PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD AND ADULT POVERTY IN TONGA

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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by the Tonga Department of Statistics (SD) to examine the perceptions of the Tongan people about poverty, and was carried out by the Institute of Education (IOE) of The University of the South Pacific (USP). The study draws attention to Tongan people's perceptions about adult and child poverty and the SD and Tongan government's efforts to establish tools to reduce poverty.

The very first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 1) targets a reduction in poverty in all its forms, everywhere. This study is part of the SD and the Tongan Government's efforts to improve the quality of life for all the people of Tonga.

The research has revealed that the main poverty-related issues affecting participants' lives fell into four broad themes: money, social obligations, individual characteristics, and resources. Under the theme of money, these sub themes emerged: income, cost of living, debt, and hardship. Social obligations had the following sub themes: community and family. The theme of individual characteristics related mainly to behaviours, while the theme of resources revealed the sub-themes of: education, technology, housing, drinking water, and transportation.

The study also reveals that participants' definitions of poverty fell into four broad categories, namely physical, mental, spiritual, and social poverty. The category of the physical issues of poverty has sub themes which include basic needs, access, and financial hardships. The category of mental poverty included the sub themes of intellectual and knowledge poverty. The category of spiritual poverty included the sub themes of apathy and the complete person, while the category of poverty relating to social life had the sub themes of cultural practice, idleness, and unemployment.

The study asked participants about ways in which children in Tonga are vulnerable to poverty. Their answers fell under four broad themes, indicating that children's vulnerability to poverty is seen in these areas: education, hardship, social issues, and youth characteristics. For education, sub themes were found, which included: school dropout; school opportunities; and corporal punishment. For hardship there were the sub themes of financial hardships and technology. Under the theme of social issues, the sub themes were: community expectations; family issues; and relationships. The theme of youth characteristics was divided into sub themes relating to youth problems, employment, and empowerment.

Participants were also asked to provide a list with what they now regarded as the 'necessities of life' in the Tongan context. From a long list, their top six necessities in descending order are: drinking water, electricity, education, and health. Perhaps not surprisingly, mobile phones came in number six and ahead of transportation. Participants wanted the Tongan Government to support and empower the people to contribute positively to the country's economy, like finding markets for their farm produce and helping youth to find employment.

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1. Introduction

This study is part of the attempt by the Tonga Statistics Department (SD) to establish more appropriate and relevant indicators for the measuring of poverty in Tonga. Poverty statistics are important in the fight to eradicate poverty but they are also important tools in trying to achieve the primary objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and are one of the national priority areas of the Tonga Strategy for Development Framework (TSDF).

The main focus of this study is to capture the perceptions of the Tongan people about child and adult poverty in Tonga. The Tongan Statistics Department (SD) contracted the Institute of Education (IOE) of The University of the South Pacific to conduct this qualitative study using a Focus Group (FG) approach. Accordingly, nineteen FGs in total nationwide were administered; eleven on the main island of Tongatapu, five in the islands of Vavaʻu, and three in the Haʻapai island group.

The research involved two teams, one from the SD and one from IOE. The SD was responsible for the logistics of the meetings while the IOE team conducted the focus groups. The IOE team comprised two research fellows, both Tongan, and a third person who carried out the video recording.

Both teams were involved in a three-day advanced capacity building workshop that was aimed at developing the skills of research staff in conducting qualitative development work in preparation for surveys on poverty, deprivation, and living standards in Tonga. The training drew upon qualitative development work conducted as part of similar studies in the UK and Uganda, which the training workshop facilitator had been involved in.

Two main research methods were the focus of the workshops: FG and Question testing. Participants were trained in the application of FG methods in researching public views on poverty and the 'necessities of life' in Tonga today. The training covered all aspects of FG methods including design, sampling and recruitment, instrumentation, and moderating FG.

2. Aims of the Focus Group

The aim of the focus groups was to improve the measurement of poverty and social exclusion in Tonga by capturing the perceptions of the Tongan people concerning poverty. This study will also help in identifying the key issues facing people in Tonga and how these relate to poverty. It will also explore perspectives on child poverty in Tonga and identify consensus and dis-consensus in understandings of poverty and the necessities of life.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The Focus Group is a form of qualitative research which is basically a small group interview but, unlike normal interview interactions, this mainly relies on the interactions within the group on the topics supplied by the researcher who may take up the role of moderating the group. The attribute of a focus groups is their explicit use of group interactions and dynamics to generate data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.

Moderating the group discussion is also an important feature that is vital for a successful FG. Moderators are not supposed to dominate the discussion but to ensure all participants' opinions and views on the topics are heard. Training by experts in FG is useful, particularly if researchers are new to the FG method.

3.2. Participants

The number of FGs was agreed between SD and IOE. The decisions on the compositions and locality (urban or rural) of those FGs were made by the IOE research team and given to the SD who worked closely with the Tonga Government's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to organize these meetings with the government officers (town and district) in the chosen villages and communities.

On the island of Tongatapu, there were two youth groups both from rural areas, one all male rural group, two all-female groups, one each from urban and rural areas, three mixed groups from urban areas and three mixed groups from rural areas.

The five groups from Vava'u comprised an urban youth and four rural, mixed age and gender groups. The three groups from the Ha'apai islands were an all women rural group, and one mixed group each from urban and rural areas.

Table 1. Number of Focus Groups/Islands

	Tongatapu	Vava'u	Ha'apai	Total
Youth -urban		1		3
Youth - rural	2			
All Female-urban	1			4
All Female-rural	1	1	1	
All Male-rural	1			1
Mixed-urban	3		1	11
Mixed-rural	3	3	1	
Total	11	5	3	19

3.3. Data collection

The focus groups were video recorded. The consent was sought from each group at the beginning of the meeting and all nineteen groups agreed. The IOE team was responsible for recording the FG discussions.

