

Women's leadership in Samoa

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Abstract

Women are under-represented in village councils, the local judiciary of traditional village communities in Samoa. The participation rate of women leaders is relatively low as the total population of these forums is predominantly male. Village councils consist of holders of matai titles only. Of the 240 traditional villages in Samoa, 41 do not allow women to be bestowed with matai titles. Additionally, 34 other traditional villages do not allow resident female matai to participate in village council meetings. Therefore, these restrictions heavily contribute to the under-representation of women in the local judiciary of traditional village communities. This article aims to explore reasons for women's under-representation as well as investigating why village rules have been established to restrict women from holding matai titles, and not recognising their participation in village council meetings. It is possible that tensions may have existed between patriarchal administration and potential women leaders who challenge the status quo.

In this article, I draw on the literature which examines the perspectives through a feminist lens to contextualise the suppression women have encountered while striving for leadership positions and relate this to village councils of traditional communities in Samoa. A mixed method methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis gathers information for the study. The findings reveal that cultural, social, and religious obstacles restrain potential women leaders from accessing leadership posts in local government. Other interesting aspects of the findings include the communal and non-hierarchical nature of women in empowering themselves when advocating for their rights to leadership.

Keywords

Representation, Participation, Patriarchal, Administration, Potential, Challenge, Leadership

Introduction

The authority to establish rules and punishments in traditional village communities rests with the village council. This forum ensures that all village citizens conform to ascribed norms and sanctions. Therefore, women leaders, as the minority group, struggle to counter the rules that restrict them from holding matai titles and not recognising their participation in village council meetings.

This article highlights the obstacles Samoan women experience while striving for leadership posts in village councils. It also provides a platform for the voices of suppressed women leaders, acknowledging their engagement in enabling activities. Through a *talanoa* research framework, this study generates dialogue about the leadership oppression faced by women in traditional communities in Samoa. The study also advocates for potential women leaders to take up leadership challenges. Employing a *talanoa* research framework provides a frame to educate village women about their rights to leadership; challenge the mind-set of women subordinates; encourage prospective women leaders; and generate dialogue about general gender inequalities in Samoan traditional communities. The article also appeals to village councils to re-examine the rules that hamper women from holding matai titles as this is the gateway to other leadership opportunities.

This article scrutinises the hierarchical leadership structure of traditional villages in Samoa to determine the limitations placed on women leaders. It makes reference to the original leadership authority of the *tama'ita'i Samoa* before foreign contact. Examples of women's suppressions are drawn from other Pacific cultures and from further afield, to depict the constraints faced by women leaders in general. Specific references focus on women leaders in village communities in Samoa. To authenticate women leaders' oppression and the implications of this, the article critiques the patriarchal leadership phenomenon of the *Fa'amatai* system through a feminist theoretical lens.

Background

Leadership of most Pacific Islands is generally patriarchal, and male leaders ensure that essential values and beliefs of the communities are maintained. One of the integral parts sustained and safeguarded is male leadership territory. In Tonga, most traditional communities desire to keep the monarchical system (Taufe'ulungaki, 2009). In Samoa, the *Fa'amatai* System is dominant and forms all types of administration for social and religious institutions on the local and national levels (Toleafoa, 2007). Teairo (2009) notes that all Pacific cultures have indigenous principles, theories, and images blended into their leadership models. These are executed in ways that achieve the conservation of cultural values and beliefs (Te'o, 2011). These cultural values and beliefs emphasise the importance of patriarchal rule.

The two dominant leadership frameworks in most Pacific countries are the *big man* and *chiefly leadership* cultural models (Bhim, 2006). Bhim notes that the status of big men emerges from demonstrating unique skills such as magic, bravery, and wealth. The ascribed status legitimates these particular chiefs to govern their traditional societies. On the other hand, chiefly titles in Samoa are inherited. However, some chiefly titles are accomplished through political influences. The power of matai in Samoa is mandated and not to be challenged. The matai system in village communities is autocratic (Lewin, Lippit, & White, 1939) especially with decision making. The autocratic authority of patriarchal leaders is adhered to as it is the norm. Hence, those potential women leaders who intentionally challenge the status quo, struggle.

Samoa myths, genealogies, and traditional roles of women demonstrate the leadership power attributed to females as highly regarded people (Le Tagalao, 1996).

