

GIRLS AND SPORTS IN SAMOA

CULTURE, POLICY AND PRACTICE IN
URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

SUZIE SCHUSTER AND PENELOPE
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Women, Sport and Exercise in the Asia-Pacific Region

Domination, Resistance,
Accommodation

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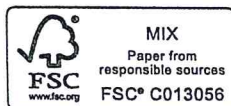
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Chapter 8

Girls and sports in Samoa

Culture, policy and practice in urban and rural communities

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Introduction

There are no published studies of girls' and women's sports participation in Samoa aside from Rasmussen and Fuamatu's (2012) historical reflections. Attitudes that defend the exclusion of girls and women from sport are found in many cultures and societies, for example that women are 'weak', that sports are 'unfeminine' and that women's sports do not attract public interest, sponsorship or create pathways to fame and fortune. These resonate worldwide and over time, as shown in feminist analyses of gender and sports (e.g. Scraton and Flintoff, 2013). In this chapter, we explain how Samoan gender norms limit the opportunities for girls, especially adolescent girls in rural areas, to take part in sports and athletics.

In our observations, apart from village volleyball, women's interest and participation in sports usually begins at school, particularly at secondary level. Our data is from a small survey of 26 secondary colleges selected because they offer the health and physical education (HPE) curriculum, designed to find out what was offered for girls and whether girls took part. We chose those schools from Samoa's 41 secondary colleges (of which three are private, 15 are church and 23 are government run) because by offering HPE they were the most likely colleges to provide organised sports for girls and boys. Throughout Samoa boys play rugby in nearly all secondary colleges, regardless of whether HPE is offered. We also interviewed the heads of Samoa's sports organisations, as well as leaders of aid donor- or government-sponsored sports programmes. In addition, we draw on our own observations and experience. We are both educators, married into Samoan families, and long-term residents of Samoa. One of us, Suzie Schuster, is Samoa's national swim coach.

Samoa in context

Society and custom

Samoa is a small island and developing country with a population of about 190,000 people. Since the 1960s there has been mass emigration to New Zealand, Australian and the United States. Most emigrant families retain close

ties to their families and villages in Samoa. As Muliana (2016) points out, Samoan families are transnationally united, with family members continuously moving between Samoa and overseas on family concerns. Family to family remittances to Samoa were recorded at STA\$32.2 million (about US\$15 million) in 2016 (Central Bank of Samoa, 2017).

Samoa comprises 192 'traditional' villages in rural and peri-urban areas, governed by councils of *matai* (chiefs). Every extended Samoan family has a *matai*, usually a man, who holds an ancestral name as a title. Titles are conferred by a consensus decision among the male and female elders of the lineage. Collectively *matai* are the authority of the village through its council (*fono*). Only 5.2 per cent of all village-based *matai* are women, according to a survey in 2014 (Meleisea *et al.*, 2015). *Matai* have considerable power and authority in setting priorities for the provision of services, land use, customary observances and maintenance of law and order. Most villages have access to electricity, piped water supplies, village and district schools and health centres.

Samoa women are as well educated as, if not better than, men; 47 per cent of women have secondary education compared with 44.1 per cent of men, and 11.5 per cent of women have tertiary qualifications compared with 10.5 per cent of men. Although, compared with men, a much smaller proportion of women of working age are counted as economically active (28 per cent) or engaged in remunerated employment (22 per cent), this inequity reflects not only the number of women who stay at home to care for family, but also the very low female share of unskilled labour. It also disguises women's 23 per cent share of skilled and professional employment compared with the 10 per cent share of men (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

According to custom, Samoan daughters have high status in their own family. But if, after marriage, they go to live with their husband's family and in his village (as is usually expected), they are required to do most of the housework and cooking. Many young women have a hard time in their new role. However, when their husband receives a *matai* title, their status rises in the family and in the village women's committee (Meleisea *et al.*, 2015).

