

WELLBEING & LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS

**17th- 19th December 2024
Nuku'alofa, Tonga**



FINAL REPORT

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Workshops Presented in Partnership



Tonga National Athletes Commission



**TOTAL
TEAMS**

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Total Teams (Edwina Ricci and Brianna Gaal)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mālō e lelei and welcome. It has been a privilege to collaborate with Tonga Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (TASANOC), Tonga Athletes Commission (TAC), and the Tongan sporting community to bring the Wellbeing and Leadership Workshops to life. These workshops marked a transformative step toward fostering wellbeing, inclusivity, and collaboration within Tonga's diverse sporting ecosystem.

Engaging 89 participants from 22 sports, including athletes (51%), coaches (19%), administrators (10%), and officials (3%), the workshops showcased the breadth and vibrancy of Tonga's sporting culture. Participants ranged from ages 13 to 63, with 55% under 30, highlighting the importance of developmental pathways for youth while ensuring intergenerational inclusivity. Gender representation was balanced (43% female), and 3% Para athletes participated, reflecting progress toward greater inclusivity.

The workshops featured personalised wellbeing plans, systemic challenge discussions, and strategic action planning. In the **Wellbeing Essentials Workshop**, 97% felt motivated to apply what they learned, with all participants recommending it to others. One participant shared, "I feel motivated to apply what I've learned about wellbeing in my training and competition." The Athlete **Talanoa Session** fostered a supportive environment (87% agreement), with participants valuing the opportunity to share, as one expressed, "Thankful for the opportunity to share my opinions with others that I can relate to as an athlete." The **Strengthening Links Workshop** aligned athlete priorities with organisational goals, with 90% appreciating its focus on roles and collaboration. In the **Leading for Wellbeing** Workshop, 95% found the content relevant to their leadership goals, with one remarking, "Active listening and reflection were cool because being able to see what the athletes thought or wanted made the exercises more effective."

Next steps include implementing strategic action plans, establishing peer networks, and embedding wellbeing practices into pathways for training and competition. These efforts will sustain momentum and position TASANOC as a leader in fostering wellbeing and inclusivity in Tongan sport.

PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

The workshop engaged **89 participants**, including athletes (51%), coaches (19%), administrators (10%), and officials (3%), with others in dual roles or not specified. This diverse group represented **22 sports**, showcasing the breadth of Tonga's sporting community.

Participant Insights:

The workshop featured team-building, personal reflection, and strategic planning activities. Key takeaways include:



- **Diverse Representation:** 89 participants from 22 different sports, spanning ages 13 to 63 reflect the richness of Tonga's sporting culture.
- **Youth Engagement:** High participation from young athletes (55%) underscores the need for developmental pathways.
- **Inclusivity:** Gender balance (43% female) and the inclusion of (3%) Para athletes highlight progress, but further efforts are needed to improve equity and access.

Opportunities for future initiatives:

The workshops showcased impressive diversity. This broad participation demonstrates TASNOC's ability to bring together athletes, coaches, administrators, and officials from across Tonga's sporting community for meaningful collaboration. Building on this success, future workshops can focus on enhancing representation in underrepresented areas. Expanding engagement with women, Para athletes, and participants from diverse regions across Tonga will ensure even greater inclusivity. Targeted support for emerging sports, could help these disciplines grow and thrive. Providing Tongan translations for materials and using Tongan-speaking facilitators could help reach additional demographics and increase retention and engagement during multi-day workshops. These efforts will strengthen TASNOC's role as a leader in creating a more inclusive and equitable sporting ecosystem. For more detail on participant demographics, please refer to **Appendix A**.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

The workshops were designed to foster collaboration, reflection, and strategic planning among a diverse group of participants. Each day featured interactive and culturally aligned activities to elevate athlete voices and strengthen the Tongan sporting community.

Day 1

Wellbeing Essentials Workshop

- **Key Topics:** Understanding Wellbeing and Mental Health, Values, Motivation, Self Compassion, Emotional Literacy, and Gratitude.
- **Activity Focus:** Personal reflection, mindfulness practices, group discussions.
- **Purpose:** To build self-awareness and introduce practical skills for mental, emotional, and physical resilience.
- **Outcome:** Participants created personal wellbeing plans, gained tools like mindfulness and gratitude exercises, and strengthened their understanding of themselves and what they need to thrive in sport and life.