3.3.1. Tongatapu

In Tongatapu, two teams, one from SD and one from IOE took part in the data collection. Most of the logistics were organized by the SD team and the moderating and recording of the FGs was conducted by the IOE team.

The composition and localities of the eleven FGs were decided by the IOE Research team. The rationale was to capture the perceptions of different people across the whole population. This was given to the SD team which asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to use its already established networks including town and district officers to organize these meetings. Both IOE and SD teams agreed to conduct the FGs in the afternoon when most people were free. MIA, armed with the information from the IOE research team, worked with the town and district officers to organize the meetings. A schedule of the meetings (villages and times) was produced by the MIA and both teams planned the FG discussions.

3.3.2. Vavaʻu and Haʻapai

The five focus groups in Vavaʻu were organized by the SD team in Tongatapu and by staff from their office in Vavaʻu. The groups' specifications were given to SD in Vavaʻu and they liaised with town officers to arrange the meetings. The two fellows from IOE travelled to Vavaʻu and were joined by one staff from the SD office there.

As there is no SD office in Haʻapai, the IOE team asked a staff member from the USP Haʻapai campus to arrange the three focus groups there. The two IOE fellows travelled to Haʻapai and moderated the FG meetings. In both Vavaʻu and Haʻapai, one fellow moderated the meetings while the other fellow carried out the video recording.

To thank the participants for their time and contributions, the IOE team prepared packed meals and bottles of water for the participants. This reciprocal cultural practice was performed with each group at the end of the FG meeting.

3.4. Moderators

The FG discussions were moderated by two fellows from the Institute of Education. Both fellows had prior experience in moderating FGs. They were also both participants in two expert trainings: the application of focus group methods in researching public views on poverty; and the 'necessities of life' and analysing FG data. These trainings were part of the capacity building workshops for SD and IOE staff which were conducted by faculty from the University of Bristol, UK. The workshops covered all aspects of focus group methods including focus group design, sampling and recruitment, instrumentation, moderating focus groups, data analysis and practical/ethical issues.

3.4.1. Moderating the FGs

The procedure for running the FGs was as follows. The FG is opened with a prayer. The moderator asked one of the participants to say a prayer, which is a Tongan protocol and a very common event in public meetings such as this. After the prayer, the moderator thanked the participants for coming. He introduced both teams (IOE & SD) then sought the groups' permission to videotape the discussion.

When the consent was given, the moderator reviewed the purpose of the group, and the goals of the meeting. He then outlined the programme of the meeting, how it would proceed, and how the members could contribute. After setting the tone of the meeting, the moderator then asked the participants to first introduce themselves by saying their names, what they do for a living and how many people live in their homes. After the introduction, the moderator then proceeded to ask the first question ensuring that that all opinions on that question had a chance to be heard. This process was repeated until all five questions were dealt with.

The last question (Q. 5) was a chance for participants to raise something that the discussions had not covered. At the end of question five, the moderator again thanked the participants for their time and contributions. The food and drinks were brought and given to the participants and then the two teams departed.

3.5. Focus Group Questions

The focus group discussions were guided by five main questions:
- What are the main issues facing people like yourselves in Tonga today?
- How would you define poverty in your own words? What does it mean to you?
- Do you think children in Tonga are especially vulnerable to poverty? If so, in what ways?
- What are the necessities of life in Tonga today?
- Is there anything else on the subject of poverty that you would like to raise which we have not covered?

3.6. Data preparation

The video automatically captured and categorised the discussions into folders. The IOE team then combined the folders into one folder for each meeting, with a total of nineteen folders. The IOE team decided that because of time constraints, the data was to be translated directly from the videos, without requiring transcription of the recordings first. This direct translation was given to the two fellows from the IOE team who are both Tongans and fluently bilingual in Tongan and English.

Each fellow translated one folder (one meeting) at a time until all the nineteen folders were translated. After the whole data set was translated, the two fellows exchanged data and double checked the other's translation to ensure consistency in each set of data. The next step was sorting the data according to the five research questions. For example, all data on question 1 from the nineteen focus groups were put together into one folder. This exercise split the data into five folders, one each for the five research questions.

3.7. Data analysis

The data was analysed by the two IOE fellows using framework analysis (FA) from the Framework method developed by Ritchie and Spencer in the 1980s. FA is similar to other qualitative analytical methods such as Thematic and Categorical analysis but its most distinctive feature is its thematic matrices in which every participant is allocated a row and each column denotes a separate sub theme.

Each of the five folders was analysed separately, one by one. Using a data projector, the data was projected onto a large screen. The two fellows immersed and familiarised themselves with the data. They read through to gain an overview of the substantive content. Keeping the research questions in mind (e.g. Q1- What do you think are the main issues facing people like yourselves in Tonga today?), they went through the data to ensure whatever labels developed were grounded in and supported by the data.

The next step was to construct an initial thematic framework where the set of headings on participants' perceptions, experiences, or views could be organized. After developing these headings or topics, the researchers refined and sorted them into themes and sub themes that comprised the initial thematic framework.

The final step was organizing chunks of data judged by the researchers to be 'about the same thing' so that similarly labelled data extracts could be further analysed and synthesized.

After the folder for question one was analysed, the process was repeated for research questions two and three. For question four, data analysis required compiling a list of 'necessities' that participants gave. After all the data were analysed, each question had its own set of themes and sub-themes. Two USP colleagues were invited to review the analysed data and the themes/sub-themes.

The themes and sub themes for first three questions were presented to two other USP colleagues who were participants in the training workshops on the topic of analysing qualitative data from focus groups. Their input was instrumental in further refining the sub themes and themes. The findings were left for a while and before the reporting began, the two fellows then revisited the findings with fresh eyes. Again further refining of themes and sub themes emerged and were recorded, and following this the project reporting was carried out.

