

Micro Finance Facility for Women in the Villages

The Ministry of Women, Community & Social Development's contribution to the national vision "*improve quality of life for all*", is embedded in the goal of its *current Corporate Plan which is to promote and facilitate sustainable economic and social outcomes for women, youth, children and men in the community*. It is through this connection that the MWCSD through its Division for women is assisting with the implementation of the ADB funded Micro credit loan scheme program with specific responsibilities.

In early 2008, the Ministry of Finance, Development Bank of Samoa and the Ministry of Women, Community & Social Development, began a series of discussions on how the scheme would roll out in order to better support vulnerable individuals at the grass root level on the establishment & expansion of small businesses that would generate income for women and that of their families. The facility is administered by Development Bank of Samoa with the MWCSD as the key implementing partner in identifying suitable candidates and monitoring of the scheme.

Given the mandate of the MWCSD and that women are recognized as one of the most vulnerable groups based on their economic and familial status, the decision was made that 'women in the rural areas' would be the first target group for the scheme with the intention to expand to both youth and other open gender groups at a later date. Hence, in October the same year, the first round of small loans were disbursed for the first group of women who qualified under the scheme for both Upolu & Savaii.

The three main objectives of the MFF program are:

1. To improve the skills and knowledge of individuals on how to start a business including preparation, implementation, management and monitoring of their business activities;
2. To increase income and employment with microenterprises sector through the improved availability of financial services and improved access to business development support services;
3. To improve group and community corporation with committee members so that they can share and network for the betterment of their families and communities.

To date, there are 1,447 women registered under the micro finance scheme with the numbers continuing to rise. Business schemes currently in operation include; agricultural & fisheries production (poultry, chicken, cattle farming, taro & banana plantation, vegetable gardens), food & restaurants, handicraft and garment / fabric art, tourism (catering, beach resorts), transportation business – taxi. To ensure continuous support for financial literacy and project sustainability for women under the scheme, the MWCSD (Division for Women) in partnership with Small Business Enterprise Corporation (SBEC), TALAVOU Program and Women In Business Inc are conducting a series of trainings for women which commenced last week.