Athlete Talanoa Session

Activity Types: Cultural storytelling, group sharing, and collaborative discussions.

Key Topics: Experiences of being seen, heard, and valued; barriers to recognition and support; and the role of community and leadership in athlete wellbeing.

Purpose: To amplify athlete voices and foster an inclusive space for open dialogue on systemic challenges and aspirations.

Outcome: Participants shared personal stories and insights, which highlighted key themes such as equity, access to resources, and recognition, setting the foundation for discussions in subsequent days.



Day 2

Strengthening Links Workshop

- **Activity Types:** Team-building exercises, collaborative visioning, and strategic brainstorming.
- **Key Topics:** Identifying systemic barriers, prioritising wellbeing needs, and defining aspirations for enhanced participation, training, and competition.
- **Purpose:** To translate insights from Day 1 into actionable goals by fostering collaboration and refining priorities.
- **Outcome:** Groups identified opportunities for equitable resource distribution, improved training environments, and pathways for participation and international representation.

Day 3

Leading for Wellbeing Workshop

Activity Types: Strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, and panel discussions.

Key Topics: Aligning athlete wellbeing priorities with TASNOC's vision, fostering leadership strategies, and developing inclusive pathways for athletes.

Purpose: To co-create solutions addressing systemic challenges and support athlete wellbeing at all levels.

Outcome: A strategic action plan was developed, with defined priorities, timelines, and responsibilities, ensuring a sustainable and inclusive sporting ecosystem.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The Wellbeing and Leadership Workshops marked a transformative step forward for Tongan sport, empowering athletes, coaches, and stakeholders to become ambassadors for wellbeing and leadership. Over three days, participants engaged in culturally aligned, skill-building activities that fostered resilience, inclusivity, and collaboration.

- **Empowering Athletes:** Participants developed **personalised wellbeing plans**, learned practical tools like mindfulness and emotional regulation, and strengthened their confidence to thrive in sport and life.
- **Amplifying Athlete Voices:** Through **Talanoa sessions**, athletes shared their experiences of being “seen, heard, and valued,” co-creating a vision for systemic improvement and inclusivity in Tongan sport.
- **Cultural Alignment:** The workshops integrated Tongan values, traditions, and language, creating a sense of belonging and fostering a community-focused approach to wellbeing.
- **Strategic Vision and Action:** Participants collaboratively developed a **strategic wellbeing plan** with actionable steps to address barriers, improve inclusivity, and enhance participation at all levels of sport.
- **Diverse and Inclusive Representation:**
The workshops included Para athletes and addressed underrepresented groups, reinforcing TASANOC’s commitment to equity and diversity. There was strong female representation (43%) and high youth participation (55% under 30), alongside intergenerational representation with participants ranging from 13 to 63 years.



KEY LEARNINGS

The Wellbeing and Leadership Workshops delivered transformative insights and laid the groundwork for future success, empowering athletes, coaches, and stakeholders while addressing systemic challenges.

- **Athlete Wellbeing Priorities**
 - Participants emphasised the need for **greater access to resources** and **mental health support**, particularly for international competition.
 - Practical tools like **mindfulness, emotional regulation, and gratitude practices** were highly valued and integrated into personalised wellbeing plans.
 - Clearer pathways for participation and development were identified as critical for strengthening the sporting ecosystem.
- **Cultural Alignment and Inclusivity**
 - The integration of **Tongan language, values, and traditions** created a strong sense of belonging and identity, enhancing engagement throughout the workshops.
 - There was **strong female and youth representation**, complemented by a notable presence of **Para athletes** and other underrepresented groups, reinforcing TASNOC's commitment to equity and diversity.
- **Empowering Leadership**
 - Athletes embraced **leadership roles** and demonstrated enthusiasm for driving wellbeing initiatives, aligning with the IOC's emphasis on athlete-led advocacy.
 - Participants contributed to the development of a **strategic wellbeing plan** with actionable steps, reinforcing a collective commitment to fostering wellbeing and inclusivity in sport.
- **Systemic Gaps and Opportunities**
 - **Gaps:** Limited facilities, inequitable recognition, and inconsistent communication between stakeholders.
 - **Opportunities:** Establishing **peer networks**, providing **leadership training**, and exploring **Polynesian wellbeing frameworks** like the Fonofale model to ensure cultural relevance in future programs.
- **Collaboration and Engagement**
 - Strong attendance across roles and sports, including 89 participants from 22 disciplines, highlighted the workshops' reach and impact.
 - Facilitators Dame Valerie Adams, Edwina Ricci, and Palu Uhatahi Tu'amoheloa inspired participants by combining personal stories, practical strategies, and cultural insights.

