

Rugby for a Cause; Tackling Violence, scoring for Equity

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Key Words

Rugby, Oceania, Resilience, empowerment, transformation, Gender-based violence prevention.

Summary

Get into Rugby PLUS has been implemented in Samoa since 2021 to promote gender equality and prevent violence through rugby. Delivered in partnership with Lakapi Samoa, Oceania Rugby, UN Women, ChildFund Rugby and Team Up, the programme engages secondary school students aged 12–16 and trains local coaches, with a target of 50% women. Nearly 300 young people have participated so far in Samoa 2025. The programme empowers girls and women to take part in rugby, challenges harmful stereotypes, promotes respectful relationships, and introduces safeguarding standards to ensure safe participation. Its impact has been recognised internationally, winning the Community Award at the Leaders Sports Awards in 2023.

Problem Statement

In Samoa, Rugby is more than just a sport it is a cultural pillar, deeply rooted in community life and, as described by Team Up, “almost like a second religion”. Beyond competition, it serves as a powerful vehicle for social change. Through initiatives such as Get into Rugby PLUS, the sport has become a space of empowerment for girls while also helping to shift mindsets on issues of gender and equality.

The Get into Rugby Plus is a programme that aimed at promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women and girls through rugby. Some of these challenges are implicit in the programme's goals and objectives, while others can be inferred from the context.

Context specific challenges:

- **Limited representation and participation:** Despite the programme's commitment to having 50% female coaches and players, there may be underlying societal attitudes and biases that hinder girls' and women's participation in rugby.
- **Cultural and gender stereotypes:** The programme seeks to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which can be deeply ingrained in Samoan culture. Changing these attitudes and behaviours takes time and effort.

- Violence against women and girls: Samoa, like many other Pacific Island countries, struggles with high rates of violence against women and girls. Get into Rugby Plus aims to address this issue, but it is a complex and entrenched problem that requires sustained efforts.
- Resource constraints: Implementing and sustaining a programme like Get into Rugby Plus requires significant resources, including funding, infrastructure, and personnel. Limited resources can hinder the programme's effectiveness and reach.
- Safeguarding and protection: Ensuring the safety and well-being of girls and women participating in the programme is crucial. This requires robust safeguarding policies and procedures, which can be a challenge to implement and maintain. Despite these challenges, Get into Rugby Plus has made a positive impact in Samoa, empowering girls and women to participate in rugby and promoting gender equality and respectful relationships. The programme's success is attributed to the collaborative efforts of its partners, including Oceania Rugby, Lakapi Samoa, UN Women, and ChildFund Rugby.

About the programme

The Get into Rugby Plus programme in Samoa is a Sport for Development initiative that leverages rugby union to promote positive behaviour, gender equality, and prevent violence against women, girls, and boys.

Since its launch in 2021, the programme has made significant strides in empowering young people, particularly girls and women, to take on leadership roles and challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

Programme Delivery in Schools

The Get into Rugby Plus programme was delivered in secondary schools across Samoa, engaging nearly 300 students aged 12-16. The programme was implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, and the Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development. This collaboration ensured that the programme was aligned with national policies and priorities, including the [National Policy on Child Care and Protection 2020-2030](#).

Key Achievements

The programme has participated in the empowerment of girls and women in different ways. For example, it provided opportunities for girls and women to participate in rugby, challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

It also allowed for the promotion of positive behaviour by promoting positive behaviour and respect for others, contributing to a safer and more inclusive environment. It worked on preventing violence by addressing violence against women and girls, promoting respectful relationships, challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours.

A powerful display of sportsmanship after the game when everyone come together through a huddle. Players, shaking hands and sharing fist bumps, showing respect and empathy. This moment helps the losing team overcome disappointment and anger, highlighting the importance of respect in the game.

The growing number of girls' teams this year in the U14, U16, U28 categories is a testament to the enthusiasm and commitment of school principals and teachers in promoting rugby among girls in Samoa.

Overcoming Challenges

The Lakapi Samoa Development staff, led by Avi'i Fa'alupega, a trailblazing female rugby referee and development officer, have overcome several challenges, including:

- **Cultural and Gender Stereotypes:** Staff have worked to challenge traditional attitudes and behaviours, promoting gender equality and inclusivity.
- **Limited Resources:** Despite resource constraints, the programme has thrived, thanks to the dedication of staff, coaches, and partners.

