Women: Matai and Leadership Survey
Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development
2015
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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

The Government of Samoa is committed to providing an enabling environment for women and girls to thrive and be empowered in all facets of life. This is evident in the development of national policies and legislations; National Policy for Women 2010, Strategy for the Development of Samoa and the Constitutional Amendment ACT 2013 to provide for a minimum number of women Members of Parliament. In addition, ratification of related International and regional instruments namely, the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992, the Pacific Leaders Declaration on Gender Equality 2012, and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women 1995.

Since then, progress has been made on the empowerment of women; however, much work was needed to achieve gender equality particularly in terms of leadership and decision making both at the local and national levels. Hence, the conduct of this survey to examine underlying social, cultural and economic factors that influence women’s attitudes towards political leadership and participation. It highlights challenges and successful pathways that women have taken to achieve positions of authority, and it recommends strategies for further empowerment and mobilization of women to positions of leadership as a means of facilitating social change.

It is our intention that this survey serves to highlight women's perspective on political participation and leadership which is critical to supporting program delivery and policy development for the empowerment of women. The recommendations will inform policies and interventions to improve women's participation and representation in local leadership as well as political leadership in line with the Constitutional Amendment Act enabling a 10% for women in parliamentary seats. We acknowledge the financial support provided by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to support the conduct and publishing of this survey. Lastly special acknowledgments are conveyed to Ms Kate Bradney, the Division for Women's Australia Youth Ambassador volunteer (2013) for her technical assistance, Women's Advisory Committee, Sui o Nuu, Sui Tamaitai o Nuu, all the village representatives, Government Ministries, Non Government Organisations, Ms Seema Naidu Forum Secretariat and all the people consulted and contributed to this survey. May the good Lord continue to bless the women and girls of Samoa.

Soifua.

________________________
Hon. Tolofuia Valelei Falemoe Leiataua
Minister for Women, Community & Social Development
ACRONYMS

AUA – Apia Urban Area
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO- Chief Executive Officer
DIA- Division for Internal Affairs
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
MJCA – Ministry of Justice Courts and Administration
MP- Member of Parliament
MWCSD – Ministry of Community and Social Development
NUS – National University of Samoa
NWU- NorthWest Upolu
NGO- Non – Governmental Organization
OEC- Office of the Electoral Commission
ROU – Rest of Upolu
SBS – Samoa Bureau of Statistics
SN – Sui o Le Nuu or Village Representative
STN – Sui Tama’ita’I o Nuu or Village Women Representative
Tusi Faalupega- A document which details salutations, laws and genealogy of villages in Samoa
WinLA – Women in Leadership Advocacy Group
Executive Summary

The Women Matai and Leadership survey was initiated by the Honourable Minister Tolofuaivalelei Falemoe Leaataua in an effort to improve data and information in relation to women’s attitudes towards the areas of political participation and leadership.

The Report findings are based on data collected across 3 research phases.

- Phase One (1) involved a take-home questionnaire given to 167 Sui o Nuu (SNs).

- Phase Two (2) involved in depth face to face interviews with selected titled women, un-titled women and a male village leader, such as a village mayor, high chief, pastor or youth leader. Interviewees represented a sample of 52 selected villages of Upolu and Savaii in field work which was undertaken from September to November 2013.

- Phase Three (3) had an online focus where data was collected targeting women who were both matai in the cultural context and also held prominent positions in the public and private sectors where 30 eligible women were contacted to participate.

The survey therefore provides;

- a glimpse into Samoa’s current situation regarding the relation of women to leadership and decision making; more so their relation to political leadership.

- challenges faced by women in pursuing leadership roles.

- successful practices and stories of women who have successfully attained and excelled as leaders whether it be as a titled or untitled woman.

- an idea of women’s perceptions of the 10% quota implemented by government for the upcoming general elections.
1) National gender based profile of Matai

1.1 Data collected in Phase 1 revealed that a total of 16,583 Matai were listed by the SNs who participated, 93% of these Matai are males (15,355), with females making up just 7% of Matai holders in Samoa (1,228). When disaggregated by region, the research findings revealed that a larger proportion of the Matai in Upolu are women compared with the figures recorded for Savaii. In Upolu, 10% of Matai are female and the remaining 90 per cent are male, whereas in Savaii, only 4% of Matai are female and the majority of Matai (96%) are male.

1.2 When disaggregated by hierarchy, 4,246 (30%) listed as part of Phase 1 have been bestowed a high chief title while the remaining 9,827 (70%) have an Orator title. When disaggregated by gender, it is obvious that the majority of Matai are men. Only 368 female high chiefs were recorded by SNs in comparison to 3,878 male high chiefs with 330 female orators in comparison with 9,497 male orators. This trend is consistent throughout Upolu and Savaii.

1.3 For women, it is likely that they will be bestowed high chief titles as a privilege and honour for the ‘Feagaiga’ of the family. Also, it is in recognition of their services rendered to their families, church and villages. Over half (53 percent) of all women who have been bestowed a Matai title are High Chiefs. When compared with just 29 percent of all male Matai, this is a positive reflection of the high status women are regarded in their families.

1.4 Bestowment of a Matai title reflects different levels of participation at the village level. Of the 151 villages in Samoa where women hold a Matai title (72 villages in Upol and 79 villages in Savaii), 115 villages have women participating in village council meetings. The decision to participate or not to participate is due to several factors that will be explained later in the report.

1.5 The SNs who participated in the research reported that there is a total of 17,340 Matai who are currently serving the village, 16,188 men and 1,152 women. About 12,171 male Matai’s are currently living and serving in their village; in comparison with just 669 Matai women who are reportedly living and serving in their village of bestowment. A further 4,017 male Matai’s and 483 female Matai live elsewhere but continue to serve the village.

2) Women’s Decision Making Attitudes and Experiences

2.1 Women defined their decision making experiences as mainly to do with decisions for the domestic everyday living such as; child rearing, budgeting and playing an advisory role while the decision making for all other matters including family ‘obligations’ or fa’alavelave is done by the men. Her ‘Faasinomaga’ or identity and the hierarchy of the matai title she carries define her role in decision making in the village setting. For instance, a woman who is a ‘Saoao and Tamaitai’ will have
an influential role in decision making compared to an untitled man’s wife. Also, a woman who carries a high chief title would make decisions in consultation with orators.

The women interviewed identified top key competencies to become a Matai which includes demonstrated cultural knowledge and skills, service and participation in village affairs, demonstrated interest in village affairs, communication and language skills with the least responses agreeing that formal education qualifications is a criteria to become a matai.

2.2 When pursuing a matai title, respondents wanted to either serve their families or they were the choice of the family because there are no male heirs and to contribute or have a voice in decision making. When foregoing a matai title, women often prioritized their male relatives to become a matai because decision making is considered a man’s role. Others feel they neither have the capacity nor financial resources to serve the matai title.

3) **Why some villages ban women from becoming Matai and the decision making barriers women face.**

3.1 10% of villages surveyed in Samoa in Phase 1 do not bestow Matai titles to women. This is more prevalent in Upolu with 16 villages compared with Savaii with only 1 village reportedly with a ban.

In regards to village council participation, almost a quarter (22%) of villages in Samoa continues to see the unavailability of women’s’ attendance in the village council. This trend is relatively consistent across both islands; 19 of the villages surveyed in Upolu (20%) and 17 of the villages surveyed in Savaii (23%) do not have women physically participating in the village council meetings.

3.2 Of the villages which do allow women to sit in the village council meetings, only 69% of villages surveyed reported to have women who sit and participate in village councils, 31% of the villages surveyed do not have female representation in decision making and leadership at the village council level.

3.3 Six key themes emerged for justification as to why the villages do not allow women to become Matai. They include a Village taboo or family rule prohibiting women from becoming Matai and is described as a taboo by ancestors which is still observed by our people today. Gender roles and responsibilities where women and men have ascribed roles whereby men are given the privilege to become matais while women play the role of the ‘Fautua’, ‘Va Tapuia’ or sacred relationship between women and men which makes it inappropriate for women and men to be seated together in village council meetings especially when sensitive issues like rape and incest are discussed. Also male matais do jesting during village meetings which might offend women. Some women prioritize
their male relatives like brother, son, husband or cousin to take the role of a matai because it is considered a man’s role. Other reasons included women being married into the village (in-laws) and women lacking knowledge on traditional/oratory skills, knowledge of village protocols to effectively carry out traditional practices and their responsibilities as a Matai.

3.4 In analysing the reasons behind villages do not have women attending village council meetings, it was obvious that the obstacle is the language used during discussions at the village council meetings especially when male matais do jesting or when sensitive issues like rape and incest are discussed. Also, respect for the ‘Va Tapuia’ between males and females, Gender roles and responsibilities, Village Taboo prohibiting women from participating at the village council. Lastly, the women matai either live elsewhere or choose not to participate in the village council due to their own reasons.

4) Women’s Attitudes towards Political Leadership

4.1 Only 4.1% of parliamentary seats in Samoa are women while the vast majority of seats are occupied by the men. Part of this survey aims at increasing political participation and representation through the implementation of the 10% quota strategy.

4.2 58% of the women who participated in the research indicated that they would consider becoming a political leader in the future. When asked to explain why they are eager to pursue a political career, they gave a variety of responses many of which fit broadly within the topics of community development and gender equality. For instance, women cited commitment to develop their villages and constituencies as well as the need to have equal representation in parliament and advocating for issues affecting women like violence, health, economic development and leadership and decision making.

4.3 In contrast, 37% of women surveyed did not want to pursue a career in politics; a commonly cited reason is financial constraints. Both titled and untitled women explained that it is expensive to campaign and contest the election. To run for the election, one has to campaign to get voters and this normally involves giving voters either monetary or any kind of contribution. When one is elected to parliament, he/she shoulders the responsibility of looking out for the constituency and assisting them where necessary. This often involves donations through monetary and other gift giving methods which is considered unrealistic given the current cost of living.

4.4 In addition, having a matai title as criteria to run for parliament makes some women reluctant to become political leaders because some want to become parliamentarians but do not want matai titles. Other reasons for women’s reluctance to participate in politics include male and community
attitudes which discourage women from considering politics as a career as it is seen as a man’s career. Other reasons given were that women have other competing priorities such as; child rearing, cooking, gardening, looking after the elderly; Women lacking the capacity, potential like knowledge of issues of development, confidence to speak in parliament and to work closely together with the male parliamentarians.

The current research reveals 47% of titled and 35% of untitled women do not choose to become leaders because they do not see themselves as leaders. There is a need for women to undergo a fundamental ‘identity shift’ when it comes to leadership, they need to acquire the confidence, skills and personal capabilities to become leaders in their community. However, this will not happen in a vacuum, men and women together can work to change the perceptions of the community towards women in leadership.

4.5 Changing community attitudes can be achieved by providing an enabling environment towards more women in parliament. Overall, research findings reveal that women strongly support an increase in female political leadership. This is evident in 94% stating that they would support a female candidate to run for parliament; 88% stated that they would like to see more women enter politics and 84% indicated that they agree with the Constitutional Amendment to reserve 10% of seats in Parliament for women.

4.6 Contrary to supportive perceptions, research findings also confirm resistance from some men and women against ‘having more women in politics’. Gender roles where women are expected to continue with the role of ‘Fautua’ and men as family heads to take on political leadership. Also, more women in parliament will not reap the same benefits as male parliamentarians. It is also perceived that the current female parliamentarians are enough to advocate for women’s issues. Therefore, some participants see the 10% quota strategy as special treatment for women because currently both men and women can contest the general election if they have a matai title.

5) The Perspectives of Professional and Prominent Women Matai
5.1 Participants were asked to describe empowerment strategies they used in pursuing a leadership role in their respective professions and communities. The key themes highlighted from the responses included; women serving their parents, families and communities all their lives and the bestowment of the matai title was recognition of their service by their families.
Also, possessing good traditional knowledge and skills in traditional protocols, practices and good public speaking skills gave the women the confidence to make decisions and speak during family and village council meetings as well as the motivation to accelerate in both the professional and traditional spheres. In addition, utilising strong support networks like family, church, community and friends and maintaining good relationships with them, know your place in society and lead by example and the whole community will give their support. Personal attributes like humbleness, confidence, and hard work helped women to stay focussed, independent and committed to strive to get to where they are today. They had the confidence to get involved with decision making and voice their opinions during village council meetings.

5.2 While the positive stance of women and their acceleration to leadership positions was noted, 8 of the respondents stated they faced challenges. These challenges include; women not having sufficient knowledge on traditional knowledge and practices like fa’aaloaloga fa’aleaganuu, ava usu and other cultural protocols; subordination feelings especially when it is only one female matai in the circle of men during meetings which results in their opinions not taken seriously during the village council meeting. Lastly, some women stated the financial resources and time constraints in meeting family, church and community obligations as well as committing time to carry out the roles and responsibilities of a matai.

5.3 Using the survey findings as well as national statistics from the Census, OEC and MJCA, it is clear that while there is evidence to support the increased numbers of women in leadership and decision making, challenges still remain in achieving gender equality in this arena. For example, there remains an entrenched cultural division of gender roles and responsibilities between men and women where men take on the role of matai or leader while the women continue to carry the role of fautua or advisor. This reveals the influence of traditional community perspective: that men are heads of families and women are not.

To address these challenges, it is recommended that the following actions be taken:

- Increase advocacy for women in leadership targeting men and women at all levels on changing perceptions about women in leadership.
- Expand the spectrum of prominent women leaders in the NUS study/curriculum.
- Data to be disaggregated by gender, year and village to visualize a trend in matai registration
- Increase budget for future surveys to increase sample to ensure national coverage.


Chapter One: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

In the cultural context the bestowment of a matai title is perceived as an honourable gesture for the individual who is bestowed a title. Ideally is the culmination of recognition for one’s service ‘tautua’ to family. It is bestowed to individuals with rights of lineage to a title and connected to rights to land. Titles are culturally sacred and are treasures ‘measina’ of families and symbolic of identity and a sense of self-belonging.

1.2 The bestowment of a title places an automatic sense of authority which distinguishes the roles and responsibilities of an individual with and without a title. Matai titles themselves, are distinguished by traditionally entrenched perceptions of rankings in that, one title may hold more esteem than another which also differentiates titled individuals in generic hierarchical rankings, extents of roles/responsibilities, extents of power-of-speech and more so, extents of authority to make decisions.

Samoa’s political history testifies to the influence of western political systems on the matai system in that its political framework was modelled against the fundamental cultural system. Since Samoa’s independence, a pre-requisite for any election candidate or Member of Parliament was to hold a genuine matai title (with the exception of Individual Voters seat). Throughout 50 years of political independence, women’s participation at this high-level decision making arena has been very limited as they continue to be underrepresented as MPs. Moreover, women’s interests are hardly prioritised matters of discussion.

As academics, technical experts or managers, Samoan women have attained great improvement leading to better standards of living for themselves and their families. As mothers, care-givers or home-makers women have proven their abilities to complete multiple tasks or earn a living from learned skills in handicraft, sewing, cooking or flower arrangements. In light of their achievements in such areas, it is a wonder why women continue to be underrepresented in positions of local (community) and national authority or actively engage and contribute in core decision making realms such as the village council setting or that of Parliament.

As such, it is the intention then of this survey to gather explanations to clarify this disconnection between women and political leadership. The focus of MWCSO is to enhance decision making opportunities for women and to highlight that they have valuable contributions to make.
Driven by political will and welcomed support by the Honourable Minister Tolofuaivalelei Falemoe Leiataua, this survey examines underlying social, cultural and economic factors which shape or influence women’s attitudes towards generic leadership and particularly political leadership (cultural and political) and political participation. Ultimately, this survey will serve to determine women’s own perceptions on political leadership generically and in relation to the Constitutional Amendment Act which allowed a quota of 10% of parliamentary seats for women. It also serves to highlight successful pathways women have undertaken in their pursuits as individual women to achieve the positions of authority they may currently hold in a community context.

With funding assistance from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Women: Matai and Leadership Survey 2013 by the Ministry of Women Community and Social Development seeks to provide both a tangible and conceptual foundation to inform programs for the empowerment of women in the future and advise on strategies to mobilize women into positions of leadership and thus, contribute to facilitating meaningful social changes.

Whilst the focus of this survey is primary on political leadership in a Parliamentary context, it delves deeply into the political leadership in the Village Council/Matai System context given the inevitable relationship between ‘Titles’ and ‘Leadership’ and expectations that membership and involvement in one, is determined by the other. The survey will identify various reasons influencing women’s personal choices for themselves which are determinants of their positive or negative reception to political interest, participation and leadership. Furthermore, it is inclusive of men’s opinions regarding women’s generic participation, their attributes and capacities to become leaders at such high-levels.
1.2 Background

Geography and Districts

Samoa is an independent island nation which lies in the centre of South Pacific roughly between New Zealand and Hawaii. Samoa is a small archipelago consisting of two main populated Islands, Upolu and Savaii and several much smaller islands of which a further three are inhabited, Manono, Apolima and Namua. A map of Samoa is presented in Chart 1.1.

Chart 1.1: Map of Samoa

The majority of the population lives on the island of Upolu; the following table outlines the population distributions across the country. At the time of the 2011 census, 76 percent of the population lived in Upolu and 24 percent lived in Savaii. Villages in both Upolu and Savaii are concentrated along the costal fringe, with 98 percent of the population living in close proximity to the coast (Amosa and Samson 2012). The Capital city of Apia is located on the central north coast of Upolu within the Apia Urban Area (AUA) with population of 36,735 people which makes up approximately 20 percent of Samoa’s population (Samoan Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census).
Table 1.1: Population of Samoa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Samoa</th>
<th>Upolu</th>
<th>Savaii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population Total</td>
<td>187,820</td>
<td>143,418</td>
<td>44,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of the population</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Samoa is made up of eleven political districts and approximately 330 traditional and non-traditional villages, 226 in Upolu and 104 in Savaii (Samoan Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Chart 1.2 illustrates Samoa’s political districts.

Chart 1.2: Political Districts of Samoa

1. (Afega)
2. A’ana (Leulumoega)
3. Aiga-i-le-Tai (Mulifanua)1
4. Atua (Lufilufi)2
The Samoan Population

According to the 2011 national census, the population of Samoa is almost 187,820. Samoa has experienced a moderate population increase over the last few decades; between 1991 and 2011 the country experienced a growth rate of 16 percent (SBS Census 2011), whilst according to United Nations population statistics, the world population grew by 30%, or 1.6 billion people, between 1990 and 2010.

As illustrated in Chart 1.3, Samoa has a relatively young population. This age distribution is comparable to other ‘developing nations’. At the time of the 2011 census almost half of the nation’s population (49 percent) was aged less than 20 years.

Chart 1.3: Age Profile of Samoa
Samoa is a proud and religious nation with strong traditions and values. Its constitution reiterates the motto of ‘Samoa is founded on God’. In the 2011 Census, 99.8 percent of the population stated they belong to a denomination, the majority identifying as Christians, with the most popular denomination being the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (SBS Census, 2011).

The Samoan people are mainly Polynesian, although some are of mixed descent and citizenship (European, Chinese and other Pacific islands). Since Independence in 1962, Samoa has retained a close connection with New Zealand, in 2006 it was identified that 3.2 percent of New Zealand’s population is of Samoan descent (131,103).

The economy

According to the World Bank, Samoa is classified as a ‘Lower middle income’ country. In 2012, Samoa was ranked 96th in the Human Development Index with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amounting to ST$1,542 million (US$677.0 million) and a GDP per capita of ST$4,5171 (Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2013; World Bank, databank 2013).

The Samoan economy relies heavily on remittances from overseas, predominantly from family members living in New Zealand, Australia and the United States. The Samoan Ministry of Finance reported that gross remittances contributed 25.9 percent of Samoa’s GDP in the third quarter of (Jan-Mar) of 2012-2013 (Asian Development Bank, 2013; Samoa Ministry of Finance, 2013). The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade estimate that, as a proportion of GDP, Samoa is among the highest recipient of remittances worldwide. This is a product of the large expatriate Samoan communities who are living in New Zealand (NZ), the United States of America (USA) and Australia, yet maintain strong family and cultural bonds in Samoa (The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013).

