

Tonga Report: Cyclone Gita Response July 15, 2018



On February 13 the most severe storm in recent memory hit Tonga causing widespread damage on the islands of 'Eua and Tongatapu. Wind speeds from Tropical Cyclone Gita reached 233 km/hour. Two people died, and more than 70,000 people were affected by the category 4 storm. Families lost homes and livelihoods: 70-80% of fruit trees fell, 40-50% of root crops were destroyed and 40% of fishing vessels were damaged or destroyed. Rainwater harvesting and community water schemes failed.

Thank you for your generous donations which have topped \$100,000. CWS received a \$164,000 grant from the New Zealand Government Aid Programme. Working together Tongan families repair rainwater harvesting systems, reestablish gardens and establish household poultry flocks.



Four months later, International Programmes Coordinator Trish Murray visited our partner Ama Takiloa of the Tonga Community Development Trust, to find how people were managing and to support their work to help families recover after the storm. She said the relief effort has been very uneven, but our partner Ama Takiloa is well-placed to address the gaps after the initial response.

Ama Takiloa in the Heart of Communities

Ama Takiloa is a network of more than 300 women's groups organised to improve health, food security and income. The groups meet monthly and undertake activities such as making large tapa and mats, and working on demonstration gardens. Village-based they can be relied upon to know what is happening and who needs help.

At the heart of their communities, Ama Takiloa is completing the assessment of all households to find out who needs help and planning where they can have the most impact. Work will occur in four communities on each of Tongatapu and 'Eua. Early indications suggest Kolofo'ou, a suburb of Nuku'alofa is among those most in need of assistance. More support has gone to the outer islands than to the capital.

Nuku'alofa is not usually hit by large cyclones

so was less prepared than those on the outer islands where disaster preparations are firmly in place. On 'Eua, Trish met Tavita Taulepa town officer of Petani who told Trish Ama Takiloa's programme will fit with the plan for the whole town.

Many of the women Trish met on 'Eua and Tongatapu reported quite severe damage to their homes and/or gardens. Families are living in hastily repaired homes or makeshift shelters. Some had received help while others missed out. In Houma, for example, the primary school is only open for half the day because there is no water. The pump for the community water scheme is not working well. At \$10 a month families are choosing not to pay for an unreliable water supply.

In Kolofo'ou, Ama Takiloa reports 1 in 13 students do not eat three meals a day, 3 in 5 do not have adequate food, electricity and a place to study. 16% of adults need jobs and many depend on remittances from overseas to meet their daily needs. One woman said she had received only a bottle of water. The assessment has identified the gaps and has the flexibility to meet specific individual and community needs after other programmes have ended.



Ama Takiloa members on 'Eua thanked Trish for listening to their stories. They are grateful for funding that will help their communities recover some of what they lost.

The Plan

Water systems and food security for families most in need are the priority in the programme that will finish in February 2019. Ama Takiloa plans to repair rainwater systems for a minimum of 160 households and install 10 large tanks at community facilities. Funds will enable at least 400 households to reestablish home gardens with fruit trees and 10 community gardens. It will be a year before banana and plantain crops recover. Seedlings are in short supply, so Ama Takiloa will help source them. A further 140 households will receive pigs, chickens, or ducks with training in animal husbandry. The animals will enable them to earn income.

Ama Takiloa may help out in urban areas where food is particularly short. The older generation long for Tongan food. "I'm sick of *palangi* food," one woman told Trish. They are depending on rice and bread as taro is expensive and in short supply. New crops take a year before they can be harvested.



Thank You

The Tonga Community Development Trust asked Trish to pass on its thanks to you for supporting this Appeal. Through the programme affected Tongans will receive the help they need in ways that strengthen their communities for the long recovery.

Young taro plants will be ready to eat in one year.