Addressing Gender Violence

The Get into Rugby Plus has also been addressing gender violence for over four years, since its inception in 2018 in Fiji and 2021 in Samoa. The programme's long-term approach focuses on shifting attitudes and beliefs around gender, power, violence, and respectful relationships. By promoting positive role models and providing safe and inclusive environments, Get into Rugby Plus has made a positive impact on participants, coaches, and the broader community.

The programme's success has been recognised globally, winning the Community Award at the Leaders Sports Awards in 2023. This achievement underscores the programme's commitment to using sports as a vehicle for positive change

Outcomes

Get into Rugby Plus has significantly contributed to promoting gender equality in Samoa through various initiatives and outcomes.

The programme has led to an increase in female coaches coaching schoolgirls' teams, challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. This shift helps empower women to take on leadership roles in sports.

Get into Rugby Plus promotes positive behaviour, respect, and inclusivity among players, coaches, and the community. This helps create a safe and supportive environment for girls and women to participate in rugby.

According to data analysis from Team Up, the programme has shown a positive impact on both players and coaches. Participants are proactively promoting gender equality and reducing violence in their lives.

Moreover, coaches and players have shared transformative stories of change, highlighting the programme's impact on their lives. For example, a female player noted that she now understands girls can play rugby just like boys, and she's become more confident in speaking up.

The programme is also dedicated to delivering safeguarding awareness in the community, ensuring children and vulnerable adults are physically and emotionally safe while participating in rugby activities. Lakapi Samoa is currently developing safeguarding standards and practices in line with international guidelines.

Programme Impact:

Get into Rugby Plus has been implemented in Samoa since 2021, with 20 coaches working with 12–16-year-old secondary school boys and girls.

The programme has: - Reached nearly 300 students

- Promoted positive behaviour and gender equality
- Prevented violence against women, girls, and boys
- Fostered a culture of respect, inclusivity, and diversity

Partnerships and Funding:

Get into Rugby Plus is jointly developed and implemented by:

- Oceania Rugby
- Lakapi Samoa (Samoa Rugby Union)
- UN Women
- ChildFund Rugby
- Australian Government's
- Team Up initiative
- Rugby Australia

These partnerships and funding support the programme's goals and ensure its sustainability and impact in promoting gender equality and preventing violence in Samoa.

Successes

The Get into Rugby Plus programme in Samoa has achieved significant successes since its launch in 2021. Some notable accomplishments include:

- **Empowering Women and Girls:** The programme has led to an increase in female coaches coaching schoolgirls' teams, challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. It has also provided opportunities for girls and women to participate in rugby, promoting gender equality and inclusivity.
- **Promoting Positive Behaviour:** Get into Rugby Plus promotes positive behaviour, respect, and inclusivity among players, coaches, and the community. This helps create a safe and supportive environment for girls and women to participate in rugby.
- **Preventing Violence:** The programme addresses violence against women and girls by promoting respectful relationships and challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours.
- **Building Capacity:** The programme has built the capacity of local coaches and teachers, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to deliver the programme effectively.

Challenges

Despite its successes, the Get into Rugby Plus programme in Samoa faces challenges, including:

- **Cultural and Gender Stereotypes:** The programme needs to continue challenging traditional attitudes and behaviours, promoting gender equality and inclusivity.
- **Limited Resources:** Sustaining the programme's impact requires ongoing support and resources.

Lessons & Recommendations

Moving Forward To build on the programme's successes and address its challenges, consider:

- **Continued Support and Funding:** Ensure ongoing support and funding to sustain the programme's impact and expand its reach.
- **Community Engagement:** Foster strong community partnerships to promote the programme's values and objectives.
- **Capacity Building:** Continue building the capacity of local coaches and teachers to deliver the programme effectively.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the programme's impact to identify areas for improvement and inform future programming.

By addressing these challenges and building on its successes, Get into Rugby Plus can continue to promote positive change and empower women and girls in Samoa through rugby.

References

<https://www.teamup.gov.au/stories/women-in-sport-lessons-from-samoa>

Complementary Material

