Toward a global information culture in Samoa: growth and challenges

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Abstract

Samoa is a small developing country in the Pacific Islands. While Samoa has often struggled to keep up with economic development, in recent years, the Samoan people have embraced a new information culture. As more Samoan people place a greater value on participating in a global information culture, libraries play a key role in the development of the small nation.

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Introduction

The Samoan islands are located in the South Pacific Ocean in the heart of Polynesia, halfway between Hawai'i and New Zealand, just 13 degrees shy of the Equator. The first Polynesian settlers arrived in Samoa some 3,000 years ago, after sailing eastward from New Guinea and the Melanesian islands. Today, ancient traditions and culture still thrive alongside the modernizing influences of media and communications technology. Young Samoan men and women still observe traditional cultural rites and undertake the ancient Polynesian tattoo process, and share their experiences via Facebook and Tumblr.

This paper focuses on the Independent State of Samoa which is comprised of two main islands: Upolu (home of the capital city, Apia) and Savai'i. The population of Samoa was estimated at 190,000 in 2011, with Samoans comprising 92.6% of the total population. The island nation continues to adapt to a global development challenges, often struggling with sustainable development and economic growth. Traditionally a subsistence economy, Samoa now relies heavily on foreign aid and remittances from overseas. While the economy is based largely on agriculture, fishing, and tourism, the country receives over $28 million a year in foreign development assistance. Despite challenges, however, more and more Samoan people are embracing new technologies and information culture. As Samoa comes to value education, literacy, and global connectivity more than ever, library and information technology development plays a key role in bringing the world to the small, isolated island country. This paper will examine the current state of Samoan libraries and information technology, their role in creating

and fostering a global information culture in Samoa, and provide a needs analysis and recommendations.

As a small, developing nation, Samoa has often struggled to maintain and develop library services; however, in recent years, the Library Association of Samoa has worked with renewed enthusiasm and energy to promote libraries and literacy in the islands. Although professional opportunities for Samoan library professional are scarce, the Library Association of Samoa continues to work to develop professional training and services. Library development in Samoa continues to grow with efforts from both the national and grassroots levels. At the national level, library services generally fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, however there are no statutes or laws regarding library services in Samoa. [1] Library services are included in the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC) Strategies Policies and Plan: July 2006—June 2015, however. Section 3.10 Library Services provides a vision statement, "Library services responsive to the needs of schools to enhance information literacy and learning for all." At the local level, Samoan villages and volunteers have collaborated to create school and community libraries to meet the growing information needs of their communities.

Libraries and Library Development

Public Libraries

The Nelson Memorial Public Library was established in 1959 in Samoa's capital, Apia, and was the first library in Samoa. The library now holds 90,000 volumes, and according to Avalogo Togi Tunupopo, President of the Library Association of Samoa, the

Nelson Memorial Public Library "has one of the very best Samoan collections in the Pacific."[2] The library was gifted to the state by the Taisi Olaf Nelson family, a very prominent family in Samoa and family of the current Head of State.[3]

According the LAS Web site, the Nelson Memorial Public Library,

"Plays an increasingly important role in improving the social and economic welfare of the Samoan people by providing equitable access to an independent lifelong learning environment and the pursuit of recreational interest for all Samoans, providing information and related services to a range of user groups, making available and preserving the published and cultural documentation of local communities, providing public access to government information and services and providing public access to new communication technologies."

A branch of the Nelson Memorial Public Library, the Salafai Public Library, is located in the small port town of Salelologa on Savai'i island. Resources at Salafai Public Library are extremely limited, Senior Library Assistant Taiaopo Taiese, explained in an email that there are no computers available at the Salelologa branch, and he still manages circulation manually. However, many local adults and children frequent the library, borrowing fiction and magazines.[4]

Academic Libraries

Samoa was one of the founders of the regional University of the South Pacific (USP), a regional university supported by 12 Pacific Island countries. The Alafua Campus in Apia was established in 1977 as the second campus of the University. The Alafua Campus Library was upgraded in 1994 with assistance from the Australia Agency for International Development (AusAID). The library currently houses about 22,000 volumes, including books, journals, videos and DVDs, and a collection of agricultural articles in files. The library also offers Internet access via student computers and access to three agricultural databases.