Urban sports facilities

Apia is the capital of Samoa and its only town, with a population of about 30,000 (which does not include the population of peri-urban areas). Until 2006, Apia Park was the centre of all sporting activities. It housed the main rugby competition field, track, national stadium and national gymnasium for all court sports, outdoor netball courts, tennis courts and lawn bowls centre. In the past, it even had a track for horse racing. There was a leap forward in 2007 when Samoa hosted the South Pacific Games that included over 17 countries and 24 sports for a two-week competition. A successful bid to host the games came with the commitment of providing international standard sporting facilities including an Olympic-size swimming pool. The Government of Samoa completed the

sizable task of building the Tuanaimato Sports Complex on government land in Faleata, a peri-urban area. The facilities there now consist of the Aquatic Centre with two 50-metre pools, a regulation dive well and a children's splash pool, a softball diamond, baseball diamond, squash courts, beach volleyball facilities, netball courts, basketball gymnasium, field hockey centre and areas for boxing and weightlifting competitions.

With these new government facilities, Apia also saw rapid growth in the health and fitness industry. In 1993, there were two privately owned gyms catering for personal weightlifting, squash and aerobics. Now there are over 12 private gyms scattered throughout the peri-urban area offering zumba, boxing, tai chi, mixed martial arts, weightlifting, cycling, cross fit and other group exercise programmes. These gyms are easily accessible to many within the urban areas, who have the financial means to pay for the classes or to join the gyms. Since the expansion of these facilities, one might assume that they have created a hive of activities for urban dwellers, especially youth. However, based on our observations, this is not the case; those facilities are underutilised.

Sports, policy and education

Government policy

Sports are seen partly as a means of promoting development in Samoa (Kwauk, 2015) and many sports are funded by external sources. Because aid to Samoa comes from international organisations with commitments to gender equality and the rights of women and girls, Samoa's sports policy explicitly endorses women's participation and specifies five goals for women's inclusion. Sports associations in Samoa have women's programmes and women's coordinators. The first Sports Policy was launched in 2010 and is administered as part of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC). It states: 'The National Sports Policy seeks to ensure that the Government of Samoa, the Samoa Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (SASNOC), National Sports Associations/Federations and other key agencies [are] together fulfilling a common vision'. Among the nine policy goals, number seven states that: 'All Samoan children and youth leave school physically educated and with the knowledge, skills and confidence in sports and physical activity to enable life-long involvement'. The policy also includes five objectives for women in sports, for their inclusion, rural participation, resourcing, skill development and opportunities (Samoa Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2010).

The Health and Physical Education curriculum and teachers

Officially, schools encourage girls and boys to participate in sports. The MESC Strategic Policies and Plan July 2006–June 2015 included sports as part of HPE

learning. The policy statement advocates encouragement of participation of all students in physical education, physical activity and sports. It also states that HPE is to be compulsory for one hour a week for Years 9–13 and is to be made examinable in Years 12 and 13. It is divided into four strands but only one involves active movement. Boodoosingh (2016: 122–124) suggests that many teachers are likely to be uncomfortable with the curriculum, especially the two strands that cover relationships and human reproduction because of the Samoan cultural prohibition of any topic with sexual connotations. Her analysis suggests that the predominantly male HPE teachers would not feel comfortable teaching that strand of HPE to a mixed-sex class.

HPE teachers are mainly male in both rural and urban areas (41 male and 15 female) and the majority of HPE teachers have no formal HPE qualifications. Because so few women teach the subject there are lack of female role models in HPE teaching and without women HPE teachers in most secondary colleges, sports for girls are unlikely to be supported. Furthermore, as our survey data suggested, male teachers are unlikely to know what physical education would meet the needs of girls. Most of them thought girls were not interested in sports, with only a minority saying that they thought girls were keen to play (Samoa Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2004: 35).

In all, 27 of 41 secondary colleges offer HPE. The remaining 14 colleges do not offer HPE even though it is part of the required curriculum (Samoa Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2016). In 2005, the first teacher-training workshop for the HPE curriculum was attended by only 14 of the 44 identified teachers from government and church schools; such low attendance suggests that school principals do not value practical and vocational subjects, which seems to be confirmed by the slow uptake of the subject. Although there are 56 trained HPE teachers overall, some colleges have no teachers while others have as many as five. The uneven distribution is due to the fact that few schools have accommodation for teachers; therefore, teachers must be recruited from the college catchment area. The disparity of HPE teachers is greatest in colleges in Savaii, a rural area.

