



Press Release

Report of Survey on Key CSO priorities and barriers preventing greater engagement with government processes released

From mid-2020 to mid-2022, SUNGO planned and conducted a survey seeking to understand the key priorities of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as well as the barriers CSOs face when engaging with policy in Samoa. The survey was part of a project funded by a grant from the EU 11th European Development Fund (EU EDF).

Key questions for SUNGO in conducting this project were:

1. How are CSOs engaging with policy processes?
2. Where have their successes and key challenges been?
3. What assistance do they need to better engage with policy processes in Samoa?

Specifically, the survey was designed to better understand the policy areas CSOs seek to influence, methods CSOs use to influence policy, types of evidence they use to influence policy, their successes, key challenges, who they are represented by and the assistance they seek.

The findings provide useful insight into an area which has not been extensively researched.

Interviews were conducted with 104 CSOs before the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2022, at which point interviews were stopped. Of the 104 organisations, 39 were community-based organisations (CBOs), 31 were faith-based organisations (FBOs) and 34 were non-government organisations (NGOs) or charitable trusts.

While there are key areas of commonality in engaging with policy, the findings show that there are also considerable areas of difference, particularly when comparing NGOs and trusts to CBOs and/or FBOs.

Some findings from the survey include (not an exhaustive list):

Areas of policy

- Most CSOs seek to influence between 3 to 6 areas of policy. Most CSOs also reported successfully influencing between 3 and 6 areas of policy.
- Health and education were in the top 4 most selected areas of policy CSOs seek to influence regardless of type of organisation. Agriculture was selected by a noticeably larger number of FBOs and CBOs when compared to NGOs and trusts. Women's issues and disability were a priority for more NGOs and trusts than FBOs or CBOs.
- Of those interviewed, 85% of CSOs seeking to influence agriculture, children's welfare and the disability policy areas reported that they had been successful in doing so

Methods and Evidence

- NGOs reported much higher usage of ten listed methods to influence policy than CBOs or FBOs. Providing services and networking were well-represented among NGOs. Among CBOs and FBOs the most well represented methods of influence were charity, lobbying and face to face engagement.
- Out of a list of five methods, consultations with either SUNGO, the government or stakeholders were the most selected for their efficacy regardless of the type of

organisation. Among these, NGOs rated consultations with government as the most effective while for FBOs and CBOs it was consultations with SUNGO. Submissions and letters to policy makers were in the bottom two for efficacy for all CSO types.

- Almost all CBOs and FBOs reported personal testimonies, academic research, surveys, statistics and case studies to be ineffective types of evidence in influencing policy. At least 62% of NGOs however reported each method to be effective to some extent.

Challenges

- The top three challenges for CSOs as a whole were a lack of funds, a lack of knowledge about policy processes and that policymakers do not value CSO's evidence. More NGOs however nominated a lack of staff time and policy processes not being open to CSO engagement over policymakers not valuing their evidence.
- The single main challenge reported by CSOs was a lack of resources (time, money, staff) regardless of type of organisation.

Assistance Desired

- CSOs nominated networking as overwhelmingly the most preferred way for SUNGO to assist them in influencing policy. Among NGOs and trusts however, there was an equal amount of support for capacity building.
- The majority of CSOs felt the most important action SUNGO and the government can take is to increase opportunities for dialogue between CSOs and policymakers.

Through this survey, SUNGO has gained invaluable insight on how best to support the different types of CSOs in engaging in policy processes in Samoa.

The full report provides more detail on the above, more findings and analysis. SUNGO hopes the survey's findings will also be useful to other stakeholders in fostering and supporting a robust civil society sector.

End of Release