

An Assessment of Secondary Education in a Small Island State: Implications for Agricultural Education

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Introduction

Western Samoa is a small independent state in the South Pacific. It lies between latitude 13-15°S and between longitude 171-173°W. Its two main islands, Upolu and Savaii, cover an area of 2,934 square kilometres. The population, according to the 1991 government census was 161,298 (Department of Statistics, 1991: 13). A breakdown of the population shows that the proportion of children is very high. About 41% of the total population are under 15 years of age (Government of Western Samoa, 1991: 76).

Western Samoa has been and is still very much an agricultural country, even though the effects of two devastating cyclones, one in 1989 and the other in 1991, drastically reduced the potential of agriculture. These cyclones and the general decline in world market prices of the dominant agricultural exports such as copra, coconut oil and cocoa, have subsequently led to the decline of the prominent role of agriculture in the Samoan economy. Thus, while agriculture accounted for 73% of domestic exports by value in 1980, it accounted for only 47% in 1989 and only 30 percent in 1990 (Government of Western Samoa, 1991: 4).

The significance of agriculture to the Samoan culture and economy was recognised long before Independence in 1962. To this end, the teaching of agriculture was seen as one of the obligations of the education system and stated in the Education Ordinance of 1959 as follows:

The purpose of education is to provide a sound system of primary education for children of school age, with the full realisation that the great mass of them live and will continue to live in the villages and be dependent on agricultural pursuits, to make provision so that senior students may obtain manual, technical and agricultural training that will enable them to become more useful members of Samoan

society; to select from the primary school, those thought best fitted for a higher education so as to prepare them for clerical or administrative positions, higher specialist training or entrance to a university; to provide adult education which will induce a fuller understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship, increase efficiency in work and contribute to the more fruitful use of leisure (Government of Western Samoa, 1950: 1-2).

However, despite its recognised importance, the present public school system still advocates academic and white collar job-oriented subjects and they have caused young people's aspirations to be academically biased. This situation must be changed. Proper legislation with respect to agricultural education should be introduced to implement agriculture or agricultural science in the schools. Presently, agriculture is still insignificant as far as schooling is concerned.

Pre-Independence Education

Christian missionaries were responsible for initiating and developing education in the early years in Samoa. Because of this historical past and the significance of Christianity in Samoa, the church has had a major influence on the education of Samoans. The London Missionary Society (LMS) and Wesleyan missions established pastors' schools shortly after the arrival of the church in 1830 (Education Department 1980: 1). Education was initially provided to enable Samoans to read and write in their own language. Later, this limited curriculum was expanded to include house building, boat building, agriculture, horticulture, sewing, printing, commercial work and English.

In 1900 Western Samoa was annexed by Germany and for the next 15 years, there were no major educational developments under the German administration except that the German language became a compulsory subject. Germany was replaced by New Zealand in 1914. The first task undertaken by the New Zealand Government was to secularise education by making it a responsibility of the state. Village schools, which were being operated by pastors, were taken over by the new administration and became known as Grade II Schools. Learning became an academic process extending

to Standard 2 (now Year 4). However, the missions still continued to operate with an emphasis on the teaching of religion.

With the dawn of the struggle for political independence in the early 1940s, Western Samoa's aspiring leaders expressed a desire for major changes in educational planning. The major concern for education now was to shift towards the preparation of an elite group which would be sent to New Zealand for study under a scheme known as the New Zealand Scholarship Scheme. It was the hope that these people would eventually return and work in an independent Western Samoa. Indeed, the first group left for New Zealand in 1945.

The elite scholarship scheme stimulated efforts to upgrade educational standards in Western Samoa. To this effect, Samoa College, the first government secondary school, was opened in 1953, making available further opportunities for people to sit for the New Zealand Public Service Certificate (now obsolete) which qualified successful candidates to enter the public service, and the New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance examinations. The latter two examinations were higher secondary school examinations sat for only in New Zealand. Thus, the system of education in Western Samoa came to be dominated by New Zealand standards. Many New Zealand expatriates were teaching in Western Samoa. The curriculum narrowed down to a New Zealand one and the average Samoan parent came to accept the fact that, to be educated, one had to pass a New Zealand examination after getting through a system based on New Zealand standards!

The early years of independence after 1962 brought little change to the standards set by New Zealand. This was understandably so, as the majority of Samoan students sent overseas were educated in New Zealand.