Secondary college sports

Our observations are that relatively few women and girls compared with men and boys, play sports in Samoa, despite the government policy for gender equity. Our survey found that there was little difference between rural and urban colleges; in the 26 schools we surveyed, girls participate in sports significantly less than boys do. All the 26 colleges in the survey participate in inter-school rugby competitions, 19 of them also participate in netball tournaments and 21 participate in athletic competitions. Both primary and secondary schools in Samoa usually have playing fields that are used by the local community as well as by the schools. The most common reasons given for lower participation by girls were 'Samoan culture' or 'parental discouragement'. Another reason offered was

that female peer groups in schools dislike sports, and also that girls see no future in sports or opportunities for participation after leaving school. Other reasons given included: lack of transport, lack of previous experience in the sport, 'shyness', 'health reasons' (menstruation) and 'laziness' or (unspecified) 'bad attitudes'.

Sports development programmes

Sport as social intervention

Hartmann and Kwauk (2011: 285) suggest that there are two different approaches to sport as a part of a development strategy: 'a dominant vision, in which sport essentially reproduces established social relations, and an interventionist approach, in which sport is intended to contribute to more fundamental change and transformation'. As we have shown, sports certainly reproduce established social relations in the context of gender norms. But there is also a vision of sports as a means of social intervention and potential economic empowerment, a vision which only targets males. As Kwauk (2015: 644) points out: 'Samoans perceive sport as enabling "at risk" youth to serve their families, to learn English and to become globally minded, ultimately equipping them with the skills needed to achieve transnational futures once beyond their reach'. A recent survey of village council representatives (Meleisea *et al.*, 2015: 33) found that village leaders have more practical concerns; they think that boys who have left school and who have not found paid work are potential trouble-makers. Their solution is to organise rugby teams and village working groups to occupy young men and channel their energy. Young women school leavers without paid jobs were not a concern, as long as they avoid unwed pregnancy.

Samoa Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (SASNOC)

One of SASNOC's roles is to introduce sport to schools through the platform of the Samoa Games. In 2016, the programme promoted 'new' sports of hockey, basketball, tennis, swimming, weightlifting, table tennis and boxing along with established games of cricket, volleyball and rugby. The coordinator said that when sport events were held in rural areas many girls took part, not only school girls, but adult women who came and played volleyball and cricket. Men and boys are targeted for boxing, and although some girls in secondary schools were interested to learn boxing, parents were likely to oppose it. The coordinator thought that training centres should be established in rural areas for school leavers. The coordinator commented that parents do not see sports as a potential success pathway for girls; girls who have played sports at school have no opportunities once they leave and, furthermore, girls who fail at school face an uphill battle, as parents see them as having failed at everything. The coordinator

advocated promoting women's sports, but said that because of their 'household chores' it is hard for older girls and women in rural villages to find time during the day to train for sports. The coordinator mentioned that the Women's Division of the Ministry for Women, Community and Social development should have programmes that support women's village-based sports and sports training.

SASNOC is also affiliated with the International Women in Sports Commission. In an interview, the chair of the Samoa branch commented that the secondary school HPE curriculum focuses on health and personal development, but does not expressly encourage girls and boys to participate in athletics and sports. Furthermore, parents do not encourage their daughters to take part because they do not see job prospects for girls in sports. In comparison, rugby has created some high-profile jobs for Samoan men overseas as coaches or players. The chair also noted that apart from school playing fields and basketball courts at Mormon churches, there were few facilities for sports in rural areas. She said that the participants in the first 'Woman in Sports Festival' in 2016 were mainly urban, and the facilities used are all based in Apia. The event included lawn bowls, outrigger canoeing, squash, running, shot-put and fitness components for strength, power and cardio fitness.

Samoa English Cricket Association (SECA)

Samoaan cricket (*kilikiti*) is a traditional sport played by men, women and children of all ages and in the past there were regular matches between villages. Initially, only foreigners living in towns played 'English' cricket, but it is now being introduced to schools and village organisations such as women's committees by SECA. This organisation is promoting the game and in the younger age groups boys and girls play in same-sex teams, but teenagers and adults play in separate male and female teams. The SECA coordinator for Apia and the surrounding area said that there was a lower turnout among girls compared with boys, but that this varied from region to region. It depended very much on the attitudes of the parents. The SECA coordinator explained in an interview that '... many [parents] don't allow girls to be out unsupervised after school so this means few turn up for tournaments'. In four villages, there are 'Healthy Nana' cricket programmes for older women, aiming to promote healthier lifestyles. Another program is 'Super Hits' (modified cricket) on Saturdays in the town area, which is for all boys and girls, any age, and is free. Numbers taking part have grown from around 50 to over 200.