4. Findings

4.1 Q.1: Poverty-related issues affecting participants

Question 1 asked 'What are the main issues facing people like yourselves in Tonga today?'

Table 2. Themes and sub themes for question one

QUESTION	THEME	SUB THEME

		Income
	Money	**Cost of living**
		Debt
		Hardship
QUESTION 1	**Social obligations**	**Community**
		Family
	Individual characteristics	**Behaviours**
		Education
		Technology
	Resources	**Housing**
		Drinking water
		Transportation

These issues fell into four broad themes: money, social obligations, individual factors, and resources. These are now addressed in turn.

4.1.1. Money

A lack of adequate income was highlighted by many participants as an issue impacting their own lives and the lives of many Tongans. Many families have regular incomes because member/s of the families are either civil servants or have paid employment. However, these regular incomes are often not enough for families' expenses including children's education, food, electricity, water bills and obligations to family, churches, and villages.

For some, achieving an adequate income via paid work was a challenge. Some families have no regular income but sometimes receive donations (both monetary and non-monetary) from family members, relatives, neighbours, and church members. Several causes of this were identified. One participant believed that there were now fewer job opportunities than there had been in the past to gain paid work using previously lucrative skills such as electrical wiring work and fishing. Another highlighted that the work that they and their family members did was not paid, resulting in their dependence on 'the love of God', expressed via what were presented as charitable donations from those who they completed work for.

> *The income to my family depends on love, love of God that comes to us and that is how we live. I have no regular form of income to help us but it's God's love that convinced people, some of them are not my relatives, to support us. (Tb4 Q1)*

Another participant reported that although they were in paid employment, their salary was paid irregularly. This lack of or instability in income was perceived to be particularly problematic because of increases in the cost of living. One participant noted an increase in the frequency and size of bills for amenities such as water and electricity. The stress this placed on family budgets had caused some participants to seek credit to enable them to provide for their families – a short term solution which

created further problems later on due to high interest rates which were described as 'frightening', leading to spiralling debts and an inability to meet their financial obligations.

Some participants expressed the belief that there is no poverty in Tonga but only hardship, although the differences between the two were not asked or captured. Maybe this is in line with this participant's belief that he is not in poverty because he is not hungry and can still look after his family.

> *Perhaps, I can say that I'm not in poverty because I'm not hungry and I'm still able to look after my family in many ways, etc. Everything is God's love and although I have retired, I still go to the bush and do farming. I do not believe there is poverty in Tonga. (Tb4 Q1)*

One participant reported that the family income may be enough for the daily needs of his family but they may struggle when other obligations have to be met. In addition, he asserts that his family will never be able to send their children overseas for further studies when they complete their education here.

A mediating factor in all of these financial hardships is the fact that there are a lot of Tongans living overseas. These overseas Tongans send large amounts of money and other materials goods to their family members here in Tonga. It is now a common practice that Tongans overseas send goods for their relatives here in Tonga to sell and therefore generate an income for themselves. This huge influx of often second hand goods arrives in containers and is being sold everywhere throughout Tonga at present.

4.1.2. Resources

Specific resources discussed by group participants included housing, education, technological resources, drinking water, transportation, and support services. The first two of these were generally considered to be important but not always adequate – in particular, several participants discussed vulnerability to flooding in relation to housing, and a lack of adequate planning and maintenance to ensure that houses were secure and resistant to poor weather conditions.

In low lying areas such as Fanga, Fasimoeafi and Popua on Tongatapu island, the construction of new roads and new houses has created man-made flooding which is another major issue. This is because the roads are higher than homes, and people who build new houses often fill their land with limestone and build their houses on that reclaimed higher ground. These frequently trap the water in the yards of houses on lower ground and which are often the older houses. Consequently, whenever there is heavy rain, these old houses are flooded and property is damaged. Drainage in low lying and flat areas is also challenging in these areas.

> *This is a big problem because the drainage system is not working on our area close to the lagoon. In rainy season like now, there is flooding. In times like this and because maybe it's lower than this side, but to me this is the cause of poverty because the land is eroded. This happens every time when there is rain. We do not have drainage and*

because we are lower than this part, every time there is rain, the water will come down to our area and we have floods all the time (Tb4 Q1)

A lot of the participants were not landholders, especially the women, and therefore could not build a house. Moreover, a lot of them do not have a family house of their own. Some are still staying in temporary shelters and cannot afford to build their own houses. Some have very old houses and admitted they will not be able to build again. Some participants have houses affected by Cyclone Gita and have not been able to fix the damage caused in 2018 by this cyclone.

I am staying in a temporary shelter (palepale). But before I moved to the shelter where I am staying right now, I was staying in a home owned by one of my relatives. I stayed and looked after that home for over ten years, then the heir of that home wanted me to move out from there. So I went back to my parent's home, both have passed away. At the moment I am staying there with my brother who is still single. So the main issue facing me today is shelter. (Tb6 Q1)

A lack of adequate education was believed by many participants to underpin problems experienced by youth. Participants emphasised the importance of students completing their education because this issue is correlated to many other social issues and problems facing the country at the moment.

Conversely, increasing levels of access to technological resources were generally not considered positive. One participant believed that people were spending too much time using mobile phones, with potentially damaging consequences for society.

Drinking water is a major issue across all the villages and communities that were involved. Drinking water for the majority of people in Tonga is rain water collected during the rainy seasons (December – April) in household water tanks. However, not all households have their own water tanks for collecting water. People with no water tanks rely on other households for their drinking water. During the cool, dry season (May – November) especially if there is no rain for a while, these people are vulnerable and struggle to obtain clean drinking water and may have limited access to it.

