



Makelesi works on a mat with others from Mata ki Ha'amoā, Talihau. The women share in the profits according to the amount of work they do. Selling craft means they have money for school and medicine as well as to meet their church and community obligations.

AUTUMN STORY

By Gillian Southey, CWS communications coordinator.



SHARING THE SECRETS OF SUCCESS

Sitting in the community hall, Umu is happy to talk about life in the village of Talihau in Tonga's Vava'u group. She is proud of the way the 18 local members of Ama Takiloa have improved family incomes and made a real difference in the community.

Most days the women can be found weaving mats for part of the day. Selling the mats locally and in Australia, New Zealand or the United States provides the cash they need to pay for school fees and other cash obligations. The mats are large and take about two weeks to make if there are no other community events. Members share in the task and the profits, making more than ten mats as a group in a year. They work hard and have plenty of time to discuss all sorts of things as they weave.

In the evenings and at other times, they concentrate on *Ta'ovala* and *Kiekie* (the traditional dress worn around the waist), baskets, fans and smaller items to sell. When someone develops a new style or item, the others are eager to learn. Four times a year, the group organises an exhibition of the local craft which is also for sale. Sometimes they pick up overseas orders.

The beautiful islands of Vava'u are becoming increasingly popular for cruise ships and yachts. The deep channels, fine beaches and whales make it a special place to stop. One member had the bright idea of selling coconut drinks, papaya and other local foods to the visiting tourists. Business is expanding.

Weaving is important, but so are the gardens that they depend on for food. Through Ama Takiloa programmes they have learnt many new skills. Now with remittances from family members overseas declining, these skills have proved popular for women feeding often large families. Talihau like many other villages where Ama Takiloa groups operate has invested in demonstration plots.



Sandalwood seedlings (above) need competition to grow and are a 20 year investment for the women. Umu Te'epa'a'ua (right) is the leader of Mata ki Ha'amoā in Talihau.



These gardens flourish because of the pride and care the women take in their work together. They grow taro, kape, kava, bananas, coconut and much more. Sharing plants and knowing how to save seeds, their home gardens are contributing to a much healthier diet that includes new and traditional vegetables like pele (a Tongan variety of spinach). The keen gardeners may grow a dozen or more crops.

With an eye on the future, the latest trend is the raising of sandalwood seedlings. Distributed through the network, these are a savings plan. Umu is nurturing ten sandalwood trees and has more on the way. "They are an



Spring onions are one of the new crops, some women choose to grow. They tend their gardens with great care.

investment for the future, for my children," she says. In 20 to 30 years they will be able to harvest them for good profit she says.

Not only have the gardens improved but so has the community's health. Ama Takilola trainers have taught the women to maintain and repair their water tanks. Instead of broken cement tanks and guttering, the women have been able to have major repairs done with the help of your gifts and matching government funding.

In a country where people are dispersed across 36 inhabited islands, Ama Takilola trains women in new skills to make sure their families can adapt to the changing economy. They learn from each other and have the whole community at heart. On special occasions they can be found hard at work keeping the culture and traditions alive.

In 2014 when CWS with other agencies was organising simulation exercises in case of a tsunami or other disaster, Ama Takilola took up the challenge. They have been central to the recovery after Cyclone Ian in the Ha'apai Group. The extension workers travel to each island to share what they have learnt and encourage the groups. With climate change causing more intense disasters and the high level of migration, Ama Takilola has the means to make sure vulnerable communities have the knowledge and resources to respond. ■



Credit: ACT Alliance/P Jeffrey

REBUILD NEPAL

Thanks to your generous response after the magnitude 7.8 earthquake, Nepalese received food, water, shelter, sanitation, replacement animals and plants, and psychosocial support. Claiming the lives of nearly 9,000 people, the quake remains a source of tension through the country. One year after their homes crumbled, people are waiting for the promised funding from government for the rebuild. Political turmoil and red tape has slowed the official process. That has not stopped ACT Alliance Nepal. They have worked with local people to get through this period and have trained people for the rebuild. You can read more in our Report from Nepal available from CWS or downloadable at www.cws.org.nz

OPERATION REFUGEE



Young refugees from Syria need help to get through the bitter long years of war that have destroyed so much. In Jordan and Lebanon, they have found safety but watch as their parents struggle to feed and care for the extended family. For some the situation seems hopeless, but when the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugee comes with food or offers medical treatment, schooling and training programmes, they are keen to take part. To keep this lifeline going DSPR needs more funding.

Will you join Operation Refugee, a fundraiser that challenges you to live on refugee rations from 16-20 June? You can do the challenge or sponsor someone who is. Call 0800 74 73 72 or check out the dedicated website to see if this is for you: <http://www.cwsoperationrefugee.nz/>

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