The National University of Samoa (NUS) was established by an act of parliament in 1984. The NUS Learning Resource Center (LRC) offers books, periodicals, reference texts, and electronic resources for use by NUS staff and students. The LRC has tried to incorporate collecting all books published in Samoa into its mission and goal, but this aim has been unsuccessful.[5] Although the LRC has limited computers for student use, students may access the library catalog via library computers and online databases including the World Bank eLibrary, IngentaConnect, and the WHO HINARI database.

Special Libraries

A variety of organizations in Apia, including governmental agencies, intergovernmental organizations, aid agencies, and religious organizations, maintain special libraries. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is an intergovernmental organization with 26 members charged with the protection and sustainable development of the region's environment. The SPREP Library and Information Resource Center holds a collection of books, grey literature, periodicals, DVDs, multimedia materials and electronic resources on the environment. SPREP also manages the Pacific Environment Information Network (PEIN), the PEIN Library collection includes materials located in the SPREP Library plus documents drawn from a network of environment libraries throughout the Pacific. The collection includes many documents available in full text.

A number of other Samoan or Samoa-based organizations maintain special libraries, including the UNESCO and UN Development Programme Apia Offices, Piula Theological College, the Central Bank of Samoa, Oceania University of Medicine, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MNRE), the Ministry of Agriculture

and Forestry (MAF), and a Legislative/Parliamentary Library which was set up in the 1970s.

School Libraries

Across Samoa, there are 142 government primary schools and 24 secondary schools. Primary and secondary education is provided by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (MESC) and five religious missions. All schools have a uniform national curriculum and common examinations. Most villages have one primary school, while secondary schools are larger, with one per district. In 2005, the estimated primary school enrollment was at 90.4% of age-eligible students, and the secondary enrollment was about 66% of age-eligible students.

Most school libraries in Samoa are housed in a separate room, usually about the size of a regular classroom. Many libraries rely heavily on donated books, and as a result collections are often outdated and of little relevance to Samoa. The expenditure of school funds is determined by the school principal, so funds for library resources are not available on a regular basis.[6] Most school libraries are in need of up-to-date reference materials including English dictionaries, Samoan-English dictionaries, atlases, and encyclopedias. All school libraries are in need of newer books; during a survey of school libraries in 2012, New Zealand visiting librarian Rosa-Jane French encouraged library assistants to weed old or irrelevant materials. At least some school libraries have timetables for class visits. During these sessions, the library assistance helps with the reading program and teaches students about using the library.

Churches and private organizations also run 30 primary schools and nine secondary schools. The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS) has five

secondary schools, all of which have a school library and school library assistant. The Catholic Church has eight primary schools, five secondary schools, and Don Bosco Samoa (a secondary and vocational education program) and all have libraries. A number for private schools have librarians and are active in the Library Association of Samoa, including Robert Louis Stevenson School, which has both a primary and a secondary school librarian, Samoa Primary School, Vaiala Beach School, Faatuatua College, and Peace Chapel.[7]

MESC and the USP Alafua Campus collaborated to offer two cohorts for a Certificate in School Library Management and Operations in 2008 and 2009. There are currently 50 to 60 school library assistants from this program working in school libraries across Samoa.[8] While there was talk in 2011 that the School Library Certificate was to continue at MESC, the ministry is still seeking funding for this project.

Although library services are included in the MESC Strategies Policies and Plan: July 2006—June 2015, and includes the policy statements: "There will be qualified teacher librarians and on-going support to school libraries," and "The activities and standard of library services will be continually monitored to ensure that libraries maintain and deliver quality services to the community," there is no official mechanism to support or supervise school libraries and school librarians.[9] To continue school library development strong leadership is needed in this area, as well as funding for books, more trained personnel and more in-service training for current personnel.

Library Association of Samoa

The Library Association of Samoa (LAS) is the official representative body of libraries and librarians in Samoa. The organization was formed in 1986 as an

incorporated legal body and registered association with the Samoan government. The

LAS Web site (www.las.org.ws) provides a variety of information for those interested in

libraries and librarianship in Samoa, including membership information, information for

library careers in Samoa and the Pacific region, and a history of libraries in Samoa. LAS

currently has 145 members on its email list, however, in 2012, only 30 members were up

to date with membership dues.[10] The Association elects four executive members and four

committee members every year.

The Aims of the Library Association of Samoa are to:

- Promote libraries, literacy, education, reading for pleasure, Internet and computer use across Samoa.
- Provide professional support and assistance to librarians, library assistants and those working with books and information.
- Provide training for all Samoan librarians.
- Preserve Samoan culture, history and literature.
- Support education, information literacy and lifelong learning for all Samoans.
- Help Samoan libraries make information resources available and accessible.
- Advocate for free access to information.
- Organize events for all people interested in literature, libraries and reading.