WORKSHOP INSIGHTS

The workshops provided invaluable insights into the experiences, aspirations, and challenges of Tonga's sporting community.

In the **Athlete Talanoa Session**, participants reflected on being "seen, heard, and valued," emphasising the importance of recognition, better communication, and equitable access. One participant shared, *"Valuing athletes is not just about medals; it's about investing in us as people."*

The **Strengthening Links Workshop** explored qualities of effective coaching and identified systemic challenges. Participants highlighted, *"Good coaches and clear pathways make all the difference, but poor communication and a lack of resources hold us back."*

During **Leading for Wellbeing**, strategic planning and leadership development were prioritised, with 95% finding the content relevant. As one participant noted, *"Active listening and reflection were cool because being able to see what the athletes thought or wanted made the exercises more effective."*

Across all workshops, recurring themes included the need for better facilities, mentorship, and inclusive pathways. These insights are shaping a collective vision for a thriving and equitable Tongan sporting ecosystem. For detailed workshop insights, please refer to **Appendix B**.



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

The workshops received overwhelmingly positive feedback, showcasing their impact on wellbeing, leadership, and collaboration. In the **Wellbeing Essentials Workshop**, 97% felt motivated to apply the strategies learned to improve their wellbeing, with one noting, “I feel motivated to apply what I’ve learned about wellbeing in my training and competition.” The **Athlete Talanoa Session** fostered a positive environment (87% agreement), where participants appreciated sharing experiences, as one expressed, “Thankful for the opportunity to share my opinions with others that I can relate to as an athlete.” The **Strengthening Links Workshop** aligned athlete priorities with organisational goals (90% agreement), highlighting the importance of roles, as one noted, “The understanding of the positions of everyone in the sport house is known to be important.” In **Leading for Wellbeing**, 95% found the content relevant to their goals, with one reflecting, “Active listening and reflection were cool because being able to see what the athletes thought or wanted made the exercises more effective.” Suggestions included maintaining momentum through regular workshops and adding Q&A panels for coaches. For a more detailed breakdown of workshop feedback, please see **Appendix C**.



NEXT STEPS

Implementation of Action Plans

- **Presentation of Findings:** Support athletes in presenting workshop insights and recommendations to their federations, the Tongan Athletes' Commission, and other relevant stakeholders. Provide tools and guidance to help effectively communicate key takeaways and proposed actions.
- **Initiating Prioritised Actions:** Launch initiatives identified during the workshops, focusing on:
 - Developing and sharing practical wellbeing resources across the sporting community.
 - Establishing peer support networks to encourage ongoing collaboration and shared learning.
 - Addressing systemic gaps, such as equitable access to facilities and resources, through targeted action plans.
- **Monitoring and Accountability:** Create a framework to track progress on action items, with clear milestones and regular reporting.

Follow-Up Workshops

- **Scheduled Progress Reviews:** Plan follow-up workshops to evaluate the implementation of action plans, refine strategies, and maintain momentum. These sessions will offer opportunities for stakeholders to collaborate on addressing emerging challenges.
- **Skill Development Sessions:** Provide tailored workshops on wellbeing, team building, leadership development, and inclusive practices to support capacity building across roles.
- **Incorporating Feedback:** Use insights and suggestions gathered during the workshops to enhance the structure and content of follow-up sessions, ensuring they remain engaging, culturally aligned, and impactful.



Long-Term Goals

- **Embedding Wellbeing Practices:**

- Collaborate with federations to integrate wellbeing strategies, such as emotional regulation and mindfulness, into athlete training and development pathways.
- Embed wellbeing skills, capabilities and practices into coach, official and administrator training via OSEP (Oceania Sport Education Program)
- Develop sustainable guidelines for incorporating wellbeing into competition preparation and recovery processes.