Samoa’s economy is also driven by the major industries of agriculture, fisheries and tourism and is dependent upon foreign aid (Amosa and Samson 2012).

Despite a relatively high per capita GDP, Samoa and other small island developing states remain seriously vulnerable to adverse external economic shocks and natural disasters. The Samoan economy remains isolated from international markets and is constrained by limited resources, infrastructure and geographical remoteness (Amosa and Samson 2012).

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1 GDP per capita is based on purchasing power parity (PPP) – Current International $, 28th October 2013 (World Bank) http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?order=wbapi_data_value_2012+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=desc
Throughout recent years, Samoa’s economy has been negatively impacted by natural disasters. Cyclone Evan, which hit Samoa in December 2012 has had a detrimental effect, resulting in a 1.6 percent decline in real GDP for the 2012/13 March quarter in comparison with the previous year (2011/12). A decline in the Construction, Agriculture, Fishing, Food and Beverage Manufacturing and Transport & Communication Industries all contributed to this downward trend (Samoa Ministry of Finance, 2013). Earnings from the tourism industry were also significantly impacted by the 2009 tsunami, which caused damage to major tourist areas around the southwest side of Upolu Island (Samoa Demographic and Health Survey, 2009).

The overall labour force participation rate of 41 percent is disaggregated to 58 percent for men and 23 percent for women (Census, 2011).

### Women in the workforce

At the time of the 2011 Census there were just over 13,000 women participating in the labour force, this amounts to less than a quarter of the working age women in Samoa. In comparison, over half (58 percent) of all working aged men were engaged in economic activity. As illustrated in the table below, women are considerably underrepresented in the labour market due to their engagement in informal non-economic activities such as domestic duties.

The low female participation rate is largely explained by the number of working aged women who are primarily engaged in domestic duties: 33,213 in total, representing over half (59 percent) of the total number of females in this age group. However, these figures can also be misleading because of the relatively significant level of subsistence activity undertaken by people labelled as ‘domestic workers’ (Fiu Elisara, for MDG Report, 2006).

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2 Participating in the labour force includes those who are employed, self employed, agricultural subsistence producers, street vendors and those who are unemployed: looking for work.

3 For Samoa, the working aged population refers to persons aged 15 years and over.
### Table 1.2: Labour Force Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Working population (aged 15+)</th>
<th>Engaged in economic activity</th>
<th>Participation rate</th>
<th>Employed persons</th>
<th>Unemployed (looking for work)</th>
<th>Unemployment rate</th>
<th>Engaged in non-economic activities</th>
<th>Domestic Duties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total aged 15+</td>
<td>115,900</td>
<td>47,910</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>45,16</td>
<td>2,720</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>67,99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men aged 15+</td>
<td>59,617</td>
<td>34,781</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>32,93</td>
<td>1,824</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>24,83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women aged 15+</td>
<td>56,283</td>
<td>13,118</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12,22</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>43,15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over three quarters (77 percent) of all women aged 15 years and over are involved in ‘non-economic’ activities such as housework, education or are not capable to work.

Women remain particularly underrepresented in the formal workforce, however, the 2011 census revealed that for those women who are employed, a relatively large proportion work in ‘higher skilled’ occupations. At the time of the census, almost a quarter (23 percent) of all formally employed women worked in Managerial, Professional, Technical or Associate Professional positions, in comparison with only 10 percent of men in the workforce. These statistics are presented in the table below.

---

4 (Participating in labour force).
5 Employed persons includes: Employers & Employees, Self employed, Persons who manufacture goods for sale, agricultural subsistence producers, street vendors.
6 Non-economic activities include: Domestic duties, attending school and incapable to work.
7 Those who worked in the occupation categories of Managers, Professionals, Technical or Associate Professionals have been classified as ‘higher skilled’
The 2011 census also revealed that employed women are more likely to work within the ‘tertiary industries’\(^8\) such as Education, Commerce and Public Administration. This reflects a positive trend in women’s employment as these sectors often attract more qualified workers and are also well established and more resilient to economic instabilities.

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\(^8\) Definition of ‘tertiary’ industry: The provision of services (teachers, managers and other service providers).
In regards to economic empowerment and equal access to employment opportunities, women in Samoa are still less likely to be employed than men (2009 Demographic and Health survey). However, nearly half (48 percent) of women who are currently employed and in a married or de-facto relationship state that they earn more than their male partners, and a further 1 in 5 state that their earnings are on par with their partners. More and more women are pursuing formal higher paid jobs and as a result women’s wages are actually increasing at a faster rate than men’s (MDGs report, Census data 2006 and 2001 census). Women are continually taking up leadership roles and positions of power within the public and private sector (MDG report), yet a ‘glass ceiling’ issue pertaining to leadership restrictions remains.

Complex community commitments can negate the impact of women’s economic and employment empowerment in Samoa. Women may be empowered in employment but socially obligated to support their extended family, the church and the village. Earning the highest wage within the family is not necessarily reciprocated with the ‘head’ decision making position (Amosa and Samson, 2012; Lee and Francis, 2009). Without a title or social status, a women’s economic wealth, employment position or educational achievements may be considered less relevant within the social hierarchical structure of the ‘Matai system’ (Lee and Francis, 2009).
1.3 The Status of Women in Samoa

Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Women in Samoa are rapidly entering the labour force and taking up roles of leadership within the community thus their role in society is constantly evolving. However, despite strong social change, traditional socio-cultural constructs of gender have remained a cherished and valued aspect of day to day life (Schmidt, 2003; The Samoan Government, 2006). In Samoa, culture and tradition provide entrenched expectations for how people should behave in relation to the social constructs of masculinity and femininity. Traditional/customary gender discourses are preserved alongside Samoa’s rich culture and enduring traditions.

“The Samoan village is made up of two conceptual entities "the village of men" and the "village of women," this division reflects the gender division of labour on which almost all traditional institutions are based.” (The Samoan Government and UNICEF, 2006, pg 20).

The Sacred Space/Relationship (Va Tapuia)

There is a sacred covenant, known as ‘Va Tapuia’ that governs all social relationships in Samoa. The relationship between male and female relatives is governed by the ‘feagaiga’, or also known as the brother and sister covenant. The ‘feagaiga’ emphasizes that within the family the brother is given the privilege of leading the family while the role of ‘Fautua’ is taken by the sister who carries the ‘mamalu’ or dignity of the family.

Within the covenant, a brother’s role is to provide for and protect his sisters. A sister’s role is to provide advice and act as a caregiver and mediator for the family. A sister is highly respected and honoured within the family. The bond between the brother and sister as defined in the ‘feagaiga’ provides a strong model for all male-female relationships. The ‘feagaiga’ guides male-female interactions within the aiga (extended family) and within the village as a whole.

Women’s social groups

The Samoan hierarchical social structure ensures respect for the eldest female of the family, and has resulted in a particularly high status for some women in the community (MWCSD, 2007). Traditionally the status of the wife is much less than the status of the sister or daughter (The Samoan Government and UNICEF, 2006). In the village setting a woman operates within one of three social groups according to her age, marital status and whether she was born in the village. The aualuma is comprised of sa’oao and tama’ita’i (daughters born of the village); faletua and tausi (wives of the chiefs – sons of the village) and those considered as ava a taulele’a who are women.
married to taulele’a (untitled sons of the village). Each woman can fall into one of the three categories depending on the context of her living environment and whether she is residing in her own village or that of her husband. The status of her husband also determines her place in the village structures.

**Women and Social Change**

Within the discourse of development it is often argued that improving women’s access to economic resources will transform imbalanced gender roles and promote women’s empowerment (Mutopo, 2010; Pillai and Gupta 2009; Leve 2007; Perry 2005). As the country develops, the status of women is improving in the key areas of education and employment. In the education sector, girls are outperforming and over-representing boys in all stages of schooling particularly at the tertiary level (Government of Samoa, 2010. Millennium Development Goals: Second Progress Report). In relation to economic empowerment, increasingly more women are taking up leadership and managerial roles and as a result, women’s wages are increasing at a faster rate than men’s (Government of Samoa, 2010. Millennium Development Goals: Second Progress Report).

Yet whilst women in Samoa are being empowered in the employment and education settings, important social and cultural constructed gendered roles are maintained within the family and community setting (Amosa and Samson, 2012; Government of Samoa, 2010). Women’s increased access to economic resources does not significantly impact their decision making ability and positioning within the home or community (Ministry of Health Samoa, 2009).

While some of the positive advancements in the status of women in Samoa can be attributed to their economic and professional empowerment, research suggests that in the Samoan context, women’s decision making status and the gradual breakdown of biased gender practices within the home and community remain dependant on other more pertinent social and cultural factors, such as marital and social status.

The 2009 Demographic and Health Survey found that factors such age and locality had a much stronger correlation with women’s decision making ability within the family compared to women’s financial earnings or formal employment status. It revealed that neither employment nor wealth had any significant impact on women’s decision making abilities within the family context. Women from the highest combined household wealth quintile were in fact less likely to contribute to decision making compared with women from the lowest wealth quintile. Older women are more likely than younger women to participate in household decision making and women from urban areas are more likely to participate in decision making than women from rural areas.
Women are assured equality in Samoa’s legal framework. The government of Samoa continues to take action to break down barriers and improve the status of women across the country in the form of policy and program development. It has ratified a number of key international conventions related to gender equality and protecting women’s human rights like the CEDAW which was ratified in 1992. The MWCSD works to generate gender-related policy to facilitate the advancement of women, and administers educational and awareness programs which work to empower women’s health, economics, leadership and decision making within the community and eliminate violence and discrimination against women.

However, despite material advancements in women’s empowerment, a number of critical issues remain pertinent for women in Samoa. Violence against women is endemic throughout Samoa (United Nations, 2010; Government of Samoa, 2010; Ministry of Health Samoa, 2009). According to a World Health Organization (WHO) study conducted in 2005, almost half (46 percent) of Samoan women have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner. Alarmingly the research also revealed that over three quarters of women justified to some level the acts of domestic violence towards them; the reasons most widely given were infidelity, followed by disobeying their husbands. These findings reveal that hegemonic masculinities and asymmetries of power are embedded and need to be further deconstructed within Samoa’s constructs of gender (Rakoczy 2004; Anderson, 1997).

Despite positive advancements and action in women’s equality, women in Samoa remain underrepresented when it comes to leadership and decision making. According to the 2011 census, only 21 percent of households were headed by women. This reiterates the findings of the 2008 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (Ministry of Health, 2009) in which it was reported that only 22 percent of households were headed by a woman.

Women are also underrepresented in formal community decision making and leadership contexts, such as parliament and in the village Matai system. Women’s empowerment in leadership and decision making at the community and political level is the focus of the current research and will be discussed and analysed in further detail throughout this research report.
1.4 Leadership in Samoa: Social and Political Structures

The Matai System (Fa’amatai)

Samoa has a distinctive hierarchical society and Samoan cultural traditions have remained strong through periods of social change and development. Samoa’s cultural way of life, the fa’samoa encapsulates the ethos of Samoan culture and society, and regulates social practices, institutions and systems.

The extended family system, known as the aiga potopoto is the fundamental social unit within Samoa. It provides the social structure upon which Samoa’s collective cultural way of life is both constructed and enacted. The extended family system consists of several aiga (family units), each headed by a Matai (chief). As a representative, the Matai is usually appointed by consensus of the aiga. This hierarchy forms the basis of the Matai system (MWCSD, 2007).

The Matai system, known as the fa’amatai is the fundamental village governance structure which operates throughout Samoa. It provides the central basis for village governance (UNICEF and Government of Samoa, 2006). The Matai act as the formal leader of each family, they represent the family at the village council where they make decisions for the betterment of the village. In most villages both men and women are allowed to become Matai, although in practice the Matai title is largely bestowed to male family members.

Samoans are extremely community oriented and share a strong collective social identity. The fa’asamoa focuses on the collective, emphasizing the achievements and requirements of the group rather than the individual. The Matai System provides a traditional social protection and support network in which traditional obligations ensure that vulnerable family members are cared for. Overall, the Matai system is effective in maintaining peaceful and efficient village governance.

The legal system of Samoa recognizes the role of the fa’amatai in regulating village laws and upholding order in the village setting (UNICEF, 2006). Disputes within the community are often handled by traditional or village law.

Throughout all periods of social change and development, the Matai system has remained extremely central to the functioning of Samoan society. At independence in 1962, the system was effectively incorporated into the overarching political system. As a system of social protection and organization the Fa’amatai is a success- it protects the vulnerable and maintains peaceful governance at the village level.
The Samoan political system

Samoan has a unique political system. At independence in 1962, it adopted a political system which blends both traditional and democratic institutions and processes.

It has experienced relative peace and political stability in comparison with other Pacific Island Nations. Through a two-party political system, the government has embodied traditional and democratic practices to create a system which operates efficiently. Elections are held every five years for both Parliamentarians and the Prime Minister, although issues of hegemony exist with the Human Rights Protection Party having remained the dominant party since 1982 (Amosa and Samson, 2012).

The national legislative assembly of Samoa, known as the Fono Aoao Faitulafono, has 49 members. Of these, 47 are matai and are elected from 41 territorial constituencies based on traditional districts while the other two represent the part-Samoan. These members are non-matai and are elected on a non-territorial basis by voters on the Individual Voters Roll (Amosa and Samson, 2012).

To run for a seat in parliament candidates must hold a Matai title, of which women are starkly underrepresented (United Nations 2012; Government of Samoa, 2010; Jivan and Forster, 2009). This has been a long maintained condition of parliament since Samoa’s independence in 1962. In line with this stipulation, originally only Matai were eligible to vote in parliamentary elections, however, the voting system was changed by the Electoral Amendment Act 1990 which introduced universal suffrage and allowed all Samoan adults aged 21 years and over the right to vote. Women’s leadership status at the community level and the repercussions of their underrepresentation as Matai will be discussed in detail throughout this report.

Samoa also has a unique hybrid electoral system which utilizes a ‘first-past-the-post based voting system’ for the majority of constituencies and a Block Vote for a number of multi-member constituencies. The first-past-the-post based voting system is used in 37 single member constituencies; within this system voters are allowed a single vote for a single member and the candidate with the largest number of votes wins (Fraenkel, 2006; Pacwip.org, 2013). The remaining 6 constituencies in Samoa utilize a block voting system. Within the block vote system, voters are allowed additional votes corresponding to the number of members in the electorate. Voters for the multi member constituencies can cast up to two votes, and the candidate with the largest number of votes wins. This method was implemented as the population of these constituencies grew over time. As the number of people in these electorates increased, the constituencies were allocated additional members on a block voting basis rather than sub-dividing the region into two (Fraenkel, 2006). The
Government has indicated its intention to reform the electoral system to introduce all single-member constituencies (pacwip.org).

**1.5 Women in Leadership**

**Women as Matai**

To contest for a seat in parliament one of the key requirements is that candidates must hold a Matai title. Although the number of women who hold Matai titles is gradually increasing, some villages still maintain a strict ban on female Matai’s (Government of Samoa, 2010). The underrepresentation of women as Matai reflects a structural barrier which may constricts women’s pathways into both local community and political leadership.

**2011 Census Data**

As shown in the following chart, at the time of the 2011 census, 11 percent of all Matai’s were women.

**Chart 1.5: Gender disaggregation of Samoan Matai**

At the time of the 2011 census, less than 2% of women in Samoa held a Matai title, in comparison, over 15% of men in Samoa hold a title.
Table 1.4 utilises the 2011 census data to detail the number of Matai holders by both gender and region. 11 percent of the Matai holders in Upolu are female; this proportion is on par with the national average yet slightly above the rate recorded for Savaii.

As shown in table 1.4, across both islands (Upolu and Savaii) only 2 percent of the female population are Matai holders.

**Table 1.4: Matai title-ship by gender and region, 2011 Census**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Matai (2011)</th>
<th>Female Matai (2011)</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are female</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are male</th>
<th>Proportion of Women who are Matai</th>
<th>Proportion of Men who are Matai</th>
<th>Proportion of All People who are Matai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upolu</td>
<td>10,275</td>
<td>1,268</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>4,746</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>15,021</td>
<td>1,766</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chart 1.7-1.8: Number of Registered Matais 1957-2014 (Upolu and Savaii)
Charts 1.7 and 1.8 convey the total number of matais ever registered by the Lands and Titles Court of the Ministry for Justice and Courts Administration (MJCA). This data has recorded that across Samoa, 14 percent of all Matai’s who registered titles between 1957 and 2014 were women, Upolu had a slightly higher proportion of women Matai (15 percent) compared with Savaii.

The following chart utilizes data from the MJCA by decade for Fa’asaleleaga No 1 to portray a trend of female Matai title holders.
The chart above conveys the total number of registered matai from 1957 to 2012. The attainment of chiefly titles is predominantly male during the periods commencing from 1957-1970 with no woman matai being registered. Women matai registration only becomes present during 1971 onwards with a steady incline in numbers. Between the periods of 1981-1990 and 1991-2000 a total number of 49 women officially registered their titles with the Lands and Titles Court while the number of males remained steady.
However, the 2001-2010 period saw a sharp incline in numbers for both sexes which indicates that a series of events may have come about which preludes to this increase of registered matai from Fa’asaleleaga No1. However, from 2011-2012 the numbers of registered men and women matai drop just as dramatically as they had risen in the previous ten year period.

There are contributing factors as to why these periods saw the sudden rise and fall in the number of registered matai; one can only fathom and assume of the events which occurred during these periods that led to the results aforementioned.

- It must be noted that Fa’asaleleaga No 1 is one of the biggest constituencies in Samoa; hence the large number of matais being registered.

- One can also assume that the electoral reforms of 1990 which saw the introduction of the universal suffrage concept contributed to the steady increase in registered matai.

- The increase in women matai from 23 in 1981-1990 to 26 in 1991-2000 to 218 in 2001-2010 can be attributed to the notion that the untitled voters can vote for a female candidate related to them. Throughout the same periods, an increase is noted in female candidates for general elections as evident in an increase of 9 and 10 female candidates in 1996 and 2001 respectively compared to 4 in 1991.

- 2006 saw the general elections being held and saw the highest contingent of women (18) contesting for a seat in parliament. It was also during this year that Gatoloaifaaana Amataga Alesana Gidlow became the Member of Parliament of this constituency and was selected the Minister for Health. One can also assume that the increased number of registered women matais for this constituency was to support Gatoloai’s victory seeing that if one is a matai at Fa’asaleleaga No 1, he/she has to vote for candidates of this particular constituency.

**Women’s Political Participation**

In Samoa, women are significantly underrepresented in both parliamentary and community leadership settings. Only 4.1 percent of parliamentary members in Samoa are women, this alarming proportion is well below the 2013 global average of 20.9 percent and ranks Samoan women as amongst the most politically underrepresented in the world (pacwip, 2013; UN Women, 2013). This trend is consistent across almost all Pacific Island Countries, although the Samoan context is both unique and complex.

Three of the 49 parliamentary seats are currently occupied by women. Following the 2011 elections, the two female members of Parliament are Honourable Fiaime Naomi Mataafa and Honourable Gatoloaifa'ana Amataga Alesana Gidlow. In 2014, a new female member of parliament Ms
Faimalotoa Kika Iemaima Stowers- Ah Kau was selected during a bi-election to replace the late Tuilo’a Anitele’a Tuilo’a, thus bringing the current number of women parliamentarians to three.

There are a number of barriers which women in Samoa face when navigating the pathway to positions of political leadership.

**Anti-women in politics discourses:** Gender power asymmetries and negative stereotypes towards women can contribute to women’s underrepresentation in both political and community life. There is some opposition towards women in leadership within Samoa and community attitudes that the rightful place for women is at home.

**The Matai hierarchical system:** A Matai title is a prerequisite for participation as a political candidate in Samoa. However, women remain underrepresented as Matai’s, as evident in only 1.9% of women who are matais.

