

Conceptualizing the Informal Economy in Samoa.

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Abstract

This paper summarises research findings from 2016-2020 on Samoa's informal economy and gives consideration to the ways that the informal sector/economy is defined in the literature particularly perspectives emanating from academics in the developed world. Exploring the various debates on informality with regard to the construct of a contextualized definition of informality that matches the findings of urban Samoa. Informal economic activity as practiced throughout the developed and developing world has been described in numerous ways such as the irregular economy, shadow economy, precarious and illegal yet legitimate means to earning a livelihood. Underpinning all this, is the significant role that informality plays in providing sustainable livelihoods for the majority of the unemployed labor force in both developing and industrialized countries. This is encapsulated in the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) that provides the theoretical framework to situate the discussion on the informal sector in Apia, Samoa.

Key Words: Informal Sector, economic activity, Unemployed, Sustainable Livelihoods.

Introduction

The paper summarizes a study of the non-agricultural informal economy in Samoa conducted in 2016-2017, followed by an overview of how the informal economy is conceptualized and defined, based on an extensive literature review of how the concept came into usage in the development literature in the 1970s. To fully comprehend the nuances of informality as it exists and practiced in the developing world, requires a development framework that lends support to the theoretical and practical aspects of informal sector operations. Hence, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is posited as a conceptual framework to situate the discussion on informal economic activities providing a livelihood for many urban households in Samoa. The second part of the paper explores some of the theoretical perspectives, in particular, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, to situate the study. The modernist, dualist, structuralist and neo-liberalist views are also explored to gauge a broad view of where the informal economy is placed in relation to these perspectives. It concludes with a contextual analysis of the informal economy in Samoa and how particular key characteristics of informality as identified in the literature are represented in urban Samoa. This paper gives consideration to the ways that informal enterprises lend support to an urbanizing population and whether there is a positive correlation between the growth of informal economic activities and their effects in minimizing the urban poverty pockets that are suggested by the visibility of street vending that is often disapprovingly publicized in the local newspapers.

The Informal Economy in Samoa

The informal economy in many developing countries constitutes a considerable and significant portion of the labour force where it accounts for 60 percent of the workforce. The ILO (2000 and 2014) defines the informal economy to include all economic activities carried out by workers that are not covered (or insufficiently covered) by formal employment arrangements. For Samoa, the informal economy would be as much as 70-80 percent of the entire economy and inclusive of small scale trading, market vending,

fishing, agriculture (the contribution of agriculture to the economy has declined from 17 percent in 1999 to less than 10 percent in 2010 (SBS, 2012c: 6). But this important aspect of the country’s economy is not accounted for nor commented upon in official government documents even donor funded studies such as the AusAID country survey on social protection, poverty and vulnerability in Samoa (2012b). Table 3 summarizes a breakdown of the employed population aged 15+ based on sex and economic activities.

Table 1: Employed Population 15+ by main activities and sex, 2011

Employed Activity	Total	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Total (E)	45,161	32,939	72.9	12,222	27.1
Employer	582	386	66.3	196	33.7
Employee	23,410	14,276	61.0	9,134	39.0
Self-employed	3,984	2,595	65.1	1,389	34.9
Make Goods for sale	1,040	491	47.2	549	52.8
Street vendors	60	37	61.7	23	38.3
Subsistence	16,085	15,154	94.2	931	5.8

Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Population and Housing Census 2011 Analytical Report, p. 78

The above data provided significant baseline information for a study of the informal economy in urban Apia. The sample size for this study and types of informal economic activities was drawn from those who are self-employed, employees (domestic helpers, care givers, babysitters), make goods for sale and engage in street vending. One important element of the informal economy in urban Apia that is excluded (either intentionally or unintentionally) from the Samoa Census survey is the incidence of begging. Begging is requesting strangers to show mercy on the grounds of poverty or destitution (Andriotis 2016: 69). According to the media survey, twenty was the unofficial count of the numbers of regular ‘beggars’ along Apia beach road (Samoa Observer Newspaper 30 January 2014 & 11 January 2015). Counting ‘beggars’ in Apia, is much easier, considering the small size of Apia town, and the usual places and/or public spaces the beggars choose to occupy every day. Beggars and begging was unseen and unheard of in the past 30 years, or since the writer’s childhood years, now it is quite a common occurrence to encounter beggars, including children. Some adult beggars have their own personal spot in central Apia to ply their begging trade from. Street vending is another economic activity that seems under enumerated in the 2011 survey which they addressed. The 2011 Census counted 60 street vendors, a gross undercount, probably due to definitions of vending adopted by the Samoa Bureau of Statistics or the method of counting employed by the Bureau. In the same vein, making goods for sale and being self-employed are categories that overlap with street vending, and the Bureau has yet to spell out the differences between these activities to ensure there is no double counting.

Children observed selling on the streets is another visible feature of informality in urban Samoa. Young children are seen on the streets of Apia selling all sorts of items at all hours of the day, even late into the night. In the past children would go quietly from house to house in villages to sell excess fish from their

families' fishing expeditions to other families of the village. This was an acceptable practice because children do not have the same social identity as adults. Adults would have to give away the fish instead of selling them, because in the past selling within the village was culturally unacceptable. It is possible that some families may still send their children to sell goods because they think it is more socially acceptable. It is not uncommon to see a child offering goods for sale in town while an older relative watches from a distance. But however families may perceive the rights and wrongs of using children as vendors, they may be acting in conflict with the government policies and laws to protect children.

