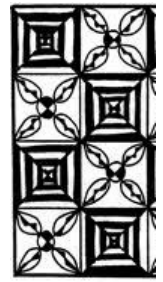
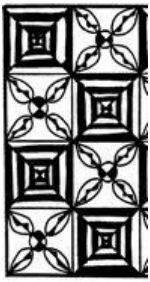


GROWING THE GOOD IN TONGA

Methodist and Presbyterian Women's Special Project 2012-2013

in association with Christian World Service



The project in a nutshell:

Malo e lava mai!

Welcome to the **AMA TAKILOA** programme run by the **Tonga Community Development Trust**. The programme aims to improve health and increase food security, self-sufficiency and income generation by:

- ✘ Reinigorating and strengthening the Ama Takiloa network in Tongatapu and the four outer island groups of 'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u and the Niua;
- ✘ Providing training and support to Ama Takiloa groups on family nutrition, organic vegetable gardening, home based piggery and poultry, income generation, budgeting, small business development, credit unions and sanitation and water supply;
- ✘ Improving and increasing the informal sale of traditional/cultural products such as tapa and fine mats to family and community members living overseas, and to the growing tourism market;
- ✘ Integrating disaster risk assessment and preparedness into the programme's activities by providing workshops and enhancing traditional coping mechanisms.

The Ama Takiloa 'a e Fefine Tonga began as the Village Women's Development programme in 1975, and was incorporated into the work of the Tonga Community Development Trust (TCDT) in the late 1990s.

The goal of the AMA TAKILOA programme is: *to empower women by encouraging them to actively participate in development through*

- ≈ food security
- ≈ environmental protection
- ≈ good governance
- ≈ leadership development
- ≈ human rights.

This involves practical assistance, as well as training, on a variety of areas requisite for the good health of the family including nutrition, hygiene, maternal health, environment, food production, gardening, water and sanitation, money management and self-help education.

The Ama Takiloa programme focuses on the most needy groups, typically those on the outer islands. There are 320 active village-based women's groups, a total membership of 3,802:

Vava'u – 204 groups with 2,534 members
Ha'apai – 67 groups with 647 members
'Eua – 44 groups with 508 members
Tongatapu – 8 groups with 113 members (villages of Popua, Lapaha and 'Ahau).

How the Ama Takiloa programme functions

Most Ama Takiloa groups have between 8-12 members, who participate in activities planned and prioritised by the group members themselves. Female Extension Officers (EO), recruited locally by TCDT, help facilitate and support these activities in an advisory and technical capacity through visits and 3-monthly inspections. Each group submits their report to the EO who, in turn, submits all group reports to the TCDT, providing an overall view of projects being undertaken across the country. The approach advocated by Ama Takiloa is experimental, participatory, practical, and coupled with training.

Making a Difference

Tonga Community Development Trust spokeswoman, 'Oketi Faletau, notes that Tongan health and wealth are both improving in areas where people heed the call to revert to old ways.

'Oketi reports that "the core financial support from CWS for our programme is helping the Trust to improve the quality of life for Tongans, particularly in the outer islands."

The Trust's approach has been to learn from the past and return to simpler, cheaper and sustainable ways of living. It runs workshops on traditional diets and support home garden projects to strengthen self-reliance. Fortunately, Tongans are traditionally entitled to a set amount of land for farming. This has helped make the move to revive old ways of growing food possible.

Many Tongans have become dependent on remittances for cash to buy imported food which has detrimental health impacts. Obesity, diabetes and heart diseases have been some of the on-going results of imported foods on Tongan life. Elders are delighted to see people reverting to a simpler, healthier diet way of life. Their advice would be a step up from our own, "eat your vegetables". A 104 year old woman advised people to "eat your seaweed."

'Oketi: "It is much healthier for us to have our own traditional foods. The smartest children in the schools are those who eat traditional diets. Those who stuck with the diet live longer."

'Oketi and her co-workers work via a mix of education, advocacy and practical hands on workshops, and have assisted more than 2,000 Tongan women to reclaim the power of older, better ways of living. The Trust also encourages women to use their newly rediscovered agricultural skills to grow pandanus grass and mulberry bark used for making woven mats and tapa. Woven mats and tapa are an integral part of Tongan culture and are presented as gifts for weddings, birthdays, for the birth of a first born, and at funerals. Women no longer have to buy the finished products or materials, reducing the need for cash. They come together to weave, an important social function and way to share information. They are also increasing income opportunities by selling tapa and woven mats both locally and to Tongans living overseas.