**Economic resources and status in society:** Women in Samoa also face barriers in leadership and political participation due to lack of economic resources and status in society. While women in Samoa are in fact rapidly entering the labour force, acquiring skilled and professional positions and often earning more than male counterparts (Census 2011; Ministry of Health, 2009), this increased income and empowerment does not necessarily translate to increased leadership opportunities. Complex community commitments can negate the impact of women’s economic and employment empowerment. Women may be empowered in employment but socially obligated to support their extended family, the church and the village. Earning the highest wage within the family is not necessarily reciprocated with the ‘head’ decision making position (Amosa and Samson, 2012; Lee and Francis, 2009). Without a title or social status, a women’s economic wealth may be considered irrelevant within the social hierarchical structure (Lee and Francis, 2009). It is often only women from prominent, high-ranking or politically successful families that are able to achieve parliamentary success in Samoa (True et al, 2012).

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**Constitutional Amendment: A Gender-Quota Strategy**

In response to the slow progress at which women are being empowered through access to political leadership positions, policy-makers in Samoa have implemented a quota strategy to enhance women’s political presence and respond to the stark underrepresentation of women in leadership.

In 2012, the Legislative Assembly of Samoa passed a bill to amend the Constitution and introduce a 10 percent ‘quota’ for women representatives into parliament. The constitutional amendment ensures that five seats within the Legislative Assembly will be reserved for women electoral
candidates. The strategy proposes a "floating" five reserved seats for women, whereby if no woman is elected during the elections, the amendment is activated and five seats are added to the Assembly. This will mean that the Samoan parliament may increase to a maximum of 54 seats (Pacific Women in Politics, 2013; MaCannat, 2013).

The constitutional amendment and reserved seats for women strategy which the Samoan government has proposed successfully embodies a transparent and unambiguous procedure for ensuring that the 10 percent gender quota is reached: if less than five women are successful in the general election, seats will be added to the legislative assembly to ensure that the objectives of the gender quota strategy are met (Pacific Women in Politics Org, 2013).

While achieving a minimum of 10 percent women in parliament may seem modest in comparison to other national legislative assemblies throughout the world, in the Samoan context the strategy is both realistic and constructive. The modest gender quota of 10 percent is considered a measure to ‘kick-start’ women’s political participation. However, there remains a need to continue ‘active equality’ intervention strategies such as increasing quota sizes to ensure that Samoa reaches a more equitable rate of women’s representation in parliament, as outlined in international conventions such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 2012; Dahlerup, 2006; Gupta et al, 2005).

The benefits and rationale for implementing a parliamentary gender quota initiative go far beyond increasing women’s political presence and promoting gender equality within political leadership. Increasing women’s representation in parliament is expected to support the overall status of women in Samoa, shift negative societal attitudes towards women, promote gender equality and work towards deconstructing harmful stereotypes and practices against women.

This survey aims to provide the contextual foundation needed to support women in their endeavour towards community and political leadership. As well as gaining a foundational viewpoint of the current socio-political context for women, the 2013 Women Matai and Leadership project also aims to explore community attitudes, the challenges and successful pathways women face in their experiences of leadership in Samoa. The research findings will offer insight which can strengthen and identify support networks and mobilization strategies as well as deconstructing barriers and negative social discourses. An overall objective of the research is to facilitate and support the implementation of the quota strategy and other initiatives which are working simultaneously to improve women’s political representation and participation. The MWCSD will utilize the research findings to both
develop new and strengthen existing programs and initiatives which support women in their endeavour for empowerment and leadership in Samoa.
Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Goal and Objectives

Goal: To analyse women’s attitudes towards political leadership and to closely explore societal perceptions of women as capable leaders in the community in order to facilitate equal access for women to participate in decision-making and leadership at all levels. Consequently, this would contribute towards achieving gender equality for women in leadership and decision making in line with Samoa’s obligations under CEDAW, the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender Equality, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals, the Pacific Leaders Declaration for Gender Equality, as well as Improved Quality of Life for All as outlined in the Strategy for Development of Samoa.

Objective One: Create a National Gender Based profile of Matai

- Aggregate the number of Women Matai (disaggregated by region)
- Matai Status (hierarchical classification). Numerically capture the distribution of women holding various types of Matai titles.
- Participation at village council (aggregate the number of women who sit in village meetings)
- The gender breakdown of Matai who have received titles from each village
- The gender breakdown of Matai currently living in the village of bestowment
- The gender breakdown of Matai who live elsewhere but contribute to the village

Objective Two: Develop a holistic understanding of Women’s decision making attitudes and experiences in the local community / village context (including experiences in regards to matai title-ship).

- Capture women’s decision making experiences in the family and village context
- Explore the reasons why women would chose (or would choose not to) to pursue Matai title.
- Explore why women have or have not accepted a title.
- Explore the barriers and challenges women face in regards to decision making within the village.
- Capture matai women’s influence, authority and leadership within the village (including participation in the village council)
- Examine women’s cultural perceptions of themselves as title holders and their attitude towards the skills and competencies required to carry out the role of matai.
- Examine women’s economic stability and their experiences in fulfilling the financial demands of a matai
Objective Three: Closely explore why some villages don’t allow women Matai and the decision making barriers women face.

- Proportion of villages that ban the bestowal of chiefly titles to women
- Proportion of villages in which women do not participate during village council meetings
- Reasons and rationale for the above (explore why some villages do not allow women to become Matai and/or don’t participate at village council)

Objective Four: Explore women’s experiences and attitudes towards political leadership in Samoa

- Participation in politics.
  - Explore why women would want to participate in the general election.
  - Explore why women decide not to contest in the general election.
- Addressing women’s Issues.
  - Effectiveness of current political parties: Identify women’s attitudes towards the effectiveness of the current political parties in addressing women’s issues.
  - What issues are important to women: Explore the political issues which are important to women in Samoa.
- General attitudes towards ‘Women in Politics’.
  - Explore women’s attitudes towards the underrepresentation of women in parliament and their support towards the notion of ‘more women in politics’.

Please note: For the purposes of this research, indicators 1.6 and 1.7 (objective one and objective two) will be captured through consultation with secondary sources (the MJCA).

2.2 Design

The research uses a ‘Mixed Methodology Design’, utilising quantitative and qualitative analysis. Relying upon both qualitative and quantitative data allows the study to meet all of the various and distinct research objectives. A nationwide profile of Matai requires predominately quantitative, numerical data. However, in-depth qualitative data collection and analysis is also required, as the study aims to comprehensively explore and understand women’s experiences and attitudes towards leadership, the pathways women have taken to pursue leadership, barriers they may face in regards to decision making, and their attitude towards political leadership.

2.3 Data Collection/Data Entry

Data for the MWCSD Women Matai and Leadership 2013 survey was collected in three distinct Phases. At each phase, data was collected using a distinct method; a take-home questionnaire (phase 1), semi structured interviews (phase 2) and an online survey (phase 3).

Details of each data collection phase are provided below and Chart 2.1 presents an overview of each phase.
Phase 1

To compile a nationwide profile of Matai and capture information for the first objective, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to the entire Sui o Nuu (SNs). This constituted ‘Phase One’ of the research. During phase 1, data was collected by means of a take-home questionnaire which were given out during the August meeting and collected during the final quarter of 2013. The SNs were asked to gather and record numerical and factual data from their village.

When the questionnaires were collected, they were translated from Samoan to English and inputted into ‘Survey Gizmo’. Prior to exporting the research data, the translations and electronic data entry were closely reviewed and verified by a team leader.

Overall, over three quarters (79 percent) of the SNs from villages in Samoa are represented in the research. Results from phase 1 are presented in chapter 3. Although predominantly quantitative data was collected in phase 1, some SNs were also asked to provide details as to why women are not allowed to participate in decision making within their village, these responses are presented in chapter 5.
**Phase 2**

The second phase of the research was conducted in October 2013 in which the research teams visited 52 selected villages to gather the qualitative information required for objectives 2, 3 and 4 of the research.

A stratified quota sampling process was utilized to appropriately select the villages targeted in phase 2. This involved determining village characteristics which are important for the study, and using SBS data to assign the villages into these subgroups and then randomly selecting 52 villages from within these groups. Data from the 2011 Census was used to identify, classify and categorize the villages according to the needs of our study.

The following village characteristics were identified as important for the current study:

**Geography:** According to the SBS data from the 2011 census, there are 227 villages in Upolu (69 percent total) and 104 villages in Savaii (31 percent total). To ensure that the sample is geographically appropriate and captures information which is representative of the entire country, it was calculated that 69 percent of the research sample should come from Upolu and 31 percent should come from Savaii. Therefore 36 of our village samples are located in Upolu and 16 are located in Savaii.

**Rate of Women Matai:** When considering the overall goal and objectives of the study, it was determined that the sample should include villages with a relatively low proportion of women Matai, villages with a relatively high proportion of Matai and villages with average proportions of women Matai. At the time of the 2011 census, the SBS reported that 1.9 percent of women in Samoa hold a Matai title. This statistic is the national average and villages were categorized accordingly.

All the villages in Samoa were organised into six distinct categories, depending on their geographic location and their proportion of women matai.

Category 1: An Upolu village with a low proportion of Women matai, Category 2: An Upolu village with an average proportion of women matai, Category 3: An Upolu village with a high proportion of women matai, Category 4: A Savaii village Category with a low proportion of Women matai, Category 5: A Savaii village with an average proportion of women matai, and Category 6: A Savaii village with a high proportion of women matai.

The participants from each village were selected with the assistance of Sui Tamaitai o Nuu (STNs) who invited women from a diverse range of families, age groups and affiliations from their villages.
Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with titled women, un-titled women and a male village leader, such as a village mayor, high chief, pastor or youth leader in Samoan by a pair of interviewers; a lead interviewer and scribe.

At the conclusion of each interview, the transcripts were reviewed by both team members. These transcripts were later translated into English and inputted into ‘Survey Gizmo’. The translations and electronic data entry was verified by both members of the research team prior to submission and later reviewed by a team leader.

To accompany the national profile in Phase 1, a series of qualitative interviews with 46 titled women, 276 un-titled women and 65 male village leaders were conducted. The information collected during these interviews provides holistic understanding of women’s experiences and attitudes towards leadership, the pathways they have taken to pursue leadership opportunities, the barriers women have faced in regards to making decisions, their eligibility for Matai titles and their attitude towards political leadership. Results from phase 2 are presented in chapter 4, 5 and 6.

Phase 3

A third phase was added to the research to gather valuable insights from successful and influential women in Samoa like members of WinLA (Women in Leadership Advocacy Group), government workers and professionals in the community.

An online survey was designed using Survey Gizmo. The hyperlink was circulated to participants who were invited to input their own responses. Some participants preferred to use hard copies which upon collection were inputted into Survey Gizmo and analysed by staff.

Over 30 women were approached to participate in phase 3 of the research. However, only 16 women completed the survey, 1 did not want to participate and the results from phase 3 are presented in chapter 6 and 7.

2.4 Participants

Five targeted groups were approached for the research:

- Sui o Nuu – MWCSD Village Representatives (phase 1)
- Titled women (phase 2)
- Non-titled women (phase 2)
- Male village representatives (phase 2)
- Professional and prominent titled women in the community (phase 3)
2.5 Analysis

Once exported, the interview transcripts, questionnaires and surveys were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Data collected by means of numerical and closed questions has been analysed to present descriptive statistical information, such as the number of women matai, proportion of villages that ban women from becoming Matai, or the proportion women who would consider becoming a political leader in Samoa.

Open ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method used for ‘identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis was conducted throughout a series of structured sessions with teams of 4 to 6 researchers.

The qualitative data was organised according to the four research objectives and indicators. The interview transcripts and survey responses were reviewed by individual team members and initial themes for each indicator were identified. These themes were discussed, reviewed and refined within the team. After the themes were defined and named, a coding framework was devised. Data for each indicator was coded accordingly. This report is structured in terms of the main themes which emerged for each of the research objectives.

2.6 Limitations of current research

1. Time & Budget Costing:
   a) Ideally this survey was not intended to take the form and scope it did however it was necessary given the initial aim of the Minister’s directive to seek out women’s status and perception on the issues surveyed. The initial timeframe was 6 months and budget secured in minimal time was SAT$17,390.00 which was merely sufficient to cover prioritized areas.

2. Sampling:
   In undertaking this research only 52 villages were targeted as sample which a sensible target given the limited resources and time available for implementation. These findings are therefore representative of the nation given the sampling methodology used where villages were selected on a random basis but were ensured that selected villages represented all districts/constituencies. It is also indicative of people’s perceptions of the issues surveyed.
   a) Phase 3 initially included 30 professional women but had received 16 responses which were unfortunate given the depth of information and dynamics to the research, these women can create had there been more than 16 respondents or more than 30 samples given time constraints.
   b) Phase 1 involving SNs was a daunting exercise of form distributions, collection and verification which consumed a lot of staff time
c) Not all targeted individuals ideally required for questioning were available on the day or at the time of research as they lived in Apia or overseas (eg: the only titled woman or the high chief with the authority to answer questions)

d) Not all sampled villages were able to participate in the research given their own reservations about the survey goals and protection of information should the village agree to take part

3. Research Gaps:
   a) Given limitations of time and resources, little was invested in phase 3 of the research focusing on professional women

4. Interview venue:
   a) The use of open fales (fale komiti, fale talimalo) or confined homes/houses for interviews and discussions with participants precluded some women from really voicing their personal opinions during an interview. This could have been especially compounded when the SN or male representative was present.

5. Limited representation of participants:
   a) Survey participant spread was often limited to women who are in or have links with the Women’s committee. This would limit the kinds of responses to women who are already participating in a decision-making role, within the sphere of the committee. The research thus perhaps failed to adequately capture the full spectrum of women’s experiences, across villages and social classes.
Chapter Three: A National Gender Based Profile of Matai

A primary objective of the MWCSD Matai and Leadership survey was to construct a nationwide gender based profile of Matai. The Gender Based profile of Matai will provide the foundations for which further detailed analysis and exploration can be interpreted and constructed. Quantifying and compiling a gender profile at the national level is crucial in providing an overview of women’s community leadership experiences. The national profile of Matai detailed and presented in this chapter will address the six research indicators outlined under Objective 1 of the research.

Objective One: Create a National Gender Based profile of Matai

- Aggregate the number of Women Matai (disaggregated by region)
- Matai Status (hierarchical classification). Numerically capture the distribution of women holding various types of Matai titles.
- Participation at village council (aggregate the number of women who sit in village meetings)
- The gender breakdown of Matai who have received titles from each village
- The gender breakdown of Matai currently living in the village of bestowment
- The gender breakdown of Matai who live elsewhere but contribute to the village

The research findings presented in chapter 3 have been divided into five sub sections:

- Disaggregation by gender
- Disaggregation by village
- Disaggregation by Hierarchy
- Participation at the village council
- Living and Serving in the village

3.1 Disaggregation by Gender

To compile a nationwide gender based profile of Matai and achieve comprehensive coverage, the Ministry targeted SNs from traditional villages in Samoa to participate in the research. The MWCSD through the Division for Internal Affairs (DIA) appointed 212 SNs from the traditional villages as defined within the Tusi Faalupega (a MWCSD document which details the salutations, laws and genealogy of villages in Samoa). A total of 167 SNs contributed to the current research, this amounts to a response rate of 79% of all the SNs. They provided information in regards to the Matais and leadership structures of their village.

3.2 A total of 16,583 Matai were listed by the SNs who participated, 93% of these Matai are male (15,355), with females making up just 7% of Matai holders in Samoa (1,228). When disaggregated by region, the research findings revealed that a larger proportion of the Matai in Upolu are women
compared with the figures recorded for Savaii. This trend reflects a strong adherence to what is considered ‘traditional’ cultural rules and customs in regional districts of Samoa and is in line with the findings of previous research and analysis including the Samoan Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census. In Upolu, 10% of Matai are female and the remaining 90 percent are male, where as in Savaii, only 4% of Matai are female and the majority of Matai (96%) are male. These figures are presented in Charts 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 as well as Table 3.1.

3.3 Chart 3.1 displays the male to female gender ratio of Matai in Samoa, illustrating that the majority of Matai (93%) in Samoa are male, with women making up just 7%. This trend of male hegemony within the Matai system is consistent across both Upolu and Savaii, as displayed in Charts 3.2 and 3.3.

*Chart 3.1 Gender ratio of Matai in Samoa*
Chart 3.2 Gender ratio of Matai in Savaii

Chart 3.3 Gender ratio of Matai in Upolu

Table 3.1: Matai in Samoa disaggregated by region and gender
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Samoa</th>
<th>Upolu</th>
<th>Savaii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Matai</td>
<td>15,355</td>
<td>7,986</td>
<td>7,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Matai holders who are Male</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Matai</td>
<td>1,228</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Matai holders who are Female</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Matai</td>
<td>16,583</td>
<td>8,887</td>
<td>7,696</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 3.4 Overview of women as matai

Information was collected from 167 Sui O Nuu / Sui Ole Malo’s (Village Representatives) across Samoa. The representatives reported a total of 16,583 Matais.

Of these, 93% (15,355) are male, and 7% (1,228) are female (7.4 per cent).

The Sui O Nuu (village representatives) reported that 1,228 of the Matai are women (7.4 per cent).
Chart 3.5: number of registered matais

The data presented above in graph 3.5 captures the number of registered matais captured within the Office of the Electoral Commission database from 2005 to 2014. The blue colour bar shows the number of women with matai titles in 41 Districts of Samoa which is very low compared to male title holders. Out of 9,106 registered matais in the Office of the Electoral Commission, only 619 (7%) were women. The contributing factors of the low representation of women in local government and governance are further discussed in other chapters of this report.
### 3.2 Disaggregation by Village

As previously discussed, this research aims to develop a comprehensive profile of Matai disaggregated by gender at the village level. Table 3.2 displays the number of male and female Matai who have received a title throughout the 167 villages surveyed. For each village, the table also displays the ratio of Matai holders who are male and the ratio of Matai holders who are female.

*Table 3.2: Disaggregation of matai by village*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Male Matai</th>
<th>Female Matai</th>
<th>Total number of Matai</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are Male</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUA</td>
<td>Vaiala</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUA</td>
<td>Magiagi</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUA</td>
<td>Moata’a</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUA</td>
<td>Vaimoso</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUA</td>
<td>Vailoa Faleata</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL AUA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Male Matai</th>
<th>Female Matai</th>
<th>Total number of Matai</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are Male</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Laulii</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Vaigaga</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Saina Faleata</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Previous</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Toamua</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Faleula</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Levi Saleimoa</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Lotosoa</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Salepou’a’e</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Nonoa Saleimoa</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Tufulele</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Tuanai</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Faleasiu</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Fasitoouta</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Fasitoouta (Matailliili &amp; Salioa)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Nofoalii</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Leulumoega</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Fasitoo-tai</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Vailuutai</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Faleatiu</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Satapuala</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Satuimalufilufi</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWU</td>
<td>Leauva’a i Sasae</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL North West Upolu**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Male Matai</th>
<th>Female Matai</th>
<th>Total number of Matai</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are Male</th>
<th>Proportion of Matai holders who are Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Fusi Safata</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Vaiee Safata</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Fausaga</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Tafitoala</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Sataoa Safata</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Saanapu</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Nuusuatia</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Mulivai Safata</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Siufaga Falelatai</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Matautu Falelatai</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Matanofo, Falevai Samai</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Pata Falelatai</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Samatau</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Samea/Paepaeala</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Gagaifo-le-vao</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Matafaa</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Salamumumu</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Matautu Lefaga</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Savaia Lefaga</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Registered Voters</td>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Safaatoa</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Tafagamanu</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Apai Manono Tai</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Apolima</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Apolima Uta</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Fuailolo Mulifanua</td>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Lalovi</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Faleu Manono Uta</td>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Salau Tai (Manono)</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Salani</td>
<td></td>
<td>165</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Sapunaoa</td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROU Satalo</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>37</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Sili</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Siufaga</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Siutu</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Tafua/Maota</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Taga</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Tapueelele</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Tufutafoe</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Vaega Satupaitea</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Vaiafai</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savaii</td>
<td>Vaipouli</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As part of the current research, the SNs from the villages of Matafaa, Moataa, Utufaalalafa and Leauvaa i Sasae in Upolu all reported that approximately one out of every three Matai in their village are women. In Matafaa, the SN reported that 43% of the Matai are women; in Moataa, the SN reported that 39% of the Matai are women; in Utufaalalafa, 36% of the Matai are women, and in the village of Leauvaa i Sasae, 33% of the Matai are women. Women matai actively participate in the village council in all of these villages, contributing to decision making and village leadership.

