

Impact Story: Leading Change with Purpose – Revising Tonga’s Minimum Service Standards

After 37 years of service with the Ministry of Education and Training, Seilosehina Fifita, was approaching retirement with a deep sense of gratitude and pride. Having witnessed education in Tonga evolve through many phases over the years, only a few moments have felt as significant to her as leading the Technical Working Group (TWG) for the revision of the Minimum Service Standards (MSS) 2025 and contributing to the National School Leadership Standards (NSLS).



Despite major shifts in Tonga’s education system, classrooms, and the realities faced by students over a decade, both the MSS and NSLS remained unchanged. To support the long-overdue policy updates, Save the Children partnered with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) under a System Capacity Grant, to provide the critical support needed to strengthen systems, review gaps, and move from intention to action. Without this support, these important reforms would have remained delayed.

The biggest shift in the revised MSS 2025 has been both clear and intentional: students are now at the center of the reforms. Notably, the revision includes the introduction of the ****fifth standard area: Student Wellbeing****, marking a turning point for education in Tonga. “Learning cannot thrive without wellbeing. By placing student learning and wellbeing at the heart of the MSS, we are making a strong statement that education is not just about compliance or infrastructure, but about nurturing the whole child” said Ms. Fifita

With many of the members of the TWG carrying competing responsibilities and demanding workloads, the revision process was not without challenges. However, commitment showed up where it mattered most, with members drawing from their professional experience, honest dialogue, and shared purpose to drive the work forward. Like Ms. Fifita, the TWG members prioritised this process because they

believed in its importance and that collective effort led to the successful completion and Ministerial approval of the revised MSS in 2025.

One immediate and concrete impact is accessibility. The revised MSS is more concise, easier to navigate, and designed as a practical guide, not a document that sits on a shelf. It promotes a whole-school approach, encouraging principals, teachers, students, and communities to work together. When everyone owns the standards, real change becomes possible.

One recommendation brought forward by Ms. Fifita in the next review cycle would be stronger and earlier involvement of communities in the design process. “Schools exist for communities, and education providers serve them. Their voices and lived realities must shape the standards that guide our schools. This will ensure the MSS remains relevant, appropriate, and sustainable,” she said.

“Looking ahead, I am confident that if the MSS is implemented faithfully and monitored effectively, we will see meaningful improvements in teaching and learning within the next one to three years.” Ms. Fifita stated. “Student achievement does not improve by chance. It improves when teaching quality, leadership, learning environments, and student well-being are strengthened together. The revised MSS provides schools with a clearer, more practical framework to make that happen”, she added.

As Ms. Fifita prepares for retirement, she does so with confidence that the work has laid a solid foundation for the future of education in Tonga. This project was made possible through strong leadership, committed technical teams, and strategic support from GPE’s System Capacity Grant (Tranche 3), implemented by Save the Children Australia’s Tonga Office.