Two actions to address vending by children in Samoa started with the International Labour Organization Minimum Age Convention, 1973 that set the minimum age of 15 for young persons to be admitted into employment and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, stipulated immediate measures to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour for all those persons under 18. The government of Samoa ratified both conventions including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. This was followed by enacting the Samoa Child Care and Protection Bill, 2013, under the mandate of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development for the protection of children at risk of harm from the worst forms of child labour such as street vending (ILO 2015b: 8-11). Despite these measures, a study of children working on the streets of Apia conducted in 2015, found and interviewed 106 children (75 males and 31 females) from 7 to 17 years of age working as vendors. Sixty five percent of the children lived with both parents suggesting that street vending is a household-based family enterprise, although the report does not state the extent of parental involvement.

A plurality of definitions for informality exists, as outlined above. There has been no consensus on common grounds to base a definition of informality that can be universally applied across regions. This is understandable considering the vast differences between developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America where informality is a significant contributor to GDP and informal sector in developed countries (Gerxhani 1999). However, for the Pacific and specifically for the study of the informal economy in Samoa, I am proposing a definition that focuses on labour, producing legal goods and services but are not regulated or protected by the state in ways the formal labour force are protected. Who are these people, and where are they found? They are informal operators, independent, self-employed producers in urban areas. These are individuals and households making a living through informal economic activities. These activities range from *lavalava* (sarong) printing, food, handicrafts and general goods vending, to housekeeping, food delivery, gardening and care giving. The relative ease of entry into the sector, reliance on local resources and minimum capital investments pull people into informal economic activities. At the same time, economically disadvantaged households or individuals are allowed to maximize the use of their abundant labour either as street traders and vendors, home based workers or itinerant workers on building sites employed by construction companies and local road contractors. Similarly, the lack of resources to meet the formal requirements for recognition as a formal enterprises pushes people into informal activities. A point further emphasized by Gibson and Kelly (1994), relates to individuals who cannot find more remunerative formal sector employment are reduced to informal economic activity as their sole means of supporting themselves. In addition, households are the 'strategic site or nested geographies' of economic practices (Smith & Stenning 2004). Within the household unit the economic goals are defined and decisions are made on how to achieve these goals, particularly in relation to income earning opportunities and organization of the household labour force. In that respect, households with

no steady source of formal income tend to have multiple income streams from a diverse range of informal economic activities, to minimize risks that the households are likely to encounter in the future (Tshuma & Jari 2013; World Bank 2005; Festo 2014; ADB 2012b) The definition of the informal economy proposed herein and expanded upon by the ILO (2000) as cited earlier is the definition used in this study.

Defining the Informal Economy

The majority of Samoans are employed in the informal sector or economy; in subsistence agriculture and fisheries in the rural areas and small road side trading enterprises in both rural and urban areas. The literature uses the terms 'informal sector' and 'informal economy' interchangeably but the term 'informal economy' is preferred over the term 'informal sector', because informal workers and economic activities do not belong to one sector of economic activity, but cut across many sectors (Sida & Jutting 2009: 97). Where the term 'informal sector' is used in the text, it relates to quotes from the literature and as preferred by the various authors whose work are cited herein. The study that informed this paper explored the urban non-agricultural small business vending, both food and non-food related, forming a critical part of the economic landscape of Apia town.

Rapid urbanization and the concomitant growth of the informal sector in other parts of the Pacific Islands region have been studied and documented (Reddy, Naidu and Mohanty 2003; Conroy 2010), and for Samoa Dunlop (2003), Boon (2001), and Taua'a (2010) are the few who have explored and written about the informal economy. However there is limited data on this vibrant part of the urban economy and little published on the increased visibility and intensity of informal economic activities in Apia.

Informal economic activity has been described in various ways such as the 'irregular economy' (Ferman & Berndt 1981), the 'shadow economy' (Frey, Weck, & Pommerehne 1982; Heintz 2012:5) as 'illegal yet legitimate activities through which actors recognize and exploit opportunities' (Webb et al 2009: 492), as 'precarious' (Sharp et al. 2015) and as the 'informal economy' (McCrohan & Sugrue 2001). These different but overlapping understandings of informality are derived from the varied nature of the activities that people engage in outside of the traditional formal economy. Portes, Castells & Benton (1989) refer to the informal sector as a situation in which people across the developed and developing world inhabit radically different environments that share certain characteristics in organization. As such, it is argued that informality cannot be too rigidly defined – street vendors scraping by and moonlighting professionals both live within the informal economy and they are linked by one thing; their economic activities are 'unregulated by the institutions of society' (Portes; Castells & Benton; 1989).

Interest in informal economic activity started to make its way into academic literature in the 1970s as described by Hart (1973) in his studies in Africa. Conroy (2012) cited earlier studies by Mayhew (1851,1861), Bauer and Yamey (1951,1957) and Salisbury (1971) claiming their work on informality preceded that of Hart, but whatever contributions that may existed then, the idea of the informal economy as a characteristic of developing countries in the modern era, started with Keith Hart. Since then, different definitions have emerged ranging from simple to complex dual, structural and legal dimensions (Becker 2004; Gerxhani 1999). There is also the breaking down of informality into perspectives or criteria such as political, economic and social and more importantly, the definition of informality adopted reflects the differences in research objectives and location or regions where the informal economy is being

studied, Schneider & Enste (2000) provide a comprehensive discussion of informal sector definitions. Perhaps, Hart's most lasting contribution to the most commonly used contemporary definition of the informal sector is that it lacks regulation by the political and economic institutions of a society. This definition of the informal economy aptly describes the situation in urban Samoa. However, the lack of a universal definition for the informal sector-economy in all its aspects and in all its country contexts is one of the problems researchers and development practitioners encounter when dealing with the informal economy. It is quite normal practice therefore to attempt a definition of the sector at the outset.

