

Mangrove Conservation Efforts lead by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment amalgamates dedication of Fusi Saoluafata village



Members of Fusi Saoluafata community, Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment and Conservation International

16-20 May 2022 Samoa, the community of Fusi-Saoluafata came out in numbers and joined forces with the Division of Environment and Conservation of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and international partner Conservation International (CI), in a week-long programme to support their interests and shared aspiration to conserve and sustainably manage their mangrove ecosystem. The initiative complements the Government's emphasis on conserving and restoring critical marine ecosystems at the grassroots level. The collaboration recognizes the threats of the community's degrading mangroves and supports their intent to strengthen resilience against the impacts of climate change and improve food security for future generations. These local efforts also contribute to national coastal marine area management goals outlined in the Samoa Ocean Strategy 2020-2030.

"This is a dream come true for our village. We have witnessed the impact of sea level rise and commencing this work will help protect our coastline, properties, and most importantly, improve the health of our mangroves." said Fuatavai Euta , an elder of the village.

The ambitions of the program were to collate baseline data and information and document mangrove habitat status through a thorough audit assessment. Furthermore, they were to conduct an awareness and educational program to raise village understanding of the significance of mangroves to local livelihoods. Additional major undertakings were coastal rehabilitation activities through conscientious waste clean-up and replanting, to restore identified degraded mangrove habitats.



The Survey Team with local community members who helped out with the mangrove audit assessment and few of the samples caught.

Preliminary findings confirmed 2 mangrove species to inhabit the area; the red mangrove (*Rhizophora samoensis*) and the oriental mangrove (*Bruguiera gymnorhiza*). The awareness program emphasized that this productive ecosystem provides a basis for resilience in terms of livelihoods, economic growth, and socio-cultural benefits. They serve as nursery grounds for numerous aquatic species, and with a better rehabilitation approach they can enhance food security standards. It is moreover, a prominent nature-based solution to reduce coastal communities' vulnerability to climate change.



Community members from different age groups gathered to join the awareness program on the second day (17 May 2022)

"Fusi is fortunate to join an increasing number of communities committing to the rehabilitation and protection of their mangrove areas in collaboration with the government and partners like CI. If we do not act now, the loss of this durable ecosystem poses devastating effects to biodiversity and humans alike," explained Seumaloisalafai Afele Faiilagi (MNRE, ACEO).

To achieve Fusi's mangrove goals, villagers of different age groups attended the awareness program. The youth were especially engaged in discussions about the value, biology, and restoration methods for mangroves. One of the major threats to Fusi's mangrove habitat was existing waste which triggered a massive waste-cleanup and despite the rain, men, women and children descended onto the shoreline, committed to cleaning out the mangroves and beaches. A total of six (6) truckloads of waste were removed and it consisted of a range of municipal solid waste, bulky waste, and electronic waste. To minimize the impact of king tides and strong waves, bulky waste scattered on beach perm such as car remnants and broken refrigerators has been left on the beach deliberately, according to the villagers.



Fusi community and partners (MNRE & CI) intensive Mangrove and Coastal clean-up.

"This is the first time I have set foot in our mangrove area and personally witnessed the waste problem that we have. I believe that all of this waste comes from the nearby families and through streams that lead back to the mangrove area. As a community, we should ban using mangroves as a dumping ground," Maria Sophie Fili, Fusi community representative stated.



Determined Women of Fusi Saolufata joined men and children to replant degraded mangrove areas for restoration and rehabilitation purposes.

Over 1000 mangrove seeds were planted for the rehabilitation of degraded mangrove areas as part of the community restoration efforts. “Despite mangroves’ critical importance, roughly 1 percent is lost each year globally. However, with the integration of mangroves into policies, there is hope. CI is excited to partner with the MNRE and communities like Fusi to protect these critical ecosystems here in Samoa,” Danita Strickland, CI Marine Programme Manager clarified.

The Fusi community waits in anticipation of continuing their collaboration with the MNRE and partners, to establish their mangrove ecosystem as a conservation area, and complete a management plan to govern its conservation and protection. Similarly, to guide sustainable management actions to ensure prosperity for now and future generations.

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One of the most important things that we can do to conserve the biodiversity of the mangroves is to get involved... All of us: our communities, government entities and partners, NGO to name a few, can help restore and maintain our mangrove areas.

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