- **Strengthening Inclusivity:**

- Expand efforts to include underrepresented groups, such as female and Para athletes, and ensure regional representation across Tonga's sporting community.
- Enhance engagement through culturally aligned materials and resources, including Tongan translations and local facilitation.

- **Building Strategic Partnerships:**

- Strengthen collaboration with TASANOC, federations, and community stakeholders to create a unified vision for sport in Tonga.
- Align initiatives with the IOC's 2032 vision, focusing on inclusivity, sustainability, and athlete-led development.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

- **Tracking Impact:**

- Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the workshops and action plans over time, focusing on participation rates, resource equity, and athlete outcomes.
- Use evaluations to identify successes and areas for improvement, ensuring continuous refinement of TASANOC's wellbeing initiatives.

- **Sustained Engagement:**

- Foster ongoing dialogue with athletes, coaches, and administrators to adapt programs to the evolving needs of Tonga's sporting community.
- Explore opportunities to integrate Polynesian wellbeing frameworks to deepen cultural relevance and impact.

By generalising the participant feedback into overarching themes, these steps will build on the progress achieved and ensure the workshops lead to meaningful, long-term improvements in Tonga's sporting ecosystem. This approach will position TASANOC as a leader in fostering wellbeing, inclusivity, and sustainability in sport.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Demographics

Gender Representation:

Gender representation was relatively balanced, with **43% female, 49% male, and 8% other/not specified, skewing slightly male overall**. Further analysis of gender data revealed a few key trends:

- Gender distribution of participants under 30 (representing 55% of 89 total participants) skewed slight female (49%), with 43% male, and 8% other/not provided.
- Participants over 30 skewed male (60% male), with 34% female, and 6% other/not provided.
- Female dominance was noted in Athletics (71%) and Netball (100%), while Rugby (83%) and Outrigger (100%) skewed heavily male.
- Sports with only 1 participant (e.g., Judo, Ping Pong, Table Tennis) were predominantly male, except Golf, which was female. In contrast, sports with 2 participants were typically balanced, except Shooting, which was all male.
- Para sports were exclusively represented by male participants, highlighting an opportunity to improve gender diversity here.

Age Range:

Participants ranged from **13 to 63 years**, with the majority (55%) under 27. This highlights the importance of engaging younger athletes while ensuring intergenerational inclusivity.

Sports Representation:

Key sports included **Football (9%), Taekwondo (9%), AFL (8%), and Athletics (8%)**, while less-represented sports such as **Golf, Judo, and Archery** highlight areas for growth. The participation of **(3%) Para athletes** underscores the workshop's progress toward inclusivity, though there is room for improvement in disability representation.

Appendix B: Detailed Workshop Insights

Day 1: Athlete Talanoa Session

Seen, Head, Valued and Vision

During the Talanoa session, athletes reflected on their experiences of being "seen, heard, and valued" and collaborated to envision a more inclusive and supportive sporting system. Many emphasised the importance of recognition from family, coaches, and community, while others noted gaps in institutional support and equitable access. Insights highlighted the need for better communication, facilities, and pathways, alongside the value of cultural alignment. Athletes co-created a vision for systemic improvements, fostering shared purpose and empowerment.

Notable Quotes:

- *"I feel seen when my coach acknowledges my hard work, but it's frustrating when only big wins are recognised by the system."*
- *"Being heard means having a voice in decisions that affect us, not just being told what to do."*
- *"Valuing athletes is not just about medals; it's about investing in us as people, building our futures, and ensuring we have opportunities beyond sport."*

Day 2: Strengthening Links

Best and Worst Coaches

This activity provided athletes with an opportunity to reflect on the qualities they value in coaches and identify areas of improvement. The feedback revealed clear patterns in the characteristics that define effective coaching and the behaviours that hinder athlete development.