Vava'u mat weaving



The work of the TCDT is not just about returning to old ways - it is about improving traditional techniques in a low cost, low tech manner. For the vegetable and crop growing lessons an important innovation has been the teaching of soil education such as compost-making techniques. Compost had not been an established feature of Tongan agriculture but its introduction is helping improve crop yields and food quality.

The results of CWS-backed workshops have spread through communities as the benefits of more self-determination have become apparent. Women on the outer islands have reported that they have been empowered by the programmes and have made such a difference to their household budgets that they have been able to afford to build 'palagi' (Western) style homes. When they took this step they were then freed from yearly maintenance on their homes which effectively meant rebuilding them. This in turn gave the women time for other more useful forms of activity, economic and social.



Community nurseries provide traditional and medicinal plants for the women's groups.

Strategies for the Future:

Improved Sustainable Income Generation

Assist people to reduce the habit of spending and consumption and instil a culture of small investment that contributes to self-reliance by working with the Government's Credit Union. This provides Ama Takiloa groups with the ability to:

- access savings to support group activities
- access small loans for emergencies.

Develop a marketing strategy for traditional items, clothing (lavalava), home-grown fruit and vegetables, pandanus and mulberry bark for local and international tourist markets.

This involves an extension of the *katoanga* system where women's groups in Tonga are matched with women's groups from the same village now living in other countries (e.g. New Zealand and Australia). The type and quantity of items to be produced are agreed, including price. Those living in New Zealand fly to Tonga and during the *katoanga* the exchange of products and money takes place. A win-win situation for all.

Reduced Risks from Natural Disasters

Women and children are more vulnerable than men in times of natural disaster. TCDT works with communities to establish natural disaster preparedness plans. These include:

- ≈ workshops on disaster risk assessment
- ≈ producing a poster on 'best practices' associated with disaster preparedness
- ≈ growing root crops (giant taro) which will survive a cyclone and can be preserved and stored; and harvesting fruits which can be dried and preserved.

These have been very popular as they focus on the traditional foods that had a role in the past for helping people survive the cyclone season.

Good Quality Drinking Water

Ama Takiloa has contributed to improving the community's access to clean drinking water. Families and communities learn how to care for the tanks by cleaning them out regularly, test the water quality, and undertake minor repairs themselves.

The hygiene and sanitation programme has been very successful, with the focus on encouraging fencing around the toilet for privacy, and a water source with soap for washing hands nearby. Sometimes this is a plastic water container with a tap on a stand, or in a tree near the toilet.

Ama Takiloa also engages communities on sustainable rainwater harvesting techniques.



Improved concrete rainwater harvesting tank replace old plastic containers like these.

About Tonga

Geography

Situated east of the Fiji Islands, Tonga (called the Friendly Islands) consists of some 160 islands, of which 36 are inhabited. Most of the islands contain active volcanic craters; others are coral atolls.

History and Government

Polynesians have lived on Tonga for at least 3,000 years. The Dutch were the first Europeans to explore the islands in 1616. British explorer James Cook landed in 1773 and called them the Friendly Islands.

The current royal dynasty of Tonga (the third line of royal rulers) was founded in 1831 by Taufa'ahau Tupou, who took the name George I. In 1900, the country became a British protected state.



Tonga became independent on 4 June 1970. The government was largely controlled by the king, his nominees and a small group of hereditary nobles until the reign of the late King George V who made some changes. Since the 1990s a movement began aimed at curtailing the powers of the monarchy,

hence the Tongan Pro-Democracy Movement (TPDM) was created. Some significant changes occurred as a result of the democracy movement, for example, Feleti Sevele became the first elected commoner to serve as the country's Prime Minister in 2006. The current Prime Minister is the Hon. Tu'ivakano. In March 2012, King George Tupou VI acceded to the throne.



Some Statistics

Capital and largest city: Nuku'alofa

Ethnicity: Polynesian, European

Religion: Christian

Population (2010 estimate): 122,580

Languages: Tongan, English

Literacy Rate: 98% (Tongan)

Land area: 750 sq kms

Arable land: 20%

Unemployment: 13%

Natural Resources: fish, fertile soil

Income: Exports (agriculture/fish); Remittances; Tourism

Agriculture: squash, coconuts, copra, bananas, cocoa, coffee beans, vanilla beans, ginger, black pepper.



Resources

Please contact CWS to order a PowerPoint Presentation about the Tonga Community Development Trust.

Malo 'aupito

(Thank you very much)

Thank you for your support of this important women's project.