'Get into Rugby': The Samoa Rugby Union (SRU)

Rugby is a beloved sport in Samoa and as noted previously, one in which many Samoan men have made international careers, although most of them started as New Zealand citizens or residents. To build the game in Samoa, in 2016 the SRU started a 'Get into Rugby' initiative that targeted boys and girls aged five to

18 years. In total, 35 primary and 28 secondary schools in urban and rural areas have been earmarked with hopes to increase the programme throughout 2017. Because rugby is a highly physical game with rough bodily contact, the organisers believe that girls (or their parents) are put off by it. Accordingly, the programme for girls is mainly 'tag rugby'. The programme reaches far fewer girls than boys because of the expectation that girls should stay at home after school to do chores, or because of the perception that rugby is 'masculine'. In rural areas, if girls play sport at all, volleyball and netball are perceived as the sports suitable.

The organiser for the girls' 'Get into Rugby' programme said in an interview that in Savaii some women feel that the girls are left out, querying why girls cannot travel to Apia for competitions like the boys. Although the SRU can finance girls' teams to come to compete in Apia, this will not be a long-term solution to getting girls involved unless village councils of *matai* support it, which few do. The programme organiser said special efforts needed to be made to get leadership support for girls' rugby. To build support she held a tournament in her own village, with young girls teaching the sessions and leading games, and with zumba offered in the evening for anyone to participate.

However, the schools' 'Get into Rugby' organiser said that there are obstacles to involving girls:

The programme gets the blame if the girls mingle with boys, and in the village teenage girls must wear a *lavalava* [traditional article of clothing worn by males and females consisting of a rectangular cloth worn wrapped around the body from knee to waist] over their shorts, which impedes their freedom of movement on the field.

He explained that if girls and boys from the same family are in a team and there is 'dirty talk' among the boys, families will stop the girls from playing. This is because Samoan custom forbids mention of sexual matters in front of people related as brother and sister. At the national level the organiser said that there is not much interest in competitions played by girls and women and the women's team is the first to be cut from travelling if SRU budgets are tight. In our discussion with three prominent women working for the SRU, they pointed out that in the past there were no programmes supporting girls to play rugby. As Rasmussen and Fuamatu (2012: 212) reported, when the Samoa Women's Rugby Union was first established in 1998: 'The perceived intrusion of women into this sport, donning "men's" rugby boots and jerseys, was not welcomed by many men, and neither by many women, who were critical of participation by women in this sport'.

Samoa netball

Netball is one of the most popular women's sports in Samoa. The national organisation 'Netball Samoa' has been the recipient of a four-year on-going funding scheme from the Australian Government. In an interview, the CEO for

Netball Samoa said the overall aim was to use netball as a model to develop the sport and the health of communities, however, despite the perception of netball as a suitable sport for girls, there is still low netball participation in rural Samoa. She commented that girls and women everywhere play volleyball although it is not organised as a national sport:

Efforts have been made through a grassroots program to train the trainers [but it] did not work out in the villages, probably due to lack of trainers, leadership and role models. Netball rings given to villages ended up being used as volleyball posts.

One issue the coordinator mentioned is that villages have developed a 'freebie mentality' because of aid being given for sports, so people expect transport, uniform and equipment to be provided for them. She thought that the divide between sports opportunities in urban and rural areas is getting bigger and pointed out that there are peri-urban areas 'that are not organised as traditional villages, where the people don't participate in [nearby] town area sports community, although they probably have lots of talent which is not being developed'.

Culture, class and locality

Culture, sex and gender

In Samoa, a particular impediment to girls' participation in sports is the cultural ideal that girls should be carefully supervised in the interval between puberty and marriage to ensure they do not lose their virginity, or worse, become pregnant. It is not unusual for an older boy to order his teenage sisters to stay in the house, to avoid the shame he would experience if other boys gossiped about them. The need to supervise teenage girls was raised as an issue in all our interviews with sport leaders, as well as with HPE teachers. Coaches, teachers and parents are all expected to make efforts to prevent adolescent girls from making friends with boys, especially as Samoan attitudes do not permit sex education in schools, forbid mention of sexuality in families and discourage unmarried access to contraceptives. Another deterrent for a young married woman is the expectation that she should be at the disposal of her husband, mother-in-law and other in-laws, not playing sport.

