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**Fa'a Samoa: An Aid to Livelihood Recovery  
Following the Samoan Tsunami?**

**A Case Study Examining Two Samoan Villages.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirement  
for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Development Studies  
At  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Natural disasters are destructive, traumatic and expensive. Costs associated with natural disasters are increasing, while simultaneously, there is a call to minimise or optimise development spending. With this in mind, this study examined the ways in which the cultural framework of Samoa, *fa'a Samoa*, influenced Samoan livelihood recovery following the 2009 tsunami. *Fa'a Samoa* is widely considered to consist of three major components, *matai* (chief), church, and *aiga* (family), supported by a variety of other factors including land, ceremonies, respect, service, love, hospitality and compassion.

This research was undertaken through qualitative research, using critical case study analysis. Semi-structured interviews within an unaffected donor village, an affected village and with key informants provided primary data. The data was evaluated against the Samoan cultural framework, *fa'a Samoa*, using key themes such as Christianity, love, family, customary land, reciprocity and village governance to ascertain trends or attribute meaning.

Research findings show that central to the recovery of Samoan communities following the tsunami, and their development in general, is *fa'a Samoa*. By drawing on *fa'a Samoa*, Samoan communities were able to recover their livelihood with the provision of less official assistance than would have otherwise been required. As a result, the principal conclusion of this thesis is that development should employ an approach in which the acknowledgement of cultural frameworks moves from desirable, to an essential requirement of policy and practice. Additionally, to aid livelihood recovery, non-affected communities should be called upon to provide assistance during the response and recovery phases and procedures should be put in place to enable families to connect with and help their affected kin.

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*It takes a village to raise a child*  
(African proverb, commonly attributed to Hillary Clinton)

I have modified the above quote to reflect my experiences while undertaking this thesis.

*It takes a village to write a thesis*

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To my global village, *Fa'afetai, fa'afetai lava*

This thesis is dedicated to the survivors of the tsunami, especially

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## ACRONYMS and GLOSSARY

### List of Acronyms

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DAC	Disaster Advisory Committee
DEMA	Disaster Emergency Management Act
DMO	Disaster Management Office (part of MNREM)
IASC	The Inter-Agency Standing Committee
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MNREM	Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Meteorology
MWCSD	Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development
MWTI	Ministry of Works, Transport and Infrastructure
NDC	National Disaster Council
NDMP	National Disaster Management Plan
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NZAID	New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SUNGO	Samoa Umbrella of Non -Government Organisations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WIBDI	Women in Business Development Incorporated Society

### **Glossary of Samoan Terms Used Within this Thesis**

Aiga	Nuclear, immediate or extended family/kin group
Apia	Capital of Samoa, located in Upolu
Fa'a matai	Chiefly system of matai, customary system of governance
Fa'avae I le Atua Samoa	Samoa is founded on God
Fa'a Samoa	'the Samoan way', also referred to as Samoan culture
Fale	Open style Samoan house
Fono	Village governing council, comprised of Matai
Komiti	Committee
Lavalava	Cloth wrapped around the waist, worn as a skirt by men and women
Matai	Chief or orator, head of the family
Meaalofa	Gift or the practice of giving, receiving and sharing of gifts, thing of love
Nu'u	Village
Palagi	White or European person, non-Samoan
Pulenu'u	Village mayor, liaison between village and Samoan government
Savaii	Largest but second most populated island in Samoa
Tala	Samoa currency
Upolu	Second largest but most populated island

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