

**From tragedy to recovery:  
Samoa tsunami response 2009-2010**



**Oxfam**



Oxfam's water, sanitation and hygiene programmes are in place for affected communities in Samoa.

# From tragedy to recovery: Samoa tsunami response 2009-2010

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“We’ve really struggled in the six months since the tsunami, but with all the help from Oxfam, WIBDI and the government we feel so grateful.”  
- Vaioalisi Faaiuga, Manono Island



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#### Acknowledgements

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#### **A year in Samoa: Tsunami response 2009**

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Cover: Lima, 12, together with his family and friends, began the massive job of cleaning up after the Samoan tsunami destroyed their homes on September 29, 2009. Photo: Jane Ussher/Oxfam

# Thank you

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At this one year commemoration of the deaths of 143 men, women and children from the tsunami that struck the south coast of Samoa in September 2009, our thoughts are with families, friends and communities. We also extend our sympathies to many of the survivors who experienced suffering and trauma. This tragic event will be long remembered by Oxfam, not only because of the extent of the devastation, human displacement and loss of life that it caused, but also because of the generous response from partner organisations, governments and the public in the aftermath of the emergency. I would like to offer a sincere thank you to everyone who supported both our immediate response and the ongoing work of rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of affected communities.

Oxfam responded immediately to the emergency by mobilising trained personnel and essential materials to ensure that those people worst affected had clean, safe water and sanitation, working in a coordinated way with the government of Samoa. Our local partner organisation, Women in Business Development Incorporated (WIBDI), helped us to reach affected communities and continues to support the recovery effort. Our partnership with WIBDI proved crucial in offering a timely and appropriate response. We are grateful to them for their support, their expertise and their professionalism.

When natural disasters strike developing countries, it is women, children, the elderly and the sick who suffer worst. Without the support we gratefully receive, Oxfam would not be able to respond to their basic needs – water, food, sanitation, shelter and healthcare. After people's basic needs are being met, we aim to leave them better off than they were before and better prepared to face these emergencies. We help to establish sustainable livelihoods that will enable communities to lift themselves out of poverty.

In Samoa, the people who were affected by the tsunami now have a greater opportunity to earn a living. Through organic agriculture, improved access to markets and increased family income, people can send their children to school, access clean water and support their community. Even though the physical devastation, life-changing resettlements, loss of life and emotional trauma associated with the tsunami will never be forgotten, the people of Samoa can look ahead to a life of hope, dignity and opportunity.

Barry Coates  
Executive Director  
Oxfam New Zealand



The overall aim of Oxfam's programme was to minimise loss of life, ill-health and disruption to livelihoods for people affected by the Samoan earthquake and tsunami.