Life in a Samoan village is intensely social and intermingled with the routines of village churches such as meetings, fundraising, choir practice and Sunday services. The family takes priority over the individual in all things, and after family there is the commitment to the church and collective village activities. Coaches and sports organisers mentioned family obligations, such as going to the airport to meet or see off visiting relatives, preparations for church events, practising performance items for fundraising. Funerals in the village always

require children and young people to participate in preparing and serving food and carrying gifts between family groups, at the expense of school or sports training commitments. Children and adolescents are strictly disciplined in most Samoan families and must ask for permission to leave the house (*fa'anoi*) when they are not at school. Nearly all our informants emphasised that girls have 'chores' which require them to stay at home and which prevent them from sports participation. None made reference to the fact that boys also have chores to do at home, which are also demanding and time-consuming. The difference between girls and boys is not that girls have more chores; it is that boys are permitted freedom of movement, which places few restrictions on them as long as their chores are done.

Bodily modesty

Participation in sports and athletics requires clothing, which Samoans regard as immodest for girls and women. Notions of modesty forbid clothing that highlights the body between waist and knee, for men and women alike, but particularly for women. Many villages forbid girls and women to wear shorts and those living in villages do not swim in bathing suits, but in *lava-lava*, usually worn over underwear or leggings. Modesty wins over policy – the Aquatic Centre in Apia mandates that all swimmers wear appropriate swim clothing, which implies bathing suits, but has never reinforced this policy. Users of the facility are still able to swim in shorts, t-shirts and *lava-lavas*. Some girls discontinue swim training because, as their parents explained to their coach, they were embarrassed about their bodies and did not want to wear a swimsuit if this was required. Teachers sometimes reinforce these attitudes, even in the urban areas. For example, in an interview, an Apia-based high school teacher forbade his students to wear bathing suits and instructed them to 'cover their body' by wearing shorts, t-shirts or other clothes. He explained that a school-based programme should not allow revealing clothing: 'I don't want the boys and girls getting the wrong idea. They don't need to get distracted. The lesson has both boys and girls in it – I don't want any bad behaviour'.

Gender images and sports

The way that gender is imagined and symbolised in Samoan culture is influential. Samoa's national heroes are men who play for rugby league and rugby union teams overseas and secure lucrative contracts in Japan, the United Kingdom and France. Other national heroes are the men who have achieved international stardom as wrestlers and boxers. Success stories like these encourage parents and their sons to make time for training (Kwauk, 2014). For many years femininity combined with high achievement in sports has mainly been performed by *fa'afafine* (transgender males) who, no matter how big and strong, eschew 'masculine' sports and excel at netball. Samoan women are typically depicted in

tourist posters and on souvenir tee-shirts as graceful village maidens, mixing the ceremonial kava, or elegant ladies wrapped modestly in lava-lavas with flowers in their hair. There are exceptions, such as Vaimasenu'u Zita Martel, female coxswain of a leading Samoan longboat (*fautasi*) crew (hitherto an exclusively male role) who in 2015 was featured in a large poster advertising mobile phone services.

Another female sporting hero is Ele Opeloge, who retroactively earned an Olympic silver medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Ele's history is instructive because she comes from a family of high achieving male weightlifters that encouraged her to train and compete, thus bypassing the usual obstacles for female athletes. These are rare examples, but because they offer new role models, they may be inspiring more girls to take up sports. These role models may explain why, according to SASNOC officials, a number of girls as well as boys have recently taken the opportunities offered to school leavers to train in weightlifting, which mean two sessions a day and a strict diet. Another rare example of a woman in traditional male sport is one of Samoa's amateur competitive woman boxers. She is a lawyer who grew up in New Zealand where she had many opportunities to participate in athletics. After a year in Samoa she found a coach and began training with a boxing group in town. This boxing ring offers community classes and many women attend. In an interview, she said her main problem to overcome was that men do not like to spar with women, because they dislike hitting a female. Women's boxing goes against Samoan cultural protocols – due to the connection between femininity and peace-making (*pae ma a'uli*), but so far nobody has publicly opposed her participation in the sport. This is likely to be because she is an urban professional who lives outside the village where village councils of *matai* and conservative community values enforce traditional norms.

