

Education Funding Successes in Pacific Island Countries; Evidence from Samoa

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Abstract - non-governmental funding for education within the Pacific, appears to be uneven. Whilst there is a difficulty in securing funding for various projects in some economies, the Pacific island nation of Samoa, appears to have been relatively successful in engaging various development partners and in securing the much needed education development funding. Analysis and inference are made from the available data released by the donor agents and government ministries in the public domain. These findings could serve as policy inputs in improving education funding. Additionally, this will collectively aid education in the region which will serve as the catalyst to socio-economic benefits to the economies.

Keywords — development partners, donor agents, education, funding opportunities, Pacific, non-government

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a very important sector in every economy, especially those that intend to see economic development. The Pacific economies and territories are represented by different economic development levels, different population sizes, different quality and challenges to education, different education development capacities and various funding structures for their education development. The expected differences that exist does have a reasonable impact on the learning systems, facilitators and learners. The quality of education is known to transform lives globally and remove the cycle of poverty that traps so many learners (UNICEF 2022). This is regardless of the language that the education is conducted in or of the age of the learners or facilitators. Through education, people from poorer communities, villages and economies are provided with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and training necessary to engage in paid work and activities that can generate wealth for them. Thus, education is the human capital investment that a nation undertakes with the intention of improving the skills, knowledge and attitude of its labor factor of production. This is why most economies of the modern world have developed education sector systems, strategies and plans to work on achieving such a noble goal of

educating as many of her citizens as possible. Furthermore, increasing the quality of labor which comes through education, is known to have a positive impact on the aggregate income, output and development of an economy. Thus, there is a link between education and socio-economic development.

Similar to the rest of the world, some of the prospective and suitable learners in the Pacific are also disabled and as a result face widespread barriers to accessing services. There is an estimated 1 billion people or 15% of the global population live with disability worldwide (WHO 2017). The uniqueness of the terrain means that some of the learners are also from remote islands. Such learners therefore end up with poorer health outcomes, and reduced educational achievement than is possible under different conditions. Further they will realise less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disability. A significant portion of the prospective learners or active learners that have partially completed their schooling are out-of-school. Some are from vulnerable populations whilst others encounter a limited parent and community engagement with regards to their education.

Besides this, education especially within the Pacific is a sensitive area in many economies and increasingly treated as a business (Yang 2003). A lot of privately owned education institutions are licensed with the intention of assisting the education of the citizens. However, with limited funding such are forced to pass on the cost of providing the facilitators and other resources to the learners. The quality of their education is also signalled through the outcomes that such institutions generate for their students which then draws the highest and best paying students to such institutions. A lot of the information that may be relevant and could be used for comparison purposes are classified as sensitive and kept out of the public domain.

Some academic research has already been done in this area but has mainly focused on the various challenges for education within the Pacific (Nabobo-Baba 2013 and Sanga 2002), Pacific education in New Zealand (Samu 2010), Cultural differences in Pacific Education (Burnett 2007), STEM in Asia-Pacific (Lee, Chai and Hong 2019), improving the quality of education in public schools (Lai, Ye and Chang 2008),

developing the Pacific through overseas human capital investments (Yemoh and Yemoh 2022). Most of the research is summarised in Levine 2013. The evidence regarding what does and does not work in public education suggests numerous instances of declining quality in Pacific public-education systems with the underlying causes being generally declining standards. The findings suggest that Island countries spend considerably more per pupil on education and attain markedly poorer results. Also, the facilitators are the main factors affecting student outcomes thus there is an advocacy for teacher-centred policies, and additionally accompanying incentives to the teaching profession as a material solution to improving the quality of teaching. Although the reports suggest that additional funding is not necessarily the answer to the challenges and problems in education of the Pacific public schools, this report respectfully submits another view. The view is that an absence of the funding which has so far helped the development of education within Samoa is a material tool that generates a significant impact on the level and quality of education.

There is a higher number of education-related development activities in Samoa that have a goal of improving access to education, and boosting productivity with the aim of improvising economic development (MOF 2022). This is in addition to the various governmental education section plans, government funding, education relation funding by religious organisations, the government's own education ministry projects and other specific or indirect education aid. This report reviews the additional non-governmental funding within Samoa's education support structure and adds to the Pacific Education research discussion by focusing on the impact that material education-related development projects have in contributing towards the improvement of a country's education.

II. EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

One of the recent World Health Organization reports, suggest that there are 15 countries within the Pacific Islands which are, Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna (WHO 2022). The three permanently inhabited U.S. Pacific territories are the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa. The Pacific Islands on record are made up of thousands of islands and territories although some are not inhabited. Within the Pacific region is a vast body of ocean and a number of the world's smallest economies with mainly indigenous populations. The world's development community considers the size and

remoteness of the Pacific Island economies as presenting significant hurdles for economic development (Coxon and Munce 2008). Also, due to various factors, education has been identified as one of the vital tools for addressing poverty and conflict prevention. This is in line with the fact that economies that subscribe to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) are also put on a path of improving the quality of the education of their citizens. The citizens of the inhabited islands do have an economy that they intend to develop.

The various countries and territories do have their own governments and governmental ministries that are responsible for their countries education policies, sector plans, strategic goals, rules, education and administration of their educational strategies. These are not the only education related framework that the countries and territories subscribe to in the region. Within the Pacific region, is a major framework called the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PACREF) which has 4 main goals. The first goal is the delivery of high-quality learning that is inclusive, and promotes gender equality and innovation with a responsive curriculum and programs that reflect Pacific values and culture. The second one is to create accessible learning pathways and modalities to meet all learners' needs within an enabling environment for school-level decision-making and flexibility to facilitate learning. The third one, is to improve proficiency in literacy and numeracy and participation and success rates at all levels. Finally, the fourth one is to have schools staffed by suitably equipped teachers (Thonden 2020). These are vital for the development of education within the region. Having a streamlined approach and framework allows for a collective effort at improving the quality of education in the region.

In the Pacific, basic education enrolment is relatively high, and most countries are on track to achieve nationwide primary education. The statistics still signal significant challenges within the education sectors that are also contributed by the resource constraints in the region (UNICEF 2022). Some of the notable challenges in driving towards quality education have been reported to include, limited access to quality early childhood education, equity gaps that negatively affect disabled children or those on outer islands, or out-of-school, and the other vulnerable populations from accessing and benefitting fully from schooling. The appropriate level of funding in many cases would have a positive influence on the resources that are made available for the education sectors and thus on the outcomes. In some cases, there is limited parent and community

engagement which has its impact on the development of the learners. There is also limited availability and use of data that can be used in the improvement to the education system (UNICEF 2022). However, the expectation from education in the Pacific is that it has the hope of keeping the region safe from the advancing external influences which could destroy the environment and way of life (Leaniva 2021). With the right tools, and support, the teachers and young people would be sufficiently educated from the safety of their own homes or appropriate teaching environment and communicate with the rest of the world.

Internationally, Education relies heavily on funding which may be from various sources. Regardless of the level of development of an economy, it still costs to provide any quality of education. Even when the learners receive education services at no cost to them, there may be persons or agencies who may be providing the payment that enables the services to be provided. With the level of developments and poverty in the Pacific Island Countries, much of the economy is being sustained through the export of agricultural produce, the international remittances and various aid projects from the development partners (Goretti et al 2021). Development assistance from external economies to the Pacific Island Countries and Territories has been material in the past. Their share within the global aid budget has recently declined due to various reasons yet the per capita aid levels in the region continue to be high relative to other regions (WHO 2022). This is a very good asset for development and improvement in many sectors like education. The comparative higher development assistance has in part been attributed to the comparative small population, location, the region's overall isolation, the dispersed nature of most Pacific island populations. This has also contributed to the high cost of aid supply to the region. Thus the achievement of receiving a higher comparative proportion of aid is a great achievement. The various list of donors include the Asian Development Bank, Australia, China; European Union, the GAVI Alliance, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Japan, New Zealand, United Nations agencies (FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO), and the World Bank (WHO 2022).

III. EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT - IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

Education in Samoa has achieved significant victories over

the decades. However, student performance and literacy rates are areas that are still identified for improvement (MESC 2022). Various inputs and projects have successfully been undertaken within the education sector which has contributed to the apparent improvements within the sector. Some of the challenges that are still faced include shortage of instructional materials, lack of bilingual teachers, substandard infrastructure, a large number of learners not completing primary education, outdated primary curriculum, insufficient technical support for many teachers and to implement the secondary curriculum or to adopt new teaching methods. What has been noted in the past and proven with the provision and use of the development projects is that the appropriate use of the funding does improve the education sector outcomes. Many of the challenges can be solved with the appropriate funding that underpins the provision of many of the resources, training, skilling and equipping of the sectors, schools and people who work in the sector. Based on the The Samoa Education Sector Plan (ESP), the reported budget required to implement the ESP is SAT 18,088,200 in FY 2015/16; and 18,385,700 in FYs 2016/17 and 16,319,200 2017/18 (DFAT 2015). Resource commitments from the Government of Samoa, Australia and New Zealand normally underpin the ESP projects. The funding for the different government departments and sectors are all allocated from the national income and from other income sources that the economy is able to raise. These have all contributed in the past and still do contribute towards the successes of the education sector.

Understandably so, out of all the education development drivers for education in Samoa is the Government of Samoa. In 2020, The Samoa government's expenditure on education was reported at 16.21% according to the World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized sources (Trading Economics 2022). The contribution has played a major role in the development of education over the past decades. Support from Samoa's Development Pathways has been long-standing and diverse. This is expected to provide education that enhances the economic development of the economy of Samoa. Development-enhancing education refers to schooling that presents several opportunities for learner exposure and practice, that is warm, individualised, age appropriate, health promoting, culturally inclusive, and academically challenging (McDevitt et al 2010).

It has not only been limited to the Government of Samoa but has also included the development partners. The provision of aid covers a wide range of inputs, modalities and subsectors, from pooled funding from Australia, New Zealand and Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) and through local and overseas scholarships, and in-country training and capacity building. This allows Samoa to receive the much needed development inducing training that they would have otherwise paid for themselves or not received at all due to the resource restraints. Samoa is also home for a broad Pacific initiative in technical training, and a campus of the USP. The

aid is provided for schooling, both primary and secondary, as well as PSET(MOF 2022). Such aid may not be unique to just Samoa however, in addition to the many other support received allows Samoa to reach further and do a lot more and better than they would have. Even in many developed economies, many of their scholarships are limited and centred around a limited number of qualifying factors. Many will be centred around the learning outcomes and in a few cases, and on the financial hardships of the learners. The reports do suggest that a comparatively higher number of scholarships are on offer and provided to Samoans from and through various bodies. This practice and great opportunity is comparatively higher than what most economies provide including those in the region. Analysing the numbers as a proportion of the population of the Island Nation suggest that the citizens of Samoa are far more endowed with these opportunities than the rest of their regional counterparts.

Additionally, there is also the Samoa School Fees Grants Scheme (SSFGS) which was successfully launched in 2010, with financial and technical support from Australia and New Zealand, to provide grants to primary schools in lieu of school fees(MOF 2022). Furthermore, the Samoa Secondary School Fees Grants Scheme was launched in July 2013 to extend SFG to secondary schools with financial support from New Zealand. The programme involves a gradual transfer of funding from development partners to MESC's budget. There is also the TVET Support Programme supported by the Australian Government, which began in May 2011(DFAT 2015). In many communities, the quality and coverage of education is limited by the affordability of the citizens in paying for the tuition. How many of the learners that are able to overcome the challenge of financing the cost of accessing learning are then able to be educated. Where support is provided that removes that limitation, the prospective learners can then receive education without having to deal with the cost of the education. The SSFGS and SFG thus allows a lot more learners who would otherwise not have been able to continue their education, or would have dropped out at an earlier education level to go a bit further in their learning journey. On the other hand, the economies that are not able to receive such investment and funding will have many of their citizens being educated to levels that are far lower than they could have reached.

Samoa does benefit from School construction projects including the JICA-funded Primary School Improvement (Grassroots Human Security Projects) and, for example, new school buildings for Falevao and Sapapalii Primary Schools(MESC 2022). Japan international Cooperation Agency(JICA) projects as at 2022 have included more than 92 school buildings that have been built under the Government of Japan's Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Project (GGP), (MESC 2022b). An example of the development projects undertaken with the support of the Japanese Government includes the 2019 construction of the Faleatiu and Satuimalufilufi Primary Schools. Other projects

also include the Primary School Improvement (Grassroots Human Security Projects), The Project for Upgrade of USPNET Communications System, Upgrading and Extension of Samoa Polytechnic of Samoa, The Project for Strengthening Technical Vocational Education and Training Development in Samoa(JICA 2022). Various economies do not have such statistics. To have one development partner build over ninety schools is a great achievement. Consequently, the support of the schools means that a lot more of the resources that would have been used to build the schools are now available to be used in other parts of the economy. Without the developmental project contribution, quite a number of the schools may not have been completed at all, not built or taken a lot longer to complete. In addition to this, the learners and their facilitators would also have been impacted in various ways.