Post-Independence Education

After achieving political independence in 1962, Western Samoa's first five year development plan was implemented in 1966. In the field of education, the philosophy was to "educate an elite group at the secondary level and plough them back into the general system, as leavening in the bread" (Education Department, 1980: 1). Unfortunately, due to this emphasis on

secondary education and also to the constraints imposed upon the education budget, a number of primary school teachers were laid off, resulting in the lack of educational opportunities for many young children in Western Samoa. This drawback was realised and an attempt was made to correct it in the second five year development plan in 1972, by giving more emphasis to primary education. Children were encouraged to continue up to Form 2 (now Year 8) where screening for secondary schooling took place. Indeed, by 1974 much had been achieved in the educational system. It had fully evolved to a stage whereby primary education was a nine year process up to Form 2, junior secondary schooling from Forms 3 to Lower 5, and senior secondary schooling constituted Upper 5 and Form 6.

The third five year development plan in education which followed was aimed at upgrading junior secondary schools in the rural areas. To this end, a secondary teachers' college was built and completed by 1978 in the capital, Apia, to train teachers for junior secondary schools. The intent was to train teachers to teach both academic subjects and others including agricultural science.

In the fourth, five year development plan, DP4 (1980 - 1984) emphasis was placed on providing children with opportunities, experiences and relevant knowledge to assist them in developing their physical, social, personal and moral well-being so that they could be productive members of society (Government of Western Samoa, 1979: 61). The targeted vehicles for affecting the above were the reformed junior secondary schools and modified primary and secondary school curricula. The other main concern in DP4 was to continue a process of curriculum revision started in the early 1970s "making education, especially between the ages of 14 and 17, more appropriate to Samoan culture and economic opportunities." Teacher training formed an important part of this process.

The shortcomings faced under DP4 included a shortage of teachers both at the primary and secondary levels, shortage of resource materials and the increasing ratio of students per teacher especially in schools in the Apia town area.

In the fifth, three year development plan, DP5 (1985 - 1987), emphasis was

again placed on opportunities, knowledge, skills and the development of desirable attitudes for all age groups up to Form 6. Again as in DP4, aspects relating to the physical, social, personal and moral growth of children were highlighted. Three priority areas were considered as means for achieving the areas mentioned. These were national curriculum development, development of technical and vocational skills, and development of educational support facilities.

A significant development at the beginning of DP5 was the establishment of the National University of Samoa (NUS). The first level intake were University Preparatory Year (UPY) students, most of whom were to be groomed for higher studies at overseas universities. Those who could not make the grade were either absorbed into the local employment market or continued to study for a local degree or proficiency certificate.

As before, under DP5 one of the major concerns was the shortage of teachers at both the primary and secondary levels, even though teacher training facilities and programmes were already established. This problem was caused by the loss of teachers, especially at the secondary level, to other professions. For example, in 1985 and 1986 the teacher attrition rates recorded were 130 and 120, respectively (Government of Western Samoa, 1984: 177). The recruiting of UN volunteers, Peace Corps volunteers and expatriates from overseas alleviated the problem to some extent.

The sixth, three year development plan, DP6 (1988 - 1990), effected major structural changes in the primary and secondary education machinery. Primary education, traditionally a nine year process, was reduced to eight. At the higher levels, junior secondary education started from Year 9 to Year 12 (Forms 3 to 5) while senior secondary made up Year 13 (Form 6). In addition to these structural changes, the education system stepped up curriculum revamping by phasing out the New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance Examinations in 1988. These were replaced by equivalent local and regional examinations. In order to ensure that earlier established standards were adhered to, the services of the South Pacific Board of Educational Assessment (SPBEA) were utilised to provide technical advice. Thus, the New Zealand School Certificate Examination was replaced by a local national examination of the same level with technical advice given

by the SPBEA. In the sixth form the New Zealand UE Examination was replaced by a regional exam - the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate (PSSC) which was administered by the SPBEA.

In making these changes, the main concerns of DP6 were to make education universal up to the secondary level, to provide education to help youngsters cope with a changing environment, to develop human resources to enhance productive employment, to prepare young people for the challenges of modern Samoan society, and to revamp the education system in order to strengthen manpower resources and enhance national development efforts. Again, as in DP5, national curriculum development, development of technical and vocational skills, and the development of educational support facilities were targeted as the means for achieving the above concerns. At the end of DP6, the problem of teacher shortage at the secondary level had not yet been resolved. In fact it had become critical. As before this led to the other problem of high numbers of students per teacher.