I know this part of the village, the only water tank that we're using for drinking is the one at this chapel (Church of Tonga) and there is another water tank at the Free Wesleyan Church chapel where most people of those blocks get their drinking water from. These two water tanks are not locked at any time because we know the situation faced by the people of this village in regards to the shortage of drinking water. I think this is the main issue facing with us in this village today. (Tb10 Q1)

There is also bottled water available at retail shops and stores, but only households with higher incomes are likely to buy bottled water for their household's drinking.

Shortage of land has been identified as a problem that a lot of people face. A lot of landowners are living overseas and a lot of people from outer islands are moving into Tongatapu, which worsens the problem. The majority of the Tongan people rely on farm produce for staple food supplies. Tongan

people's main staple foods are cassava, yams, and taro, and the majority of the people grow their own food. The problem is that there is a shortage of land for plantations and for living areas where one can build one's own house.

> *I believe that the problems facing us are not the same for everyone. For example, for me, the main issue or problem facing me and my family today is the piece of land that we are living on. We really need a piece of land for my children. The piece of land that we are living on now is not big enough for all of us because I am staying together with one of my daughter's family. (Tb3 Q1)*

Low-lying land in the coastal areas of Fanga, Fasimoeafi and Popua on Tongatapu island ideally require infill using coral gravel and soil. Usually the coral gravel is deposited first on the low lying piece of land and a spread of soil is added before buildings are erected. People need to purchase these truckloads of infill and those who can afford to will have their land higher than the others. This uneven infilling and lack of proper landscape and engineering expertise to supervise these activities has contributed to the man-made flooding in these areas.

The focus groups were held a year after Tropical Cyclone Gita and its destruction can still be seen in many of the villages and communities on the main island of Tongatapu. Tonga is vulnerable to natural disasters, especially cyclones. The cyclone season is from November to April, however storms and strong winds can affect the country at any time during the year. People in old or poor quality housing are vulnerable to the bad effects of natural disasters because they do not have houses that can withstand cyclone force winds and rains and are living in areas prone to flooding during the rainy seasons.

Participants also raised the issue of sanitation facing low lying areas when there is flooding. Most households in Tonga use a septic tank system. Some of the houses in these areas do not have safe and secure toilet facilities, and when there is flooding these septic tanks leak into the surrounding areas and this is a serious hygiene and health related issue faced by people in these areas.

A similar concern was raised in the outer islands focus group discussions. In some rural villages pit toilets are still used. Safe and secure sanitation facilities are key to people's health, while pit toilets increase the risk of contaminated flood waters. The data collection did not confirm whether this is still a common practice by a significant portion of the villages. However, it is still a health risk to some of the villages and their communities.

Participants also noted their problems in relation to transportation. Safe public transport is a very big problem nationwide. There are no bus companies, only privately owned buses who operated independently. There are no regular schedules or timetables and services depend on the goodwill of the drivers. From remote areas, it is common practice to offer the services in the morning and afternoon. There are also a lot of people who do not own any vehicles and therefore rely on other people's vehicles for transport. One student and a mother raised their problems in relation to this.

The main problem facing me today is transportation to school and other functions. I'm currently studying at X College. Sometimes we do night catering, however, to find transportation or a vehicle to take me there is a big issue for me. That is the main problem that is facing me nowadays. (TP5/Q1)

The problem related to infrastructure is mostly to do with the condition of the roads to peoples' farms and plantations. These roads are not in good condition and deteriorate when there is bad weathers and a lot of rainfall. Vehicles can no longer use the roads and therefore people cannot do work in their plantations or harvest their crops and prepare their products for sale.

Rural to urban drift has also been identified as a problem that causes poverty. This migration has a lot of negative effects on both sides of the process (rural and urban locations). In rural areas, there may be economic decline because the resources, especially agricultural areas, are not utilized fully due to a labour shortage. In urban areas, it is observed that the rise in population also correlates with a rise in unemployment, overcrowded households, health issues related to overcrowding and a rise in crimes.

Participants believe that the Government does not have services and policies to empower the people to be productive and industrious in trying to eradicate poverty. Farmers and growers feel that the government should help them market their crops.

We already heard that our major problem is relating to the financial thing, and the reason why we have this problem is that we don't have good markets so we can sell our crops and our handicrafts. I am saying this because this is a serious problem facing my family. I'm the younger brother of our district officer, and we do crop farming but the main problem is that we don't have a market for our crops so we can have money to support our family. (Vv3 Q1)

It is perceived that the Government also contributes to this by having controversial policies that hurt a lot of civil servants.

This new program required every staff to fill up an increment application form and then submit this to the office. They will evaluate the things you wrote on those forms and from there decide whether you will get a yearly increment or not. For me this is really hurting us, the civil servants, because we were always looking forward to have a yearly increment every year. Anyway, after we filled up the PMS form and when we received the results from our main office, some staff only got 1.5% increase, some they got 2% increase, and 3% increase. These small percentages were the only ones given to us at the lower levels in the work organization, but on the other hand, those senior officers and those in the higher office levels they received huge percentages in increment increases. (Tb11 Q1)

4.1.3. Social obligations

For some participants, struggling to fulfil financial obligations was linked to social obligations. Fulfilling social obligations is a problem that a lot of the participants faced. Some believed that people

are sometimes pressured by social expectations to perform obligations that they cannot afford. In most cases, the obligations are met while other more important responsibilities are overlooked, such as paying for children's education or food for the family.

> *I think the problem that is common to everyone is that their needs are too high for what they earn. Our expenses for our families, for the church, and for our community are too much higher than what we earn. So that is the problem that I'm faced with; the expenses that are demanded by our church obligations, community obligations, and family obligations are too high compared to what we earn every day. We all know that we can't do away with these obligations, although we struggled with them, but we always try to find a way to fulfil those duties. (Vv2/Q1)*

One participant highlighted a lack of support from their adult children in servicing loans they had secured to fund their children's education, another reported having taken responsibility for their son's children after he separated from the children's mother, to prevent them becoming "problem children".