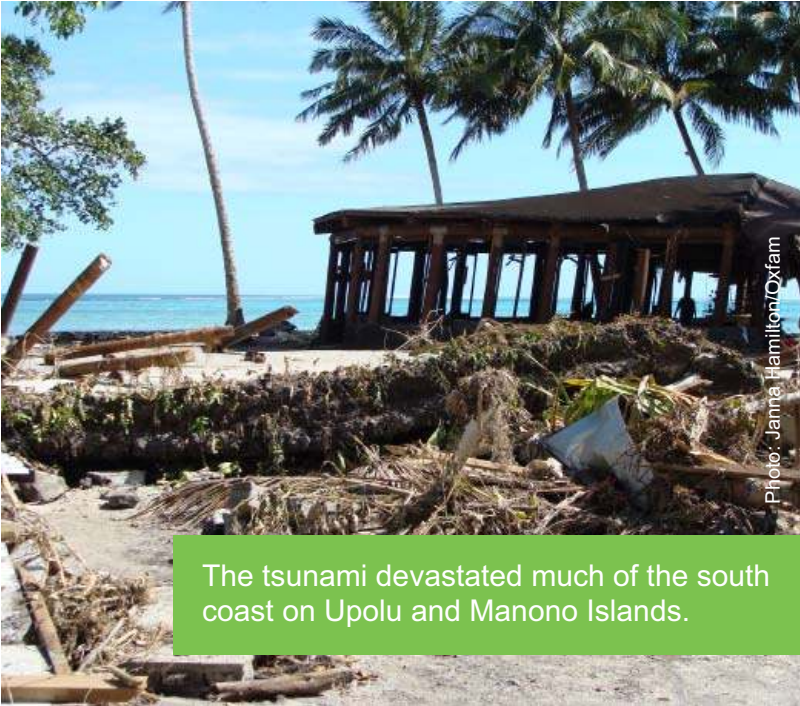


Photo: Janna Hamilton/Oxfam

The tsunami devastated much of the south coast on Upolu and Manono Islands.



Homes and livelihoods were destroyed, forcing families to relocate inland. Oxfam and partners are helping them to rebuild.

Photo: Janna Hamilton/Oxfam

# Background

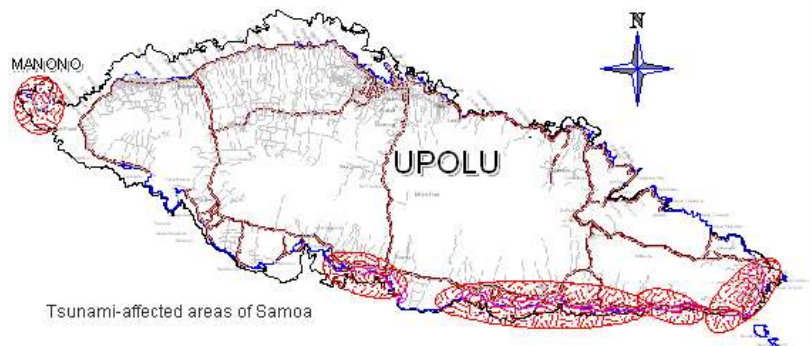
At 6.48am on Tuesday September 29, 2009, an 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck 190km south-south west of Samoa at a depth of 33km. The tsunami that followed devastated large parts of the south coast of Upolu and Manono islands.

Thousands of people were forced to move away from their coastal homes and villages. Limited access to water, sanitation, power and roads provided significant challenges in the wake of the disaster.

The death toll in Samoa was 143, with 5 missing and 310 injured. A further 31 people were confirmed dead in American Samoa and 9 in Tonga.

Thousands of people were forced to move away from their coastal homes and villages. Limited access to water, sanitation, power and roads provided significant challenges in the wake of the disaster.

Oxfam responded immediately, and in the months following the tsunami provided local communities with emergency assistance and sustainable access to clean water, sanitation and family income.



Oxfam continues to work closely with its long-term partner in Samoa, Women in Business Development (WIBDI), a local organisation whose knowledge and expertise were invaluable during the crisis. In total, Oxfam and WIBDI helped approximately 4500 people at the peak of the response, with 2500 people receiving ongoing assistance.

Funding totalled NZ\$1,470,000 and came from Oxfam New Zealand; the New Zealand Aid Programme's Humanitarian Action Fund; Oxfam Australia; Oxfam America; Oxfam Canada; Canada Fund; the German Consulate; and through generous donations from corporate organisations and the public in New Zealand and Australia.



At the peak of the emergency, Oxfam reached 4500 people with water, sanitation and hygiene support.

## In partnership for recovery: Oxfam and WIBDI

Oxfam worked closely with long-term local partner Women in Business Development Incorporated (WIBDI) to provide immediate and ongoing emergency relief to thousands of affected people.

Strong links with rural families and experience in providing emergency assistance in the wake of cyclones allowed WIBDI to respond effectively within hours of the tsunami. Their alliance with the National Disaster Management Office was utilised during the initial distribution of food and essentials.

Oxfam was able to draw on its relationships with local organisations such as WIBDI to provide an established platform from which to launch its response.