Western Samoa is currently operating on the basis of development plan DP7 (1992 -1994). The central aims of the education sector in DP7 are:

- . the continuation of curriculum reform.
- . upgrading the training of teachers.
- . formulating ways to overcome the teacher shortage (Government of Western Samoa, 1991: 65).

In order to achieve these objectives, the Western Samoa Government is committed through bilateral and multilateral projects in the areas of teacher education, technical training, science teacher development, and environmental and marine science. Many of these training areas have already commenced, with most of the funding coming from New Zealand, Australia and Japan. There are other projects such as the UNDP/UNESCO/AIDAB/UNICEF Basic Education and Life Skills (BELS) Programme. This programme has three major Modules, involving primary teacher in-servicing, collection and storage of educational data to improve management, and agricultural education. This

is a regional project in which Western Samoa is one of the participating countries.

Current Educational Organisation

The government and five religious missions (Congregational, Methodist, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist and Mormon) are largely responsible for education in Western Samoa. The structure of the education system makes primary education an eight year programme, with children usually beginning school at 5 or 6 years of age (see Table 1).

Age (Years)	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Primary Level Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8					
Secondary Level Year									9	10	11	12	13

Table 1: Educational Organisation in Western Samoa

Junior Secondary Schools and Agricultural Education

The curriculum reform which was initiated in 1975 to make the junior secondary school more relevant to the way of life and economic circumstances in Western Samoa, is a long way from being complete. Under the BELS programme it is still the intention of policy-makers to make the junior secondary school the vehicle by which schooling is integrated with economic opportunities and the world of work.

There are currently 22 junior secondary schools in Western Samoa - only 10 of these teach agricultural science. The existing curriculum at the junior secondary level includes the following areas with their related subjects: (Varghese, personal communication, 1993).

Core Curriculum

Samoa, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, Social Education (Social Science).

Vocational Options

Industrial Arts, Business Studies, Home Economics, Agricultural Science.

Cultural Subjects

Music (Singing), Physical Education (Games).

The Need for Agricultural Education

The fact that fewer than half the junior high schools in Western Samoa offer agricultural science (and it is only an optional subject) suggests that there is a need to train more agricultural manpower, particularly in the rural sector of the country. The teaching of agriculture is needed to prepare persons for careers in agriculture, and in rural development as a whole. This would also help those who intend to pursue higher education.

To some extent the goals of education have been responsible for creating the lack of enthusiasm for and skills in manual labour. Nonetheless, since agriculture plays a major role in the culture of Samoa and currently produces some of the major exports which are important foreign revenue earners, proper emphasis must be accorded to it in the current junior secondary educational system. This will help cater to the future needs of the youth who form the majority of the population of Samoa. The problem of reconciling the educational, cultural and practical components of agriculture is the real issue of concern. Since agriculture is the backbone of economic development in Western Samoa, it would be erroneous to neglect the development of agricultural education.

Conclusion

Educational policy makers should be asking themselves how the stigma associated with agricultural labour can be alleviated so that it becomes socially and educationally acceptable in the eyes of local communities. In answering this question it is important for policy makers to take a holistic view of agricultural education and try to incorporate all aspects that can contribute to its development as part of the junior secondary curriculum.

Such aspects should include a philosophical outlook on agriculture in terms of its economic, cultural, and traditional values. In deriving a solution concerning the place of agricultural education in secondary education, educational policy makers, in line with the national plans already formulated, must critically address the issue of a national commitment by the Education Department to the teaching of agricultural education as indicated by:

- . a clearly spelt-out intention to formulate an agricultural education policy,
- . the selection of a national curriculum officer to organise the subject matter of agricultural education,
- . the establishment of a curriculum committee to lead the development of agricultural education,
- . providing for further training of teachers in agricultural education,
- . the provision of back-up services for in-service training of agriculture teachers,
- . the selection of appropriate schools to initiate the agricultural education programme, and
- . the provision of resource materials for teachers and students.

In the development of these policy guidelines, the development of agricultural education at the junior secondary level should not be driven entirely on the basis of economic and occupational principles, but should be based on a

balance of all aspects that reflect the role of agriculture in the national identity of Western Samoa.

Last but not least, the developed policies on agricultural education must be implemented, and this requires commitment at all levels of the system. Samoans need to be educated and made aware that agricultural pursuits now involve brain work as well as 'muscle power'. Indeed, agricultural education should at the very least, be on an equal footing with the core subjects. It has the potential to be personally more fulfilling and rewarding.

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