Contributions to community members could also be considerable – one participant noted that their material well-being had been impacted when they took in another family in whose accommodation had been destroyed by Gita. These participants were eager to stress that they did not expect reciprocal support, but that their actions to help others had placed additional burdens on their own well-being.

The strong cultural commitment to community and family was therefore a somewhat ambivalent issue. On the positive side, providing for family and community was evidently a sign of social and economic success. In contrast, for many participants, commitments to community and church left them with less time and fewer resources than they would have liked to dedicate to their own family and children.

There was a significant number of participants who came from big families. They are supporting a lot of dependents, especially children, in their households. One participant acknowledged having thirteen children, two having eleven children each, and parents living with both children and grandchildren or with other families in the same household. With big families like these, multiple members of the households need regular incomes or livelihoods to sustain better living standards.

> *I'm staying at home with my children and 12 grandchildren plus another family. This family had moved from place to place and from home to home. But now they are staying with me in my house. The father of this family has passed away, so only the mother and the children are at home with me. (Tb3 Q1)*

Broken families is also a major issue discussed. One participant is a divorced mother with four boys. They have been moving houses until 2015 when they were invited to share accommodation with another family. The mother said that their most urgent need is a house of their own. Another separated mother is looking after her five children. Her problem is trying to have money to finance her children's education.

The family unit is the basic social unit for stability and harmony in larger social units like the extended families, the churches, and villages. When this unit is broken, either by death, divorce, separation, overseas travel, or employment, it affects the stable dynamics of the families and larger social units. When one parent no longer plays his/her role the other parent struggles to make ends meet, and this creates further social problems. Such families are vulnerable to poverty and other social problems.

> *I'm separated from my husband and we have moved houses many times. I worked as helper in many homes to help the education of my children. They are four boys and the eldest has got a scholarship to Japan, the second has completed form 7 at X College, a third is at form three and the youngest is still in class six at primary school. (Tb2 Q1)*

> *I am a single mother of five children. My eldest daughter is Form 5 at X High School, the second daughter is Form 4, the third daughter is Form 1, and the two youngest boys are both at the primary school. (Vv5 Q1)*

Physical disability is related to people with physical disabilities which prevent them from contributing financially or playing their roles in their families. One mother reports that her husband who helped her look after their family is now blind and therefore he can no longer contribute and the roles and responsibilities they used to share are now on her shoulders alone.

> *I have only three people staying at my home: myself, my husband, and one son. The main issue facing my family now is that my husband is blind and he can't do anything, therefore I am responsible for everything in looking after my family. (Hp2 Q1)*

4.1.4. Individual characteristics

Limited capacity to provide resources and attention to children and young people was, for some, linked to a perceived problem with individual characteristics – specifically laziness and behavioural issues, and this was observed particularly among younger people. Several participants believed that many Tongans, and particularly younger Tongans, were "lazy", choosing not to work but rather to live in impoverished circumstances, rely on resources provided by others and, in some instances, turn to crime (particularly theft) to acquire the resources they needed. Such behaviour was considered by some to be a result of attitudes rather than necessity, and one participant gave an example of someone who they believed to have not been 'really' poor, but who chose to live in a manner the participant considered impoverished by choice. However, this issue was debated by others who linked crime and impoverishment to a lack of adequate resources and opportunities rather than to personal attitudes and motivations.

Robbery is a growing social problem nationwide. This is exacerbated by the fact that there are also prospective buyers of these stolen goods. Participants feel that if the stealing is to feed the family then maybe its morally justified, but most of the stealing is for personal use and financial gain. Some participants from one urban area have found that a family from one of the villages have a stall beside the main road in their area and this family sells stolen farm products. The mother manages the stall while the children bring the products in.

For one family, they feel that they are trapped in the middle when thieves target the main income for the family.

> *So the main problem facing my family today is the work of the thieves. Some people like to steal our tutu. To be honest we are sick and tired of what these thieves do to our tutu and sometimes we decided to quit from planting the tutu. But we can't because we know that is the main income of my family and that is where we can get the children's school fees and money to pay our bills. (Tb10 Q1)*

Laziness is another problem that participants believe causes poverty. Laziness is when someone has the bad habit of not wanting to work even if they have the energy and health to do so. Some participants believed that the drinking of kava caused laziness in the male population. Laziness and inactivity have strong links to health issues as well. This is what one participant said about laziness.

> *The only reason why we are poor is because of our laziness and not doing any work to support the family. There are many things in here that we can do to get money, such as weaving mats and fishing or growing crops at the bush. (Hp1 Q1)*

Drugs and alcohol abuse is considered to be a major problem in the whole of Tonga currently. There have been high numbers of recent highly publicised drug-related cases, involving crimes ranging from murder, to violence and assaults, with multiple arrests for drug smuggling, which highlight this growing problem. In response to the increase in drug-related cases and arrests, the Tonga Police Drug Enforcement Taskforce was launched in 2018. This is to combat serious and organised crimes that are related to drugs. The fight against illicit drugs and their harmful effects on people should be a government priority.

Since majority of the people struggle financially, drugs as a means of getting quick money is always a temptation. The recent arrest of a senior customs officer on drug-related charged demonstrate that everybody is vulnerable to this problem.

> *I think our village is one of the village in Tonga that has more drugs and drug dealers. I know it because in the block where I'm staying, I saw many cars parking around there during the night time. Those cars are not from here. So I suspect that those cars belong to the drug dealers. We saw many youths walked around that area and I believe they have something to do with the drugs that spread around this village. (Tb9 Q1)*

Another factor that contributes to poverty is unemployment. Participants see this as a major problem and this is related to other social issues such as internal migration, increase in crimes, and the use of illicit drugs. The lack of jobs for the increasing youth population of Tonga limits the capacity of youths to earn cash and contribute to families' finances.