Beyond the immediate emergency response, WIBDI has been able to extend its existing community development programme to provide long-term support to affected families, helping them rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Eighty families are now being supported by WIBDI's post-tsunami Livelihoods Recovery Programme.

### WIBDI

WIBDI, with Oxfam's support, helps women, youth, people with disabilities and their families contribute to the development of their community by encouraging them to generate a sustainable income; they work with individual families, focusing on women and those who traditionally have less power in the community. In order to achieve empowerment for women in rural Samoa, WIBDI believes that men in particular will have to recognise the value of women's work and their contribution to family livelihoods. They aim to strengthen families and support women and men to work toward the shared goal of providing for their family rather than women having to take on additional roles.



Loliga Filo's family received vegetable seedlings for their new inland home. Oxfam's local partner, WIBDI, is helping 800 people feed themselves and earn a living again.

# The immediate response

## Meeting basic needs

Oxfam's first objective was to provide 54 extended family groups with food and other essential items, and to help ease the psychological trauma of the emergency.

In the first week, Oxfam provided funding for two water trucks and supplied two 5000-litre water bladders so displaced families could have safe drinking water. Within the first month, 4500 people had access to safe water.

The day after the tsunami, bottled water, clothing, sheets and blankets, tinned food, bread, utensils, sleeping mats and bags, towels, pillows, dried bananas and vegetable seeds were distributed by WIBDI to 31 families on Upolu. With the help of the National Disaster Management Office, Oxfam provided a further 45 families with tools and kits of essential items for babies and families.

In the first week, Oxfam worked with the Samoa Water Authority (SWA), providing funding for two water trucks to transport two 5000-litre water bladders so displaced families could have clean drinking water. After initially delivering water from family to family, Oxfam and the Red Cross quickly moved to install community water tanks. Two Oxfam water engineers provided technical support to the SWA and Ministry of Health (MoH) to assess and repair the damaged water supply. Oxfam helped the SWA to obtain water supply materials and offered advice on solid waste management.

These initial activities ensured access to safe water for 4500 people. Communities reported that the food and essential items they received were sufficient to meet their needs.



Clean water was initially delivered in 5000-litre bladders.

## Counselling and support

Oxfam provided counselling support to WIBDI staff so that they were better able to manage their own psychological trauma as well as that of affected people in the community. Two psychologists ran a series of training sessions.

By targeting families with whom they had an existing relationship, WIBDI was able to begin its counselling response quickly, connecting with and helping affected people with personalised support. Affected communities valued this approach, appreciating that WIBDI was 'there to listen' while offering 'sympathy and comfort'.

In total, WIBDI helped 177 families cope with the psychological trauma of the tsunami. Each family received a minimum of two visits, with some families visited on three or four occasions.

The devastated village of Lalomanu suffered the greatest loss of life, and survivors received two days of counselling from WIBDI staff and a psychologist. This work will continue until December 2010.

## There for the most vulnerable

Four families with members experiencing disabilities were supported by WIBDI. Families requiring wheelchair replacement were identified, and the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys were addressed by the MoH with technical support from Oxfam health workers. As a result of training given to WIBDI by Oxfam's health promotion workers, WIBDI staff were able to successfully promote family hygiene.

Oxfam and WIBDI installed water tanks for two isolated families lacking access to safe drinking water. It is a tribute to the thoroughness of WIBDI's outreach work that it was possible to quickly find these families and respond to their needs.

Hygiene and sanitation training was provided to eight WIBDI staff members in December 2009, and community hygiene promotion is ongoing. At least 10 families (around 80 people) have received advice regarding their sanitation practices.



*"I shouted at my neighbours to run – everyone was screaming to run. I grabbed my youngest daughter and also helped our great aunt, 82 years old, up the hill – and I thank God that we all made it. We stood above our village and stared down watching the wave destroy everything." – Lasi Vea*

### Samoan voices

The Vea Family: mother Lasi Vea, father Vea Lasi Palea, Natalya, 8, Vino, 10, Tarzana, 17. There are ten children in total.