A widely used cross cutting definition of the informal sector in small island developing states has been proposed by the International Labour Organization (ILO 2000, p.15)

Simply expressed, the informal sector is the 'way of doing things' characterized by:

- ease of entry
- reliance on indigenous resources
- family ownership of enterprise
- small scale of operation
- labour-intensive and adapted technology
- skills acquired outside the formal school systems
- unregulated and competitive markets
- self-funded, no access to credit from financial institutions

An organization, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), working in close association with the ILO, expanded on the latter's definition to include workers in informal employment. "Informal employment refers to all employment arrangements that leave individuals without social protection through their work, whether or not the economic units they operate or work for are formal enterprises, informal enterprises or households" (WIEGO 2014: 5). All those in informal employment were then further classified into two types as follows:

- (1) Persons employed in the informal sector (including those rare persons who are formally employed in the informal sector):
 - i. Own account (self-employed) workers in their own informal enterprises
 - ii. Employers in informal enterprises
 - iii. Employees of informal enterprises
 - iv. Contributing family workers working in informal enterprises
 - v. Members of informal producers' cooperatives
- (2) Persons in informal employment outside the informal sector, specifically:
 - i. Employees in formal enterprises not covered by social protection, national labour legislation, or entitlement to certain employment benefits such as paid annual or sick leave
 - ii. Paid domestic workers not covered by social protection, national labour legislation, or entitlement to certain employment benefits such as paid annual or sick leave
 - iii. Contributing family workers working in formal enterprises

On the first category, all the sub-categories were found in the Samoan study referred to above, a survey of the 302 sample population in research in 2016 discussed below. However, in the second category, employees in formal enterprises not covered by social protection, or entitlement to certain benefits such as paid annual or sick leave were excluded from the study sample because of the difficulty in confirming their employment situation with their employers. Furthermore, paid domestic workers not covered by social protection, and contributing family workers working in formal enterprises, such as those persons helping out or working part-time for family-owned supermarkets and restaurants volunteered information through informal discussions but were not part of the study sample.

Essentially from the WIEGO (2014) perspective, the “informal sector” of a national economy refers to unincorporated enterprises that may also be unregistered or small; whereas “informal employment” refers to employment without social protection through work both inside and outside the informal sector. The “informal economy” refers to all units, activities, and workers as categorized and defined above, plus the output from them. Together, workers identified in these categories form the broad base of the workforce and economy, both nationally and globally. These are important official statistical definitions endorsed by international agreements that need to be followed by both official statisticians and researchers to ground and exemplify work on this very critical part of a country’s economy (WIEGO 2014: 6) In the same vein, Edgcombe and Thetford (2004: 6), define the informal sector as a ‘component of the overall market in which enterprises, employers, and self-employed individuals engage in legal but unregulated activities, while they do not comply with standard business practices, taxation regulations, and/or other business reporting requirements; they are otherwise not engaged in overtly criminal activity’. Linked to this aspect of informal employment and economic activities is the idea, that labour and work in the informal economy is subject to segmentation. This means that there are productive and less productive jobs in the informal economy that can be represented by a triangle-pyramid where the productive jobs and economic activities occupy the apex of the triangle made up of employers, the second tier of the triangle consist of regular wage workers, tier 3 is made up of own account operators, tier 4 is occupied by casual informal wage workers, and the bottom portion of the triangle-pyramid consists of the home-workers (Chen 2005 cited in Sida & Jutting 2009: 99; also cited in Hull 2009: 72). This representation of informal workers and the informal economy in the larger developing countries does not reflect the segmentation of workers in Samoa, but the idea presented can be adapted to depict the segmentation of informal workers in Samoa. The segmentation of informal labour and activities in Samoa can be derived from identifying the type of activities the operators are doing and how much income they are earning.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2006) on the other hand, attempted to describe the sector rather than define it. The informal sector can be seen on streets, sidewalks and alleys of cities and includes street vendors, petty traders, and small scale artisans who function on a small scale. In Asia, a large share of the informal sector consists of self-employed individuals. The logic of survival underpins the development of informal activities (Tokman 2007: 15). In the Pacific, however, the bulk of employment in the informal sector is based on household family labour directly or indirectly engaged in subsistence production (Conroy 2010; Lal and Raj 2006).

Others (Bekkers and Stoffers 1995) saw the informal sector as a short term engagement for participants while they await better opportunities in the form of formal wage employment. For example in Indonesia, the informal sector accounts for most of the total employment. In the 1980s and 1990s, 60 percent of the economically active population depended on the informal sector as their main source of employment and income (Sethuraman 1976; Aziz 1997; Gibson & Kelly 1994). Likewise in the Pacific, 50-60 percent of Fiji and Vanuatu's urban population work in the informal sector (Storey 2006). For Samoa, the 2011 census survey reported that for the Apia Urban Area 4.4 percent of the economically active population aged 15+ produce subsistence for use/sale, 0.2 percent are street vendors, 1.6 % make goods for sale and 12.3 % are self-employed (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2012a: 77). It is unclear from the report the types of work performed by those who reported themselves as self-employed. Presumably, those 'self-employed' persons may be engaged in informal economic activities of which this study would be able to pick up and properly enumerate their earnings and account for the reasons they are self-employed. Elsewhere in the developing world, informal sector operations are critical forms of production and organization that contribute immensely to income and employment opportunities (Misati 2010: 222). For example, ILO informal sector studies in Thailand, Mongolia and Zambia reported on the role of the informal sector in forming human capital through apprenticing and other forms of learning-by-doing, where the sector is portrayed as an 'incubator for entrepreneurship in the economy (ILO, 2004,p.83).

Equally important is the role of the informal sector as a growth base for micro enterprises in certain niche markets, such as tailoring and designing ventures that started off as informal sector ventures but now produce for local and export markets (ILO 2004: 84). Similar experiences have been reported in the past from Samoa where a handful of 'flea market' ventures in the late 1980s started off as informal vending but have expanded to become fully registered enterprises in rented spaces in the Apia Central Business District such as the 'Indoors Variety Shop'. Some of these businesses are exporting *lavalava* and printed *elei* materials to American Samoa.