We have many children here that already graduated from High school and they have good education but they are not working because there are not enough jobs available here in Ha'apai. We wish that the government could provide more jobs here so our children can work there to support themselves. You know, the money that we earned on our work is only enough for our daily needs, we can't save any money for later use. (Hp1 Q1)

I believe that majority of the youths here in Vava'u are unemployed. And the reason for that is because there are not enough jobs here in Vava'u. We don't have enough industries or business companies here in Vava'u for youth to work there. There are many youths who have a good education but they can't work somewhere just because there are not enough jobs here in Vava'u. As a result, some of them are going to the bush and do crop farming and some girls are weaving mats. That's the only thing that we do now to get money from. (Vv1 Q1)

4.2 Q.2: Definitions of Poverty

In question two, participants were asked to define poverty in their own words and say what poverty means to them. From the data collected, ten sub themes were found and these ten sub themes came under four major categories.

Table 3. Themes and sub themes for question two

QUESTION	THEME	SUB-THEMES
QUESTION 2	Physical	Basic & Daily needs
		Access
		Financial Hardships
	Mental	Intellectual
		Knowledge
	Spiritual	Apathy
		Complete person
	Social	Culture Practice
		Idleness
		Unemployment

The four categories were: Physical, Mental, Spiritual and Social. These are now addressed in turn.

Definitions
-   Physical: basic and daily needs, access, financial hardships
-   Mental: intellectual, knowledge
-   Spiritual: apathy, complete person
-   Social: cultural practice, idleness, unemployment

4.2.1. Physical poverty

Participants believed that you are in poverty if you cannot afford to have the basic needs or the physical needs of the family. Some argued that because all the people have access to food, clothes and drinking water, there is no poverty. They believed that the issue is the quality and accessibility of these basic needs. Some, however, really do struggle to obtain these basic needs.

> *For me, poverty is not able to afford the basic needs of life that I mentioned earlier. Poverty is also about the levels of living that are below the required standard due to being unable to afford the basic needs of life such as food, water, clothes, etc., so they will be able to live as normal people in the community. I am not saying to live like in luxury. What I'm saying is that they should get those basic needs of life so they can live, then later on try to improve their lives' standards. We're talking about food, water, clothes, etc. (Tb8 Q2)*

Participants also believed that some people are poor because they have no access to basic infrastructure and services. Rural roads, for example, hinder people's travelling to and from their plantations, which provide the major means of income and food for most people. Furthermore, a lot of people do not have access to land for plantations. On the western side of the main island of Tongatapu, access to land is a serious problem. People who migrated from outer islands do not have access to land in the main island and because of the increase in population, and there is a shortage of land. This means that people with no access to land have to buy their food from farmers. Families with many dependents and children and who rely on a single and low incomes then struggle to meet their families' needs.

No access to land also affects the capacity for people to build their own houses. This is more serious for single mothers with children to look after. Most of these people live in overcrowded and unsanitary households. Some have to move house frequently because they do not have their own homes. Children from these poor households are unable to access good education because most often their families cannot afford to pay for their education.

In all the focus group discussions, it was obvious that participants' perceptions of poverty and the most established means of measuring it have been those that are related to money. Tonga's economy has developed from traditional subsistence into a market economy where money is the medium of exchange and is much desired and needed by the people.

Money is required to pay for goods and services, particularly goods that are the daily needs of the family, such as food, clothes and other necessities. Money is necessary to pay for services including electricity, water, education, transportation, and health. Money is needed to fulfil the many obligations to one's extended family, church, village, school/s and other organizations one is affiliated to. Without money, these responsibilities, family needs, services and obligations will not be met and will not meet the expectations of individuals, families and communities.

4.2.2. Mental poverty

A lack of knowledge ("masiva 'ilo") has been raised by many participants as part of the definition, as well as a cause, of poverty. The phrase 'lack of knowledge' has been popularized in a sermon by Tupou 1 when he quoted Hosea 4:6 'my people perish for lack of knowledge'. As a Christian country where the words of the bible are taken as the truth, participants believed that this is a very serious kind of poverty.

It was perceived that the lack of knowledge is a permanent issue that one will take to his/her grave if there is no proper support. This is unlike money or other materialistic things which come and go, and one may not have money today but tomorrow you may have some and your situation will be better. This is exacerbated by the fact that other people are affected, especially the extended family and those closest to someone who lacks knowledge.

> *Sometimes I am angry at this family because the wife went to America and worked there as 'live-in' and when she came back with the money they hosted a big birthday party at their home and invited the people to come and eat. So I can say this is another type of poverty that most people have in this village – the 'lack of knowledge' (masiva 'ilo & fk'atamai). (Tb1/Q1)*

There is also a perceived lack of knowledge in managing resources and creating sources of income for the family. Sometimes people have enough resources but do not have the capacity and skills to manage them appropriately.

> *A type of poverty is related to managing our resources. Maybe we need to revolutionize our thinking and beliefs so we can minimize the unnecessary spending. What a waste to make a big table and fill it with food for people to use a small portion of it! What are the reasons that I should accept this happening? After all, the family could have used that for other needs like breakfast, and bus fares, but because of obligations and protocols to attend to not only for churches but also for leaders and chiefs, therefore when we go back home we have to pay loans, have not enough money for proper toilets and clean drinking water! (Tb2 Q2)*

The sub theme of intellectual poverty represents some participants' views that there is no poverty in Tonga. This view acknowledges that everyone has access to food and drinking water and no one has died of hunger, but there is intellectual poverty instead.