Class and locality

As the case of this woman boxer illustrates, sports and athletics are very much the province of Samoa's middle-class urban elite who are only marginally bound by Samoan cultural norms, and whose preferences and values are shaped by their social and economic status (see Bourdieu, 1978). In the colonial era and for several decades after, nearly all sports were for the privileged and included tennis, lawn bowl, golf, horse racing and many other sports unavailable to most Samoans. It is not merely that the urban elite has better access to sports facilities and training; many Samoans of lower economic status living in or around the town have access, but do not participate. As we have shown, the rural-urban divide in Samoa is greatest in relation to sports amenities and opportunities. Unlike most Pacific small island states, rural villages in Samoa have well developed infrastructure, but they do not enjoy proximity to gymnasiums, sports fields, golf courses, tennis courts and other sporting facilities. Nor do they have access to after-school transport to attend training and practice, to sporting

equipment, sportswear, sports training and coaching expertise, beyond that offered by the district secondary college.

Village programmes

Aid-funded village and community level sports projects show that role models and motivated coaches can help. Exemplary leaders who are encouraging girls to engage in sport are found in various villages throughout Samoa. For example, the Taga Sports club is in a rural area of Savaii, and promotes netball, soccer and rugby, using the district college playing field. The participants are mainly senior college students, with girls comprising about a third of the members. They play sevens rugby and netball. The organisation is looking for ways to involve school leavers in rural areas and has succeeded in attracting growing numbers of girls as well as boys. Despite traditional norms, parents are beginning to see the benefits of allowing girls to participate in sports programmes as boys do. A rare example of success in village-level women's rugby is the village of Sa'anapu. As teacher at Safata College said:

Sa'anapu loves their rugby. They love their teams. Everyone is behind their success. The women's team has had as many successes as the men's team. There is never a question of rugby participation in our village – both male and female – as they win so many tournaments.

However, even the best efforts face challenges. The only village swimming club is in Saluafata, a rural community in northeast Upolu. It is assisted by an Apia-based swim coach who leads two training sessions per week. He has struggled to keep girls in the club; nearly all the 15 original girls who took part have dropped out because they moved elsewhere or were kept home by parents. Currently there are five girls, but more than twice as many boys on the team. The village coach brings his daughters. The village is proud of the swimmers, who post their activities on Facebook and have engaged in the international swim events in Apia. The coach thinks that local leadership is the key; having a village-based coach who has the respect and trust of the community and support from the *matai*. But national level support is also needed, to provide transport, secure gear from overseas and ensure readiness for competitions.

The CEO of Netball Samoa expressed disappointment at rural participation rates in Samoa and pointed to the success of Pacific Islander women in netball overseas. In Tonga and in Fiji, netball receives larger community support. She pointed out that although girls do better academically than boys overall, they are disadvantaged in Samoa when it comes to sports. Accordingly, netball is tailored to the demand, which is from girls from urban families who can afford their daughters' after school sport and provide them with transport and supervision. The need for villages to have advocates for women's sports and athletics was also emphasised by the Sports Development coordinator of SASNOC:

'When villages have proven success in a sport, then local leaders rise to continue the momentum of the village success. The team is not only celebrated, the village gets the honours as well'.

Conclusion: a school-village partnership programme for girls' sports

As our survey data and interviews have shown, despite all the policies for sports equity for women and girls, and efforts to promote health and exercise for girls and boys via the school curricula, Samoan culture continues to be a major impediment to women's participation and equity in sports. The opportunities are not being realised for girls and women. Samoa has very fine sports facilities compared with most small island states, yet they are out of reach for most villagers, especially girls. Most of the sports leaders we interviewed pointed out that, with the exception of some middle-class parents, Samoan parents tend to be doubtful about allowing their daughters to participate in sports because of cultural values.

To fulfil the government's policy for girls, women and sport, far more effort will be needed to place more emphasis in the HPE curriculum on physical activities, and to train and employ more women HPE teachers to promote athletics and sports for girls as well as boys. However, the key to including girls and women in rural communities will be support from village leaders. Nearly every village in Samoa has a primary school and every rural district has at least one secondary college. Village leaders comprise the majority of members of school management committees. What is needed is a strategy to win support from school principals, village leaders and parliamentarians so that they will encourage girls and women to participate in sports. To overcome cultural anxieties, separate, supervised programmes for girls could be offered. Villages compete with one another for renown; once there are successful female village teams, other villages will emulate them. A programme is needed to develop village-school partnerships to get girls into sport, that emphasise opportunities for girls, that maximise the school's resources – playing fields and teachers – and that provide sports equipment for communities through their schools, working with village authorities.

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