Another more commonly used definition for the informal sector emerged in 1993 after the 15th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) where it was resolved to define the informal sector as:

'...consisting of units engaged in the production of goods and services with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes to the persons concerned. These units typically operate at a low level of organization, with little or no division between labour and capital as factors of production and on a small scale. Labour relations - where they exist – are based mostly on casual employment, kinship or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements with formal guarantees.'

(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD 2002: 162).

Essentially, units of production referred to in the ICLS definition can be either, formal sector enterprises; informal sector enterprises; or households. These units can be engaged in any type of activities that are legal, not underground; legal, underground; or illegal. However, it is a well-known fact that in developing countries most informal sector activities are neither underground nor illegal, as they represent simply a survival strategy for the people involved in them and for their households (Husmanns 2003: 11).

The purpose of the ICLS definition was to extend as broad as possible the idea of the informal sector as a statistical concept to include a large extent of non-observed activities that rarely make it into the statistical records, such as care giving, grounds or yard maintenance, housekeeping or unpaid family labour. This includes the large number of households engaged in agricultural related activities in the rural areas. Thus, the definition encompasses the variety of ways in which the informal economy reveals itself in different countries. A broad definition allows countries leeway to formulate relevant parameters in defining and studying the informal economy as it exists within the local context of individual countries. A case in point is the study of the informal sector in Papua New Guinea by Kavan (2013), where the urban informal sector is defined as a sub-set of the urban and rural informal sector combined (Kavan 2013: 31).

In short, the informal economy is best explained by comparing it with the formal economy for ease of reference. Table 1 presents key differences between the two sectors to highlight a clear demarcation between formal and informal operations. Table 2 presents the shift in conceptualizing the informal sector in the last 10 years.

Table 1: Differentiating between formal and informal economic activities in the urban setting

Formal	Informal
Waged work in Government, private sector, own licensed business.	People 'get by' earning or producing for own consumption, without having jobs [vending, hawking]
Pay income tax, value added tax	Do not pay income taxes, nor collect value added tax
What is produced is counted in GDP	Not counted in national production, although it is a form of livelihood that feed, clothe, and shelter families and the census of population and housing tries to capture it with questions on economic activity
Time is structured by law	Time is unstructured: people work whenever they can or as long as it takes.
Legal protection and rights	Without rights and protection, or rights are ignored.

Adapted from Conroy, D (2010 d. p. 191)

Looking at the column on the right in Table 1, all the features presented by Conroy (2010) apply to the informal sector in Samoa. Informal operators may not pay income taxes but they pay tax indirectly via the value added goods and services tax (VAGST) when they buy goods to sell from retailers and wholesalers. For example, the vendors of imported items such as canned soda drinks and snacks pay the 15% VAGST on these items purchased from the wholesalers in Apia. An important point to note though is that, people in the informal economy are not all doing it 'to get by'. There are variations and differentiation amongst informal operators, where some have done well in terms of earnings, that the informal venture is treated almost like a formal unit, in the sense that the owners actually set up a 'bank account' for the venture,

other than the owners personal account. On the other hand, it is not yet a formal unit because it is not formally registered as a business venture, with a business license, but the operations imitate that of a formal business where the owner's income is kept separate from the business earnings. Anecdotal evidence suggest a handful of informal vendors in the early 1980s have now become fully fledged formal businesses in clothing manufacturing with established designer labels exported to American Samoa and New Zealand. Other than subsistence and agriculture production, items produced by the urban informal economy are excluded from GDP calculations and these range from food production, clothing and sewing, catering, general trading and vending activities, floral arrangements, home-based carpentry and furniture making services to name a few.

Past and Present Characterizations of the Informal Economy

The contrasts between the old and new thinking about the informal sector reflects how the concept has evolved over the years and what society expects to happen as time passes, when modernization takes over (Table 2). The old view, that the informal sector is marginally productive, relates to agriculture, in particular subsistence agriculture. The new view of agriculture sees it as providing employment and a main contributor to GDP. The informal sector was also once thought to exist separately from the formal economy but after much studying and research work into the informal sector, it is found to be closely linked to the formal economy (Chen 2007; Moreno-Monroy et al. 2014). Evidence from the study referred to below also found that many of the buyers and users of informal goods and services are formal sector workers. Some formal sector workers earn a second income through informal activities. There was also evidence of trading between informal and formal operators along the lines of a supply-chain link between for example, vegetable growers and supermarket chains, or vegetable growers and restaurants. Moreover, the informal economy is more than just street traders and small scale producers; it is comprised of a broad range of occupations such as casual work, part-time and home-based type occupation.

Table 1: Key differences between earlier and current thinking about the informal sector

The old view	The new view
1)...the traditional economy that will wither away and die with modern, industrial growth	...here to stay and expanding with modern industrial growth
2)...only marginally productive	...a major provider of employment, goods and services for lower income groups. It contributes a significant share of GDP
3)...exists separately from the formal economy	...linked to the formal economy –it produces for, trades with, distributes for and provides services to the formal economy
4)...represents a reserve pool of surplus labour	...much of the recent rise in informal employment is due to the decline in formal employment or to the informalization of previously formal employment relationships.
5)...is comprised mostly of street traders and very small scale producers	...is made up of a wide range of informal occupations- both resilient old forms such as casual day labour in construction and agriculture as well as emerging new ones such as temporary and part time jobs plus home work for high-tech industries.