4.2.3. Spiritual poverty

One participant highlighted that when someone feels that nobody loves him/her, then it is a form of poverty. This may be related to loneliness and isolation from important members of the family. This is also related to negligence, the failure to exercise proper and ordinary care for others, and because there are a lot of broken families today. As a result, a lot of people - especially young children - are experiencing these feelings.

The second type of poverty is when you feel that there is no one in the community that loves you. Doesn't matter which community or society you are living in. Either in your own family or in your own church, sometimes you feel that no one loves you and you feel lonely. So I know there are many people in our society who are facing this type of poverty but we can't identify them. I know for sure that none of us would be able to say 'I don't love my mother' or 'I don't love my father'. (Tb1 Q2)

Some participants referred to the development of the total or complete person ("tangata kakato") as the balance between intellectual, physical, and spiritual development in a person's life. A complete person is someone who is physically, intellectually, and spiritually capable on their own and does not need others for support. They believe that someone is in poverty when one of these aspects is missing.

To me poverty is when your needs are higher than what you have in terms of spiritual, mental and physical needs. When you are short on one of these, you are poor. We have our own Tongan economy where we contribute to families' activities like weddings or funerals. In fact, it is reciprocity in practice and without this we may not be able to fulfil some of our obligations. (Tb4 Q2)

4.2.4. Social poverty

Our Tongan cultural practices are also causes for poverty, as some participants believed. Sometimes participants felt pressured by society to perform certain obligations in certain ways even if they cannot afford these obligations.

Our national way of life deprives families, since there are obligations to meet, to do this and that, you do things for the sake of others but at the end there's nothing left. Our churches place obligations on our ways of life and encourage us to spend everything and we go back home to pay loans and the names of people unable to pay their loans are on public media, so I believe that Tongans support poverty and hardships and that is why school fees cannot be paid, electricity, water bills and others, that is the reason why we cannot buy a water tank. But if we can use money wisely maybe we can buy these things, but not with our ways of life. (Tb2 Q2)

Unemployment, including idleness has been raised as an issue facing participants and was again raised here as part of the definition of poverty. People with employment have regular incomes and therefore have better chances of looking after the daily needs of the families. People without employment have no means of income and therefore cannot perform their obligations to families. Similarly, lazy people are not employed by their own choice and therefore depend on others for their needs.

What are ways in which we can educate our young ones to have a better understanding of our struggle? Talking about koka'anga, there is a lot of money in that but because of my obligations, I have to spend it on these, plus people will see that I cannot do this, my table is poor, I cannot afford my church tithe, all these things and no wonder a lot of people have heart disease at very young ages nowadays! Sometimes we want to be like others, if xx has ten and I only get two, I will try hard to

have the same as her, even if I do not have them, but I can do this by loaning from others. (Tb2 Q2)

4.3 Q.3: Ways in which children in Tonga are vulnerable to poverty

In question three, participants were asked whether children in Tonga are especially vulnerable to poverty and, if so, in what ways?

Table 4. Themes and sub themes for question three

QUESTION	THEME	SUB THEME
QUESTION 3	Education	School dropout
		School opportunities
		Corporal punishment
	Hardships	Financial hardships
		Technology
	Social Issues	Community expectations
		Family issues & relationships
	Youth characteristics	Youth problems
		Employment
		Empowerment

The data came up with these four themes:

    Education: school dropout, school opportunities, corporal punishment

    Hardship: financial hardships, technology

    Social Issues: community expectations, family issues and relationships

    Youth characteristics: youth problems, employment and empowerment.

4.3.1. Education

A lot of participants believed that youth are vulnerable to poverty if they do not complete their education and they believed that there are a lot of young people dropping out of school for various reasons. The majority of these drop-outs do not have enough knowledge or skills to find jobs or to do something to support themselves and their families. This vulnerability factor of school dropout is directly related to a lack of knowledge that has been raised numerous times as a cause of poverty.

On the other hand, if students remain in school and complete their education, participants believed that they will not be vulnerable to poverty.

I believe that the children and youths today will be better than us if we will educate them well. They will be better than us. I'm saying this because I know that the reason why we are experiencing living in poverty is because we did not have a good education. So I believe that is why we are living like this because we did not have a good education. Therefore, we need our children to be well educated to avoid living in poverty in the future. (Tb6 Q3)

Some participants were concerned with the use of corporal punishment as a form of discipline for children. It was allowed in the past but today it is illegal. As a result, some parents cannot control their children. Teachers who used to discipline students at school cannot use this form of punishment to discipline students and these participants believed that this contributes to students' problems. They believed that that their children would be worse off than their parents if they grow up like this. They believed that Tonga should still allow the use of corporal punishment as a form of discipline by parents and teachers.

Participants believed that children from poor parents will be vulnerable to poverty because they will inherit their parents' poverty.

> *However, I believe the thing that can stop our children from getting these opportunities is our lack of money to support them with these opportunities. I think the consequences of living in poverty will prevent our children from achieving opportunities. For those reasons, I think one way of encouraging our children to strive forward is to make sure as parents we teach and always remind our children who we are and what we have been through in the past. (Vv3 Q3)*

4.3.2. Social issues

Participants affirmed that some people are pressured to meet other people's expectations of them. These are social expectations of what people should do. Most often, when people fail to meet these expectations, there are negative repercussions for the rest of the community. Fear of not meeting community expectations and fear of these negative consequences forces some people to meet the expectations even if they cannot afford to do so financially.

It is believed that 'problem children' usually come from dysfunctional families where proper care and discipline are absent. Children lack self-confidence and self-esteem and children may have behavioural problems. Other children come from 'normal' households but they grow up and behave differently. A mother reported one of her sons behaving differently when their father is not at home. When the father is away, he gets drunk with boys from their neighbourhood and does not do what his mother asked him to do.

