

# SAMOA AGRO-FORESTRY AND TREE FARMING PROJECT (SATFP)

## SIX MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT 1 July - December 2012

February 2013

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Date: 21 February 2013

# **SAMOA AGRO-FORESTRY AND TREE FARMING PROGRAM (SATFP)**

## **SIX MONTHLY REPORT**

**JULY - DECEMBER 2012**

### **Background**

The overall goal of the SATFP is *to enhance sustainable livelihoods of Samoan and improve their resilience to Climate Change impacts through better use of agricultural and forest resources, resulting also in mitigation of (GHG) emissions and an improved economy*. The purpose is to improve the financial viability, resilience and sustainability of agro-forestry and tree farming activities and associated industry. The four main components of the Program are:

1. Agro-forestry and tree farming systems
2. Value Adding
3. Institutional strengthening
4. Program Management

The problem to be addressed by the SATFP has been described as follows: Samoa has a narrow economic base, which has been further aggravated by the depletion of forest resources, and the narrower the economic base, the more vulnerable the Samoan population and its economy are to climate change impacts.

The SATFP has a duration of 5 years and a budget of AUD2.3 million which is approximately SAT5 million.

### **Summary of Key Achievements**

The Samoa Agro-Forestry and Tree Farming Project (SATFP) made some important (albeit) slow progress during this final six months of 2012. These are discussed in greater details below and throughout this report. High among them is the signing of the contract between the TA consultant and the MNRE bringing to a close this prolonged and drawn out process. The highlights of the period reported on are:

1. Increased number of farmers and communities engaged in program activities through the Taiala program run by METI. One hundred more farmers have been added to the 164 already engaged in the Taiala project during the period. Ten (10) new villages have established Cooperatives under the program and have received training mainly in life skills and permaculture.
2. Cyclone Evans which hit Samoa in early December 2012 caused further delay to the implementation of activities planned for the period as government and communities placed priority on recovery efforts throughout the country but especially on the island of Upolu which was severely affected. Many MNRE senior staff including the CEO and ACEO were heavily occupied in recovery efforts as a State of Emergency was declared for the country.

3. In the aftermath of cyclone Evan, SATFP was requested to assist with the development of a recovery plan for the forestry sector. This was submitted to MNRE, AusAID and other SATFP partners for review and comment.
4. Consultations continued with NGOs and CBOs such as METI, WIBDI and FSA with the view to engage them more in the implementation of program activities. Relations with METI are excellent however, WIBDI and FSA have yet to show greater interest and commitment.
5. The on-going delay with the recruitment of the Project Coordinator continues to undermine serious efforts by the MNRE to execute the SATFP in a timely manner. Outstanding issues with the PSC relating to the filling of this position must be resolved immediately in order for the new PC to benefit from the presence of the TA in the next few months of his contract.

Whilst the recruitment of the TA was a welcome forward step for the SATFP, the lack of progress on the recruitment of a PC on the other hand continued to hamper overall progress. An important part of the TA's job is the provision of technical and management advice to the PC which obviously could not be fulfilled until a PC is on board.

As required under the TA's contract, a Project Inception Report(PIR) was prepared and presented to the ACEO within two weeks of the TA's coming on board. The PIR enabled the TA to present his understanding of the project objectives and goals including suggested changes which could further enhance the projects capacity to achieve its objectives. Such changes included revisions to the budget and rescheduling of certain work plan activities (for obvious reasons) but had no major bearings on the overall project budget. Except from the ACEO, no comments were received from members of the Steering Committee in which case, the report was deemed acceptable to the Committee.

Immediately following cyclone Evan, the MNRE in collaboration with SPREP and other partners carried out a rapid assessment of the damage caused by the cyclone to the forestry sector. The ACEO requested the TA for assistance in preparing an SATFP input to the forestry recovery plan following the cyclone and this was expeditiously done. Whether the recovery plan will impact on the resources and scheduling of SATFP activities remains to be seen and is a matter for the Steering Committee to consider and decide on.

Negotiations with RECOFTC for the conduct of agro-forestry training using the 5 modules agreed during the preparation of the project design document are well advanced with the RECOFTC mission now scheduled for the period 10 to 20 March 2013. Actual dates for the training will be determined during the mission and stakeholders and interested partners will be advised accordingly.

The specific achievements under the different outputs during the period reported on are detailed below:

## **Component 1: Agro-forestry and tree farming systems**

### *1.1. Adequate quantities of high quality seedlings produced.*

The five nurseries listed in the PDD have all received support from the SATFP. Extension work is completed for all nurseries except Vaipouli which is on-going but expected to be completed soon. It should be noted that the same nurseries also receive funding support from other FD implemented forestry projects and do not specifically set aside seedlings for specific projects. SATFP has been assured that there is adequate high quality seedlings produced for all forestry projects under the Division. This assurance has been given to all other projects of the FD.

### *1.2. More productive, diversified and valuable farm forestry systems.*

Support for the FD Community Forestry Program continued for the raising of adequate seedlings for SATFP distribution to farmers and NGOs. One hundred (100) new farmers have been registered under METI's Taiala project bringing to 264 individual farmers already registered with the project. Ten new villages have established Village Cooperatives with the view to improve cooperation and set up local partnerships for farming purposes at the community level.