Source: Managing informality: Local government practices and approaches towards the informal economy –Learning examples from five African Countries; 2012.p.12 and Chen, 2007,p.12

The shift in thinking about informality across the world reflects what is happening in Samoa. Whereas in the 1970s-1980s decade, informality was frowned upon and considered the downside of capitalism that will eventually disappear when development takes off (see studies by ADB 2010; Ndabeni 2013; Ndiweni et al. 2013; Nazier & Ramadan 2015; African Development Bank Group Website and Blog), informality is seen as becoming more relevant with time (World Bank, 2007, p.37). Instead of informality shrinking and withering away through structural transformation, it is acting as a dispersed development engine, creating widespread income and employment (Chakrabarti & Kundu 2009:.28). Evidence collected from the study discussed below emphasized how informal operations have enabled a number of households and individuals to feed their families and meet other family obligations. It is linked to the formal economy in many ways, for example, informal vendors depend on salaried workers buying their products. There is also a vendor-vendor relationship, where informal vendors are known to vend products on behalf of formal businesses on a commission basis. Many of the young people in Apia are employed in the informal economy while they are looking for jobs in the formal economy, which is the case with five of the study participants. The old view that the informal sector is comprised of street traders and very small scale producers has changed or shifted to include a wide range of informal occupations such as home based sewing operations (*fale su'isu'i*), floral arrangements, car washing and home-based baking, and catering.

The internet has also been used as a means of advertising, selling and placing orders online. Some formal sector workers reported advertising their *elei* fabrics on Facebook. Facebook is the new 'word of mouth' means of spreading the news about one's latest print design among friends and relatives. It has also become the means of placing orders for printed fabrics among friends, and work colleagues. In March 2016, the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship conducted a training exercise with women in small business ventures on how to use the various social media applications such as Facebook and Instagram to market their products. Sixty per cent of the participants were women with informal businesses, and one of them was a respondent in this study.

Causes of Informality

Having attempted to define what the informal economy is, identifying the causes for its existence and persistence is equally important at least for this study, since it is presented as an option to pull urban Samoans out of their hardship because informal sector economic activities has proven to do so elsewhere (ILO 2000b; Morris E 2001: 85; Tshuma & Jari 2013; Mbaye 2014). Lack of economic growth (Sethuraman 1976; Tokman 1978) was presented as one key reason for poor people turning to make a living in the informal sector amidst slow economic growth in the face of rapid population growth and sluggish job opportunities particularly in the developing countries as far back as the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Lewis 1954). A second explanation to the causes of informality is the jobless growth theory in the formal sector of developing countries' economies (Islam 2010: 10). This lack of job creation despite overall economic growth in the global economy before the 2009 recession, and the phenomenon of jobless growth is thoroughly discussed elsewhere (UNDP 1993, 1996), but for the purpose of this study, jobless growth in the formal economy has a bearing in the proliferation of informal economic activities. Other factors that cause informality are explained in terms of 'exclusion' and 'exit' concepts (Oviedo 2009).

For example, informal operations as a result of exclusion is due to (i) stringent and costly regulations, and (ii) lack of opportunities, particularly for certain demographic groups in the formal sector. Informality as a result of exit is due to (i) mediocre benefits of being formally employed (or formally registered), (ii) individual preference for self-employment, and (iii) lack of trust in public institutions (Oviedo 2009: 7).

And, finally, informality seems to be the natural response of people to structural changes in the economy over time, such as the shift from agriculture to manufacturing (Kuznets 1955; McMillan & Rodrik 2011; Aggarwal & Kumar 2012) manifested in massive rural to urban movement of people in developing countries and the inability of these economies to generate productive formal employment to absorb these new comers. In some cases, the change in political ideology and economic organization such as moving from a centrally planned economy to market forces as was the case with Mongolia in the 1990s boosted the growth of informal operations to absorb a large proportion of the population who found themselves unemployed due to privatization that accompanied the transition to a market economy (Morris E 2001). Moreover, thinking of where to get money to pay for the household's daily subsistence and other needs are questions that confront individuals at several points in their lives particularly the young and economically disadvantaged (Shapland n.d.:3). This is when the economic opportunities presented in the

informal economy are perceived by many as the answer to these pertinent questions. For example, once a person starts making and selling an item, others follow, and informality continues to grow. There is a close link between the explanations for the causes of informality and the theories presented in the later parts of this chapter, thus more will be said about this in the sections to follow.

Measuring the Informal Economy

Many countries have adopted the International Labour Organization Guidelines on Measuring the Informal sector (2013). Labour Force Surveys, Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, Informal Sector Enterprise Surveys and Informal Sector Mixed Household-Enterprise Surveys are some of the more common tools proposed to quantify the activities and growth of informality particularly in the Developing countries. Selecting the appropriate tool, depend upon the measurement objectives. For example, if the objective is to track informal employment in terms of the number and characteristics of the people involved, and the conditions of their employment, then the data can be obtained by adding questions addressing these particular issues to an existing labour force survey (OECD 2002: 169). But, one of the challenges identified with setting objectives and collecting data through labour force surveys, for example, relates to timeliness and cost of conducting regular surveys of this magnitude in developing countries such as Samoa.

Other statistical and economic measures proposed in the literature such as the Dynamic Multiple Indicators or Multiple Causes Modeling (Aldersdale et al. 2006:13) uses multiple data sources available in the country, including studies such as this one, to capture as much information as possible about the informal economy. Furthermore, the method can be applied to small scale local levels that are cost-effective and easier to administer. For example; measuring output from home-based informal operators in a particular region of the country.

It is also flagged as capable of determining the size and evolution of economic activity over time. This method has the potential to be used in Samoa alongside the conventional Labour Force Surveys and Household Income Expenditure Surveys.