Since the year 2000, ADB has engaged in Education Sector Projects in Samoa and helped to build a more equitable and effective education system, primarily by improving the quality of learning for primary and secondary school learners(ADB 2017). The contribution that such support has provided the education sector, the facilitators and learners and its subsequent socio-economic impact on the economy as a whole can not be understated or ignored. Much of what the comparative economies have not been able to secure may be a better indication of where Samoa's education sector would be without the support. The ADB project priority focus was the disadvantaged areas, and with a goal to improve government-led coordination and the effectiveness of externally assisted and nationally funded programs(ADB 2017). Much of this was made possible with the adequate and relevant for the sectors in question. According to the documents, the cost of the first phase of the project was \$7.41 million which was financed through an ADB loan(ADB 2011). The significance of the funding can be brought to light by comparing such an economy to an equally similar economy that does not receive such funding. The result of the assistance is that a lot more minority leaders have not received access to poverty alleviation resource of education. Various other learners who for one reason or another would have been excluded in the education framework would have now been included through the assistance.

Another major education contributor in Samoa is the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps program in Samoa currently focuses on promoting English literacy in Samoan primary schools(Peace Corps 2022). With education, any support that has the potential of positively impacting any level of education is a very important asset to the economy. The Peace Corps program was developed in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC) and was officially launched in fall 2012. Peace Corps volunteers have played vital a role in helping learners develop literacy skills. The scope and contribution of the volunteers have also extended to the teachers by providing them with the necessary student-centred teaching methods. The volunteers have contributed to

improving information and communication technology resources and increasing the community's involvement in literacy activities. The Contry manager supported MESC by serving as a judge for the literacy category in the SSILNaS competition in 2022 and in MESC's 2020 SSILNaS program design. Also, the Program Manager served as a judge for the Year 12 & Year 13 Samoa National Speech Competition in 2021. In September of 2021, The Peace Corps in Samoa implemented a week-long Counterparts Workshop for English Literacy with 10 Upolu primary school educators to share English literacy resources and teaching ideas. This training was funded by the Small Project Assistance (SPA) program of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC). These represent a significant asset to the education framework and the equipping of the facilitators.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Pacific Countries and Territories are made up of economies that are classified as developing or emerging. Wages in the economies are comparatively lower including those working in the education sector. Although the cost of education is relatively higher for the learners, the introduction and support by the development partners provides the much needed support to ensure a lot more learners are able to receive education. Many of the various stakeholders are engaged in education sector plans, strengthening legal systems, policies and strategies aimed towards, increasing the number of suitable young children with quality early learning opportunities, building education system capacities that solve issues like at risk students, and students with learning needs, and capacities that strengthen resilience and prepare learners and their learning communities respond to emergencies and disasters, and for delivery of quality and inclusive education services for all suitable learners(UNICEF 2022).

The level of economic development that an economy has been able to achieve does impact and reflect in the level of income it generates which then also determines the portion that is allocated to the departments and sectors. Samoa according to the available data has been comparatively successful in providing a better funding structure and development partnership engagement in their education sector. The various education development funding structure in Samoa includes ADB, New Zealand, Australia, Chinaaid, JICA, European Eunion, Peace Corps affiliated small grants programs and many other supporters. One this that is suggested from the various education related research is that, a decline in education funding contributes to the reduction in tuition,quality of education, educational institutional budget crisis, sometimes a reduction in faculties and departments,

limiting courses on offer, and in some cases the closure of educational institutions(Mitchell, Leachman and Masterson 2017). This is what has been limited and reduced in the case of Samoa through the help of the funding assistance that is provided through the various channels of support to the education sector.

The findings in this research has provided some of the main funding strategy, process and structure that is employed in Samoa as provided by the government departments and donor agencies. This does open up other areas of interest that fellow researchers can be conducted such as, the funding structure of the other pacific Island economies, the relative proportion of aid that is being provided to Samoa compared to the rest of the economies in the region, how their structure compares with Samoa and the rest of the world and other related areas that may be contributing to the differences in educational funding in the region.

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