Notable Quotes:

- *"Honesty and fairness are what make a coach great. A good coach treats everyone equally and always puts the team first."*
- *"The best coaches support us, communicate well, and create a positive, safe environment where we feel cared for."*
- *"Favouritism is the worst. It divides the team and makes us feel unimportant."*
- *"Dishonesty and laziness are what destroy trust in a coach."*
- *"A great coach doesn't just care about our performance; they care about who we are as people and help us build our character."*

Current State and Aspirations

This activity explored athletes' perspectives on strengths, challenges, and opportunities within Tongan sport. Athletes identified strong teamwork, safe spaces, and supportive policies as key strengths. However, they highlighted gaps in communication, facilities, and resources, along with cultural and systemic barriers to inclusivity.

Notable Quotes:

- *"Good coaches and clear pathways make all the difference, but poor communication and a lack of resources hold us back."*
- *"We need more recognition for smaller sports and better access to facilities for everyone."*
- *"Athletes need a balance of discipline and growth, but also environments that prioritise fun, safety, and inclusivity."*

Athlete Implementation Ideas

This activity focused on practical steps to grow participation, enhance training and competition environments, and support international representation. Athletes identified specific actions, stakeholders, and resources required for sustainable progress in Tongan sport.

Notable Quotes:

- *"Good resources and facilities, with professional coaches who turn up on time and care, are essential for success."*
- *"We need to prepare our squads early, with clear timelines and strong government support, to be ready for international competitions."*
- *"Life after sport should be a priority. Creating pathways for athletes to work as ambassadors or in development roles will ensure sport in Tonga continues to thrive."*

Vision Statement

Athletes articulated a shared vision for the future of Tongan sport, emphasising inclusivity, performance excellence, and strong community connections. The vision encompassed safe and supportive environments, equitable opportunities, and pathways for athlete development, both locally and internationally.

Notable Quotes:

- *"Build a stronger structure to support and keep athletes safe at all levels."*
- *"Fairness and equality for all athletes, with more athlete voices in decision-making."*
- *"Tonga to lead in battling climate change, creating a safe space for athletes to live and train."*

Day 3: Leading for Wellbeing

Active Listening

This session provided athletes and stakeholders an opportunity to reflect on presentations and discuss priorities for fostering a thriving sporting environment in Tonga. Discussions emphasised the importance of wellbeing, resources, and inclusive participation while identifying challenges and actionable solutions.

Notable Quotes:

- *"Athletes' voices must guide decisions. If wellbeing matters to us, it should matter to leaders too."*
- *"Good relationships between coaches, athletes, and families create the foundation for success."*
- *"Grassroots development isn't just about sports; it's about creating opportunities for the next generation to grow and lead."*

Implementation Plan

This activity enabled athletes and stakeholders to collaboratively design actionable strategies for improving training environments, growing participation, and supporting international representation. Key themes included infrastructure development, capacity building, and fostering grassroots pathways.

Notable Quotes:

- *"Good facilities and better coaches are the foundation of athlete success."*
- *"Grassroots programs must provide clear pathways to elite levels and ensure access for all."*
- *"Every training session should also build community – this is how we grow together."*

Commitment Cards

Participants made **44 commitments** reflecting personal, team, and community development across various sports. Notably, **8 participants pledged to join the Tongan Athletes' Commission**, supporting its revitalisation and demonstrating a shared commitment to enhancing athlete representation and leadership. The commitments covered themes such as consistent training, resource provision, mentorship, and community outreach, underscoring the collective drive to foster a thriving sporting culture in Tonga.

Notable Quotes:

- *"I'm committed to training every day, setting goals, and helping my teammates grow."*
- *"Swimming is a passion. Teaching children to swim not only saves lives but builds a stronger, more connected community."*
- *"I will help the Athletes' Commission develop policies that ensure fairness and opportunities for everyone, not just the big sports."*

Appendix C: Detailed Workshop Feedback

Day 1: Wellbeing Essentials Workshop

The Wellbeing Essentials Workshop received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with participants praising its engaging activities and relevance to their personal and sporting development. **97%** of participants agreed the workshop encouraged active participation, and **97%** found the topics helpful for their growth. Additionally, **97%** felt motivated to apply the strategies learned to improve their wellbeing, and all participants would recommend the workshop to others. The workshop environment was highly rated for being safe and inclusive (**97% agreement**), and **87%** of participants found the facilitators engaging and effective. While **88%** agreed the materials were clear and easy to apply, a few participants saw an opportunity to further refine the content for greater clarity and cultural relevance.