Chart 3.6 displays the top ten villages with the greatest proportion of Matai who are women. The number of male and female Matai in each village was collected from the SNs; these figures were aggregated to determine the total number of Matai in each village.
The Top 10 Villages with the highest proportion of Matai who are Women (%)
Chart 3.6: Villages with the highest proportion of female Matai

These results of chart 3.6 above are encouraging and reveal that gender equality and advancements in the status of women can be achieved within the parameters of the traditional Matai system. Gender empowerment and equality in leadership within the Samoan context is unique. Traditional systems of village governance, such as the Matai structure, traditional gender roles and the ‘Brother and Sister covenant’ provide a series of complex and compounding factors which are often considered detrimental to women’s empowerment. However, the Matai system is a cherished and largely effective system of village governance.

The positive results reported from the villages of Matafaa, Moataa, Utufaalalafa and Leauvaa i Sasae in Upolu and those displayed in Chart 3.6 provide clear evidence that it is possible to deconstruct gender inequalities without undermining cultural integrity and abandoning cultural structures within the Matai system. The gender equality evident within the Matai system in these villages reveals that distinct culture and traditional gender roles can exist without perpetuating hegemonic power dynamics and perpetuating gender inequality. Rather than crudely and naively deconstructing traditional and cherished practices, it is important to analyze and understand the unique considerations traditional practices pose in regards to achieving gender equality. The MWCSD is focused on maintaining Samoa’s cultural integrity whilst also promoting women in leadership and simultaneously deconstructing harmful gender based attitudes, stereotypes and practices.

3.3 Disaggregation by Hierarchy

A Matai title can be classified into two distinct categories, “an ali’i title” (High Chief) or “a tulāfale title” (Orator). The taxonomy of ‘Matai’ is complex, the distinction between High Chief and Orator is central to the functioning of the Matai System. A family may have a number of High Chiefs and orators, the role of the High Chief is to make decisions and the role of the Orator is to speak on behalf of the high chief. A high chief title may be an inherited, passed down through generations, or it may be bestowed to those who have demonstrated a strong and principled commitment towards their family through service. Those who have shown characteristics of leadership, wisdom and dedication may be nominated for certain high chief titles through a consensus of their family. A number of organizations such as the Samoan Bureau of Statistics and the MJCA collate and manage national statistics for the number of Matai in Samoa. However, detailed information regarding the classification of Matai is limited; there are considerable ‘gaps’ and shortcomings in the existing data.
The current Matai and Leadership research aims to further explore the hierarchical classification of Matai in Samoa. As part of this research, 150 Sui O Nuu were able to provide details in regards to the hierarchical classification of Matai in their village. This information has been utilized to create a detailed profile of Matai, which includes a close analysis of men and women with high chief titles.

As detailed in the table 3.3, 4,246 (30%) of the Matai’s listed as part of the current research have been bestowed a high chief title while the remaining 9,827 (70%) have received an Orator title. The majority of Matai in Samoa are Orators, with high chiefs accounting for less than a third of the Matai in Samoa. This trend is consistent throughout both Upolu and Savaii.

Table 3.3: Disaggregation of Matai hierarchy by gender and region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Samoa</th>
<th>Upolu</th>
<th>Savaii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Chief</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3,878</td>
<td>1,727</td>
<td>2,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4,246</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td>2,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orator</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9,497</td>
<td>4,697</td>
<td>4,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9,827</td>
<td>4,895</td>
<td>4,932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When disaggregated by gender it becomes evident that compared with their male counterparts, women remain significantly underrepresented across all levels of the Matai system. Only 368 female high chiefs were recorded by the SNs, in comparison to 3,878 male high chiefs. The SNs also accounted 330 female orators in comparison with 9,497 male orators. The research findings reiterate that the overwhelming majority of Matai are men.
Chart 3.7 illustrates the hierarchical distribution of Matai by region and Chart 3.8 illustrates the gender breakdown across the hierarchical classifications of the Matai system.
Chart 3.8 Matai hierarchical classification by gender

- Female High Chiefs: 368
- Female Orators: 330
- Male High Chiefs: 3,878
- Male Orators: 9,497
Chart 3.9 breakdown of female Matai’s by hierarchy

Chart 3.9 displays the breakdown of female Matai’s by hierarchy; it illustrates the ratio of female High Chiefs compared to Female Orators. As discussed previously in this chapter, 150 SNs were able to provide details in regards to the hierarchical classification of Matai in their village. Analysis of this data reveals that 368 (53 percent) of the female Matai’s have received a High Chief title and the remaining 330 (47 percent) are Orators. Chart 3.10 displays the breakdown of male Matai’s by hierarchy. According to the current research findings, 3,878 of the male Matais are High Chiefs (29 percent) and 9,497 are Orators (71 percent).

Chart 3.10 breakdown of male Matai’s by hierarchy
The results of this research revealed that for those women who are able to receive a title, there is in fact, a high chance that they will be bestowed the privileged status of high chief (ali‘i). Over half (53 percent) of all women who have been bestowed a Matai title are High Chiefs. When compared with just 29 percent of all male Matai, this is a positive reflection of the high status women are regarded in their families.

### 3.4 Participation at village council

Within the community context of Samoa, quantifying the number of female Matai does not provide an accurate representation of women’s decision making opportunities. Receiving a Matai title does not necessarily provide women with equal access to power and leadership within the village. Women’s decision making opportunities at the village level are more accurately represented and reflected by analyzing the number of women who sit and participate in the village council.

Chart 3.11 illustrates the gradual limitations of women’s decision making opportunities. While there are 151 villages in Samoa where women are allowed to become Matai (72 villages in Upolu and 79 villages in Savaii), 115 villages have women actively participating in decision making.

**Chart 3.11 Representation of Women at the village council**

![Chart 3.11](image)

Charts 3.12, 3.13, 3.14 and 3.15 portray the exact extent of women’s decision making opportunities within the Matai system. As illustrated in chart 3.12, 90 percent of villages in Samoa allow women to become Matai (72 villages in Upolu and 79 villages in Savaii), although there are only 140 villages in Samoa (84 percent) where women are currently serving as a Matai. Chart 3.14 illustrates that only
78 per cent of villages in Samoa allow women to sit in the village council and chart 3.15 reveals that there are only 115 villages in which women actively participate in decision making. Participation at village council can provide a more accurate reflection of women’s decision making and leadership opportunities at the village context. Almost one third (31 percent) of villages in Samoa do not have a woman sitting on their village council.

**Chart 3.12 Villages which allow women to become Matai**

**Chart 3.13 Villages which currently have women as Matai**

**Chart 3.14 Villages which allow women to sit in the village council**
Women are marginalized and underrepresented in decision making at the village level for a wide variety of reasons. Women face a range of systematic barriers which inhibit their participation at village council; these barriers may be overt, personal or deeply embedded within social practices. Often women are allowed to attend the village council but still choose not to participate. This is considered a personal decision although it is also inevitably influenced by both cultural and social factors. Women may choose not to participate due to personal reason which is mainly the ‘Va Tapuia’. The multitude of reasons why women do not to participate in village is explored in more detail in chapters 4 and 5.

A number of common themes are echoed throughout the collective rhetoric of male village representatives from the 31 percent of villages with no female representation at village council. It is often considered that although women do not participate in the village council directly, they do in fact contribute to the village in a range of alternative ways.

Women are seen to have their own unique roles and expected to work alongside their male counterparts. Gender is a collective and communal practice and gender roles are negotiated in relation to the shared needs of the wider family and community. In Samoa, almost all family and village life involves a strong cultural division of labour and responsibilities based on clearly defined gender roles (Bindon, 2006). In the context of women’s participation at village council, the male village representatives who were surveyed as part of the research have continually reiterated a strong rhetoric of gender disaggregation and attest to the clearly defined roles of both men and women in the village context.
Among the 31 percent of villages where Matai women are not represented at the village council, a number of the male representatives who participated in the current research have elaborated on the distinct and valued role of women Matai within their village; providing further details in regards to the specific responsibilities of Matai women and their role in decision making at the village level. It was commonly reported that the women’s role is to support their male Matai relatives, provide advice and maintain care giving responsibilities.

With their role of advisor, women support and counsel their male relatives who in turn represent the families’ collective needs at the village council. The village council manages village governance; male Matai representatives portray the collective perspectives of their family and make decision on behalf of their family as a whole.

The barriers women face and the reasons some villages exclude women from decision making will be further explored in further detail throughout chapters 4 and 5 (Objective 2 and 3). A selection of responses is presented below.

“When it comes to decision making at the village council, women and men do not mix together. It is due to the brother and sister covenant. Samoa is a well defined society, a person’s role and responsibilities is inherited at birth”. - SN of a village in Upolu.
“Women have huge contributions in the village because they are the mediator in families”. - SN of a village in Upolu.

“God has already arranged and prepared our life. He created the man to become the head of family and women to become an advisor to the father”. -SN of a village in Savaii

“Women already have a social group within the village which is the Aualuma and women’s committee. The Aualuma is the covenant of alii ma faipule and the Faletua ma Tausi. The women’s committees take good care of the village men and also the village as a whole.”

- SN of a village in Savaii

“Women are not allowed to sit in the village council meeting because it is inappropriate to be present together with their male Matai relatives when exchange takes place between Matai’s especially when sensitive issues are discussed like rape and sexual abuse. During meeting breaks, the men make jokes which might offend the women. However, the women are still ‘serving’ their title.” - SN of a village in Upolu

3.5 Living and Serving in the village

The SNs were also asked to indicate the number of Matai who live and serve the village, as well as the number of Matai who live elsewhere but continue to serve the village. Usually a contribution comes in the form of financial donations or participation in the family/village obligations.

The SNs who participated in the research reported that there is a total of 17,340 Matai who are currently serving the village, 16,188 men and 1,152 women. As displayed in table 3.4, the SNs reported that 12,171 male Matai’s are currently living and serving in their village; in comparison with just 669 Matai women who are reportedly living and serving in their village of bestowment. The SNs reported a further 4,017 male Matai’s who live elsewhere but continue to serve and 483 female Matai who live elsewhere but still serve the village.
Table 3.4: Outline of Matai who are serving the village (living in the village or living elsewhere)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Samoa</th>
<th>Upolu</th>
<th>Savaii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Matai living and serving in the village:</td>
<td>12,171</td>
<td>5,990</td>
<td>6,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Matai’s who live elsewhere but still serve the village:</td>
<td>4,017</td>
<td>1,838</td>
<td>2,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of male Matai who are currently serving ('active'):</td>
<td>16,188</td>
<td>7,828</td>
<td>8,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of 'active' male Matai who live in their village of bestowment:</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of 'active' male Matai who live elsewhere:</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Matai living and serving in the village:</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Matai’s who live elsewhere but still serve the village:</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of female Matai who are currently serving ('active'):</td>
<td>1,152</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of 'active' female Matai who live in their village of bestowment:</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of 'active' female Matai who live elsewhere:</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men are more likely to “live and serve” in the village, 75% of the male Matai’s who ‘contribute’ live in the village of bestowment, whereas only 58% of the active female Matai’s currently live in their village of bestowment, the remaining 42 percent of Matai women who contribute live elsewhere. This can be attributed to the migration of women relocating to their husband’s village, as well as urban and international migration for employment and educational opportunities. The implications of living outside of the village limit the decision making opportunities for women. While many Matai women continue to contribute to their village with finance and attendance at important social and cultural events, living elsewhere inhibits their ability to participate in routine decision making when compared to their male counterparts who reside in the village.
Chart 3.17 illustrates the proportion of ‘active’ Matai who live in the village compared with the proportion who currently reside elsewhere, yet continue to contribute. This is disaggregated by gender to reveal that a far greater proportion of male Matai “live and serve” in their village of bestowment while women Matai are more likely to live elsewhere.

The multitude of ways in which women Matai actively contribute and serve their village is further explored throughout chapter 4 of this report.

**Chart 3.17: Proportion of ‘active’ Matai who are living in the village compared with those who live elsewhere**
Chapter Four: Women’s decision making attitudes and experiences in the village context

Chapter four provides a holistic profile of women’s decision making attitudes and experiences in the local context. The findings presented in chapter four are focused upon addressing the research indicators outlined under objective two of the research.

Objective Two: Develop a holistic understanding of Women’s decision making attitudes and experiences in the local community / village context (including experiences in regards to matai title-ship).

- Capture women’s decision making experiences in the family and village context
- Explore the reasons why women would chose (or would choose not to) to pursue Matai title.
- Explore why women have or have not accepted a title.
- Explore the barriers and challenges women face in regards to decision making within the village.
- Capture matai women’s influence, authority and leadership within the village (including participation in the village council)
- Examine women’s cultural perceptions of themselves as title holders and their attitude towards the skills and competencies required to carry out the role of matai.
- Examine women’s economic stability and their experiences in fulfilling the financial demands of a matai

The perspectives of both titled and untitled women are presented in chapter four. To gain an in-depth understanding of women’s experiences and attitudes towards leadership, qualitative interviews were conducted with women across 52 villages in Samoa. The qualitative research component of this study is referred to as ‘phase 2’ in which 46 titled women and 276 untitled women were interviewed; their responses have contributed to the research findings presented throughout this chapter.
4.1 Women’s Decision Making in the Village Context

4.1.1 Status in the Household

A woman’s status in the household is an important indicator of the decision making and leadership opportunities she is exposed to. In this research, 40 women described themselves as ‘head of the household’. The majority of female household heads were matais, only 6 women headed the household but did not have a matai title.

Most of the women who participated described themselves as ‘wife of the head’. A further 112 were a daughter to the household head and 24 were a daughter in law. These results are presented in chart 4.1.

Chart 4.1
4.1.2 Women’s Decision Making Responsibilities.

During the women matai and leadership survey women were asked to describe their decision making responsibilities within the family and village. Chart 4.2 details the 15 most common responses.

Chart 4.2

Almost half (47%) of the women who were interviewed stated they are involved in budgeting for the family. This was a common theme, with many women expressing they are active in financial decision making for the family, while others are even involved with budgeting for the wider community such as the church and women’s committees.

“I do decisions with our family budget; I am also the treasurer for the church I contribute into decisions whereby church money is used” (An untitled woman, respondent 85)

Within the family setting, women who were employed and contributed financially to the family finances had an increased involvement in budgeting and financial decision making.
“I only make decision for the family money because I am the one providing money for the family but many of the [other] decisions come from the family head, therefore I don't have a voice with it” (untitled woman, respondent 165)

Women were also heavily involved with decisions concerning their children and general child-raising. In particular, 46% of the women explained that they make decisions regarding discipline for the children; 41% make decisions regarding a child’s general care, and a further 25% make decisions regarding children’s education. Some of the women make autonomous decisions in regards to child raising issues and many indicated they are far more involved in child rearing decisions compared to their husbands.

“I decide what’s best suited for the children like education and health, which school the children attend, whether to take the children to hospital or traditional healer when they get sick.” (Untitled woman, respondent 103)

Almost a third (30%) of the women were involved in decision making for family fa’alavelaves. Decisions regarding faalavelave included budgeting for faalavelave donations, communicating with relatives’ overseas and organising family events.

“I do decisions with family fa’alavelave with regards to the amount given, considering the relationship we have with whoever the fa’alavelave is upon.” (Untitled woman, respondent 70)

An important role for women in the Samoan village context is to provide mediation and advice. During the research, a women’s role as advisor and peacekeeper routinely emerged as a broad theme which was echoed by both male and female participants. The concept emerged as a dominant theme while analysing women’s decision making responsibilities. Almost one out of every five women (18%) provides mediation and dispute resolution for their village. As one untitled woman describes: “I am a mediator to the village I also decrease penalties to the women where necessary when I think it’s too much” (An untitled woman, respondent 97).

A number of women also gave details about their experience as advisors. This included providing advice to the head of the household, advising their adult children and advising the family in general. In total, 12% of women who were interviewed identified their role of ‘advisor’ when describing their decision making responsibilities in the village and family contexts.

During the interviews an untitled woman detailed her role as an advisor. “I am consulted in decisions made for the family given my husband and I are ‘the matai’ responsible for overseeing the family. My husband is the chief therefore I am able to make contributions and have a voice in decision making in
many things” (respondent, 240). This reaffirms the influence women have in shaping the opinions expressed and decisions made by their husbands.

### 4.2 The Challenges and Barriers Women Face.

Women were asked to describe the challenges and barriers they face in regards to decision making within the village. The most common themes are presented in chart 4.3.

**Chart 4.3**

![Chart](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village laws and practices discriminate against women</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are dominant</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All decisions are dependent on the male centric village council</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women have no voice</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraints of the 'Va-Tapuia' (Brother and Sister Covenant)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative social attitudes towards women</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Theme 1: Village laws and practices discriminate against women.

Roughly one in four women (25%) explained that village laws and practices can discriminate against women. The women gave responses such as:

“In the village it is a taboo that women are not allowed to hold titles, therefore it is a challenge because some women might want to become matais but cannot due to the taboo. (Untitled woman, respondent 83)"

#### Theme 2: Men are dominant

During the interviews, a number of women explained that men dominate decision making in both the family and the village context.

“The men matais do all decisions within the village; they do all decisions because they are the heads of the families and are matais within the village.” (Untitled woman, respondent 92)
“Men dominate all decision making in the village including decisions made in the women’s committee. The women make their decisions but the village council can change these decisions.” (Untitled woman, respondent 284)

“Women are seen as inferior in the village. They do not have a voice within the decisions made by the village council.” (Untitled woman, respondent 31)

“There can be challenges when trying to resolve an issue in the family. There are times where my advice is not considered by others when trying to find a solution. There can be challenges also when women who have been subservient all their lives are suddenly thrown into the leadership limelight and do not know what to do. From here she would usually look to her male counterpart to assist in/assume this role.” (Untitled woman, respondent 35)

### Theme 3: All decisions are dependent on the male centric village council

Gender balance in decision making underpins gender equality across all aspects of society. A male-centric village council can potentially constrain women’s decision making opportunities, undermine women’s empowerment and reinforce inequalities within the village setting. This issue was discussed by a number of women throughout the research.

“I think matais with low status (rank) and who sit at the back cannot express their opinions because their representative is supposed to speak on their behalf. Other women cannot express their opinions because they fear that the men might react negatively to what they say, and it might result in their matai male relatives arguing with other matais over their opinions.” (Titled woman, respondent 51)

“Women tend not to make decisions about things because the decision making role is left to male matai to make. It’s a common practice in the village and people in the village accept this practice as a way to keep the village together and united. Women are only responsible for deciding matters that are specific to women in the womens’ group (saofaiga)” (Untitled woman, respondent 76).

“Men do all the decisions in most families and the village council makes decisions for the whole village without allowing women to express their opinion” (Untitled woman, respondent 182).

### Theme 4: Women have no voice

Women feel that their opinions and ‘voice’ are constrained and marginalized in the village setting. For many women, this is at both the collective and personal level.

“...there were important matters, for the development of women that were given by women to the village council but were just ignored by men matai” (Untitled woman, respondent 263)
“Women have no voice in village council, men do not take women’s opinions seriously.” (Untitled woman, respondent 273)

“All decisions are dominated by older women in the women’s social group whereas the village council all decisions are dominated by men.” (Untitled woman, respondent 206).

“Titled men made most of the decisions during village councils. Women can only advice.” (Untitled woman, respondent 26).

**Theme 5: Constraints of the 'Va-Tapuia' (Brother and Sister Covenant)**

Women explained that observing the ‘Va Tapuia’ can restrict constructive communication and socialization between men and women. Four of the titled women emphasized that the sacred space between male and female relatives makes it difficult to communicate in the village council.