LAS maintains membership with the International Federation of Library

Associations (IFLA). IFLA has sponsored library development projects in Samoa, as well

as training opportunities for Samoan library professionals. One such project was Building

Capacity for In-country Training for Small Library Associations in the South Pacific,

Samoa, part of the IFLA Action for Development of Libraries Programme (ALP). This

project, which was undertaken in 2011, was comprised of three components: a workshop

in information literacy, a workshop on "building strong libraries," and the promotion of

library and the Library Association of Samoa during Library Week 2011. The workshops

and trainings were attended by 56 participants representing the school, university, public, and special librarians of Samoa.

Organizational Affiliations

LAS keeps close ties and memberships with neighboring national library associations, including the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), and the Fiji Library Association (FLA).[11] As an organization in a developing country, LAS has struggled financially at various times since its founding in 1986. After a quiet period during the 2000s, LAS received funding from UNESCO in 2009. That year, LAS held a variety of successful activities, including Library Week Samoa, the first library week since 1988. Events included a parade through town, the official opening, competitions, movies at the library, storytelling, short story and poetry writing competitions and a literary high tea. Since 2009, LAS has remained active in promoting libraries and literacy in Samoa and organizing trainings for library professionals and special events.

Education and Professional Development

Limited opportunities for formal education in library and information science exist in Samoa. MESC and the USP Alafua Campus collaborated to offer two cohorts for a Certificate in School Library Management and Operations in 2008 and 2009. Many of these library assistants are continuing their studies through the Library and Information Science Certificate and Diploma programs offered at USP Fiji via distance learning.[12] USP Fiji offers certificate, diploma and a minor in librarianship that can be studied by distance learning from in Samoa. While there was talk in 2011 that the School Library Certificate was to continue at MESC, the ministry is still seeking funding for this

project.[13] For degree programs, current or future Samoan library professionals must seek opportunities overseas. The LAS Web site provides links to postgraduate study programs at Victoria University of Wellington, in New Zealand, and Charles Sturt University in Australia.

LAS works to support training and professional development of librarians and library professionals working in Samoa. Periodically, the organization will organize training courses or workshops for members. As mentioned above, in 2011 the IFLA Action for Development through Libraries Programme (ALP) worked with LAS to offer training workshops for members. These workshops took place in May 2011 and consisted of two major components: Information Literacy and "Building Strong Library Associations." The event was facilitated by visiting librarian Rosa-Jane French, from New Zealand, with Avalogo Togi Tunupopo and Tologau Uatisone of the NUS library. Fifty-six LAS members from school, public, university, and special libraries in Samoa attended the training. The training consisted of two 2-day training modules. The first portion of the training included sessions on organizing resources, the role of librarians, libraries and library associations in organizations and society, and the second portion of training included sessions on information literacy, online databases and Web sites, blogs, bookmarks and library networking online. In addition to formal sessions, the workshop also provided an opportunity for Samoan librarians to network and share success stories.

Grassroots Library Development

In Samoa, as in many developing nations, libraries are often viewed as a cornerstone to education and economic development. While the Library Association of Samoa and the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture strive to improve library

services at a national level, villages and volunteers around Samoa are establishing libraries at the local level.

The United States Peace Corps was invited to work in Samoa in 1967, since that time, over 1,700 volunteers have volunteered in Samoa in areas of education and community development;[14] there are currently 19 Peace Corps volunteers serving in Samoa, across the islands of Upolu and Savai'i.[15] Over the last four decades, Peace Corps volunteers have worked with Samoan villages and primary and secondary schools to establish or revitalize library programs. Peace Corps volunteers have helped solicit book donations from overseas,[16] applied for grant funding,[17] and trained local teachers in librarianship.

