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**Social Change and Deforestation:
A Case Study of Western Samoa**

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Abstract

Deforestation has caught much attention within wider concerns about the global environmental crisis. Though it is often large countries with rich forest resources which have caught most attention globally, forests in Western Samoa are worthy of attention as they have experienced some of the highest per capita rates of loss.

The causes of deforestation reveal an intricate mix of social, cultural, economic and political factors within a specific local context. At the same time, external factors, which exist outside the national borders, also influence on the state of the forest.

Deforestation in Western Samoa is an example of such complex relationships. It is not commercial logging operations which cause deforestation in Western Samoa, and most deforestation is occurring on communal land. Recent studies have claimed that the modification of land tenure system, caused by the influences of Western individualism and the cash economy, induces Samoans to cut down trees. However, this study has found that the main cause of deforestation is the land conversion for agricultural use by villagers who seek increased money income. At the same time, changes in the traditional Samoan society have had significant influences on deforestation. Factors, such as an increasing number of *matai* (chief) and the advent of nuclear families, have interacted to encourage villagers to clear forests.

No society is constant. Forests in Western Samoa have been lost in the continuing friction between traditional and modern values in the society. Conservation of the forest depends on the views and values of Samoans themselves, seen through the lens of their culture, and on the decisions made based on such perceptions and attitudes.

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Glossary of Samoan Terms

<i>'aiga</i>	Extended family, descent group or kinship in all its dimensions.
<i>'aiga poto poto</i>	A gathering of the main representative members of an <i>'aiga</i> in order to decide upon matters of mutual interest.
<i>'aitu</i>	Ghost or spirit.
<i>ali'i</i>	Paramount chief.
<i>aumaga</i>	A society of untitled man.
<i>fa'a lavelave</i>	Public ceremonies, such as funeral, weddings, title bestowal ceremonies. It sometimes means any difficulty from paying school fees to funeral expenses.
<i>fa'a matai</i>	Samoan political system based on <i>matai</i> .
<i>fa'a Samoa</i>	Samoan way of life.
<i>fale</i>	Samoan open house. <i>Fale palagi</i> is Western style house with walls and windows.
<i>fono</i>	Village council of <i>matai</i> .
<i>ie lavalava</i>	Traditional wraparound skirt for both men and women.
<i>palagi</i>	People of European descent.
<i>pule</i>	Authority.
<i>Matai</i>	Chief.
<i>nu'u</i>	Village or polity.
<i>tautua</i>	Service to one's family, village, district and country.