Conceptual Framework: Sustainable Livelihood Approach

Since efforts to define and measure the informal sector began with Hart's work in the 1970s, two schools of thinking continue to debate its advantages and disadvantages. The first group pointed out the advantages of informal sector activities in providing employment and income earning opportunities (Hau'ofa 1979; McGee et al 1980; Waldorf and Waldorf 1983; Reddy et al 2003; ILO 2004; Khan & Khan 2009; Conroy 2010; Sparks D.L & Barnett S.T 2010; Asian Development Bank 2012). The critics on the other hand, highlighted the downside of informal activities as exploitative at individual levels, provides low earning opportunities, low levels of living standards and a nuisance and eye sore in urban centers (Suharto 2002; Portes et al. 1989; Moser 1981) The study on the informal economy in Samoa subscribes to the former school of thinking and the evidence that follows hopefully is convincing to support the rationale for building the capacity of informal sector participants to enable them to earn their livelihood and become self-reliant, a welcoming change from reliance on remittances.

Given the research looks at the informal economy as an income earning opportunity for the poor in Apia, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Department for International Development-DFID 1999) is therefore the more appropriate framework to place this study. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework became prominent in the 1990s and largely spearheaded by the work of Robert Chambers. It has been used extensively to frame pro-poor development policies for many southern developing economies (Mensah 2012:8). The concept of livelihoods has become increasingly popular in development thinking as a way of conceptualizing the economic activities of poor people (Adato & Meizen-Dick 2002:7; Chambers & Conway 1991). It helps to capture the daily, complex, inter-related systems and socio-economic dynamics that constrain households. While the focus of development thinking revolved around job creation in the formal sector, as an important strategy for poverty reduction, the reality for poor people in developing island states depends on the pursuit of different opportunities such as those available in the informal economy.

A livelihood was initially defined as having adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs (Chambers & Conway 1991:5), it was deemed an inadequate definition without it being sustainable, hence the concept of a sustainable livelihoods. Sustainable, therefore refers to the maintenance on a long term basis of the resources that people's livelihood depends on. For example, a household may be able to procure their livelihood through numerous means – subsistence farming, fishing, formal employment, livestock (pigs, chickens) farming or through varied activities in the urban informal economy.

Robert Chambers used the 'household' as the focus of his sustainable livelihoods analysis which is very relevant to this study of the informal economy in Samoa because as the data gathered for this study indicated those persons active in the informal economy primarily do so to feed (*fafaga*) their families, meet their church and social obligations and help out (*fesoasoani*), with their families/household daily needs.

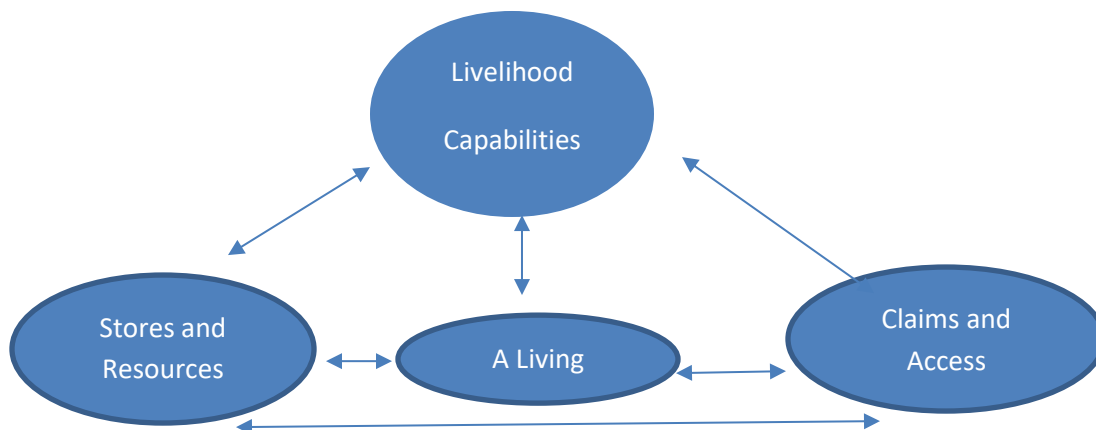
Chambers (1991) proposed four categories that make up the livelihood of a household as follows:

- (1) People (their livelihood capabilities),
- (2) Activities (what they do),
- (3) Assets (tangible [resources, land, reserves/stores], intangible [access]),
- (4) Gains or outputs (a living, what they gain from what they do)

People include all men, women, youth and young children in the household and what they are capable of doing to earn a living. Capabilities depend on factors such as, education level, age, physical ability or disability, and actual number of able-bodied persons in the household. The activities of the household is simple to grasp, these are what they do to earn their living such as farming and fishing ,food vending, making things to sell, fabric painting (elei), lavalava making, sewing and floral arrangements in the informal economy. Assets include tangible things like the land used for cultivation, reserves or stores such as food stocks and items of value such as fine mats (ie sae or 'ini'ini ranges from a minimum of SAT\$2,000.00 to \$5,000.00 depending on size) and intangible assets such as access and rights to use assets such as land and fishing grounds. What people get out of the activities they do is labeled as their gains or outputs. These are the direct and physical benefits such as decent livelihoods, wider choices, improved

self-respect, and better quality of life for the household. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach to depict how it can be applied to the study.

Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihood Framework



Source: Adapted from Krantz, 2001, p.14-16

There are three reasons to justify adopting the Sustainable Livelihoods framework. First, Sustainable Livelihoods is centered on people and their livelihoods and has been trialed and found to have contributed immensely to people centered policy discussions in the developing world (Ashley & Carney 1999; Farrington et al. 2002; Mensah 2012: 11). It seeks to understand how people make their living. Moreover, in defining poverty in the Pacific (chapter 4), the people's view of what is causing their poverty and hardship was factored into the definition and recommendations by Abbott and Pollard (2004) and Pollard (2012) on probable ways to ease Pacific Islander's state of hardship.