In 2011, the U.S. Embassy in Samoa collaborated with Peace Corps volunteers to develop a mobile library program.[18] The Embassy and Peace Corps volunteers collected hundreds of free books from American publishers, then purchased several large waterproof crates and packed each crate with several dozen books. The crates circulate between village schools with resident Peace Corps volunteers. The goal of the project is to provide books to schools that may not have an adequate library and familiarize teachers and students with a borrowing library system.[19]

Other village libraries have been developed by Samoan communities and informal international partners. In 2011, an Australian couple built a library at a Lalomanu school on Upolu. The resort town of Lalomanu was devastated during the 2009 Pacific tsunami. The Salavert-Wykes family, on holiday in Samoa at the time, lost their young daughter in the tsunami. The couple established the Clea Salavert Library as a tribute to their daughter in hopes that will create a positive future through literacy and education for the

young people of Lalomanu.[20] The Matavai Library in Matavai village on Savai'i is another grassroots library project undertaken by village leaders and the community with support from connections in New Zealand.[21] The project began in 2008 when the village pastor sought the help of a retired local teacher to establish a local library. Village leaders donated money and library coordinators created a Facebook page to raise funds. Friends and relatives in New Zealand also donated boxes of books. The small library now serves the children of Matavai and nearby villages with books and a homework center.[22]

Libraries and Information Technology

In recent years, the development of communications and information technology in Samoa has seen tremendous growth, as well as serious obstacles. The launch of Digicel Samoa in November 2006[23] provided a new mobile service provider and competition for the government-operated SamoaTel. Mobile phone service quickly became affordable for all Samoans. By 2009, there were 151,000 mobile phone users in Samoa (roughly 80% of the total population) and 31,900 main phone lines. In 2010, the country had about 17,000 Internet hosts and roughly 9,000 Internet users. While the private sector in Samoa has seen an explosion of Internet and mobile phone users, the public sector continues to struggle with funding resources and training personnel.

Technology in Libraries

Access to basic technology is extremely limited throughout Samoa, particularly in rural areas. Outside of the major libraries in Apia, very few libraries have access to even the most basic technology tools. Most school and public libraries still manage cataloging and circulation manually. The Nelson Memorial Public Library uses Koha, an open-

source integrated library system. The academic libraries at the University of the South Pacific and the National University of Samoa offer more technology based-services for patrons.

The SPREP library and the Oceania University of Medicine library both have significant digital components. SPREP manages the Pacific Environment Information Network (PEIN) a virtual library which provides access to documents drawn from a network of environment libraries throughout the Pacific. The collection includes many documents available in full text, as well as records for print holdings in various libraries around the region. The Oceania School of Medicine eLibrary allows students access to a range of electronic resources, including reference materials, medical news services, full-text e-books, full-text journal articles, and clinical practice guidelines.

Information Technology Development

International development agencies and funding organizations have worked in conjunction with Samoan government ministries on a variety of projects aimed to help address Samoa's need for greater access to information. Two such projects were the Samoa SchoolNet project and the Rural Connectivity Program.

Under SchoolNet, which was funded by Asian Development Bank, five Samoan schools and communities were provided support in setting up a Community Learning Centre (CLC). Each CLC was provided with 10 Internet-ready networked computers, two PC servers, a video camera, a projector, two printers, a photocopier, and an uninterruptable power supply (UPS). SchoolNet also developed a number of e-Resources and collected links to teaching resources online, made available via the SchoolNet portal.

SchoolNet also provided training to teachers appointed as the key teacher for the project ("ICT Administrators").

In 2006, UNESCO conducted a case-study of this project as part of the report *ICT in Teacher Education*. UNESCO found that while participating schools were generally enthusiastic about the project, staff interviewed at the participating schools said that professional development and training were urgently needed. The majority of teachers at the participating schools had yet to receive any training in basic computer usage. Other key challenges included a lack support from the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC), and environmental and infrastructure concerns (e.g., fluctuating power supply and frequent blackouts, poor or no telephone lines, irregular public transportation). The UNESCO study showed serious obstacles for long-term sustainability for the project.

The Rural Connectivity Program is a similar project managed by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and funded through numerous donors, including numerous donors including, Government of Samoa, ITU (International Telecommunications Union), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), VIA Technology and APT (Asia Pacific Telecommunications). The Rural Connectivity Program set up Feso'ota'i Centres in 12 villages throughout Samoa. The centers included Internet-ready computers, a digital camera, projector and screen, printer and uninterruptable power supply (UPS). The centers were intended to be run by community organizations and to eventually become sustainable and independent businesses over time. The Feso'ota'i Centres suffered many of the same challenges as the SchoolNet

program however, in a lack of sufficient training and ongoing support, environmental and infrastructure concerns, and problems with hardware maintenance.

Discussion

As Samoa adjusts to being part of a global culture, the demand for access to information and information technology has risen sharply. The Samoan national culture has largely embraced the need for improved education and information literacy. Libraries are a living force for information, culture and information and provide a local gateway to knowledge,[24] which will play a crucial role in the development of the nation of Samoa.