However, amendments in traditional leadership framing influenced by colonisation and Christianity have diminished the leadership power of women. As a result, the number of male leaders in many traditional societies continues to increase (Schoeffel, 1979). Patriarchal leadership emerged in the mid-17th century and became very active in all traditional village communities in Samoa. In their efforts to empower more people in the leadership arena, Samoans have generated new titles and allowed numerous titles to be singly or jointly held. The recruitment of new titles predominantly involves males – thus limiting opportunities for prospective females to hold matai titles and participate in the leadership arena of traditional village communities.

Feminist theory

Feminist theory is an outcome of the general movement to empower women worldwide (Malabre, 1978). According to the Malabre, the feminist movement can be broadly defined as a critique of male authority together with efforts to change it. The explanation warrants using feminist theory to scrutinise the obstacles Samoan women encounter in striving for leadership positions in local government. Feminist theory is about social justice, advocating for marginalised women, and attending to injustices (Barton, 2006). The notion of promoting social justice is fitting for this study given the suppression of women leaders in traditional communities in Samoa. According to Tong (1989), feminist theory helps people to honour the feminine and encourages both men and women to be more authentic. Honouring women's capabilities is one of the main foci of this study.

Feminist theory in the Pacific context is about the equality of all people, and social justice (Griffen, 1989). The concept of social justice, according to Griffen (1989), incorporates feminist perspectives of Pacific women from Guam, Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Cook Islands and Samoa. The same author concludes that Pacific feminists strive for opportunities to participate equally with men in decision-making forums. Similarly, this study aims to provide platforms for Samoan women leaders in village communities to be as equally involved as men in decision making. Most of the theoretical characteristics of feminist theory were evident in the interviews and observations – thus affording the eligibility of these theoretical lenses in validating the information provided by participants of the study.

Methods

This qualitative research involved the participation of 15 women leaders selected through a purposive sampling technique. The selection takes into account the experience and wealth of knowledge women have about the investigated topic (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). The intention of gaining detailed, rich information (Patton, 2002) was the main reason why the research employed the purposive sampling approach. It was envisaged that the selected women would freely provide confident and thorough responses to the interview questions. Patton (2002) also alludes to the strategic nature of the purposive method in ensuring that substantial information about the explored topic is extracted.

All participants were Samoan females whose ages range from 50 to 76 years. They were chiefs, orators, or holders of managerial positions in government ministries, non-government organisations and private entities. The 15 participants' anonymity was protected through a numerical system. In this article, the responses of each individual quoted can be traced since direct quotations from the data are numbered accordingly. Standard ethics of anonymity were observed, and each of the 15 participant interviews was conducted either in English or Samoan, depending on the participant's choice. The English interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, while the Samoan interviews were later translated into English. Participants received a transcribed version and final script of their interview to ensure accuracy. The length of the interviews varied from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes.

Interviews were facilitated by the talanoa research methodology, a Pacific conversational approach where people converse in a language of their choice (Vaiolleti, 2006). Talanoa in the interviews focused on the four research questions listed as follows:

1. What are the challenges that prevent Samoan women from being traditional leaders?
2. What is leadership for women in traditional village communities in Samoa?
3. What are the strategies Samoan women use to serve as leaders?
4. How do Samoan social philosophies, cultural beliefs, and perceptions inform women's leadership?

The main research question was: *“What are the gender inequalities pertaining to Samoan women's leadership, representation, and participation in the local government of village communities?”*

Participants were given a choice of language to use in the interviews. The nine rural participants selected the Samoan language, while the six urban participants selected bilingualism. Manu'atu (2000) claims that the context in which people activate talanoa is both formal and informal. Talanoa at the participants' homes in village communities started off with a formal address in which the sacredness of the land, spirits of ancestors and family gods were all acknowledged. This address is significant regarding asking for permission to allow the researcher on to the people's land. Talanoa upholds practices that elevate people's identity, strengthen contextual cultural elements, and simplify evidence of activities in the Pacific context (Anae, Mila-Schaaf, Coxon, Mara, & Sanga, 2010). Rural participants were overwhelmed and appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the research. They took their time, and happily responded to questions in the tranquillity of their homes. Participants acknowledged their ancestors and family gods who passed over the leadership knowledge and skills. Nabobo-Baba (2005) alludes to a major significant element of talanoa whereby people, protocols, and ethical values shape the direction of the research process. The researcher and participants upheld the value of respect as the talanoa progressed. However, there were spaces for side-tracked conversations and short intervals for parties. The researcher gifted the participants with money and groceries at the end of the talanoa sessions; reciprocally, the hosts prepared meals to share with the researcher. The researcher went back to the participants to validate the transcripts to ensure the recording captured the participants' viewpoints.