Second, the framework sees beyond the conventional poverty indicators of income and consumption to include well-being, access to land, credit, social relationships and social exclusion to name a few. A case in point is the application of the framework to diagnose the causes of poverty done through participatory poverty assessments. This tool aids to disaggregate the poor and vulnerable, to allow for a more focused approach to frame poverty intervention policies and programmes such as support and build-up of informal economic activities (Norton & Foster 2001:30). The poor are not a homogeneous group, hence, the need to disaggregate them. There are female-headed households, the elderly, and the disabled, for example who may be vulnerable to poverty and poverty intervention programmes to address their needs vary from one group to the other.

Third, the Sustainable livelihood framework has shed new light on the importance of working with the poor and supporting them in their efforts to reduce poverty (Carney 1998). It recognizes that there are important differences among households in a given community, and among individuals who make up the household. Equally important, the framework is an instrument to understand the types of assets (skills, knowledge, and abilities) people rely on, ways they develop to make their living, the context in which they

live and operate, and the variables that make their livelihood vulnerable to shocks and stresses. Another important argument in support of the framework emerged from a recent concern coming out of Africa, to include the informal economy in the ongoing discussions on the green economy and sustainable development (UNRISD 2012). Indeed a relevant point also for the informal economy in Samoa considering the country's vulnerability to natural disasters and economic shocks that put the poor at risk. Vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change are critical concerns for Samoa that will underpin the next theme for the Strategy for the Development of Samoa as outlined in the 2016/2017 budget presentation by the Minister of Finance on Tuesday 31st May, 2016.

Livelihoods of the poor depend also on assets they possess or have access to. Natural capital assets encompass the soil, air, water and environmental services that are necessary for human survival. The physical capital on the other hand, refers to infrastructure, production equipment and technologies needed to earn a livelihood. Financial capitals imply all the cash, credit, savings and other economic assets required to fund people's livelihoods. Social capital encompasses the networks, social claims, and social relations people engage in for mutual benefit (Ruzek 2014:28). Essentially, the sustainable livelihoods framework presents two elements that are critical in the study of informal economic activities. These are 1) livelihood assets and 2) livelihood strategies (Ashley & Carney 1999; Singh & Gilman 1999). Livelihood assets fall into five categories that are particularly important in achieving positive livelihood outcomes.

These are human capital, natural capital, financial, physical and social capital (Morse et al. 2009: 6; Brocklesby and Fisher 2003: 186).). Human capital refers to the number and quality of labour in a household that can be deployed to work in household subsistence or paid employment. The household may have to fall back on these members in difficult times. The quality aspect of human capital refers to the level of skills, education and health of household members. A case in point is the Samoan extended family network, expected to coalesce in times of fa'alavelave (social-cultural obligations) to lend support to the affected members of the wider extended family. Another example is getting a member of the extended family to care for younger children or an elderly parent in return for a small wage or no wage.

Livelihood assets underpin the asset vulnerability framework advocated by Moser (1998). Implicit in this framework is the idea that access to resources/assets as outlined above, will assist the poor with their vulnerabilities. "The more assets people have, the less vulnerable they are, and the greater the erosion of their assets, the greater their insecurity (Moser 1998:24). In the case of Samoa, land is an abundant asset, but given the shift in population from rural to urban and peri-urban, and uncertain earnings in agriculture, changing economic expectations and increasing demands for cash, total dependence on village agricultural lands for a livelihood (semi-subsistence) is quite a challenge. The challenge emerges from several factors. First, plantation work is indeed hard work. One of the respondents in the focus group survey, indicated that one of the reasons for engaging in vending lavalava relates to 'fast money' compared to work in the plantation, where planting, weeding, maintenance and harvesting [excluding theft and disease] can take up to five months, meanwhile, basic needs such as cash power, food, and transport, are daily expenses that need to be met. The cocoa value chain study by Schoeffel and Meleisea-Ainu'u (2016) also found a preference for 'fast money' which implied access to cash week by week by storing the crop and selling it in small amounts, or making kokoSamoa, instead of earning money in one lump when the whole cocoa crop is sold. Second, there is a tendency among many rural persons to look

unfavorably on farm work. According to the President of the Samoa Farmers Association, one of the obstacles facing the association in delivering their FAO funded farm projects (vegetable farming to diversify food crops for consumption and income earning) to the villages is getting the farmers excited, motivated, and sustain the motivation to keep the project going (Personal communication, 2016). There seems to be a general dislike of farm work, particularly vegetable farming since the work required to prepare the soil and vegetable beds can be quite hard compared to taro and yam cultivation, and coupled with a long history of failure, pests, costly inputs and problems with transport and selling very perishable produce, is enough to discourage vegetable farming as a form of economic livelihood. Third, insecure customary land tenure is another factor. People are reluctant to commit resources to commercial plantations (despite availability of customary lands in most villages) that are most likely shared by the entire extended family under the control of the Head Matai (Sa'o).

The underpinning principles of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach as advocated by the Food and Agriculture Organization and the United Nations Development Programme are useful in supporting the objectives of this study. These are as follows:

1. People centered
2. Holistic
3. Entitlements
4. Build on strengths of the people and opportunities available
5. Uses micro-macro links
6. Aims for sustainability

Principles 1, 2, 3 and 4 are particularly important in rationalizing the adoption of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach to frame the study of the urban informal economy in Samoa. Placing people at the center of economic development efforts and building up their capacities with the opportunities that are available is a positive step to address urbanization problems and poverty issues. To lift people out of poverty and hardship requires support (government, civil society, aid agencies) to focus their efforts on what matters to the people paying attention to the differences between groups of people and work with them in a way that is congruent with their livelihood strategies, social – cultural environment and ability to adapt (Norton & Foster 2001:13). In the same vein, livelihoods can be complex and multidimensional. Hence the need to take holistic views of the multiple factors that impact on people's livelihoods. For example, people adopt many strategies to secure their livelihoods which in turn are affected by factors that may be outside their control such as the macroeconomic policies of the government of the day. Equally important in the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is identifying all assets available to the community and individuals (land and other physical resources, human ingenuity, creativity) that have the potential to reduce their poverty (ILO 2004:23).