MESC has acknowledged the importance role of libraries in the document Strategies Policies and Plan: July 2006—June 2015. Section 3.10, Library Services, provides the vision statement, "Library services responsive to the needs of schools to enhance information literacy and learning for all." However, Samoan Parliament has yet to pass a national library act. Access to information is still greatly limited to many Samoan people, and a strong network of rural libraries and community resources centers will play a key role in the educational and economic development of the nation. The government of Samoa must take an active role in meeting the information needs of its citizenry. A national library act, designed to account for Samoan culture and information needs, will be instrumental in establishing a global information culture in Samoa, in which all Samoan people have access to information.

The two government ministries which have been most active in addressing the information needs of the Samoan people have been the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC) and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology

(MCIT). MESC oversees the public libraries and school library programs. While the Nelson Memorial Public Library in Apia is able to offer high quality services to patrons living in close proximity to the capital, the Salafai Public Library, which serves the entire island of Savai'i (43,000 Samoan people)[25], is left with a bare-bones operating budget and without the most basic resources needed to meet the needs of patrons.

MCIT has managed projects such as the Rural Connectivity Program, which sought to bring Internet connectivity and communications technology into rural Samoan villages, and collaborated with MESC on SchoolNet, a similar project which sought to bring Internet connectivity to secondary schools. Unfortunately, both projects suffered from serious obstacles to sustainability, including a lack of trained personnel and environmental and infrastructure concerns.

Both MESC and MCIT have sought to improve information access available to the Samoan people, particularly in rural areas, and many of the obstacles faced by MESC and MCIT could be overcome through better collaboration and cooperation. Rather than viewing libraries as depositories for books or relying solely on new technology to meet the information needs of rural Samoans, the two agencies must combine efforts to provide Samoan communities with necessary information resources. Small public libraries or community resource centers which offered both computers with Internet access, as well as traditional print resources, would bridge the information gap. Books, periodicals, and reference materials on high-interest topics (such as agriculture or health), require no special training to use and would serve to meet many of the information needs of Samoan people. Computers and Internet connectivity, with ongoing training and

support from MCIT, will offer higher quality services and allow Samoan people to engage meaningfully in a global information culture.

Samoan school libraries play a particularly crucial role in the education of Samoa's youth and have the opportunity the pave the way for librarianship in Samoa. School libraries have been an area of focus under MESC in recent years, and in order to reap the rewards of this investment, the ministry must continue in its commitment to a high standard of school library services. A new cohort of the Certificate in School Library Management and Operations through USP Alafua and MESC must be enrolled, and funding allocated so that this program may continue to grow. School library programs in Samoa currently lack the sufficient leadership necessary to prosper. A school library supervisory position, created at the ministry level, would fill this vacuum.

The Library Association of Samoa (LAS) plays a pivotal role in the development of libraries and information culture in the country. LAS is in a position to undertake evaluative studies and conduct surveys of library and information services in Samoa. Such empirical data will play a crucial role in the association's ongoing advocacy efforts. LAS is also in a position to collaborate with local communities. As can be seen in villages such as Lalomanu and Matavai, as well as villages hosting Peace Corps volunteers, there are communities across Samoa motivated and committed to creating small-scale local library projects. The Library Association of Samoa must make a greater commitment to community outreach and offer trainings or other services to help ensure the sustainability of village libraries.

Conclusion

Like other Pacific Island nations, Samoa has struggled with the challenges of economic development, and continues to endure environmental degradation, natural disasters, inadequate health education, heavy reliance on foreign aid, and regional isolation. Library services and a strong information culture will support the needs of all Samoan citizens and the development of the country as a whole. Although Samoa has made significant efforts to improve information access to all Samoan citizens, more must be done. Libraries, especially school and public libraries, must be integrated into the information culture of Samoa. Here are recommendations toward this end:

- Samoan Parliament must develop a national library act which establishes a formal network of public libraries and a sound administrative set-up and commits proper and continuous financial support.

- In order to improve information access to rural Samoa, greater collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) is needed.

- Continuation of the Certificate in School Library Management and Operations program through USP Alafua and MESC.

- Creation of a school library supervisory position at the ministry level in order to monitor and ensure that school "libraries maintain and deliver quality services to the community."

- The Library Association of Samoa must increase evaluative research efforts across Samoa.

- The Library Association of Samoa should develop better community and grassroots outreach, connecting with local communities and international volunteers working on library projects.

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