Notable Quotes from Participant Feedback:

- **Workshop Highlights:**

- *"We are being seen, heard, and valued."*
- *"I feel motivated to apply what I've learned about wellbeing in my training and competition."*
- *"Mastering the art of breathing taught me how to be kind to myself, the same way I treat others."*
- *"I think this is the best workshop that I have ever had. And it has been really helpful!"*

- **Constructive Suggestions:**

- *"Longer breaks to prevent burnout."*
- *"Workshops like this are very useful and we need more."*

Day 1: Athlete Talanoa Session

The Talanoa session was highly regarded, with **87% of participants** agreeing it fostered a positive and supportive environment. Sharing and visioning activities, like **Design Our Ideal Sporting System**, stood out as the most widely engaging and meaningful. Notably, all participants would recommend the workshop to others. Some participants (**13%**) suggested adding clearer guidance or examples to further enhance understanding and engagement during discussions.

- **Highlights:**

- *I think when athletes brainstormed their 'ideal sporting system' because it shows how many of these sports struggle with the same thing."*
- *"Yes, gratitude helps us to experience joy in God."*
- *"Sharing and elevating athletes' voices to be heard and hearing other athletes' voices."*
- *"All the Talanoa feedback was meaningful as it helps me understand more about myself as an athlete."*

- **Constructive Suggestions:**

- "Get athletes to get into different groups with different sports in the group and share more. Do it more often to make the session more impactful."
- "Putting things into action."

Day 2: Strengthening Links

This workshop effectively aligned athlete priorities with organisational goals, as noted by **90% of participants**. Additionally, **88%** appreciated the opportunity to reflect on the current state of Tongan sport and explore future opportunities. Participants (**13%**) suggested increasing the balance between information delivery and active collaboration, providing an opportunity to refine future sessions for even greater impact.

- **Highlights:**

- "What matters most and value yourself as you would close friends."
- "Knowing the true meaning of Wellbeing and its importance."
- "The confidence in failing to improve in a better standard of being a player/athlete in order for a good outcome."
- "The understanding of the positions of everyone in the sport house is known to be important."

- **Constructive Suggestions:**

- "Session should be broken down into and provide some break time so that we can relax and prepare our mind to start over for the next topic or sessions."

Day 3: Leading for Wellbeing

The Presentation of Athlete Personal Wellbeing Plans and Collaborative Action Planning were the most valuable activities for the majority of participants. **90%** praised the facilitators for being clear, engaging, and effective, and **95%** found the content relevant to their leadership and sporting goals. Furthermore, **90%** reported an enhanced understanding of leadership's role in fostering wellbeing. Participants (**21%**) suggested simplifying the action planning framework, which offers an opportunity to make implementation even more accessible.

- **Highlights:**

- "Active listening and reflection were cool because being able to see what the athletes thought or wanted made the exercises more effective."
- "Collaborative action and better understanding of the group."
- "Gaining new ideas and knowledge from sharing in groups."
- "Knowing your roles and responsibilities and to reach out to others."
- "Importance of positive talking not only to athletes but to yourself as a person."
- "Prioritising the wellbeing of athletes."

- **Constructive Suggestions:**

- "Include a Q&A panel for coaches to interact and share knowledge."
- "Introduce SMART goal-making into the workshop."
- "Create more breakout sessions for better interaction."
- "Maintain and regularly organise workshops to keep momentum."
- "Ensure what we talked about is implemented or followed through."
- "Invite more participants to ensure diverse perspectives."
- "Provide tools for different learning styles to ensure inclusivity."



We extend our deepest gratitude to **Dame Valerie Adams** for her invaluable time, expertise, and dedication in facilitating the Wellbeing and Leadership Workshops. Her inspiring presence and heartfelt stories of resilience, determination, and success captivated everyone involved, leaving a lasting impact on the athletes, coaches, and stakeholders. As a two-time Olympic Gold Medallist and global icon, Dame Valerie exemplifies the qualities of a true leader and role model. Her ability to connect with participants and empower them to embrace their potential and overcome challenges was truly transformative. We are honoured to have had her guidance and leadership, which enriched the workshops and inspired the next generation of Tongan athletes to strive for excellence both on and off the field.