“Women can hardly speak due to the respect they have for men... (va tapuia)” (Untitled woman, respondent 202)

“Women and men are not allowed to joke around on sensitive issues because it might cause internal disputes. It is a barrier because it limits socialization of men and women in the village.” (Untitled woman, respondent 63)

“Challenge of not having the confidence to sit in the village council because of concern with being present with brothers and male cousins who are also matais in same setting especially if sensitive issues are discussed.” (Titled woman, respondent 17)

“I participate in all meetings except in cases when there is a serious crime committed in the village and the council has to interrogate offenders eg: adultery. The language used or the topic in itself is very sensitive and being mindful of matters which may be investigated, I leave this to the men and do not participate. It’s uncomfortable for me, although I attend all other traditional matters required of matai” (Titled woman, respondent 21)

**Theme 6: Negative social attitudes towards women**

A number of women discussed feeling marginalized and discriminated against due to the impact of harmful gender stereotypes and deeply entrenched negative social attitudes towards women.

“Women are seen as inferior in the village. They do not have a voice within the decisions made by the village council.” (Untitled woman, respondent 31)
“Men are always against women becoming matai, this is due to village traditional and cultural beliefs that women look after children and men make decisions.” (Untitled woman, respondent 283).

“For my case, I have met the challenge of people questioning my decision making and leadership capacity. This in turn has had an effect on some members of my village women committee, such as discrimination towards me.” (Untitled woman, respondent 153)

4.3 Becoming a Matai

4.3.1 Pursuing a Matai Title

During the survey both untitled and titled women were encouraged to describe their attitude towards becoming a matai. In total, 276 untitled women were interviewed as part of the research. These women were asked if they would like to become a matai in the future. Interestingly, 123 untitled women indicated ‘yes’, they would like to become a matai in future (45%).

The women matai who were surveyed during the research were asked to describe why they had accepted their titles and the untitled women were asked why they would like to become a matai in the future. Twelve broad themes emerged from the research in regards to why women take-on and pursue the role of matai, these themes are presented in chart 4.4.
**Theme 1: To serve**

Amongst both titled and untitled women the theme of ‘Service’ emerged as a dominant reason for why women become matai. The untitled women expressed a desire to serve their family and village while the titled women explained that they had received their title as recognition or reward for service.

24 of the titled women cited recognition for service when discussing why they had been offered a matai title. Service often refers to caring for the family and staying in the village, although it also includes providing financial contributions towards family and village fa’alavelaves.

“I am the one staying and serving the family and village. My older brothers refuse to become matais and they chose me to become the matai to look after my family”. (Titled woman, respondent 37)

“It was what my siblings wanted because they had thought I have served our family well and that I’m the only one of us living in Samoa” (Titled woman, respondent 19)
“I was chosen by my whole family because I had been serving them very well all my life. I love and care for my family and they are very supportive of me in my role as matai. I have the capacity to lead my family and make decisions for the betterment of my family” (Titled woman, respondent 41)

“I had been serving my parents and being the family choice, it was to acknowledge my hard work”.  (Titled woman, respondent 31)

“I was the one who had been serving the family in every fa’alavelave even though I live in Apia”  (Titled woman, respondent 27)

Similar sentiments were shared by the untitled women who participated in the research. 28 untitled women expressed that they would like to become a matai because they have a desire to serve their family and village. The untitled women reiterated comments such as ‘to serve my village’ or ‘to serve my family’. Some women also explained that they would like recognition for ongoing service and commitment.

“Yes [I would become a matai] when the time is right, because I am the one who is caring for my parents.” (Untitled woman, respondent 215)

Theme 2: Family Choice

When discussing why they would become a matai, thirty-three of the women explained that it is a family choice. The family decides who becomes a matai. This was a common response amongst both titled and untitled women. Many of the untitled women stated that they would accept a matai title if they are offered. As one untitled women explained: “I want to be a matai, but only if the family approves of me becoming one.” (130). A significant number of the titled women (23) also explained that they were chosen by their family to become matai.

“I was chosen by my whole family because I had been serving them very well all my life. I love and care for my family and they are very supportive of me in my role as matai. I have the capacity to lead my family and make decisions for the betterment of my family” (41)

“My father was a prominent figure and he used to serve the family so well, so I was chosen by the family to acknowledge my father’s service. I did not have to fight for the title it was agreed upon by all the members of the family.” (25)
Theme 3: Heir to the title

Many of the women matai who participated in the research explained that their title was handed down through the generations, they were bestowed a matai title because it was their inheritance as heir to the title. This was the most common response amongst titled women in regards to why they became a matai. Many of these women explained that they received the title because the family had no male members to inherit the title.

“Our family doesn’t have males that have the right to inherit the matai title. The title cannot be given to males that are married to the family or any outsiders. Therefore, as the oldest daughter I have to inherit our family matai title so that we can continue to pass it down to the next generation” (33)

“An heir of the family has to inherit the title but unfortunately there are hardly any male heirs in my family to inherit and continue on with the family title. So the extended family decided to give to me...” (43)

“I became the matai because there were no men nor did I have any son who could take on the title” (45)

Theme 5: To have a voice

A number of women expressed their desire to have a voice within the community. Becoming a matai was seen by many as a pathway to achieving this. In total, 20 women who participated in the research described an aspiration to ‘have a voice’. The majority of these women were untitled.

“In my village, women are not allowed to become matai but I want to become a matai so that my voice will be heard in parliament”. (Untitled woman, respondent 174)

“I want my voice to be heard in the village council and I also want to make a contribution within my family and village”. (Untitled woman, respondent 210)

“So I have a voice and contribution into my extended family's decision making and affiliations”. (Untitled woman, respondent 203)

Theme 6: Represent the family and village

Both titled and untitled women stated that they would like to become a matai to represent their family and village. As one untitled woman explains, “I would like to become a matai so that I can represent my family and have a say if other family matais are not present”. (Untitled woman, respondent 265). This sentiment was reiterated by a number of other women who took part in the research.
Theme 7: Advocate for women’s issues

Theme 7 broadly encompasses women’s desire to advocate and emphasize women’s issues in forums such as the village council and parliament. The theme is closely connected with theme 5: To have a voice and with theme 8: Gender equality. A number of women who participated in the research felt that women are underrepresented in decision making and as a result issues which pertain predominantly to women may be neglected in assembly such as village council and parliament. An untitled woman explained that she felt the need to become a matai because “some women’s issues are not prioritised by men in the Village Council” (Untitled woman, respondent 183). Other women shared these concerns:

“I want my voice to be heard in the council as a contributory factor to village level development. I can represent village women in the village council” (Untitled woman, respondent 301).

“I want to be a matai only if the family approves of me becoming one, I also want to give a voice within the village council to represent the views of the young women in my village.” (Untitled woman, respondent 130).

Theme 8: Gender equality

The broad notion of gender equality reiterates many of the themes and issues previously discussed in this chapter. While aspects of gender equality are implicit within many of the other themes, when asked why they would like to become a matai, 16 women focussed clearly on the need for gender equality in the village council and parliament. It is interesting to note that all 16 of these women are currently untitled and some reside in villages where it is prohibited to become a matai.

Within the broad concept of gender equality, a series of underlying themes emerged. Women referred to a need for gender balance in community governing committees, such as the parliament and local village councils. Many of the women also acknowledge that this is, in theory an equal right for both men and women.

“To make a stand inside parliament for all women within my village and within Samoa. There should be equal numbers of male and female parliamentarians.” (Untitled woman, respondent 34).

“Because both males and females have equal rights to family titles. I want to become a matai so that I can represent my extended family in village affairs and meetings”. (Untitled woman, respondent 273)
“Because women should be recognized in family, church and the government” (Untitled woman, respondent 12).

Other women sought the need to counteract male hegemony and empower women within their community:

“I want to voice issues affecting women today like violence and health. I’m old now, but I want to encourage young matai’s to consider both genders when making decisions”. (Untitled woman, respondent 3).

“Because men make biased decisions which can be better if a woman's perspective was sought.” (Untitled woman, respondent 3).

“Because men matai are abusing their power as matai in village councils when imposing penalties to village offenders. Women matai have to advise men matais on such matters.” (Untitled woman, respondent 227).

4.3.2 Forgoing a matai title

Almost a quarter (23%) of the untitled women who were interviewed revealed to researchers that they had been previously offered a matai title and had declined the offer. The research revealed that it is not uncommon for women to abstain from pursuing a matai title. In total, 64 untitled women had declined a matai title in the past, a further 101 women had never been offered a matai title yet explained that they would not like to become a matai in the future.

A number of women elaborated on the reasons why they had declined or wished not to become a matai. Responses were collected from 118 women, as 47 women chose not to provide a reason. Five dominant themes emerged through the thematic analysis and are presented in chart 4.5.
**Chart 4.5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Prioritize a male relative</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: It is considered a man's role</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Women feel they do not have the capacity</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Financial pressures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: It is inappropriate to sit in the Village Council</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Prioritise a male relative**

The most common theme to emerge through qualitative research involved a woman’s desire to prioritize her male relatives. If offered a matai title 38 women indicated that they would (or had previously) defer their title to their husband, son, brother or another suitable male heir. Often women described this as a mark of ‘respect’, others explained that they would prefer to focus on other duties, including the role of advisor. While not overtly discussed by the women, implicit themes of obligation and the impact of social pressures may impact a women’s decision to forgo a matai title in preference of a male relative.

“Because I respect my husband as the head of the family, so I let him take the title offered to me by my family.” (Untitled woman, respondent 176)

“My husband is a matai so there is no reason for me to want to obtain one. I'd prefer to resume with my current duties” (Untitled woman, respondent 158)

“My family offered me the title but I deferred it to my husband as I thought a matai is suitable for male, so my husband is now a matai with the title that my family offered me. “(Untitled woman, respondent 64)
“I deferred it to my eldest son as it is best for a man to become a matai” (Untitled woman, respondent 68)

“I am suitable of becoming a matai, I rather defer to my brothers as they are more capable.” (Untitled woman, respondent 213)

“Out of respect for my older brothers I give them the opportunity.” (Untitled woman, respondent 4)

**Theme 2: It is considered a man’s role**

A number of women also consider the responsibility of becoming a matai to be a man’s role, not a women’s. This theme also encompasses the notion that men are the head of the family. A women’s role as ‘advisor’ was also resonant throughout this theme.

“The bible says the father is the head of the family and the mother is the advisor, therefore mothers should not be matais because they should not be heads of families.” (Untitled woman, respondent 106)

“Women are not suitable to become matais, if they will become matais they will think highly of themselves and will want to dominate all decisions within the family and village. Being matais and decision making is suitable for males not females.” (Untitled woman, respondent 268)

“Women should not become matais because the husbands are the heads of the families. Their role is to provide advice for the betterment of the families.” (Untitled woman, respondent 271)

“It won’t be appropriate for me. It’s not my calling. I am the ‘tamaitai’ (daughter) of the family and I’d maintain that role.” (Untitled woman, respondent 249)

“Women are not suitable of becoming matais, it is inappropriate for women to deal with village affairs” (Untitled woman, respondent 211)

**Theme 3: Women feel they do not have the capacity**

Some of the untitled women who participated in the research had declined a matai title, or would decline a matai title because they felt they did not have the capacity, confidence, cultural knowledge or competencies to become a matai.

“Because there will be many problems I will face when I become a matai especially conflicts between families, It will be hard to come up with a solution to solve family disputes hence I do not have the skills and knowledge to provide the right solutions for my family problems” (Untitled woman, respondent 111)
“I do not have the capacity to become a matai. A matai suits men not women”. (Untitled woman, respondent 111)

**Theme 4: Financial pressures**

Becoming a matai involves significant financial contributions. This is a barrier which restricts both men and women from becoming matai. As one untitled women describes;

“At the moment I am not sure [if I would like to become a matai] because of the responsibilities and financial pressure that comes with it.” (Untitled woman, respondent 82).

The burden and concern of financial pressures was discussed by other untitled women who were interviewed for the research.

**Theme 5: It is inappropriate to sit in the Village Council**

Some of the untitled women cited a commitment to the ‘Va Tapuia’ between men and women. These women expressed a strong respect for the social relationships between males and females in the village context and were motivated to adhere to Samoa’s rich and cherished cultural traditions.

“I rejected the title because I did not want to become matai’s together with my brothers, I did not want to break the importance of the ‘Va Tapuia’ between us especially when we all sit in the village council meetings.” (Untitled woman, respondent 202)

“Because of my upbringing in my village, I have come to believe that women should never sit in village council.” (Untitled woman, respondent 228)

A number of other themes emerged throughout the qualitative analysis, these included:

- **A woman’s age**: Both young and elderly women revealed that age restricts them from becoming a matai. One would be too old or too young to become a matai.

- **Prioritizing an older relative**: A number of women stated that they would prefer a matai title be bestowed to their older siblings, either male or female.

- **Already a matai in another village**: Five of the women who were interviewed explained that they are already a matai in another village, although they do not hold a title from the village they are currently residing in.

- **Husband is a matai**: Many of the women who were interviewed were in fact the wife of a matai. Some of these women explained that they have inherited matai responsibilities and respect alongside their husband. They provide an important advisory and support role and consider this to be parallel to having the title themselves. One woman even asked the
interesting question: “Why would I need [a matai title] if my husband is already a matai?” (Untitled woman, respondent 306). Other women corroborated this notion:

“Because my husband is already a chief and that’s enough for me. His position as a male chief in itself makes me one too in the gathering of women” (Untitled woman, respondent 196)

“Because my husband is a matai. So if he’s a matai, then I’m a matai as well...” (Untitled woman, respondent 296)

“I respect my husband and if I get to accept the title then there will be no one to play the advisory role if we are both matai holders” (Untitled woman, respondent 87)

- **Taboo or village law:** Other respondents explained that because a village taboo or family rule prohibits women from receiving a matai title in their village, they have little aspiration or ambition of becoming a matai. As one untitled woman stated: “Why bother [wanting to become a matai] when the village law prohibits it?” (Untitled woman, respondent 290)

### 4.4 Women as Matai

#### 4.4.1 Women’s Authority and Influence in the Village

A women’s authority and influence in the village is dependent on a number of complex and structural factors, these includes both the hierarchy of their matai title and their ability to participate in the village council.

**Hierarchy of matai title:** 46 titled women both female orators and female high chiefs were interviewed as part of this survey. As presented in chart 4.6, almost two thirds of the titled women who were interviewed were high chiefs (63 percent) and the remaining 37 percent orators.
**Participation at the village council:** The majority (78 percent) of titled women who were interviewed in the research participate in the village council. These figures are presented in chart 4.7. All but 10 of the titled women who were interviewed participate in the village council.

**Chart 4.7**

![Proportion of matai women who participate in the Village Council meeting](chart)

**Authority and influence in the village:** Over half of the titled women who were interviewed for the research have the potential for active leadership, decision making and authority within their village setting. These are the women who have both a high chief title and also participate in the village council. Altogether, 27 titled women respondents fit within these structural parameters, constituting 59 percent of all the titled women interviewed. During the interviews these matai women were able to discuss and provide details in regards to their leadership and influence in the village:

“I am a decision maker in village council because my title is a decision making title, High chief. Myself and other matais of the same rank make the final decision for village matters.” (Titled woman, respondent 51)

“In the village council, I always pay attention to issues discussed. If the decision is right, I will support it, but if it’s not, I will go against.” (Titled woman, respondent 33)

Only two of the female high chiefs who were interviewed in the current research did not participate in the village council. While these women possess paramount chiefly titles, they decide not to sit in the village council meeting because of respect for the ‘Va Tapuia’.
4.4.2 Women’s Capacity to Become Matai

The titled women were asked to identify the most important and most essential competencies an individual needs to become a matai in their village. Chart 4.8 presents the 5 most common responses.

*Chart 4.8*

Women were encouraged to reflect upon their own personal competencies and capabilities in becoming a matai. They were asked to describe the cultural knowledge and skills they rely upon to fulfil their duties as a matai. The women referred to a range of personal qualities such as patience, compassion, flexibility and confidence. In particular virtues of love and respect were mentioned by many of the women.

“Anyone who is matai should have love for his or her family, good behaviour and be a down to earth kind of a person” (Titled woman, respondent 26).

The women matai also considered communication and problem solving skills to be essential in delivering their duties. This included capabilities such as dispute resolution, the ability to give advice and converse confidently with a range of people in the community.

“One would have to have good knowledge of the culture and be able to speak the language well. Another skill is to be fearless when expressing opinion in what should be done” (Titled woman, respondent 23).

“Should have good cultural knowledge and understanding, good advisory skills and to be able to solve problems” (Titled woman, respondent 39).
“Must be able to advise to keep the peace during disputes and must also be able to accept any advice from someone else. A matai must be able to help other matai” (Titled woman, respondent 45).

Both high chief and orators explained that they rely on well developed language skills to fulfil their matai duties. One of the female high chiefs explained that “A matai needs wisdom and knowledge in oratory skills and making traditional Samoan speeches, and to serve the family and village with respect” (Titled woman, respondent 30). Responses from other titled women also emphasized the importance of language, traditional speeches and oratory skills.

“Yes I have the skills to carry out my matai role. You have to have a good understanding of language and how to speak and you must have good qualities and values such as respect for the older people, and having humility. You must know the salutations of villages and know the traditional languages of speeches (lauga)” (Titled woman, respondent 21).

“A matai needs the oratory knowledge in the way she speaks; good public relations, as well as respect for the elders” (Titled woman, respondent 15).

“A matai requires demonstrated knowledge of village protocols; wisdom and knowledge in making traditional speeches, and good public relations and respect for the family and community” (Titled woman, respondent 24).

During the interviews, many of the titled women referred to a strong commitment to tradition and strong cultural beliefs. Most of the women emphasized that a matai requires both cultural wisdom and an inherent cultural respect. This included traditional knowledge and an understanding of village laws and protocols.

“Wisdom and knowledge of oratory skills, an understanding of culture and Samoan traditions, good public relations and respect for everyone, kind hearted, humble Healthy body and mind” (Titled woman, respondent 41).

“You should have wisdom and knowledge to make traditional speeches; respect and good public relations and knowledge and understanding of the village protocols.” (Titled woman, respondent 39).

“You must have an understanding of your family ancestry and village honorific or those of other villages” (Titled woman, respondent 44).

“A matai requires oratory skills and an understanding of village protocols and the Va tapuia or sacred space covenant between the brother and sister” (Titled woman, respondent 49).
During the analysis of the titled women’s responses, it became evident that many of the women are both devoted and dutiful in their role as matai. They serve and care for their village and family. This personal quality was discussed by a number of women. When the women were asked to describe the personal qualities and skills they rely upon as a matai, the theme of ‘service’ was embedded and echoed within many responses.

“The pathway to holding power and authority is through good service; love and concern for your entire family, oratory wisdom and knowledge, demonstrated knowledge to make traditional speeches.” (Titled woman, respondent 27).

“To have the skills and knowledge to become a matai, you must serve within the village, participate in the ‘auluma’ activities, involve yourself in the women’s committee so that when you become a matai, you represent all these young and untitled women in the village council” (Titled woman, respondent 33).

4.4.3 Financial Stability

Throughout Samoa, both male and female matai experience a financial burden when holding a matai title. A matai title comes with financial obligations and responsibilities, these financial concerns can restrain people from fulfilling or even accepting their position as a matai. As presented in chart 4.9, 37 percent of the titled women who were interviewed in the current research explained that they have felt restrained from holding a matai title due to their economic stability and financial situation. As one woman explained; “being a matai comes with responsibilities and financial pressure”.

**Chart 4.9**

![](chart.png)
Financial considerations can play a role in who is chosen to become a matai and subsequently impact an individual’s decision to accept the title. These concerns are highlighted throughout the following comments:

“Being a matai is expensive, especially high chief titles because some of the contributions are too much. Some families also choose women to become matais based on their wealth” (Titled woman, respondent 25).

“Personally think that it’s one of the reasons for the issue of women not becoming matai, people have to find money so that they can have matai titles. For me, lucky I have a job, I did a loan so that I can get the money to have a matai title.” (Titled woman, respondent 33).

“These days, there are many women who do not want titles because they may not have the finance to undertake their expected duties” (Titled woman, respondent 44).

