



*Multi Country Office for
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News Article

For immediate release

UNDP assists the Salei'a community in gearing up for inclusive and accountable successes

By Jenny Iao Jorgensen

6 January 2011, Salei'a — In the run-up to the New Year, the villagers of Salei'a, had more than the festive season to celebrate. With the support of the team from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/Global Environment Fund (GEF) Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) project, women and men, young and old from the village gathered to celebrate and gear up their collective actions and responsibility for their own development while increasing their resiliency to the impacts of climate change.

Agriculture and fishing are the main income and livelihood sources for the coastal village of 700 inhabitants. Since the 1990's, climate change impacts such as flooding, storms and coastal erosion have affected the coastline and destroyed seaward homes. The increasing intensity of rainfall has brought regular flash flooding in the area, damaging homes along the stream pathway, and siltation of the coral reef leading to coral degradation and ultimately smaller fish catches. The clearing of the watershed area for plantations and livestock farms has also exacerbated the climate-induced flooding problems. Both the livelihoods and the ecosystems including coral reefs and mixed herbaceous coastal marsh surrounding the village and the neighboring Avao and Vaipouli are threatened. Climate change projects for Samoa paint an even grimmer picture with rising sea level and increased intensity of tropical storms, cyclones and rainfall.

Small communities like Salei'a, often the most severely affected by climate-driven impacts, are some of the least resourced to cope and adapt. In the face of this and the important resource volunteering can foster, the UNDP-GEF CBA project aims to strengthen community engagement and build resilience of the communities to the adverse effects of climate change. The project, currently being piloted in nine other countries, is supported by the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme and Small Grants Programme (SGP) partners in the field to enhance community engagement, ensure inclusive participation and to value volunteers' contributions.

As the project's name suggests, CBA projects strive to be community-based and community-driven. For Salei'a and the neighboring Avao and Vaipouli, the project was initiated in May 2010 through a participatory process, Vulnerability Reduction Assessment (VRA), which involved all sectors of the village. Following these consultations, the project has funded the construction of a 200-metre retention wall to strengthen vegetation barriers and to clear the stream pathway. With co-financing from AusAID and the communities themselves, the project also proposes to rehabilitate coastal marshlands and plant native tree species along the stream pathway. So far, more than 200 trees have been replanted in the flood-prone area.

This second VRA exercise, focusing again on community perceptions, was organized for the Salei'a villagers to assess the change made so far by the project. After ensuring the gender balance among the participants, the village mayor started the exercise by recalling the project's objectives, outcomes and outputs. Participants were then divided into three smaller groups: women, youth and men to allow different voices to be heard. Each group was asked to draw three pictures of the project site: before (how did the village look before the project?), now (how does the village look now that the project has been partially implemented) and future (how will the village look at the end of the project?). Each group then fed back their discussions to the main



group. Participants were subsequently asked to score their vulnerability and capacities to adapt to climate change risks based on their individual perceptions. The results were then presented against the VRA baseline data and scores that had been collected in May.

The scoring result, a positive 24% change from the first VRA scores, as well as testimony from the group discussions all suggest that the project investment is paying off. “Although we haven’t experienced any major flooding this year, we are very confident that the rock wall and redirection of the stream would be able to safeguard our properties against any flash flood”, said Soonafai Oipuas who is in her 70s as she proudly presented the drawings and highlights of the women’s group discussion.

Not only did the exercise reflect increased awareness among the participants in climate-driven risks, the benefits of the project to the village environment and livelihoods were consistently highlighted. Some groups even suggested collective activities and community mobilization beyond the project cycle.

“Albert Einstein once said, ‘not everything that counts can be measured and not everything that can be measured counts’. We are also interested to hear about how volunteering has been a powerful means to engage ordinary villagers in tackling their own community development challenges and how volunteering can encourage inclusion and contribute to CBA project’s sustainability”, said Richard Crichton, UNV programme associate for Samoa’s CBA project.

VRA is only one of the monitoring and evaluation tools that CBA projects across the globe are practicing. Observing the VRA in Salei’a, Adeline Aubry, UNV global volunteerism and CBA specialist added, “Monitoring and evaluation for locally-driven adaptation is still a new field. We are trying out different approaches to capturing disaggregated data by for example gender, age, people with special needs, to not only assess the project’s success but also to draw lessons to inform our practices. As part of the global team that supports the CBA projects, I’m very encouraged by what I saw today. There is still much to do to take monitoring and evaluation seriously. But we’re very excited to continue working with the communities for more inclusive and accountable means to plan, implement and measure development successes.”

For more information about UNDP Community-Based Adaptation projects, visit www.undp-adaptation.org/project/cba

For more information about the UN Volunteers programme, visit www.unvolunteers.org

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Figure 1: A youth group representative portraying the group's discussions on the village's climate-driven risks before, during and after the Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) project. Promoting community mobilization and inclusion of all segments of the community are central to the CBA project.



Figure 2: Soonafai Oipuas (left) and another woman participant from the women's group reading the question carefully before giving a score to their individual assessment of the CBA project's progress so far.



Figure 3: Tiuli Vao Foti, Salei'a CBA village committee member and a self-employed electrician, standing on the project site where a 200-metre retention wall was built and more than 200 trees were replanted along the stream against flooding and coastal erosion.

| | YOUTH | WOMEN | MEN |
|----|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | 2.46 4.00 | 2.89 3.27 4.00 11 | 2.25 3.00 |
| 2. | 2.46 3.50 | 3.47 4.53 | 2.50 3.50 |
| 3. | 2.50 3.50 | 2.89 3.81 | 3.65 4.0 |
| 4. | 4.60 5.00 | 3.47 4.00 | 4.23 4.50 |

Figure 4: At the end of the mid-term Vulnerability Reduction Assessment (VRA), participants were presented with the scores perceived by each group on the village's adaptive capacity to climate change. By comparing these with the baseline scores from the first VRA before the start of the project, the project team was able to know if the project is working. Notes were carefully taken during the group discussions to capture why it is working and why it is not working.



Figure 5: Participants watching a video called *Tofiga o Pili A'au*, which was created by eight Samoan coastal villages including Salei'a, featuring testimony and lessons from their ongoing CBA projects. *Tofiga o Pili A'au* means the assigned duties of every Samoan to ensure the enrichment and the continuation of the environment given by their forefathers *Pili A'au*, for the good of everyone now and those who come after.