Participants were informed that information provided and their identities would be anonymised. Therefore, participants are known as Participant 1 to Participant 15 in the study.

Results

Results from participant interviews identified cultural, religious, and social barriers as major hurdles that restrain potential women leaders from participating in local government of traditional village communities in Samoa. These major hurdles are continuously enforced by rules and practices and are monitored and controlled by local government. Participant 5 strongly refutes the controlling manner of local government by saying:

These male leaders control local government in ways to suit them and their egos. They always look for excuses of convenience to defend their gender-biased decisions. This is why they never allow women to participate in meetings of local government because they don't want to be challenged.

Participant 8 lamented the same sentiment:

It's disheartening to witness the absence of women in decision making because of the male leaders' roadblock. These leaders should provide equal opportunities for both genders instead of sparing the decision-making arena for themselves only. This is very selfish of them.

Participant 2 specifically points to a cultural barrier established by male leaders. In her own words she says:

Male leaders always think it is culturally appropriate for them to lead organisations of any type. Be it the family, village, church, district, even politics. This cultural belief is generally expected, supported and practiced. The worst thing is, it diminishes the chance[s] for prospect[ive] women leaders.

The opinions of the quoted participants portray their disappointment with male leaders who establish systems that disadvantage prospect women leaders.

There was a strong willingness in participants to advocate for potential women to be bestowed with matai titles, and their participation to be recognised in village council meetings. However, restrictions force them to utilise their leadership skills in women's committees where they are actively involved in running small businesses and income-generating activities (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996).

Participant 10 expressed readiness to fight for the rights of women leaders. She says:

Women need to exercise their rights to leadership. They should hold matai titles of their families and join local government to challenge the status quo. Women leaders must participate in village council meetings. No one should take away this privilege from women.

This quote sends a strong message to all women who are striving for leadership

positions. It also encourages potential women leaders to be more proactive in challenging male leaders' decisions.

Some of the participants describe how they secretly confront male leaders without upsetting the cultural protocols of local government. Cultural protocols are central to people's everyday life. The sacredness of cultural protocols should not be compromised as this results in punishments. Consequently, women maintain peace while covertly convincing male leaders of the significance of women leaders' participation.

Despite the hindrances, women have explored empowerment avenues to uplift the standard of living in communities. Additionally, 75% of all community women have participated in leadership training and entrepreneurial initiatives (Samoa Women Empowerment Project Report, 2015). Women's participation in these activities proves that their lower status in the hierarchical structure of village communities does not undermine their perception of development and achievements (Le Tagalao, 1996). Women's active participation in developmental activities is evident in the following quotes:

Participant 1:

I enjoy learning leadership trainings to gain confidence in my role as a leader. I also love to engage in money generating activities to raise the standard of living of my family. I don't worry about male leaders because they don't work hard, but talk hard.

Participant 3:

I focus mainly on developing my family because I am happy to witness my own achievements. I claim that I am successful in all these because of my effective leadership skills.

Participant 11:

Men cannot do what the women do. Men spend most of their time talking and dreaming. Women have proven themselves very successful because they plan well. Women work extremely hard to ensure that their families are secured financially, socially and spiritually.

Participant 15:

As a woman leader, I move forward with the developments all the time. I am happy to provide the social and financial needs of my family. My family takes advice from me because they see how hard-working I am. I am a leader in my own right.

In summary, women claim that they are eligible to hold leadership positions because they have proven to be successful in the things they do. Unfortunately, they are denied the right to leadership in these contexts, and are assumed to be supporters and advisers to male leaders.

Cultural challenges

Historically, Samoan society was patriarchal in terms of leadership since the advent of colonisation and Christianity in 1830 (Te’o, 2011). Prior to foreign contact, Queen Salamasina, holder of the four paramount chiefly titles (pāpā) reigned for more than 60 years (Meleisea, 1987). Prior to Queen Salamasina’s administration, the war goddess Nafanua was the initial ruler (Te’o, 2011). Participants during the talanoa sessions made reference to the matriarchal leadership that harmonised the country for many years. According to Participant 4:

The country lived in peace and harmony during Queen Salamasina’s time in power. People paid her a lot of respect because she was loving, caring and kind. She did not do any dirty politics but made sure her people lived happily. Now, these male leaders do corrupt practices which upset every single institution in the country.