“Other families do not have enough to offer when it comes to village contributions and church contributions, and that is the reason why they don’t want to have matai titles” (Titled woman, respondent 43).

“This [financial pressures] is becoming an issue as it now seems like titles are being bestowed to women who possess money and are financially stable without consideration of whether they are loving or not” (Titled woman, respondent 46).

“Not all families are the same, some are better-off than others and most women in poorer families tend to be deterred from accepting titles” (Titled woman, respondent 19).

It is becoming increasingly apparent that ‘financial stability’ is a contributing factor in how, why and if women become matai. However, it is important to acknowledge that cultural commitment and service to the village is still at the fundamental core of what it means to be a matai in Samoa.

“Some women who are not wealthy are still chosen by their families to become matais because they stay for good in the village and serve the village.” (Titled woman, respondent 17).

“There are women who do not have material wealth but are matai due to their knowledge of culture, education and being the choice of their families to acknowledge their hard work and service.” (Titled woman, respondent 27).

In spite of the financial pressures and ongoing expenses associated with becoming a matai, many of the titled women explained that the whole family can assist in the financial burden of fulfilling ones
chiefly duties. In fact, family collectiveness and support was discussed explicitly by seven of the titled women who took part in the research.

“I personally think that Samoans treasure their family assets and treasures like matai titles, land etc. Therefore, even if the person chosen by the family is not rich, the whole family will contribute to serving their matai” (Titled woman, respondent 40).

“Your whole family can contribute financially or in kind to serving your matai, if you served your family well and with respect.” (Titled woman, respondent 47).

“….even if the appointee is not wealthy, her family can assist her financially.” (Titled woman, respondent 34).

“Anyone can become a matai because anyone has the right to access titles in their families as heirs. The whole family can assist financially when the person chosen by the family to become matai cannot afford the matai bestowment contribution and serving the matai.” (Titled woman, respondent 48).
Chapter Five: Why some villages ban women from becoming Matai and the decision making barriers women face

As detailed in the previous chapters, the findings of the MWCSD 2013 Matai and Leadership survey have revealed that women experience both structural and systematic barriers in decision making within the village context.

Chapter 5 aims to closely explore why some villages do not allow women to become Matai and the decision making barriers women face in the village context. This chapter utilises data collected during both the nationwide survey and the in-depth interviews (phase 1 and phase 2). The research findings presented in this chapter addresses the issues outlined under the third research objective of the survey:

**Objective Three: Closely explore why some villages don’t allow women Matai and the decision making barriers women face.**

- Proportion of villages that ban the bestowal of chiefly titles to women
- Proportion of villages that ban the participation of women in the village council
- Reasons and rationale for the above (explore why some villages don’t allow women to become Matai and/or don’t allow participation at village council)

Some of the themes and findings presented in this chapter have been previously introduced and discussed in Chapters 3 and 4; chapter 5 will initially recap some major trends and then closely explore the reasons women are marginalized in decision making throughout the village context of Samoa.
5.1 Overview of women’s participation in decision making and leadership

10% of villages surveyed in Samoa do not bestow chiefly titles to women. When disaggregated by region the taboo which prohibits women from becoming Matai is far more prevalent in Upolu compared with Savai’i. In Upolu, 15 villages ban women from becoming Matai (16%), in comparison, only one village in Savaii reported a ban.

In regards to village council participation, almost a quarter (22%) of villages in Samoa observed the non attendance of women in the village council meeting. This trend is relatively consistent across both islands; 19 of the villages surveyed in Upolu (20%) and 17 of the villages surveyed in Savaii (23%) do not have women attending the village council meetings. These results are also presented chart 5.1.

Chart 5.1

These findings reveal that in a selection of villages across Samoa women remain overtly sanctioned from becoming Matai and attending the village council meetings. This is due to the strict village laws, traditions and taboos. Although, as previously discussed in chapter 3, these proportions do not
accurately reflect the full extent of women’s decision making and leadership suppression within the village and community setting; a much larger proportion of women may be constrained from participating in decision making due to complex underlying systematic and social barriers which will be discussed further in this chapter.

A more accurate representation of women’s decision making and leadership opportunities can be attained through exploring the number of women who actually attend and participate in village councils. Only 69% of villages surveyed reported to have women who sit and participate in village councils, meaning that almost a third (31%) of the villages surveyed throughout Samoa do not have female representation in decision making and leadership at the village council level. These figures are presented in table 5.1

**Table 5.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages that ban the bestowal of chiefly titles to women</th>
<th>Samoa</th>
<th>Upolu</th>
<th>Savaii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages that allow women to receive chiefly titles to women</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages who have NO women Matai</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages who have women Matai</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages which observed the NON ATTENDANCE of women in village meetings</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages that allow women’s to participation in village council</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages with NO representation of women at the village council</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages where women sit in the village council</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 An in-depth analysis of why some villages don’t allow women to become Matai

As part of the MWCSD 2013 Women Matai and Leadership survey both male and female participants were given the opportunity to explain ‘why their village does not allow women to become matais. 83 participants gave a response to this question. Six key themes emerged during qualitative thematic analysis and will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter:

- **Theme 1:** A village taboo or family rule prohibits women from becoming Matai (6)
- **Theme 2:** Gender roles and responsibilities (2)
- **Theme 3:** The ‘Va Tapuia’ between women and men (1)
- **Theme 4:** A male relative is prioritized for the role of Matai
- **Theme 5:** The untitled women being interviewed is married into the family (in-law)
- **Theme 6:** Women can lack traditional knowledge and/or resources

Chart 5.2 outlines the six themes and displays the proportion of respondents⁹ who made reference to each theme.

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⁹ The research findings present the proportion of those participants who gave a response to the question ‘why are women not allowed to become a matai’. Some respondents cited multiple reasons as to why women are not allowed to become Matai in their village. These responses may be classified into multiple themes.
**Outline of male respondents**

Male representatives were given the opportunity to explain ‘why their village does not allow women to become matai’ during ‘phase 1’ and ‘phase 2’ of the research. Therefore the results utilised in the current analysis may include multiple perspectives from the same village. In total, 30 male representatives provided insight into ‘why their village does not allow women to become matai. Three key themes emerged from their responses.

**Chart 5.3**

![Bar chart showing reasons why women are not allowed to become matai](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Proportion of male respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: A village taboo or family rule prohibits women from becoming Matai</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Gender roles</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: The sacred space between women and men</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outline of female respondents**

During phase 2 of the MWCSD Women Matai and Leadership survey in-depth interviews were conducted with a selection of Matai women, male representatives and untitled women from 52 villages across Samoa. Findings from these interviews have been utilized to further explore the dominant trends in women’s decision making and leadership experiences.

As part of phase 2, 276 untitled women from 52 villages were interviewed. These women were asked if they are allowed to be bestowed a Matai title in their village of residence. Almost two thirds of the untitled women interviewed indicated that they are allowed to become a Matai, a further 19% of women indicated that are not allowed to become a Matai and the remaining 19% of women
did not answer the question or indicated that they were unsure of the village protocol and laws regarding a women’s Matai title.

Chart 5.4

When asked, 53 of the untitled women were able to provide insights and comments in regards to why women are not ‘allowed’ to become Matai in their village. Six key themes emerged from their responses. These themes are presented in chart 5.5 and will be discussed in detail throughout the chapter.
When asked the question ‘why are women not ‘allowed’ to become Matai in your village’, a significant number of both male and female respondents explained that a village taboo or family rules prohibit women from receiving a matai title. In fact, just over half (54 percent) of all the participants who responded to this question referred to the village laws, traditions or rules.

57 percent of the men who provided a response to the question: ‘Why are women banned from becoming a matai in your village’ stated that a village taboo or family rule prohibits females from becoming a matai. Many of the men cited factors such as their village’s founding laws, traditional practices, cultural foundations and a respect for ancestors.

“It is the village’s protocol/rule which was set up by ancestors and is respected up to today. It is a village taboo not to bestow titles on women up until now they are still holding on to that taboo they do not want to change it”.

5.2.1 Theme 1. A village taboo or family rule prohibits women from becoming Matai

Chart 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why women are not allowed to become Matai:</th>
<th>Responses from untitled women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Untitled Women (who gave a response)</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: A village taboo or family rule prohibits women from becoming Matai</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Gender Roles</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Sacred space between women and men</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: A male relative is prioritized for the role of Matai</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: The untitled women being interviewed is married into the family (in-law)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 6: Women can lack traditional knowledge and/or resources</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overt barriers

Hegemonic masculinities and the social status of women within Society
“Village taboo which was established by our ancestors and the village council will continue to respect this taboo.”

“It is allowed. But farewell wish from to the deceased paramount chief was there should be no more women matais after the current one passes away.”

While discussing the village taboos, a number of the male representatives also identified the cherished status of women in the village and cited the ‘feagaiga’ (covenant) as an important reason as to why taboos are upheld and respected.

“We are still following the beliefs, history and legacy left behind by our ancestors especially the importance and sacredness of the relational space between a sister and a brother (Va Tapuia). It is also because of the jokes and language used by matais during village fonos, they will not hold back with the words they say. Therefore it is important to still honour the covenant between a sister and brother. We still believe that women’s role is to advise not to become the heads of families.”

The Women’s perspective:

Over half (53 percent) of the untitled women who provided a response to the question: ‘why are women not ‘allowed’ to become Matai in your village’ also stated that a village taboo or family rule prohibits female ‘mataiship’. The women cited factors such as their village’s ridged adherence to traditional practices and the impact of family rules and strict village laws. In conjunction with the men who answered this question, the women also referred to a strong collective commitment to their village’s traditional and cultural beliefs.

“Because it is a village taboo and whatever it is, it is being agreed upon by the village matai’s and it will never be changed”.

“Because it is our village laws form the olden days that women are not allowed to have matai titles”

“Because in my family women are not allowed to become matais and I use my children to become matais since they are boys.”

While this theme was undoubtedly the most prevalent in the opinion of both male and female respondents, many of the respondents also indicated a series of underlying subtle and systemic practices which prohibit women from becoming Matai.

Themes 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 can all be classified as examples of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and a product of the status of women in Samoa.
5.2.2 The hegemony of men and the status of women in Samoa

In most villages throughout Samoa, women are not overtly outlawed from receiving a Matai title. Throughout the country as a whole, becoming a matai is an equal right for both men and women. However, deeply embedded masculine hegemonies and unequal gender attitudes can work to discourage and marginalise women from attaining a matai title.

The Constitution of Samoa states that men and women are equal before the law. Throughout most villages in Samoa it is generally considered that men and women have an equal right to receive a matai title. However, the social constructs of femininity and masculinity in Samoan society mean female matai comprise a relatively small percentage of matais in the country, while men dominate the leadership arena.

The complexities of hegemonic masculinity and the status of women within the faamatai system will be explored in further detail throughout this chapter. Theme 2, theme 3, theme 4, theme 5 and theme 6 of section 5.2 all reflect the impact of implicit gender power imbalances between men and women in the Samoan community; excerpts from the qualitative interviews have been utilised to illustrate how hegemonic masculinities and the social status of women can restrict them from becoming a matai.

5.2.3 Theme 2. Gender roles and responsibilities

The second theme: ‘gender roles and responsibilities’ was discussed by both male and female respondents.

The Men’s perspective:

While providing a response as to why women are not allowed to become matai, ten male participants in the research made reference to distinct gender roles and responsibilities in Samoan society. The men provided either explicit or implied mention of the social expectations placed upon men and women, and explained how this governs a women’s ability to become matai.

“It is not a responsibility of the women to become matai. It is a man’s responsibility. This Taboo is from paramount chiefs of the village”

“Because we are still following the beliefs, history and legacy left behind by our ancestors especially the importance and sacredness of the relational space between a sister and a brother (va fealoaloa’i). It is also because of the jokes and language used by matais during village fonos, they will not hold back with the words they say. Therefore it is important to still honour the covenant because
such exchange can offend both the brother and the sister. We still believe that women's role is to advise not to become the heads of families.”

The Women's perspective:

When trying to explain why women are discouraged from becoming a Matai in their village, ten of the untitled women interviewed as part of the research also provided a response which fits within the current theme of ‘gender roles and responsibilities’. Men are considered to be the head of the family and key decision makers while women even though they have equal right to become a matai take up advisory role.

As detailed in the extracts below, this sentiment was reiterated by a number of the untitled women interviewed during phase 2 of the survey.

“This taboo [of women being banned from becoming matai] has been imposed in the village for as long as I can remember. Personally I believe that obtaining a chiefly title is more relevant for males. The woman's role is to support and advice on decisions which the man has to make.”

“I prefer only my husband to be a matai so that I give him the respect that he deserves; women are not suitable for matai positions.”

5.2.4 Theme 3: The ‘Va Tapuia’ between men and women

Another prevalent theme which emerged from within both male and female responses involved a strong adherence and respect for the ‘Va Tapuia’ between men and women in Samoan society.

The Men's perspective:

A third (33 percent) of the men who provided an explanation for ‘why women are not allowed to become matai’ cited the sacred space and social relationships between men and women in their village. Many shared the view that if women became matai, this sacred space would be jeopardised, especially if women were to sit with men in the village council. Many of the men made explicit reference to the brother/sister covenant.

“It is inappropriate when deliberations are intense especially when sensitive issues are discussed like rape, incest etc. It will break the sacred space covenant (va tapuia) between the brother and sister. It is not appropriate because women cannot take their clothes off when it is time to make traditional speeches as the male orators do when they make traditional speeches. The village council do not support this for one reason only because some women who have become matais are crossing the border mark and are being very cheeky to their families and village.”
“Because the language used in village council meeting deliberations is harsh and therefore it is inappropriate especially when sensitive issues are discussed. It will break the importance of the brother and sister covenant (va tapuia).”

The Women’s perspective:

Many of the women who were interviewed also consider it to be inappropriate for men and women to sit together in settings such as the village council. This is largely due to respect for the ‘feagaiga’, the sacred space between men and women in Samoan society. In fact, almost one out of every ten women (9 percent) who provided a response to the question: ‘Why are women not allowed to become matai’ indicated that either they or their community considered it to be an inappropriate social interaction. Allowing women to become matai would undermine the principles of the brother sister covenant (‘feagaiga’).

“It is inappropriate for women to be seated in the village council with male matai because of the ‘Va Tapuia’ and it should be observed as it is important in our traditions”.

When exploring this theme in more detail it became evident that the use of inappropriate language is a real concern amongst the untitled women. The qualitative interviews reveal that some of the untitled women respondents feel it is inappropriate for women to be present in the village council while their male matai relative’s discuss sensitive issues.

“It is a taboo in the village that women are not allowed to become matai. This is because it is inappropriate for a women matai to sit in village council meetings especially when deliberations are intense.”

“It is a fundamental practice and belief that directs this taboo, it is in consideration of respect between a brother and sister that prefers men to be titled, mindful that during council meetings there are certain talks of the orators/chiefs that a woman should not listen to.”

“Village law and common belief is that [if women become matai] the covenant will be disregarded because women will be exposed to male chiefs’ inappropriate behaviour and language during times of jesting”

5.2.4 Theme 4: A male relative is prioritised for the role of Matai

In line with gender roles and the hierarchal constructs of masculinity and femininity in Samoa, it is far more common for male family members to be offered the role of matai compared with female members. Despite having an equal right to the title, women often prioritise or defer their title to a
male relative. This trend was evident in the current research; many of the untitled women affirmed that they would prefer their husbands, brothers or sons to uphold the matai title. As one untitled women stated: “We give the opportunity to male relatives to become matai and take the lead”.

### 5.2.5 Theme 5: The untitled women being interviewed is married into the family (in-law)

Traditionally the status of the wife is much less than the status of the sister or daughter. Social groups in Samoa are a cherished and important aspect of society. However, the difference in status between social groups can pose both a structural and systematic barrier for many women in their pursuit of community leadership.

During the interviews, one woman described how it is very unlikely that she would be able to become a matai in her village, although other women are allowed:

> “Because I am married into the village, therefore it would be very hard for me to become a matai in this village, although other women in my village are allowed to become matais”.

**In total, five of the untitled women explained the concerns of being ‘in-law’ of the village and cited this as a direct reason why some women are ‘not allowed’ to become matai.**

### 5.2.6 Theme 6: Women lack traditional knowledge or resources

As discussed in detail throughout this report, Samoan social structures can present systematic and implicit socio-cultural barriers that impede women’s ability to become matai and fulfill leadership and decision making roles in the community.

The untitled women who were interviewed expressed some of these concerns. When asked why their village did not allow women to become matai, some of the untitled women identified the following barriers:

- Access to traditional knowledge;
- Lack of financial stability or independence;
- And even ideological and psychological obstacles, such as a lack confidence.

> “It’s a lack of traditional knowledge to carry out traditional practices”

> “Because of resources (material wealth) for serving the family and village in which the matai is from. It comes with more financial pressure and responsibilities”.

> “Not having the potential and the capacity to become a matai.”
**The men’s perspective:**

It is interesting and important to take into consideration that when asked about why women are not ‘allowed’ to become matai, the male representatives did not make explicit mention to a women’s ability to fulfil the role. A woman’s perceived lack of ability and competency was often implied when discussing the roles and responsibilities of women. Attitudes of ‘superiority’ and women’s perceived incompetency emerged during analysis of the men’s responses to other questions throughout the research.

**5.3 An in-depth analysis of why some villages do not allow women to participate at the village council**

**The men’s perspective:**

Male representatives were given the opportunity to explain ‘why don’t women participate in the village council’ during ‘phase 1’ and ‘phase 2’ of the research.

In total, 66 male representatives were able to provide insight into ‘why women do not participate in the village council’. Five key themes emerged from their responses. These themes are presented in chart 5.6 and will be discussed in detail throughout the chapter.

- **Theme 1:** The language used at village council is inappropriate
- **Theme 2:** The ‘Va Tapuia’ between women and men
- **Theme 3:** Gender roles and responsibilities (8 and 3)
- **Theme 4:** A village taboo prohibits women from participating at the village council
- **Theme 5:** The matai women live elsewhere or choose not to participate in the village council
Almost half (48%) of the men who provided a response to the question ‘why don’t women attend the village council’ explained that it is often inappropriate for women to hear the language used in the village council meeting.

A number of sub-themes also emerged from the data which fit within the scope of ‘inappropriate language in the village council’. Many men referred specifically to ‘harsh words’ which are used during times of punishment and deliberations about sensitive issues. Other men discussed the jokes and intervals of jesting which commonly occur in the village council. The breakdown of sub-themes is presented below

- **Sub theme 1.1: Sensitive issues are discussed using harsh words**

  “It is inappropriate to female matai to be seated together with their male matai relatives in the village council because the language used during meetings might offend the women especially when sensitive issues like rape and incest are discussed.” (67)

  “It is inappropriate especially if sensitive issues are discussed because men have so much respect for women, and the language used in council meetings might offend women.” (52)
“Women are bestowed titles but they cannot sit in the village council meetings because it is inappropriate for a woman matai and her brothers who are also matais to be present at the council meeting especially when sensitive issues are discussed.”

- **Sub theme 1.2: Inappropriate jokes are made**

“They do not attend because it is unnecessary when a brother and sister are seated in the same house during village council meetings especially when the men joke about stupid things or when sensitive issues are discussed.” (33)

The issue of language links closely with theme 2, the sacred space between women and men and theme 3, gender roles and responsibilities. Language is a complex and deeply embedded feature of the social dynamics, hierarchies and relationships which operate in Samoan society.

### 5.3.2 Theme 2: The sacred space between women and men

The ‘Va Tapuia’ between men and women in Samoa is extremely valued and respected. While discussing why women do not attend the village council, a large proportion of men referred to the complex social dynamics of male and female relationships. Three sub-themes emerged under the common theme of ‘sacred space’; the breakdown of sub-themes is presented and discussed in detail below:

- **Sub theme 2.1: Adherence and respect to the brother/sister covenant**

“It is inappropriate when deliberations are intense especially when sensitive issues are discussed like rape, incest etc. It will break the sacred space covenant (va tapuia) between the brother and sister. It is not appropriate because women cannot take their clothes off when it is time to make traditional speeches as the male orators do when they make traditional speeches.” (62)

“When it comes to decision making at the village council, women and men do not mix together. It is due to the brother and sister covenant. Samoa is a well defined society, a person’s role and responsibilities is inherited at birth.”

