and Prisons. These initiatives although not specific to any age group, also targets older persons.

2. Advancing Health and Welling into Old Age

In terms of health, the old age is well taken care within their homes as well as the hospitals. The work on health promotion and mental health policy takes into account the health and well-being of everyone including older persons.

The Ministry of Health and the National Health Services continues to provide support for older persons by enabling those over the age of 65 years to access free medical consultations as well as the dispensing of medication free of charge. For example; the old age’s access to free medical supplies from government owned pharmacies and free consultations with general practitioners when they utilize the medical services. Furthermore, the continuation of the implementation of a national wide ‘hygiene and sanitation’ program called the Healthy Homes and Healthy Villages targeting family level households promotes key wellbeing and health components which is also inclusive of the elderly population.

The conduct of the National Health Fair – a program led by the Samoa Parliamentary Advocacy Group on Healthy living (SPAGHL) supported a whole of government /country approach to community based screenings for village based citizens. This resulted in the services of different health professionals (doctors, nurses, community development officers, dentists etc) to be made available in the villages of the islands in Samoa.

There is also the national physical activity program led by the Ministry of Health, which also targets older persons as part of the ‘healthy Samoa’ campaign.
The uniqueness of Samoan society is that the most secure and safest enabling environment for an older person is within his/her own family. It is a family duty to look after your elderly parents. Compared to neighboring countries, where there are a multitude of elderly age retirement homes, there is only one private institution which provides such a service that is outside of the traditional family unit; the Mapuifagalele: Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged was founded in 1975 and is supported by donations made by the community, families of residents, as well as the business community and is home to 50 elderly residents with 70% being women.

3. Ensuring enabling and supportive environments

The Government of Samoa is committed to ensuring that enabling environments are facilitated for its senior citizens. The National Policy for Women identifies women’s participation in the decision making process at levels one of its key priority outcomes during its five year lifespan. An example of older persons namely women participating in decision making processes and continuing trend in women’s political representation is the active participation of village women representatives in national trainings and processes, as well as in village affairs.

Since Samoa’s TSUNAMI experience in 2009, several projects and initiatives are now catered towards improving climate resilience through climate adaptation and mitigation. A pilot program on climate resilience now exists and will support national efforts towards strengthening disaster risk reduction and management at both the national and grass root levels. The need to ensure ‘social protection’ concerns and mechanisms are adequately addressed through these different initiatives and the impacts on the different population groups including the elderly, has been raised so that Samoa can better respond before and after a disaster strikes.

The Samoa National Provident Fund has two (2) pension schemes which cover older persons. The Retirement Pension targets employees who have reached the retirement age of 55. Citizens are given the choice of either withdrawing all or a portion of their contributions made to the NPF since becoming a part of a workforce. The majority of eligible applicants usually prefer to continue working and opt to take out portions of their retirement funds while the remainder is left to accumulate considering interest applied by the NPF on an annual basis as well as their ongoing contributions made during the resumption of duties as an employee/employer. The Senior Citizen Pension
Scheme applies to those who have reached the age of 65 years. Citizens receive a pension amounting up to $125.00ST from the Fund on a monthly basis. The NPF in collaboration with Samoa Shipping Corporation also provides a service for senior citizens who travel between the islands of Upolu and Savaii. Those who are over 65 years are entitled to travel freely between the islands provided that an identification card is presented to shipping staff for verification.

In terms of cultural and social life, a key national program led by Government in support of preserving and promotion of Samoa’s traditional skills and knowledge; is through the annual exhibition of the fine mat weaving. The weaving of the fine mat is an art of finesse which demands utmost patience and diligence. It has been noted that while the number of young women partaking in this traditional form of art has increased, the majority of women weavers that are keeping this tradition alive are the elderly. Fine mats are considered as traditional treasures and are used as an alternative currency during special occasions (i.e. funerals, weddings). Fine mats are highly valuable where one (1) mat can be sold for up to $1000-$5000ST depending on its quality. This traditional art form has provided some women with income and fosters an enabling economic environment.

**Challenges**

While we acknowledge the strength of our systems in support of older persons as well as the progress made thus far in advancing the status of older persons we also recognize the challenges in our efforts to ensure an inclusive environment is maintained for our older population. These are as outlined below:

- Strengthen research and data availability in the area of older persons in the areas of social, economic, and climate change. So that there is better and updated data availability that is also disaggregated by age and gender for older persons. This research and data will also inform effective policy, legislative and program intervention for older persons.
- There is a need to continue to strengthen supportive mechanisms to support traditional family units who are the main support for the care of older persons. The traditional family unit as the main carers for the elderly must be embraced and supported given that Samoa is a small country that thrives
on its traditions and customs. It is this tradition that has led to political and traditional stability for 50 years since Independence.

- Policies, program implementation and any legislative reform in line with resource capacity of our country should be inclusive of older persons and are not overshadowed by other age and gender priorities that are also facing critical issues such as children, youth, women etc.

- Development assistance to also be inclusive of programs and initiatives targeting older persons. This will also facilitate the linkages and synergies amongst the work of other international conventions, including the MDGs where older persons are concerned despite their gender.