Women’s strong voices were echoed regarding their appreciation of female leadership. Participant 7, in comparing leadership styles of males and females, said:

The patriarchal power in village councils is regulatory, governing and controlling. This leadership style contradicts with that of the females who are more accommodating and flexible.

Participant 9 alluded to the originality of patriarchal leadership. She said:

Male leadership is a Victorian era concept imposed by London Missionaries in 1830. It’s a pity because this is now seen as a norm. But, if we wind the clock back, we would see the effective leadership styles of Nafanua and Queen Salamasina as recorded in our myths.

Participant 14 commented on the ingrained mentality of male leadership, saying:

It’s very hard to change the patriarchal leadership as the idea is accepted generally. Whether women like it or not, it’s there, and the practices say it all. If I concentrate on improving my family, people would see the good leadership skills in me. So, hopefully, the mind-set will change.

The selection of matai is another influencing factor in women’s leadership. The nomination of matai titles is primarily male, as they are more capable of using Samoan proverbs in traditional speeches than women. Coupled with this is the belief that men are salient and fitting for the leadership task in the eyes of the community. This ingrained mentality makes women’s struggle for leadership very hard. However, women leaders do not dwell on this suppression, but vow to move forward in their development. Participant 6 said:

We need to educate people to change their mind-set about leadership. However, we shouldn’t push our agenda too far in case we ruin relationships and upset the cultural protocols of village communities.

Participant 12 thought along the same lines, stating:

What we should do is ensure that our families live in comfortable houses, eat healthy food, and wear good clothes. If we are able to provide necessities for our families that is the best that counts. Successful leadership is about achieving our goals, whatever they are.

In Samoa, 41 out of the 240 village councils do not allow women to hold matai titles. A total of 34 other villages do not recognise the participation of women matai in village council meetings (Center for Samoan Studies, 2015). The reasons for the rules include the inappropriateness of relatives in discussing fragile issues and sharing jokes in village meetings. However, this argument is claimed by participants of this study as an excuse of convenience for male leaders. The women further argue that a village council meeting is responsible for officiating rules and sanctions, but not a place for less important business. Participant 13 said:

The deep-rooted notion of male leadership has to be changed. Otherwise, women leaders continue to suffer the consequences.

Participant 15 strongly refuted the reason for refusing women in village councils. She said:

Male leaders never run out of excuses to safeguard and preserve the village council territory for themselves. They enjoy receiving things gifted to them by the villagers for doing nothing. The beauty of the Samoan culture is spoiled by these corrupt practices.

Social challenges

Assumptions that attach women to child rearing, taking care of old people, and domestic tasks are other restrictions for prospective women leaders. These ascribed roles make women vulnerable because doing otherwise is going against the norms of the society. Respecting male leaders who are physically seen in leadership roles is another contributing factor to rejecting female leaders. Regularity in attendance to village activities secures leadership positions for males. Consequently, the respect for prospective women leaders gradually diminishes as not playing leadership roles contributes to their ineligibility to compete in leadership posts. Participant 8 said:

We were the most sacred siblings until the missionaries came and said that we should raise children, nurse old people, and take care of the welfare of the family. This is not fair because such ascribed roles diminish the status of the Tama'ita'i Samoa. Now, people expect us to do all [the] domestic chores and treat us like door mats.

Participant 1 expressed the same sentiments by saying:

We are hardly seen in leadership positions because we are fully occupied with roles assigned to us by males. This is wrong because it makes us feel small and unworthy. But, if you do a survey of our potentials, you will be surprised to see that we are more capable leaders than males.

Women leaders partake in empowerment leadership training to refresh, explore, and gain new approaches to leadership (Samoa Women Empowerment Report, 2015). However, they are confined to leading women's committees. Therefore, they are not constituted leaders because of their absence in the decision making of the village. Consequently, these culture-oriented, conservative norms limit women's chances of becoming leaders (Le Tagaloa, 1996). The restrictions put pressure on prospective women leaders and the general population of women. This pressure is relieved through the women's following expressions.

Participant 15 said:

The community is blind-folded by the stupid mentality of associating women to domestic tasks. This strengthens the belief that women are only capable of leading the women's committee, a smaller organisation that equips women with skills to do domestic tasks.