All that remains of the Vea family's coastal home are the foundations and some of the fale posts. Lasi said the seawater just rose up – no big waves formed until it hit the sea wall 20 metres in front of the house. They have moved inland to their large coconut plantation and are living under a makeshift tarpaulin. They plan to rebuild their new home here.

The plantation was organically certified through WIBDI before the disaster and they were operating a coconut dryer to produce organically certified coconut oil for export.

In the weeks after the tsunami, the family concentrated on building a new house before the arrival of the rainy season. They cleared some land and WIBDI is bringing them organic seedlings so they can grow their own food and sell the extra produce to other relocated families and at the market in Apia.

# Providing water, sanitation and hygiene

## Water

Approximately 4500 people were affected by the tsunami, with around 2000 people relocating from their coastal homes.

*“We perceived Oxfam as very experienced in this sector and respected this, which helped our relationship. Oxfam has become our friend in the Pacific.” – Tainau Moefaaau Titimaea, Managing Director, Samoa Water Authority*

The immediate need for families relocating inland was to have access to clean water and sanitation facilities. There were no existing water sources in these previously uninhabited areas.

The relocation placed a huge burden on family members, who would have had to walk long distances up and down steep hills to the coast to collect enough water.

Oxfam’s goal was to provide a safe water supply and effective sanitation; our Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programmes are in place for affected communities.

Oxfam’s assistance enabled the SWA to truck in enough water to meet people’s basic needs. Rainwater harvesting activities initiated by Oxfam greatly assisted families and women to supplement their water supply. The assistance given by Oxfam has benefited women in their daily activities and helped to reduce the risk of illness.

Oxfam worked in partnership with UNICEF and Red Cross, and emergency response coordination was led by the Government of Samoa. Early recovery, water, health and shelter committees were formed to coordinate relief efforts.

Oxfam actively participated in all coordination committees as well as the water sub-committee, which specifically looked at designing and implementing a longer-term water supply.

Access to safe water and sanitation was a priority for families who relocated inland.



Of those evaluated, 97 per cent of people responded that rainwater harvesting activities were appropriate for their situation, and 1700 people are receiving water from this initiative.



Rainwater harvesting materials were distributed to 250 families.

Oxfam is helping to construct a system that will take water from a high level lake to communal tanks. This will provide 50 litres of water per person per day.



Oxfam's four WASH experts actively participated in government coordination meetings and their expertise was central in ensuring the response met the needs of affected communities.

The water supply initiatives gave adults a chance to rebuild homes and livelihoods and for children to return to school. So far, 70 families have received 5000-litre rainwater tanks.

Oxfam identified vulnerable people who were not having their needs met and provided rainwater harvesting materials for families who had moved inland. These materials were delivered to families, who completed the installation with the guidance and support of Oxfam staff. Rainwater harvesting materials were distributed to 57 families on Manono Island and 193 families on the south coast of Upolu.

Oxfam is also involved in piping water from a high level lake (Lanoto'o) to the affected areas and connecting the pipes to communal tanks. This will significantly reduce the need for trucked water and is designed to provide 50 litres of water per person per day until a permanent solution is in place. Oxfam supported the SWA with the purchase of ten 11,000-litre kitset water tanks that are easily transported and installed along the new pipeline, which will provide water for 1700 people. This is a sustainable solution in that it will connect to the permanent water programme and, if well maintained, will last more than 20 years.

Oxfam supported the Samoan government's shelter rebuilding project by successfully advocating for rainwater harvesting guttering and tanks to be incorporated into the design of new houses (fales) and by supplying 70 families with 5000-litre rainwater tanks.



*"Water is our greatest need, and the water tank has been the most important thing for us to receive."  
- Vaioalisi*

*"We feel comfortable with the water supply now and we don't have to beg our neighbours for water anymore" - Fa'aiuga*

### **Samoa voices**

Vaioalisi Fa'aiuga and her husband Fa'aiuga Tui have seven children aged 3 to 22. Their house is 20m from the beach. Vaioalisi was home with her 3-year-old. Her eldest was up the hill working in the garden and when he started to yell that there was a tsunami coming she ran into the fale and grabbed her 3-year-old. She saw the ocean start to rise and ran up behind the house. The sea surged through their fale, washing away everything they owned and lifting up the concrete floor. The water reached her and the two children but luckily they weren't injured.