“Women are restricted from participating in the village council because of respect for the sacred space covenant (va tapuia) between the brother and sister”

- **Sub theme 2.2: Respect in general for male and female social relationships**
“The woman matai who’s serving in the village does not come to meetings because of the sacred relationship between a Samoan male and his sister and we treat her as a sister. So she prefers staying out of the meetings but still contributes and serves the village” (44)

- **Sub theme 2.3:** Women feel ashamed to participate with the presence of male matai

“They are allowed to sit in the village council meeting but most of these women live overseas, for the ones who do live in Samoa, they are not comfortable to sit in the council meeting because they feel that it is inappropriate for them to be present, because their brothers and husbands are also there as matais. They feel it is inappropriate especially when sensitive issues are discussed.”

“They feel uncomfortable to speak out in front of their male matai relatives.”

The impact and importance of social relationships and the dynamics of men and women in the village also connect closely with the third theme identified in analysis. Many of the issues discussed within theme 3: ‘Gender roles and responsibilities’ overlap with the issues previously discussed.

### 5.3.3 Theme 3: Gender roles and responsibilities

Often participants referred to the gender roles, responsibilities and expectations of men and women in the village when trying to explain why women do not participate in the council. Three sub themes were identified within the concept of ‘gender roles’, these are presented below.

- **Sub theme 3.1:** Segregated decision making in the village

  “[Women do not sit in the council] because they have their own governing body in the village where they may discuss their issues and pass it on to the village council for approval”

  “Women fully participate in decision making within their own social group (auluma) as well as the women’s committee (faletua ma tausi).”

  “It is inappropriate for men and women to be faced in the village council because the mens’ village is different from the women’s village”

  “Women’s side have their own independent village, therefore the dignity carried by the men matai was also carried by their wives who are in the Faletua ma Tausi group”

  “When it comes to decision making at the village council, women and men do not mix together. It is due to the brother and sister covenant. Samoa it a well defined society, a person’s role and responsibilities is inherited at birth.”
Sub theme 3.2: A woman’s role is to mediate and give advice

“It is not suitable for women to become a matai because her only role is to give advice and mediate” (114)

“The village foundation is that men are suitable to become matai but women are the mediators, when the village matai discuss harsh matters the language used might offend women’. (163)

During the research one male participant described how women’s competing responsibilities can impede their ability to attend the village council meeting, let alone participate in meaningful decision making and village governance:

“Many tasks are given to women to undertake whilst men meet in council, so it may not make them available for meetings, such as preparing or organizing food for meetings.”

Sub theme 3.3: It is the man’s responsibility to become matai (not a woman’s)

Some of the male representatives who took part in the research also announced that participating in the village council is a man’s role and not suitable for a women. Gender stereotypes which deny women from actively participating in leadership and decision making opportunities have a devastating impact on women’s empowerment.

“The village council meeting it is only for men, and it suits men alone…” (Respondent 109)

“It is not a responsibility of the women to become matai. It was men’s responsibility. This Taboo is from paramount chiefs of the village” (Respondent 186)

5.3.4 Theme 4: A village taboo prohibits women from participating at the village council

“Women are not allowed to become matai in my village and that is why they are not allowed to be seated in the village council” (Respondent 200)

A number of the male participants referred to village laws and taboo as reasons why women do not participate in the council of their village. Most of the men who cited this reason described the taboo against women becoming matai, reiterating the village law which prohibits women from being bestowed a matai title and therefore prohibits them from attending the village council.
5.3.5 Theme 5: The women matai live elsewhere and/or choose not to participate in the village council

Only a very small proportion of the male representatives explicitly stated that women matai in their village choose not to participate in the village council meeting:

“It’s mostly because women choose not to come to meetings but they are allowed to join” (Respondent 25).

“[Women do not participate in the village council] because the majority of titled women live overseas or in other villages. Some women just choose not to come to council meetings but they are not restricted to attend” (17)

However, a number of the male representatives who took part in the research did discuss a level of perceived refrain from the titled women of their village who reside elsewhere. When discussing why women do not sit in the village council some men stated that women who live overseas or in Apia do not want to contribute to decision making.

“There are no women matai living in the village, they are all overseas, and when they do come back to the village they don’t want to contribute to the village affairs” (157)

“There is only one woman matai in this village, but she does not participate in the village council because she is living overseas” (194)

Village governance is often left to the matai who reside in the village. Women who migrate overseas to pursue advancements in their education or careers maintain a close bond with their village; often these women make contributions to the village through remittances or fa‘alavelave. It is not uncommon for men and women living abroad to be bestowed matai titles in acknowledgment of their financial service.

5.3.6 The women’s perspective

Unfortunately the matai women who took part in this research did not provide an explanation for why women are ‘banned’ from participating in the councils of some villages. Although many discussed, in general, the challenges they face in regards to leadership and decision making within the village. The following extracts provide some insight into why women do not attend and participate in the village council.

“Women cannot participate in decision making; the opportunity is just for the men to do all the decisions” (Response from a titled woman).
“There are matters which are discussed together with other male matai but they don’t accept/consider any advice or thoughts mainly because they look down or do not appreciate the thoughts of a woman” (Response from a titled woman).

Some women matai explained that they make a personal choice and decide not to participate in the village council. However, complex social dynamics make it difficult to assess the extent to which societal pressures and gender power inequalities are marginalising their leadership and decision making opportunities. During this research, the women matai provided some valuable insights into the barriers and challenges they face in the context of decision making at the village and community level. Implicit themes of lacking a voice and male dominance are detailed in chapter 4 of this report, section 4.2.

5.4 Statistical Analysis of Phase 2 Responses

Male representative from 49 villages across Samoa participated in the in-depth qualitative research component of this study (phase 2). Often, a number of male representatives were approached and interviewed from each village, in total 65 men participated in the qualitative component of the research. These men were village leaders, high chiefs, church ministers and even youth leaders from the community. Chart 5.7 illustrates that over two thirds (64%) of the men who were interviewed during phase 2 live in a village that allows women to sit in the village ‘fono’, while chart 5.8 reveals that only half of the men interviewed (52%) live in a village where women actually attend the council meetings.

Charts 5.7 and 5.8 are not statistically representative of Samoa as a whole. They present the perspectives of the 65 male representatives, from 49 villages who were interviewed in-depth for the research. Please refer to chapter 3 for a country wide profile.
Chart 5.7

Are women allowed to sit in the village council?
(Responses from male representatives interviewed in 49 villages - Phase 2)

- Women are allowed: 64%
- Women are NOT allowed: 27%
- Unknown or not answered: 9%

Chart 5.8

Do women sit in the village council?
(Responses from male representatives interviewed in 49 villages - Phase 2)

- Women sit in the village council: 52%
- Women DO NOT sit in the village council: 38%
- Unknown or not answered: 9%
Chapter Six: Women’s attitudes towards political leadership

Chapter six presents a holistic analysis of women’s attitudes and experiences towards political leadership and participation. The findings presented in chapter four are focused upon addressing the research indicators outlined within objective four of this survey.

Objective Four: Explore women’s experiences and attitudes towards political leadership in Samoa

- Participation in politics.
  - Explore why women would want to participate in the general election.
  - Explore why women decide not to contest in the general election.
- Addressing women’s Issues.
  - Effectiveness of current political parties: Identify women’s attitudes towards the effectiveness of the current political parties in addressing women’s issues.
  - What issues are important to women: Explore the political issues which are important to women in Samoa.
- General attitudes towards ‘Women in Politics’.
  - Explore women’s attitudes towards the underrepresentation of women in parliament and their support towards the notion of ‘more women in politics’.

This chapter presents findings from the perspective of 338 women collected during phase 2 and phase 3 of the research.

6.1 Women’s participation in politics

At present, only 4.1% of parliamentary members in Samoa are women, this alarming proportion is well below the 2013 global average of 20.9% and ranks Samoan women as amongst the most politically underrepresented in the world. This issue is a significant consideration for the MWCSD and is at the heart of the current research.

The women who participated in the current research were asked if they would consider becoming a political leader in Samoa. As detailed in the chart 6.1 below, the responses were encouraging and reveal that many women are interested in pursuing leadership opportunities at the national level.
6.1.1 Desire to participate

Over half (58%) of the women who participated in the research indicated that they would consider becoming a political leader in Samoa. When asked to explain why they are eager to pursue a political position, the women gave a wide range of responses many of which fit broadly within the topics of community development and gender equality.

Community Development

When reflecting upon their ambition to participate in politics, a number of the women cited a commitment towards serving their family, village and the country as a whole. Some women described a broad social responsibility to both regional and national development while others indicated a desire to represent the specific needs of their family, village or constituencies in parliament.

“I would like to become a political leader so that the village and district can have a say, a voice, in the government. Other villages are developing because their MP is active. (265, untitled)

“I would like to become a political leader to make an impact in helping Samoa's development; because I understand the issues experienced by people. It [adversity] is felt by poor people not by the
parliamentarians because they are not experiencing the economic hardships we go through” (71, untitled).

“...becoming a parliamentarian is a good chance to help improve the standard of my family, my village, my church and also my district” (46, untitled).

“I want to express my thoughts for the betterment of many things within my village for example roads (aula galue)” (217, untitled)

**Gender Equality**

The research findings have revealed that Samoan women are devoted towards improving the status of women throughout many facets of society. While reflecting upon why they would like to become a political leader many of the women who participated in the research discussed issues surrounding gender equality and advocating for the issues affecting women in Samoa. Although structural barriers remain, the statements presented below are encouraging as they indicate that as more Samoan women are elected into parliament, they are likely to possess the determination and motivation needed to lobby for positive policy change and facilitate advancements in the status of women.

When asked if she would ever consider becoming a political leader in Samoa? One woman responded enthusiastically with “Why not? ... Women have contributed to every social development sphere in existence and they should also have the right to contribute to this era of decision making in our country. There are areas which men often overlook that women do not”. (Untitled woman, 153)

While responding to the question: “Why would you consider becoming a political leader in Samoa?” The women discussed a range of themes within the overarching issue of gender equality. As presented in the excerpts below, some women emphasized the overall legacy and capabilities of women in their responses, other women focused upon addressing specific gender issues, while many others identified that need for women to ‘have a voice’ in parliament.

- **Women’s voice and equal representation**

“*I wanted to represent women and their interests in parliament to improve status of women. I want to see gender equality in parliament so that there are more women to argue for issues that benefit women.*” (Titled woman, 51)
“[I want] to fight for women’s side to become stronger and to encourage men not to look down on women in parliament but to amplify their potentials and knowledge.” (Untitled, 174).

“I would like to become a political leader because women tend to have different perspective from men on most issues.” (Untitled, 116).

“Because decisions made in parliament are inconsiderate of effects on women/bias. Women understand the current situation Samoa especially in rural communities is going through better than men.” (Untitled, 83)

- **Women’s legacy and capability**

“This has been my dream that one day there will be a parliament made up of women because women’s legacy is one of total achievement. It would be good to have a women's political party in the future (Untitled, 82).”

“It is a must for women to participate and I want men to take away the mentality that only they are capable. Political leadership is suitable for women nowadays because they are educated and capable” (Untitled, 87).

“It is more suitable for women issues to be brought into parliament by women. Plus in this day and age, more Samoan women are well educated so this makes them eligible to participate in politics” (Untitled, 289).

- **Addressing Women’s issues**

“I want to help with the development of the status of women in Samoa.” (Untitled, 208)

“I would like to become a political leader to ensure advocacy for the protection for women and children from violence continues” (Untitled, 34).

“So I can support my country in terms of the things that really needs development and priority like economic development through more job opportunities for women especially the young ones” (Untitled, 70).

- **Gender roles**

It is interesting to note that a number of women made reference to women’s socio-culturally defined gender responsibilities within the Samoan context of village and family life. Many women mentioned that women can provide ‘mediation’, ‘advice’ and ‘support’ in parliament, these are all
terms which are routinely used to describe women’s responsibilities within Samoan society and culture.

“Women are peacemakers and advisors so they can mediate in parliament when things go rough. Also, they can advise the male parliamentarians so the decisions made are not biased.” (130, titled)

### 6.1.2 Reluctance to participate

Despite the strong enthusiasm for political participation expressed by the majority of women surveyed during the research, 37% of women stated that they would not consider becoming a political leader in Samoa and a further 4% gave no response to the question.

Titled women were significantly more reluctant to consider becoming a political leader compared with the untitled women surveyed. Only 44% of the titled women indicated that they would consider participating in politics, 47% indicated that they would not consider this pathway and a further 10% chose not respond to the question. In comparison, the majority of untitled women (62%) indicated that they would consider becoming a political leader in the future. These results are presented in Chart 6.2.

**Chart 6.2**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of titled and untitled women who would consider becoming a political leader in Samoa.](chart)

The current research reveals that a series of systematic barriers constrain women from pursuing political leadership endeavours in Samoa. These include structural barriers such as socio-economic status and financial constraints, systematic barriers such as the condition that only a matai can
contest in the election, and deeply embedded and complex socio-cultural barriers such as male hegemony and gendered roles and responsibilities.

**Financial constraints**

When analysing why women decide not to participate in politics, a commonly cited reason involved financial concerns. During the research both titled and untitled women explained that it is often too expensive to campaign and contest for parliament. As a titled woman explains; “I am not that wealthy to run for parliament” (Titled woman, 31). Women need financial support from their family and community to contest in a general election and for a significant proportion of women in Samoa this is either unrealistic or impossible given the standard of living today.

**Holding a Matai title**

To run for a seat in parliament, candidates must hold a Matai title which in turn can impact women becoming political leaders in Samoa.

“I wouldn’t consider running for parliament because one of the conditions of being able to run for Parliament is that you have to have a matai title” (Untitled respondent, 156)

**Male hegemony**

Throughout the country as a whole, becoming a matai and political leader is an equal right for both men and women. However, men dominate the leadership arena in Samoa. Samoan social and customary attitudes about women’s roles impact their involvement in politics. Masculine hegemonies and unequal gender attitudes can work to discourage and marginalise women from participating in politics, in the same way that they constrain women for attaining a matai position.

When discussing their reluctance to participate in politics, the women who were surveyed for the research identified two distinct themes within the concept of ‘male hegemony’:

- **Discrimination towards women**

Both titled and untitled women spoke fervently about the discrimination of women in leadership when describing why she would not consider pursuing a pathway to politics:

“It will be a waste of my time as there is still strong discrimination against women within my village and district. This is due to the fact that women cannot sit in during village meetings. However, women are still serving the village even though this village is very stupid with their decisions.” (Titled woman, phase 3, respondent 9)
“Men look down at women and think that women do not have the capacity to make decisions” (Untitled woman respondent, 75).

a) Politics is a man’s game

While explaining why they would not pursue a position in politics, a large number of women expressed concern that political arena is either ‘not suitable for women’ or ‘dominated by men’. Politics is largely seen as a man’s game.

“Women should not participate in parliament decisions because men and women have different decision making skills, therefore men tend to have stronger decision making abilities” (Untitled woman respondent, 213).

“I will leave that politics] to men as they are more appropriate for those roles. A mother’s role is to ensure peace is maintained” (Untitled woman respondent, 249).

“The brother on the other hand is required to protect his sister and make decisions for her benefit. So obviously I would give the opportunity to the man first. Secondly I prefer not to participate in politics as it is a profession more suitable for males” (Untitled woman respondent, 28).

“My title bestowment was in 2010 which was after the previous general election. Also, I think that parliament is for males only and is not suitable for females.” (Titled woman respondent, 18)

Competing priorities

There is a greater ‘social cost’ for women to participate in political leadership than men. When women choose to pursue a leadership position they have to juggle competing priorities like domestic duties and often make considerable sacrifices in other areas of their life. The burden of being ‘time poor’ and having competing priorities was discussed by a number of women when they described why they would not consider a political leadership position.

“There won’t be enough time to carry any duties in politics because there are so many responsibilities as a mother in the family” (Untitled woman respondent, 104).

“I have no intention to run for parliament my main focus is my family” (Titled woman, 19)

A perceived lack of capacity and potential

The process of seeing oneself as a leader is both fragile and complex. Many of the women who indicated that they would not consider becoming a political leader cited that they did not have the potential, the skills or the personal capacity to fulfil a leadership role.
Many women echoed the sentiments: “I do not have the knowledge and capacity to become a leader”, while others professed that they do not have the confidence to pursue leadership opportunities: “I do not have the confidence to speak in the parliament. Being a political leader is a male dominated field.” (Untitled woman respondent, 13)

For some, this may be an accurate reflection of their capabilities and personality. However, for many others, the rhetoric is likely to represent the subtle marginalization women experience as they construct their gendered identities. The current research reveals that women do not become leaders because they do not see themselves as leaders. There is a need for women to undergo a fundamental ‘identity shift’ when it comes to leadership, women need to acquire the confidence, skills and personal capabilities to become leaders in their community. However, this will not happen in a vacuum. Identity is socially and culturally constructed; therefore women’s attitudes towards themselves will need to evolve alongside wider social perceptions and attitudes.

6.2 Addressing Women’s Issues

Participants were asked if they thought the current political parties were effectively addressing women’s issues. While majority believed the current political parties are effectively addressing women’s issues, a large proportion (31 percent) did not agree. The results are presented in chart 6.3.

Chart 6.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think the two political parties in Samoa are effectively addressing women's issues?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants were also asked to identify key issues of concern for women which they would like the current political parties to prioritize and attend to. As presented in table 6.1 Domestic and sexual violence or abuse against women and particularly was a paramount concern indicated by 61% of participants. Within these broad themes, women referred to incidences of violence and aggression, verbal abuse, rape and incest.

Family planning, teenage pregnancies and baby abandonment by their mothers were other issues of concern raised throughout by a significant number of participants.

Table 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue:</th>
<th>Number of women who identified this issue</th>
<th>Proportion of women who identified this issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual violence against women</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse against children</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health (and disability)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Planning &amp; Counselling</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living / financial pressures</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality &amp; empowerment</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s employment / skills building</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster recovery and preparedness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3 General attitudes towards ‘Women in Politics’

A key objective for the research was to gauge women’s support towards the notion of ‘more women in politics’. The research findings revealed that overall; the women who participated in the research strongly support an increase in female political leadership in Samoa. When surveyed, 94% revealed that they would support a female counterpart to run for parliament; 88% stated that they would like to see more women enter politics and 84% indicated that they agree with the constitutional amendment to reserve 10 percent of seats in Parliament for women. These results are presented in charts 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6.
Chart 6.4

Would you support other women to run for Parliament?

- Yes: 94%
- No: 4%
- Not Answered: 2%

Chart 6.5

Would you like more women to become political leaders?

- Yes: 88%
- No: 8%
- Not Answered: 3%
6.3.1 Support towards women in politics

Women participants were asked to elaborate on their attitudes and opinion towards women’s involvement in politics. It was widely agreed, that women are underrepresented in this field and a number of common themes emerged supporting the notion of having ‘more women in politics’.

a) Women have a right to equal representation in parliament and a voice in decision making.

Many women believe that the 10% quota and enabling initiatives supporting women’s pathways in politics will eventually and successfully increase the representation and ‘voice’ of women in Parliament.

This sentiment was reiterated by a number of women throughout the research.

“Because there should be gender equality in the parliament, and women should have a voice in all decisions made in parliament because it also affects women in Samoa.” (Untitled woman, respondent 1)

“Gender equality in parliament because women are citizens of Samoa and should have a say or voice in parliament discussions.” (Untitled woman, respondent 276)
“50% of Parliament seats must be filled by women who constitute 50% of Samoa’s population.”
(Titled woman, phase 3, respondent 17)

b) Women are proactive and will advocate for women’s issues

The impacts of gendered ‘quota’ initiatives go beyond facilitating an equitable gender balance in Parliament. Previous analysis of gendered quota strategies have highlighted that having more women in parliament can enhance the focus on women’s issues in policy making, support positive advancements of societal attitudes towards women in leadership and reduce overall gender based discrimination towards women. The women who participated in the current research recognized that women who participate in national politics are likely to prioritize and advocate for women’s issues.