A holistic, 'big picture' approach is necessary when exploring how to make the best use of what few assets people have at their disposal. It implies a closer examination of available and able bodied family labour. In the case of Samoa, able bodied males make up the bulk of seasonal workers (fruit pickers) to New Zealand. All those persons who can make a collective contribution to earning income that can be shared by the entire household are considered crucial to the household's livelihood. Policy framers and

implementers need to understand the multiple factors that impact on people's livelihoods to ensure proposed interventions work for the benefit of communities.

A case in point to illustrate the Sustainable Livelihoods 'asset' approach is the latest push by the Government of Samoa to free up customary lands for foreign investment purposes (Samoa Observer 29 December 2013). Freeing up customary lands to boost economic returns on a commercial scale may not necessarily be the best option for the wider population. This is due to the extent of capital investment required and the potential threats to land ownership that may accompany such huge ventures. Also, as stated in the earlier chapter, only 14.2 percent of the total land area of Samoa is fertile land suitable for agriculture, the remaining land area pose severe limitations for agriculture and would require substantial investment in crops that may be environmentally unsound such as plantation forestry.

Furthermore, as Schoeffel et.al. (2021: 104-109) asserted, the greatest value of customary land may be that it is a place of belonging (*fa'asinamaga*) to those who have moved to town or settled overseas, and who remit money to their families living on the land to affirm and secure the rights of those not living there. What the study is advocating in this 'asset' approach is a more family, eco- manageable utilization of the land to support the informal economy. This support does not have to be in farming the land. Households are already engaged in subsistence farming across rural and in the urban fringes of Samoa. The 'asset' idea suggested in this study is similar to the Grameen Bank micro credit scheme approach where small loans are given to poor or vulnerable people so they can start or prop up their existing small ventures (Hasan 2002: 46). Evidence from this study suggested a number of informal economic operators started their operations from this type of small lending; for example one woman told of how she borrowed from a woman's group she belonged to, to fund her small enterprise selling lunch-time food to school children.

Principle 3 on entitlements is equally important from a human rights perspective. These rights extend to include economic, social, cultural and political rights. Even the poor have rights, and as such, government and non- government institutions are obligated to ensure measures are in place to promote and empower individuals and communities to achieve their economic, social, cultural and political rights. It is imperative for any government of the free world to provide or facilitate employment opportunities among other things for its population. And in the event of insufficient job availability, and high unemployment rates, other means of income earning opportunities such as in the informal economy need to be supported to allow people to make a decent living. Advocates of the informal sector espouse informal income opportunities to satisfy people's basic human needs through self—employment mechanisms (Krasniqi & Topxhiu 2012: 3).

Principle 4 draws on people's existing capabilities. In other words, Sustainable Livelihood approaches encourages ways of tackling people's 'poverty' by strengthening and making the most of the skills they have and the opportunities available to them. Directly linked to people's capabilities are the 'assets' that give them the capability to be and to act (Bebbington 1999: 2022). Such assets provide people with the means to make a living but also give meaning to their world which is reflected in the decisions people make about their livelihood strategies such as how they respond and deal with their poverty. To understand how people respond to their hardship requires an inquiry into the coping and adaptive

strategies pursued by individuals and households. In the informal economy, the people have come up with innovative ways other than subsistence agriculture to earn their livelihood. The wide range of activities the respondents are engaged in is a testament to how they are making the most of economic opportunities that come their way.

Conclusion

A number of take away messages emerge from the above discussion. First, the informal economy is a global phenomenon that was once thought to characterize developing economies more so than developed, modern industrial societies. But, according to Keith Hart, the informal economy is a label for economic activities that escape state regulation. It arose in response to the proliferation of self-employment and casual labor in Third World cities; but later the expression came to be used with reference to industrial societies, where it competed with similar epithets – the ‘hidden’, ‘underground’, ‘black’ economy, and so on’ (cited in Conroy, 2012, p.4).

Second, the proliferation of the informal economy in developing economies of Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific was once looked upon with disdain by economists, as an indication of social-economic ill-being, linked to poverty and unemployment. But, Hart’s work in Africa has demonstrated the sector’s capacity to foster growth and create jobs and opportunities particularly for women and youths. It provides a potential tool for redressing poverty. The informal economy in Samoa has become the safety net for urban (and rural) households in the absence of formal employment and social protection for many households. It plays an important role in employing those leaving the rural agricultural sector (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2016: 23). Added to that, it provides the basic needs of the poor and vulnerable members of the population by enabling them to earn income that would prevent them from falling deeper into poverty or hardship. This justified the need to support informal livelihoods through improved access to resources such as financial literacy, micro credit and skills development training.

Third, informality promotes and grows entrepreneurship and not all the entrepreneurs operating in the informal economy do so out of economic necessity or as a survival strategy. For instance, some people encountered in the study, withdraw from the formal economy for personal reasons or because of family obligations and turn to a livelihood based on informal income earning activities to supplement household income.

In short, the informal economy in urban Samoa as defined in the foregoing discussion is an essential component of the economic landscape of the country or any country for that matter. Informality is expected to exist alongside the formal economy, after all the formal and informal economy are two sides of the same coin.

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