The family's three water tanks were destroyed. Oxfam has provided them with a 5000-litre tank and guttering as a permanent water solution. They have begun building a new fale with government-supplied materials and will attach their new tank once the house is completed. They are currently using the guttering to collect water into a drum.

## Hygiene

Two Oxfam public health professionals from the Papua New Guinea Highlands programme were deployed to Samoa for two weeks to offer health promotion and sanitation support. They helped design an Environmental Health Follow Up Checklist, advised on safe sanitation, latrine construction and hygiene practices, and encouraged and assisted families to build latrines.

Oxfam helped the Ministry of Health (MoH) deliver health and hygiene promotion to the entire affected population.

Oxfam helped to assess latrines, design sanitation kits and deliver public health messages. Oxfam also provided 500 10-litre water containers and sanitation materials to affected families.

There has been no outbreak of communicable disease in the affected area since the tsunami, which suggests that public health promotion and sanitation activities have been effective.

Families who had not been able to build their own latrine were assisted by the MoH public health teams. Oxfam actively advocated for the involvement of women and girls in deciding the location of the latrines, and 18 of 26 evaluated families reported that female members were involved in the decision making process.

## Community participation

Community and village leaders were actively involved in the development of water supply projects. The SWA consulted with representatives of all villages in the affected areas who are to benefit from the intermediate water supply.

Families were asked if they would like to participate in the rainwater harvesting programme. Materials were distributed based on an assessment of the family situation and the families were asked to install the materials themselves to ensure family participation and to provide knowledge and skills to the community. Oxfam staff conducted follow-up visits to monitor the installations and to give advice if required. Several follow-up visits were made to each family if installations were not completed at the time of the first visit. During these visits families were able to share any difficulties they were having. An average of 88 per cent of affected families on Manono Island and 78 per cent on Upolu installed their rainwater harvesting materials successfully and reported an increased access to water.

Oxfam's WASH staff worked in the field daily, either making new assessments for rainwater harvesting materials or doing follow-up visits to talk to families about any problems they might be experiencing.



Local community leaders are involved in the development of water and livelihoods recovery projects.

# Restoring livelihoods

The tsunami destroyed the livelihoods – the means of earning a living – and food sources of many families and communities. Through a livelihoods recovery programme, Oxfam set out to restore these for at least 54 extended families by April 2010.

Most families' food gardens around their homes were completely destroyed by the tsunami, with a small number of families also losing their coastal plantations. While many families had inland plantations that were unaffected, they did not have vegetable gardens.



Families with new vegetable gardens have expressed a sense of purpose.

Establishing vegetable gardens provides one of the fastest options for regenerating people's livelihoods, as it takes only 8-12 weeks to harvest the produce. It is also an effective means of supplementing families' short-term food supplies.

Oxfam established a seedling nursery with WIBDI so that new plants could replace lost crops. Imported organic vegetable seeds and seedlings were raised for 80 families who lost their crops and therefore their livelihoods. (Locally available seeds are limited to one season of growth, hence the need to import seeds that regenerate.) Families were also given support to plant and tend the crops. In the first months, over 9000 plants were distributed. Families have also received tools to replace those lost in the tsunami.

A total of 177 families have been given technical advice about the planting materials they received, as well as information about organic methods of gardening and the associated health benefits.

Families are responding well to this assistance. With the supply of the much-needed first round of vegetable seeds and seedlings, gardens are up and running, complete with composting to assist with soil health.

