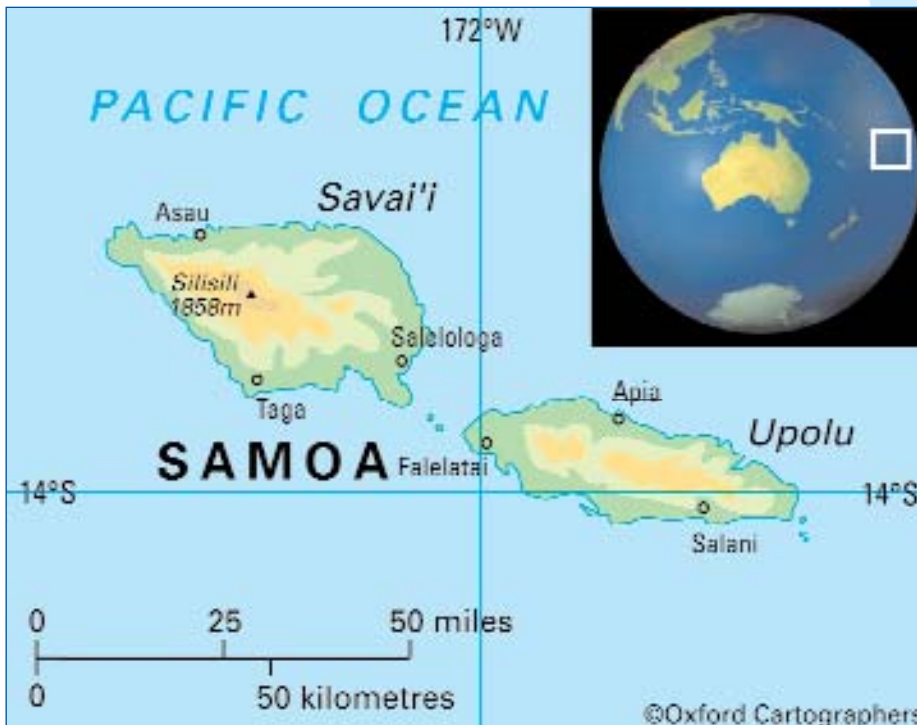




## THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN

## SAMOA



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The independent state of Samoa is a unitary state located in the south Pacific to the north-east of Fiji Islands. It comprises two major islands and seven small islands, five of which are uninhabited. There is a population of 180,741<sup>1</sup> on an area of 2,830 sq km.

The head of state, the O le Ao o le Malö, is elected by the parliament for a term of five years.

The head of government is the prime minister who appoints the 13-member cabinet from amongst the elected members.

The legislature is unicameral comprising 49 members. Forty-seven are elected to represent 41 constituencies. They are elected by universal adult suffrage but may be contested only by matai title-holders (chiefs of extended families, of whom there are 18,063). The two other members are elected on a separate voters' roll comprising citizens of European descent. The parliament is known as the Fono and sits for a five-year term.

## 2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF SAMOA

### 2.1 Position of local government in the state

Over the past five years the Samoan

government has put particular emphasis on economic revitalisation. This has focused on the agricultural sector and micro-enterprises. The village economy is at the centre of this policy.

The last general election was held in March 2006. The Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) won 37 seats, establishing a majority government. The Samoa Democratic United Party won eight seats and independents four. The next election is due not later than March 2011.

The Minister of Internal Affairs is responsible for local government matters and is responsible for enacting legislation and providing leadership in this sphere. The minister's powers are derived from the Internal Affairs Act 1995. On occasion the minister has had to suspend pulenu'u (village mayors) for not performing their duties and responsibilities. The prime minister is also involved with issues pertaining to tradition and culture.

There are 26 urban local governments plus the NCDC, 286 rural level local governments, 19 provinces and 89 districts. The capital, Apia, is managed by the national Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA). The distinction between urban and rural authorities is not always clear, with even the capital being managed by a fono.

## 3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 3.1 Constitutional provisions

The constitution is silent on the subject of local government.

### 3.2 Main legislative texts

The main legislation pertaining to local government is:

- Village Fono Act 1990
- Internal Affairs Act 1993.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for the administration of these laws.

## 4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

### 4.1 Main divisions

The main division in local government is between the rural village fono and the urban authorities. However, they operate as a single tier.

### 4.2 Distribution of local governments and population

The average population of the village fono is 1,300 and there is very little deviation from this. Some 29% of the population live in urban areas.

## 5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Village councils (fono) are made up of the matai (chief) of a village. Every family has a matai that is a member of the Village Fono. The village mayor (pulenu'u) is elected by and from the village councillors for a period of three years, using a first past the post system. Approximately 20% of matai are women.

### 5.1 Village fono

The village fono are required to establish executive committees and land boards. The councils' leaders are chairpersons directly elected. They are remunerated in accordance with levels set by the central government.

### 5.2 Local government staffing

Much of local government staffing is supplied by the Public Service Commission, which retains the authority to discipline and dismiss staff. Central government staff are also seconded to local authorities.

### 5.3 Independent scrutiny

The individual local authorities are not subject to any independent scrutiny.

## 6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

Local authorities are wholly responsible for pre-school services. They share responsibility with one or more other spheres of government for: policing and civil protection; education; kindergarten and family welfare services; water and sanitation; cemeteries and crematoria; slaughterhouses; sports and leisure; religious facilities; district heating; agriculture, forests and fisheries; economic promotion; trade and industry; and tourism.

## 7 FINANCE

### 7.1 Revenue

No information on the aggregate revenue of local government was available.

### 7.2 Revenue-sharing

Central government makes transfer payments to local authorities for capital development on an ad hoc basis.

### 7.3 Expenditure

No information on the aggregate expenditure was available.

Local authorities are not permitted to set deficit budgets.

## 8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There is no local government association.

## 9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Intergovernmental relations are conducted through both formal and *ad hoc* mechanisms. The assembly of pulenu'u and its executive committee promotes intergovernmental relations.

## 10 E-GOVERNMENT

There is no e-government currently in place, and there is no strategy to involve local government in a future e-government strategy. In 2004 there were estimated to be 7,000 internet users in Samoa, representing 3.4% of the population.<sup>2</sup>

## 11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

Central government is seeking to achieve greater involvement of pulenu'u (village mayors) in its decision-making. The Ministry has decided to focus its Institutional strengthening programme on improving local governance.

## 12 MISCELLANEOUS

Increasingly rural residents are becoming more aware and more informed of the work of central government.

### 12.1 Traditional leaders

The traditional leaders are of fundamental importance in the governance of Samoa in both the central and local government spheres. Their roles are to provide leadership and make laws.

## 13 SUMMARY

The local government system in Samoa is based on the traditional matai structures. The village fono have few exclusive responsibilities for service delivery, instead sharing the vast majority with one or more spheres of government. The village fono does though have significant socio-cultural responsibilities within the community.

### References

- 1 Government of Samoa, 2007
- 2 CIA World Factbook 2007.