Participant 12 contributed to the discussion by saying:

Women always look out for empowerment avenues to boost their morale and lift their profile. But, the community's expectation of women tarnishes their efforts. We are like animals in a cage and we are striving for ways to get out.

Participant 3 commented similarly:

It is surprising to see that the mentality of not accepting women leaders is deeply rooted in the mind-set of village community people who are supposed to be living in a world of changes. These people refuse to acknowledge the leadership capabilities of women.

Unfortunately, male leaders remain in power for most, if not all, traditional village communities, while women leaders endure as the minority.

Another barrier is government representatives (male and female) receiving unequal remuneration packages for the same job descriptions. The work of government representatives include the recording of births and deaths, promoting harmony in the village, enforcing law and order, preparing matai certificates, and encouraging health and sanitation activities (Internal Affairs Act 1995). However, the salary of the male representative is \$100 more than the female. Consequently, the male representative appears superior to the woman. Participant 10, who is a government representative, said:

The Internal Affairs' Division should raise women's salary to be equivalent with men because they perform the same roles. Therefore, I cannot see the logic in not having the same salary.

Another government representative, Participant 13, said:

The issue of salaries has been raised in our meetings many times, but falls on [deaf] ears. Our supervisor, the manager of the Internal Affairs usually says that our concern is noted. However, there is no action done, which is very sad.

The unequal treatment of women in the national government level strengthens the practices of 41 village councils that restrict women from holding matai titles. Women strongly disagree with this practice as it implies that men hold higher leadership positions than women.

Religious challenges

Patriarchal leadership, a concept prevalent in the Victorian era was introduced to the Samoan society when the missionaries from the London Missionary Society arrived in 1830. The notion was well supported by the introduction of Biblical values and beliefs. Participant 6 explained her experience:

These imposed ethics resulted in diminishing the status of the Tama'ita'i Samoa who was the most elite to being a commoner. She is now playing the advisory role, but not the sole decision maker. She is just like the wife of a pastor who advises the congregation on what to do. Sadly enough, the tama'ita'i's advice is not considered most of the time.

Participant 3 contributed to the discussion by saying:

Many alterations have been made since the introduction of male leadership. For example, the missionaries' wives prepared young Samoan women to cook for their husbands when they are married. In the past, it was the brother who prepared the sister's meals. This practice is a real disgrace that weakens the brother's respect for his sister [feagaiga].

In the meantime, the adopted role now becomes a Samoan society norm. It is evident that young women cook for men in the household, strengthening the leadership position of men, and weakening the leadership status of women.

Religious teachings also enforce male leadership, emphasising the rationale that as God, a man, is the head of the congregation, therefore the man is the analogical equivalent head of the household. Participant 9 expressed her disagreement to such analogy by saying:

Some people take it to the extreme that when walking, the wife does not walk alongside with the husband. She walks behind to illustrate the hierarchical level difference between the leader and the subordinate. Women who behave in such manner respect and honour the godly belief. I personally feel that this is an injustice.

Participant 1 contributed to the discussion:

Women should hold equal status, equal rights and equal everything to men. Men should not be superior. The problem is, some women encourage this wrong practice of respecting males as the supreme ruler and leader. This practice should be stopped.

Participant 3 sympathised with the former participants, she said:

I pity the women who think that their husbands hold a higher status than them. This typical thinking is wrong and should not be encouraged. Equal leadership rights should be enforced and practised all the time.

The majority of participants of this study expressed their disappointment with such practices and claimed them to be discriminatory. The three mainline denominations of the Congregational Christian Church, Catholic, and Methodist, neither train nor ordain women priests. However, the Congregational Christian Church is progressive in other countries like New Zealand, Australia, and Great Britain, as they now ordain women ministers. The Samoan branch is still conservative. Because of the absence of women on church podiums, they are considered unworthy of preaching the Bible and performing religious tasks. Therefore, women do not constitute capable leaders. Women are given the opportunity only to organise supporting activities and women's organisations in churches. The embedded value of women's inappropriateness for leadership positions in churches adds more pressure to the women's struggle for leadership. Participant 4 put blame on the church by saying:

Church ministers are so territorial that they don't want women to share their space. We count on them being religious, but they are hypocrites. They are perfect in manipulating the system to suit their needs. Therefore, they don't want women to interfere with their business.