*“Even the kids have grown to like it here. They’re getting used to growing fruit and vegetables. I prefer living life this way rather than before when we relied on relatives from overseas sending money. We can now grow as much as we like; if all the plants produce then we’ll sell the extra and make money. We’re making use of the land for the future of our kids and family.”*

- Loliga Filo, Malaela, Upolu

Four months after the seedlings were distributed, a follow-up with 58 families showed that 74 per cent of bananas, 50 per cent of coffee, 83 per cent of cocoa and 77 per cent of yams were growing successfully.

Families who have benefited from this project have expressed a sense of purpose in the wake of the devastation. By engaging in planting work on newly re-settled land, people have shown a sense of looking forward to the future when they may earn an income from the plants in their garden. People have adjusted well to the change in lifestyle since relocating from the coast.

## Community participation

Extended families (aiga) would gather and participate during Oxfam's assessments of the community's needs. Whole families would sit down together, the elders involved and the children listening. They were provided with information about WIBDI's work and were asked what kind of recovery activity would suit them. Families could then choose whether or not to participate, and all but two did so.

Families participate in the work by engaging with staff during visits, spending time in the garden with staff planning and learning about how to care for the plants. The families then plant the materials themselves and maintain them. Families are also involved in the follow up on plant growth, accompanying field staff to planting areas and helping to assess what is growing well or not.

On occasion, WIBDI will ask a village member to volunteer to participate in the field work being conducted in their village. This helps to provide a point of contact, knowledge of which family is based where, and a friendly face for families when WIBDI arrives.

Families are also given the opportunity to provide feedback on the way in which WIBDI has been working. People are satisfied with the number and frequency of visits and the manner in which staff interacted with them.



*“These vegetables are now our only source of income, and once the garden is established I’ll look for other work as well. I’m really looking forward to being a part of the organics programme, not only to feed my family but also as another way we can earn an income.”*  
– Nu’usa Mamea

### Samoan voices

The Mamea family's home was completely destroyed in the tsunami. They stayed with extended family for three weeks before relocating to customary land about 1.5km inland.

Nu’usa used to run a small business selling ice-blocks on the coast, but he lost everything in the disaster and the family has since been totally dependant on remittances.

WIBDI distributed organic seedlings to Nu’usa to assist in his family's recovery from the tsunami. He has cleared a vegetable patch and planted the seedlings. He hopes to organically certify the land in the near future so that when he's growing enough he can sell to the organic market. For now, the vegetables are a good source of food for his family.

# Ongoing response

Oxfam's response in Samoa is ongoing, with 1700 people continuing to benefit from water projects and 800 people from livelihoods recovery work.

When a permanent water supply is in place for affected communities, the Oxfam water tanks can be taken down and stored for future emergency use.

Rainwater harvesting materials provided by Oxfam mean communities can respond to future water shortages following a disaster. Gutters and fittings used on temporary shelters can eventually be used on other permanent shelters to continue the collection of rainwater. The water bladders donated to SWA for use in the trucking programme will be stored and used for future responses. When the permanent water supply is in place, the 11,000lt Oxfam water tanks can be dismantled and stored for future emergency use or for other projects. Rainwater tanks for new houses will last more than 20 years as long as they are well maintained.

Further ongoing field work to support families involved in the livelihoods programme is provided by WIBDI's organics team to promote soil health, vegetable garden establishment and protection, and preliminary work for organic certification continues. Thriving vegetable gardens provide families with an opportunity to supply tourism operators with local produce. This is a ready market in close proximity, and families who are able to become organic certified producers will have a competitive advantage in the long term.

Two new activities are being piloted with tsunami-affected families to explore new means of income generation: soap production and fetau oil production. Most of the work is being done by WIBDI staff, who will learn and refine the processes involved before developing the necessary training for families. Both have ready markets available – the tourism operators for soap and overseas cosmetic companies for fetau oil – and the executive director of WIBDI has already commenced communications with these markets with intent to supply.