“Women understand the issues faced by other women and they can address them accordingly. Women [in parliament] will action the decisions and plans made because men just do not walk the talk” (Titled woman, respondent 27).

“We need more women because they go into politics to change things while men go in for power.”
(Titled women, phase 3, respondent 9)

“I wanted to represent women and their interests in parliament to improve status of women. I want to see gender equality in parliament so that there are more women to argue for issues that benefit women.” (Titled woman, respondent 51)

“There are many Samoan women who have the experience and determination to become parliamentarians. Women also have the tenacity to bring to light different issues faced by women and also have the foresight to identify other issues which are often overlooked by their male counterparts.” (Untitled woman, respondent 228)

“Having more women in parliament would ensure that matters pertaining to women are considered and because women tend to think to things for good of all, they also pose love and are good advisors” (Titled woman, respondent 23).

“Men think only of themselves Women make decisions wisely. Behind a good man, is a great woman” (Titled woman, respondent 29).

“There should be many women parliamentarians to represent the female population. Issues affecting women are better reflected and understood if proposed and discussed by women themselves.” (Titled woman, respondent 17)
c) Women’s contribution is valuable

As discussed in earlier chapters of the report, a woman’s status in Samoa’s context is one of recognition and esteem. Her duties often centre on providing advice, nurture, support and mediation. In accordance to participants such qualities add value to a woman’s affiliation and contribution at the level of a Parliamentary setting as fundamental qualities of a leader.

“Women have wise thoughts to share for the good of the country; they can resolve conflicts by giving advice to the male parliamentarians.” (Titled woman, respondent, 34)

“Women tend to have richer opinions compared to men. Women are also courageous and they strive for the best not only for their own families but for the country as a whole.” (Titled woman, respondent 55)

“So that women’s voices can be heard and make a contribution because women advise for good things and as the traditional saying goes ‘the legacy of a women is one of total achievement’” (Titled woman, respondent ,11).

6.3.2 Resistance towards women in politics

Contrary to supportive perceptions, research findings also confirm opposition from some men and women against ‘having more women in politics’ in the advent of the quota and constitutional amendment. The following comments provide insight into why women are opposed to the notion of ‘more women in politics’. The responses presented below have been coded into general themes which emerged throughout analysis.

d) Gender roles

“A man, a father, heads a family, village or church and is an appropriate leader in Government. However, times have changed and some women have become more educated than men, but I maintain that a women’s role is to advice.” (Untitled woman, respondent 249)

“To be in parliament is a man’s calling, definitely not women.” (Titled woman, respondent 37)

“Women have roles which have been ascribed to them. It is preferable if they stick to it: Leave the politics to men!” (Untitled woman, respondent 113).

“Women should refrain from trying to get into politics, they are more suited as advisors.” (Untitled woman, respondent 302)
e) Conflicts and contradictions in parliament

“More women will cause more conflicts and gossiping in parliament” (Untitled woman, respondent 44).

“Women’s participation in parliament will create contradictions for leaders (men) therefore, they should maintain their roles in the women committees.” (Untitled woman, respondent 60)

“I believe that the two women representatives in parliament is enough to provide advice to the parliament, as the role of men is to become heads in villages and families, hence parliament” (Untitled woman, respondent 109).

“There should be men only in parliament because men and women have different views, and it will be harder when it comes to decision making.” (Untitled woman, respondent 213)

f) ‘More women in politics’ is considered unnecessary

“Two women in parliament at the moment is enough to represent all women in Samoa.” (Untitled woman, respondent 62)

“Can we please just leave the politics to the men?! Women have far better things to do compared to attempting to enter parliament.” (Untitled woman, respondent 113)

g) Opposition towards the amendment

“I believe in hard work and getting elected by the people. I am against being given a seat just because the law allows me, as a minority just to be there, even though the people did not vote me in.” (Titled woman, phase 3, respondent 29)

“This act is very bias towards women because it is special treatment for them when everyone (men and women) have equal access to being a candidate for the general election.” (Titled woman, respondent 16)

“Why should government go out of their way to enact such a law? People should be elected into parliament based on their own merit instead of expecting a meal ticket.” (Untitled woman, respondent 28)
Chapter Seven: The perspectives of professional and prominent women matai

In ‘phase 3’ of the MWCSD Women Matai and Leadership survey, a number of influential and prominent women were approached to take part. A sample of 30 individuals was selected whereby a total of 16 responded. The experiences and perspectives of these women added an extended value to the research given that they are prominent ‘women’ title holders and are professional leaders in their own right. They are role models in communities and are indicative of women’s transition in overall empowerment in a cultural and professional context.

Chapter 7 aims to:

- **Pathways:** Explore the proven pathways and strategies women have utilized in pursuing decision making and leadership opportunities;
- **Barriers:** Identify some of the barriers and challenges women have experienced throughout their professional and leadership endeavours;
- **Advice:** Gather practical advice and formulate constructive strategies which can be used to support other women in Samoa in their pursuit of leadership and decision making opportunities.
Participants were asked to reflect upon and describe the pathways which have lead them to fulfilling a leadership or professional role within the community; describe some of opportunities, empowerment strategies and support mechanisms they utilised to achieve their current position of leadership within the community. When analysing the responses, five distinct themes emerged:

**a) Service and a social commitment to the community**

“I served my parents and my family, my extended family, church, village and Women’s groups in my district and others.” (Phase 3, respondent 9)

“As a youth I served in my family, my village and church by contributing to whatever that needs to be done. In recognition of this service I got given the matai title by my family. I sat in on all village council meetings then the village requested to put my name forward as their candidate for parliament.” (Phase 3, respondent 21)

“I came to Samoa to Volunteer with SRCS after Tsunami. I stayed to take care of my father, learnt to respect Faasamoa through work at the ‘Centre for Samoan Studies’, I saw social issues that needed addressing and made a commitment to Samoa, to stay and contribute.” (Phase 3, respondent 15)

“Through passion, commitment and a personal interest in contributing to creating a culture of peace and equality in the world.” (Phase 3, respondent 12)

**b) Traditional knowledge and Formal Education**

“I attended Samoan course on cultural and traditional language and presented this as ‘on the job training’. [I recommend] more involvement and participation with ongoing support to village activities, ongoing financial and in-kind contributions.” (Phase 3, respondent 18)

“Graduated in 1999 with an applied science degree for Food Science & Technology and after 2 years of service with the public sector which wasn’t really relevant to my degree I enrolled in USP Alafua and later NUS Management programme (the first intake of students) so I can pursue a career in the private sector. In 2006 SROS was set up which was very relevant to my degree and I graduated in 2007 with B.Com. Management. I am currently studying part time for a Masters in Project Management as I realize that a lot of the younger generations are getting higher degrees so for job security I need to keep studying” (Phase 3, respondent 24).

“[participate in] formal education, technical courses and gain cultural knowledge from older members of the family.” (Phase 3, respondent 9)
“Expanded Professional development; built confidence over the years to be adaptable to different situations and am always consistent in knowing facts and influences about every situation I will be in prior.” (Phase 3, respondent 6)

“Hardwork with continuous learning and affiliated with the right people that contribute to my career path and calling.” (Phase 3, respondent 19)

c) Strong support networks

“You have a good knowledge base, ensure good relationships with different audiences know your place in society and lead by example” (Phase 3, respondent 6)

“Having a stable family background; being grounded in the word of God with faith in God’s calling; Surrounded by friends and family who are hard working and committed workers and having formal qualifications and experience.” (Phase 3, respondent 12)

“Used my connections with community organizations and my ability to network and use resources creatively. Used my family to help me navigate systems I am not familiar with.” (Phase 3, respondent 15)

d) Personal attributes (humble, confident, hardworking)

“If you are faithful with small things, greater things will be entrusted to you. No responsibility was small responsibility; Humbleness and ability to communicate with people from all walks of life. Like the people on your way up because you will meet them on your way down. Being passionate/committed to everything I do” (Phase 3, respondent 17)

“Always been independent; had to work hard at getting to where I am. There were no helps or easy ways but these all made me the person that I am today-focused, independent and confident.” (Phase 3, respondent 29)

“Love what you do. Be close to your God and pray; surround yourself with positive and empowering people. Take risks. Embrace change but do not lose your values. Never stop learning and be positive.” (Phase 3, respondent 29)
e) Have the confidence to get involved

“Learn more about the matai language and you won’t have any problems. Do not feel afraid to join and voice out your reasons in a matai meeting. I have experienced that matai men do appreciate your participation and involvement if they see that you are comfortable when presenting yourself. Do not show any fear when you are seated in that circle of discussion. Do join in the fun discussion with the men matai and do not react against any funny jokes they may say about women and their role and contribution in the community. Always react positively and do not react or feel negative against your co-workers or your community representatives.” (Phase 3, respondent 18)

7.2 The barriers and challenges women have faced in professional leadership

Participants of phase 3 were also asked to describe barriers or challenges they faced as women in leadership positions within professional and community contexts. Significant in our findings was noting that only half (8) of the 16 women respondents indicated that they faced barriers thus the instant assumption was that the other 8 women, did not face any barriers.

Three distinct themes emerged through thematic analysis of their responses and such echo the responses of titled and untitled women interviewed in phase 2 of the research as presented in section 4.2 of chapter four. The themes highlighted below capture constraints faced by women in leadership.

Cultural capacities

“During village inspections and outreach programs out in the villages there is an expectation of cultural affiliations (faaaloaloga faaleaganuu, ava usu) when we arrived, I am always the one in charge of these traditional affiliations.” (Phase 3, respondent 9)

“It is very hard to get respect of local community unless one has proven record of dedication/ service. People of a higher status look down on you. Men often do not want to hear what you say unless you are forceful.” (Phase 3, respondent 15)

Male hegemony

“I sometimes feel that when I speak in a circle of men matai, they do see me as a person holding a weaker position in the circle of discussion. No matter how right or sufficient the information I present, I really do feel that I am not being honoured or seen as an important person within the circle of male matai. To me I do not seem to care sometime but as long as I know that I am doing my job. I take it as a big challenge but then on the positive side, it does make me want to get involved more and not to be scared from facing the older male matai.” (Phase 3, respondent 18)
“Women cannot socialise like men do thereby limiting their networking somewhat. Women have always got to be professional at all times to be taken seriously.” (Phase 3, respondent 21)

**Financial and time constraints**

“Resource constraints, and making time for all the commitments (family, church, NGO)” (Phase 3, respondent 17)

### 7.3 Recommendations to other women who would like to achieve a leadership or professional role within the community

Participants were invited to share advice or recommendations for other women who are interested in pursuing professional and cultural leadership roles within the community. The advice provided was diverse and comprehensive, a selection of responses are presented below.

“For women who hold matai titles and are aspiring to be members of parliament I strongly advise great participation in village and community affairs so they know who you are and your capabilities for when election time comes around.” (Phase 3, respondent 21)

“Be committed to Work Hard; Be Ethical and honest, aim to develop an excellent character; Commit to develop your knowledge through reading, training, and mentoring by more experienced and knowledgeable people; Be a visionary; Always share what you know and have.” (Phase 3, respondent 19)

“Attend a Samoan course on language and traditional culture by one of the Samoan experts from the National University of Samoa. Get a Matai title as this will give you more opportunities to take part and learn more from your matai colleagues. Connect and get involved with the community projects especially the women’s committee project and church activities”. (Phase 3, respondent 18)

“Pursuing leadership can but be part of professional courses but there is always the need to contextualise and the key is to lead by example” (Phase 3, respondent 18)

“Professionally, if you want something then go for it, but make sure you go about it the right and honest way, look after yourself and your family first because if everything is okay at home then everything else follows through, take opportunities that are offered if you can; especially any opportunity to learn new skills.” (Phase 3, respondent 24)

“Have honesty and Commitment. Work with the faith that we are only instruments of God, be passionate in making a difference.” (Phase 3, respondent 17)
“You must be strong, must be dedicated, must not fear being disliked, must be generous, must be caring, and you must be dedicated: No one questions the dedication and passion (only the means it is used).” (Phase 3, respondent 15)

“Life and your experiences prepare you for any role you find yourself in. Taking Management courses in leadership, human resource helps put some things into perspective. Alternatively taking Law has empowered me in more ways than I had ever imagined, certainly being knowledgeable about the law does go a long way. Network and make new associations.” (Phase 3, respondent 29)
Chapter Eight: Conclusion, Research Limitations & Recommendations

8.1 Conclusion

From the outset, the Women: Matai and Leadership Survey sought to explore women’s attitudes and interests as leaders in the context of local and national politics. It also sought to seek male and generic societal perceptions of women’s capacities as leaders. Ultimately this survey sought to discover insights into women’s participation and contributions in high-level decision making realms on par with men.

Survey findings re-affirmed that ‘leadership’ in itself is understood in variations of meaning and form. The concept of ‘leadership’ and requirements to be a ‘leader’ transcended from high-level roles as Members of Parliament to being Chief Executive Officer to mothers who Home-makers. Whilst the survey sought to capture women’s own interests in ‘political leadership’, it was discovered that women carry leadership roles daily as mothers and guardians without having to be Members of Parliament per se. In saying that, it was obvious that the same qualities afforded to domestic duties, are the same qualities which elevates her to undertake any other form of leadership including being an a CEO or MP. As advisers who are patient, well informed, honest, open minded, empathetic, courageous and fair individuals, women have natural qualities which somewhat qualify them as leaders in any context or at any level.

As ‘matai’ the survey confirms that women already have the capacities to take on such roles within their families and communities. Women who hold titles are also generally aware of what’s required of a woman should she be selected by her family to take up a title. The sense of leadership and authority associated with being ‘matai’ is not immune from countless responsibilities to families and commitments to church. It is this very basis that deters most women from taking up matai titles when offered by their families. The role of a ‘matai’ is a demanding one which requires personal perseverance and also economic support to supply constant ‘faalavelave’ obligations. Women’s experiences have varied as others are financially stable enough to undertake such roles whilst others are collectively supported by their immediate families (siblings, husband and children).

Women have various reasons which drive their ambitions to advance from domesticated leading roles into local politics. Whilst other women are comfortable and content as the untitled ‘feagaiga’ or a simple ‘mother’ statuses, others choose to be matai to serve their families, to represent their family interests in the context of village affairs, to have a voice in decision making, to create change in stringent traditional systems or to represent women and advocate women issues in male dominated decision making circles. In some instances, women are chosen to become matai when they have no brothers at all or have none who are available to undertake the role. Generally however, women have a tendency to give the honour of a matai title to her brother and such has been commonly practiced to date. The covenant of a brother and sister in Samoa’s context extends to personal choices or preferences on leadership and variations of service ‘tautua’.

It is qualitatively conclusive that the culmination of these factors explains why men continue to dominate positions of cultural leadership as title-holders and high chiefs. They continue to dominate decision making forums at communal levels and this dominance translates to the national level of decision making. Chapters 4 to 7, present common themes shared by women surveyed on a number of determining factors to pursuing titles and rationales as to why obtaining a title is favoured. We sought to understand challenges for women in attaining a title as well as seeking to understand
barriers for titled women, deterring their engagement in village affairs and decision making processes. Findings confirm the complex influences of; traditional practices and perceptions, cultural structures of village operation, hierarchal groupings individuals, taboos of ‘feagaiga and tuagane’ covenant and the impact of a woman’s ‘faasinomaga’ in a family and village setting.

Also highly significant in findings is confirmation that women do not always want the same things for themselves nor do they think or feel alike about their own advancement. A woman’s personal outlook defines her roles and determines her own capabilities. This distinction is evident between women from highly traditional villages which ban the bestowment of titles to women and those from villages which are more liberal. Some women who may be academically or professionally successful may be reluctant to be involved in local politics as a matter of personal choice. The survey also confirms that there are women who express a desire to be political leaders at the national level but show little or no interest in obtaining a title or that they prefer to gain a title without venturing into the realms of politics.

In conclusion, the survey has successfully provided a current glimpse into women’s own perceptions of generic leadership and political leadership. They have offered their perceptions on women’s qualities as leaders at any level and have made a qualitatively confirmed support for advancing women’s involvement in generic local and national politics. It is conclusive that women are successful individuals and are capable leaders within the family, community, professional and parliamentary contexts. They are receptive to matters of interest that will benefit communities and manage in a more consultative and participatory manner. The complexities of the faa-samoan however cannot be ignored as they form the fundamental basis of key influences which have both supported and constrained women’s advancement into political leadership roles. There is obvious disconnection between a woman’s need to excel into Parliament and her preference to remain untitled given the financial demands of the role or given traditional taboos for women or the influence of the brother and sister covenant. There is a need for Samoa’s cultural and western political systems to coincide to serve the gaps identified by women if their advancement to high-level decision making engagement is genuinely considered.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Generic Recommendations

1. There is a need to evaluate in detail, women’s financial circumstances and capabilities, in relation to their personal confidences and preferences to pursue areas or positions outside of the home environment. This study confirms financial/economic limitations as a major factor women consider prior to accepting or declining forms of leadership outside of the home. Women themselves do not have the same academic qualifications nor do they possess the same economic-generating skills. However, with the demands of being a matai, CEO or Parliamentarian, the economic capability of any woman is critical. Recommendation is therefore to invest in further improving the economic capabilities of Samoan women.

Culturally entrenched beliefs are positive for women given their status as ‘feagaiga’. However, this also brings the expectation that a woman’s place in decision making is merely as an advisor confined by practice in the context of the home. Women’s qualities as leaders must not be misunderstood with their capacity as leaders. A key part of women’s advancement to high-level decision making realms is their acceptance and involvement in community based decision-making group.
Recommendation to strategically mould cultural beliefs and systems with initiatives to advance women in positions of leadership;

2. The current survey has provided a preliminary basis for future research, identifying current preferences, rationales, gaps and influences of cultural norms and practices on women’s ownership of high-level leadership roles.

3. Recommendation to expand the scope of coverage for this initial research, to gather more perceptions on the issue of women matai and leadership.

4. Changing mindsets and perceptions is a difficult task, nonetheless advancing women’s status as leaders in Samoa’s formal Governing frameworks will serve to improve women and more so, improve community wellbeing. The Constitutional amendment to allocate 10% representation of MPs to women is a notable achievement for Samoa’s politics and community development sector. Momentum and Government commitment to the initiative must be maintained and such can be sustained through collective engagement and dialogue with village communities, churches, and civil society organizations to promote and advocate for women in leadership and decision-making circles. Recommendation for Government to engage all partners in supporting of the initiative and to further consider the establishment of a Parliamentary Women’s Advisory Committee to complement the 10% requirement of Parliamentary membership.

8.3.2 Programming Specific Recommendations

1) Education and Awareness

a) Advocacy Programs

- Encourage advocacy programs for potential female candidates and female voters on parliamentary and election procedures.

b) Mentoring Programs

- Encourage mentoring programs either formal or informal targeting young girls with an interest in politics as a mechanism to raise awareness and understanding of leadership in the context of political roles and expectations.

c) Youth Parliament Programs

- Continue ‘youth’ parliamentary sessions as a strategy to engage young girls in parliamentary protocol.

2) Economic Empowerment Activities

- Conduct economic empowerment activities for women to improve their economic background to finance election campaigns.
3) Media Campaign

- Conduct media campaign to raise awareness on the 10% Constitutional Amendment Act 2013.


GLOSSARY

STN- Village Women Representative

SN – Village Men Representative

Sa’oao and Tama’ita’i – Daughters born of the village

Fautua – Advisor

Va Tapuia- Sacred Space/Relationship

Fa’aaloaloga Faaleaganu –

Ava Usu- Welcoming Ceremony (traditional)

Tautua – rendering the Service

Measina – Treasure

Feagaiga –Covenant

Faalavelave – Family obligations

Mamalu – Dignity

Faletua and Tausi – Wives of the chiefs (Sons of the Village)

Ava a taule’a – Women married to untitled men of the village

Aiga potopoto – Extended family system

Aiga – Family

Fono Aooao Faitulafono – Legislative Assembly