Participant 11, in her analysis of the situation, said:

The structure of the three mainline churches in Samoa is so rigid. The leaders cannot accept changes happening in other countries, especially with ordaining women ministers. They do not want women to [equal] them in leadership roles. They are very selfish and territorial.

Participant 6 strongly opposed the church's restriction on women by saying:

I condemn these discriminatory practices of the church. Not allowing women to be ordained ministers [is] unreligious. Church leaders need to think twice because women are ... strong supporters of church developments. Churches never move forward without women, and men cannot function on their own. They always need women.

Participant 5 contributed to the discussion by saying:

The church should be a modernised institution. We are now living in the 21st century, and yet, leaders still live in the ancient world. These leaders should open up their minds and eyes and be able to visualise good changes for the betterment of the church. One of the good changes is providing leadership opportunities for women.

Women encounter the restrictions established by church ministers and male leaders while striving to lobby for leadership opportunities in religious institutions.

Discussion and conclusion

Participants in this study have advocated for the rights of disregarded women through their responses to the interview questions. They have also been observed striving for social justice in village and church developments. Their efforts to counter injustice is well documented in reports and surveys of empowerment training (Samoa Women Empowerment Project Report, 2015). The women's full participation in local and national activities, village and church developments, and administering women's organisations aligns with the aims of the feminist theory (Barton, 2006). The notion of empowerment, central to feminist theory (Malabre, 1978), has been effectively executed by women through their participation in enabling and leadership training. Planning, implementing, and monitoring developmental activities to benefit families, villages, churches, local and national governments supports what Griffen (1989) refers to as ensuring equality for all people. Participants have promoted the idea of honouring femininity (Tong, 1989) by motivating male leaders to acknowledge women's right to leadership.

Interviews were facilitated by the talanoa research framework. The exchange of information was both formal and informal, elements of talanoa that Manu'atu (2000) notes. It was noticed that talanoa lifted participants' morale, created comfort, and encouraged willingness to give information. These are the characteristics of talanoa suggested by Anae et al. (2010). The research was guided by the cultural values of respect and love, components of the talanoa that Nabobo-Baba (2005) refers to. Talanoa proved a practical choice with rural participants who conversed with the researcher in the Samoan language. The discussions flowed well and were complemented with laughter and fun. The participants' responses were strong, touching and challenging, delivered through bravery and straightforward expressions. A feminist theoretical lens synthesised the participants' responses, observations and document analysis.

Cultural beliefs, social assumptions and religious obstacles diminish women's leadership status. In addition, these challenges weaken women's struggles for leadership posts in local and national governments. The national government of Samoa started to allow 10% women occupancy of parliamentary seats when the parliament convened in March 2017 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2011). However, there is no government law to claim superiority over 41 local government bodies that restrain women from holding matai titles. Consequently, potential women parliamentary representatives from these villages do not have the chance to run in general elections. Thus, the Samoan parliament continues to be dominated by males.

Advocating for an increased number of female leaders is a real struggle in Samoa because of the cultural, social and religious implications of this change. While potential women leaders believe in their right to leadership, the communities think otherwise. In countering this mind-set, women seek empowerment in leadership training and income-generating activities. Irrespective of their success, women advocates remain leaders of women's organisations, and subordinates for male leaders.

Patriarchy suggests a top-down, male-dominated approach to decision making as portrayed by the Biblical reference to Jacob's ladder. The image in this structure shows a competitive, hierarchal scheme for decision making and power. In contrast, feminism

is represented by Sarah's circle, an approach to problem solving depicting a circular web of shared experiences and relationships. In this image, the decision making is a result of being communal and collaborative. These contrasting images of a hierarchy convey different ways of structuring relationships. Moreover, these images are associated with different views of morality and self. These distinct visions reflect the illogical truths of human experience we encounter as we interact with others.

Non-government organisations such as the Office for Women (UNESCO Branch) in Apia, Ala Mai, Samoa Umbrella for Non-Government Organisation (SUNGO) and other collaborative groups promote awareness programmes to increase the number of women leaders in local and national governments. These training programmes also encourage prospective women leaders to run for parliament. At the moment, five women (10%) occupy seats in one parliamentary sitting for the first time. The leadership spheres in local and national governments are continuously dominated by males. Therefore, this article aims to generate discussion on gender equality in managerial and leadership positions in Samoa. The main problem – gender equality in terms of participation and representation – is a long way off due to the cultural, social, and religious restrictions against current and potential women leaders.

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