A sample of Fetau Oil has been produced. The sample will be provided to The Body Shop and an Italian company for their review. Soap production is still in its infancy, but 300 bars have recently been made. Two families are selling this soap to a resort on the south coast and to a local beauty salon. WIBDI already has an organically certified recipe for soap that they intend to use, which gives their soap a higher value than other locally produced soaps in the retail market.

Fetau will provide two benefits to communities: a sustainable income, and the trees themselves offer significant protection against storm surges, cyclones and tsunami.

The planting work supported by WIBDI has helped reinforce lifestyle changes that have resulted from moving inland away from other livelihood options such as fishing. The planting materials are readily utilised by families who now have more time to work in the garden because they don't have to travel from the coast to get to their land. Some feel that in the past it was hard to go to the plantation to plant taro and other crops; but now things are easier as they can plant crops right beside their own house.



The Mamea family's new organic garden is a sustainable source of food and income.

## Disaster Risk Reduction

With the advice of its national agricultural consultant, WIBDI has started a fetau tree planting programme as an additional tsunami response activity.

The planting of fetau trees along the sea front aims to reduce the vulnerability of families living in coastal areas and minimise the potential impacts of climate change. The planting will strengthen coastal defences and help to minimise the impact of waves, sea surges and the effects of increased erosion.

In doing this work, WIBDI is addressing the fact that the majority of the population lives on the coastal fringes of Upolu and Savai'i and could experience increased coastal erosion and more intense weather events. WIBDI has recognised the need to work in coordination with others involved in seawall construction efforts. Participation in the UNDP and the Government of Samoa's workshops on Manono Island have helped pave the way for this work to progress.



The fetau tree not only offers protection from cyclones, tsunami and rising tides, but harvesting its oil could offer a new income stream for local communities.

Fetau planting incorporates climate change adaptation into WIBDI's disaster recovery work. The vast majority of the Samoan people live on the coast and could experience increased erosion, storm surges and sea level rise.

Photo: Oxfam

# Evaluation and learning

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As Oxfam's lead affiliate in the Samoa tsunami response, Oxfam New Zealand has actively sought to build learnings from the experience into its organisational development and future planning. We commissioned a Real Time Evaluation (RTE) of the response with team members from Oxfam New Zealand, Oxfam Australia and Oxfam International. The overall objective was to review progress and capture lessons for the Samoa country programme and share findings that are also relevant to other Oxfams responding to similar emergencies.

The RTE team interviewed Oxfam staff, Samoan government department heads, WIBDI, staff from other International NGOs, Red Cross and the UN, and affected communities. Staff discussed recommendations for the existing programme and for future developments in the Pacific. The recommendations for immediate improvements were acted on and recommendations for future responses have been incorporated into Oxfam New Zealand's contingency plans.

Local families have participated in structured interviews to evaluate the WIBDI livelihoods programme. An internal staff evaluation was also conducted with WIBDI staff.

Based on this learning, Oxfam New Zealand will: further develop emergency planning and preparation, concentrating initially on Samoa and Tonga; will further build response capacity; will build 'emergency response relationships' with partners, donors, UN and governments; and will continue to support communities in disaster risk reduction.

*"The involvement of other Pacific islanders in our teams helped us get along with each other and should be encouraged throughout the region".*  
– Andrew Peteru, Director of Public Health, Samoa

## Lessons learnt

1. Oxfam's deployment of Pacific island staff was appreciated by Samoan government officials, who felt that this improved communication and joint work. It was noted by Oxfam staff that productivity was higher for teams that were made up of Samoans and other Pacific islanders.
2. It was reinforced that livelihood rebuilding, such as the distribution of plants and seeds, needs to be at a time when affected populations are ready to receive them. This can be affected by trauma over new location decisions, shelter construction efforts, and time availability of recipients to utilise and maintain the items to avoid wastage.
3. The importance of Oxfam working with partners – in this case, the Government of Samoa, the United Nations, Red Cross and WIBDI – has been reinforced through the tsunami response. Feedback from each of our partners has confirmed that this way of working is appreciated and encouraged.



The Mamea family, Satitoo, Upolu Island, Samoa.