4.3.3. Youth characteristics

The issues raised here related to youth problems, employment and empowerment. Some participants believed that the youth today will be better off than their parents' generation because of the advances in technology. They thought that advancement in technology provided more and better opportunities for young people, especially in their education.

However, there is also concern relating to the misuse and abuse of technology, especially with youth. It is perceived that they waste a lot of their time on social networking sites and students are addicted to a lot of inappropriate information from the internet. Access to the internet and other electronic devices also help criminals through the use of mobile phones in drug dealings and organising theft.

The majority of Tonga's population are under the age of 24, and this is a very significant portion of the population. This should be a government priority, to educate them and to find ways of employing them so that they contribute to the economy. The education systems should cater for a diversity in learning styles, educational opportunities, and different pedagogies. It is felt that a strong emphasis on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) will provide more pathways for these young people.

Participants have confirmed that some youth have left their homes and stay with friends on their own. Without adults' and parents' supervision, these youths are vulnerable to poverty and all kinds of youth problems including drinking, drug abuse, stealing, and other crimes. It is believed that people who deal drugs use these young and vulnerable people to sell and carry drugs for them.

Participants were concerned with youths and students who are very lazy and do not do any work or to go to school. Some spend most of their time on social media. Even with better transport, some students are still seen to be too lazy to go to school.

> *When I was a little younger I was really good at rugby. I had many chances to go and play rugby overseas but because I could not stop drinking beer and alcohol, all those opportunities vanished for me. So I think I will be poorer than my parents in the future. The reason why I say this is because the normal thing I do every day is sleep and eat. That routine of life is very hard for me to change and it's seem to have become my way of life now. (Tb9 Q3)*

This problem has been discussed before, but it was raised again here in relation to youth vulnerability to poverty. An unemployed person is defined as someone who does not have a job but is actively seeking work. However, there are also unemployed youths who are not seeking work at all. The main problem is that there are not enough jobs for the rapidly growing youth population. Tonga has significant high school dropout rates and therefore it is very hard for these youth to find jobs. This is often due to household budget constraints. It is perceived that youth unemployment has negative impacts on the economic growth and productivity of the nation that the government cannot ignore.

4.4   Q.4: Necessities of life in Tonga

Question 4 asked participants what the necessities of life were. These findings show the classification of the necessities raised, and an approximate number of participants who raised that necessity.

Table 5. List of necessities

Necessities	Tally	Basic Needs	Social Needs	Economic Needs	Education	Health	Service	Utility
water	11	x						
electricity	10						x	
education	9				x			

		basic needs	social	economic	education	health	service	utility
health (medical)	9					x		
phone	9						x	
transportation	6						x	
money	6			x				
religion	6		x					
internet	5						x	
community hygiene	3					x		
love	3		x					
boat	3							x
family unity	2		x					
food	2	x						
clothes	2	x						
government support	2						x	
land	2							x
honesty	2		x					
leadership skills	2		x					
Tongan culture	2		x					
house	1	x						
job	1						x	
role model	1		x					
transparency	1		x					
respect and dedication (tauhi va & mamahi'imea)	1		x					
social life	1		x					
family welfare	1		x					
solar power	1						x	
sports equipment	1						x	
stove/fridge/washing machine	1							x
wharf	1						x	
computer centre	1						x	
good behaviour	1		x					
petrol	1						x	

Table 5 is a summary of the necessities of life given by participants. The necessities were grouped under seven categories of humans 'needs'. It has basic needs, social, economic, education, health, service and utility.

For basic needs, four were raised, drinking water was the most raised necessities of life by participants; food, house and clothes. Twelve of the necessities are under social needs. Only one economic necessity (money) but it is the most significant indicator of poverty. Education is also a significant indicator in the fight to eradicate poverty. There were two necessities under health and eleven necessities under services and there were three necessities under utilities.

4.5 Q.5: Other poverty-related issues raised

Question 5 asks whether there was anything else on the subject of poverty that participants would like to raise and which had not been covered. There was not much data in relation to question five but the data from the participants was mainly on one issue – that the government should support and empower the people to contribute positively to the country's economy. They asked for the government to find markets for women's weaving because women can produce their weavings but there are very few outlets for them to sell their products. Men also wanted the government to find markets for their farm produce. They reckoned that farmers are discouraged from farming because their efforts are wasted when there is no market for them. They also wanted support in the preparation of the land for their plants, such as in ploughing.

Participants also wanted support for the dropouts from school to enable them to find employment. They also wanted support for talented students in sports to get more and better opportunities to grow their talents.

There was also a need for community halls for community activities and for refuge in times of cyclones and other natural disasters. Some women weaving groups have no place for them to do their weaving. These community halls will provide the much needed shelters for these groups. Other communal activities like tapa making and meetings and workshops to empower youths and the communities can be carried out if every community and village has a community hall.

5. Conclusion

The very first SDG calls for an end to poverty in all its forms, everywhere. In line with this and the Tonga Strategy for Development Framework, the Tonga Statistics Department is working to establish indicators for measuring poverty. Poverty statistics are important tools in the fight to eradicate poverty in Tonga.

Tonga SD subcontracted the IOE to conduct this qualitative study in Tongatapu, Vava'u and Ha'apai, and the focus was to capture peoples' perceptions of adult and child poverty. The IOE team, together with a SD team, conducted 19 focus groups nationwide and the IOE team was responsible for analysing the data.

It is hoped that this report will contribute to the SD and the government of Tonga's poverty reduction strategies. In order to achieve poverty reduction targets, it is the income of the poor that needs to increase, and therefore the poor need to be empowered and supported. Clearly though, the definition of what it means to be poor is wider than simply the economic. It is felt that the government has to commit to reduce poverty and then develop plans to support the people experiencing the variously identified forms of poverty, but first and foremost to address money-related poverty.

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