### *1.3. More productive, diversified and high value permaculture farming systems.*

METI has been given funding in support of its on-going life skills and permaculture training programme. Initial consultations have also been held between the SATFP and the Ministry of Agriculture (MAF) to identify appropriate crops that could be used for permaculture systems based on MAF's existing research and program results.

## **Component 2: Value Adding**

### *2.1. Private sector development funding for value adding provided.*

Discussions between MNRE and MCIL regarding the transfer of SATFP funds in support of the private sector under the PSSF have been scheduled for early 2013 as guidelines and eligibility criteria for the use of such funds had to be developed first to help discussions between the agencies when they do happen.

## **Component 3: Institutional Strengthening**

### *3.1. Forest Sector Plan updated*

It is noted that the ICCRRIFS which is co-funded by the SATFP has also included this activity in its work plan. For cost saving and logistical reasons, preliminary discussions have been held between SATFP and ICCRRIFS for the latter to take over the activity with the SATFP providing technical support and advise as required.

### *3.2. Agro-forestry and Tree Farming Strategy developed.*

This activity has not been implemented as it is considered necessary to have the Sector Plan completed first before the strategy is developed.

### 3.3. *Video*

According to the work plan, this activity is not due for implementation until 2013.

### 3.4. *Training and awareness.*

Preparation for stakeholder training are well underway with first training workshop to be conducted by RECOFTC now scheduled for first half of 2013.

## **Component 4:       Program Management**

### 4.1. *Project Coordinator*

Recruitment is still on hold due to unresolved issues with the Public Service Commission (PSC).

### 4.2. *M & E Consultant*

In the Inception Report, the TA suggested that except for the mid and terminal evaluations where independent consultants may be required, M&E should be carried out by SATFP staff. The TOR for the mid-term consultant could be expanded to include training of staff in carrying out M&E activities.

### 4.3. *Technical Adviser*

The TA has been recruited and the activity is considered completed.

## **Issues and Challenges**

### a) *Project Management*

The long delay in the recruitment of a Project Coordinator for the SATFP is the single most important issue affecting the effective implementation of the Program to date. It will continue to frustrate the Program in future if it is not resolved soon. As head of the SATFP team, the PC provides direction and plays a critical role in the decision-making process of the Program. It is strongly recommended that MNRE try as much as possible to resolve this matter with the PSC so that the new recruit could benefit from the presence of the TA in the next ten months.

Operating the SATFP a long distance away from headquarters is a huge management challenge for the SATFP team especially when there are only two staff on the team to date. Placing orders and/or seeking information from headquarters can be time consuming and frustrating at times and while Vailima offers an ideal environment to work from, the time spent on administrative matters require a pragmatic solution to this problem. In this regard, it is recommended that a new position of a Procurement Officer / Assistant PC be created to amongst other responsibilities, attend to the administrative and less technical needs of the Program such as procurement of goods and services. Creating such a position will not only enable the professional staff to concentrate on the more technical aspects of the Program, it will also ensure that there is an understudy to the PC who could immediately fill the PC position if it becomes vacant again. Savings from funds allocated for the PC position during

the past year could be used to top up the salary of one of the FD's principal officers to fill this post.

***b) Financial management***

An important aspect for any donor-funded project is the requirement to develop and support project management (including financial) capacity of the recipients. In the case of the SATFP where project funds are handled by MNRE, MoF and MCIL, the building of the financial management capacity of SATFP staff is not happening. Staff are not able to keep track of what funds are being spent on what project activities and have no knowledge of what funds are available for various activities at any particular time. This is most unfortunate as this is a very important step towards the officers' development and learning as complete field officers able to pass on knowledge, conduct training and mentoring for community groups and individuals in rural areas. The establishment of the Assistant PC position/Procurement Officer position that is able to work closely with the Accounts section of MNRE to keep track of SATFP procurement as proposed above will go a long way to resolving this matter.

***c) Support to cyclone-affected farmers***

Following cyclone Evan, the possibility of redirecting some SATFP support funding to help cyclone affected farmers was mooted although the SC has not had the opportunity to formally address this matter. This meeting presents that opportunity and it is hoped that the Committee will provide some direction on what assistance the SATFP should provide and where such assistance should focus. In addition, the SC will also need to agree on what procedures and processes should apply for accessing these funds by farmers and community groups. The secretariat suggests that as a community-based assistance initiative, such procedures and processes should be made very simple and easy to follow by local farmers. The establishment of simple guidelines and criteria (draft attached) supported by a registration system where farmers applying for such support may enter their names for follow up site inspection visits by SATFP staff will probably ensure a speedier delivery of program support than a rigorous review of written applications to see if they meet the MCIL criteria.

**Risk Management**

The SATFP acknowledges the presence of the following risks and have identified some actions to address these risks.

***1. Likelihood of program not achieving deliverables within program timeframes.***

Proposed actions:

- Increase efforts to encourage more farmers to participate in program.
- MNRE to resolve outstanding issues with PSC relating to recruitment of PC
- Support ongoing efforts for the transfer of SATFP funds earmarked for the private sector to the MCIL and ensure processes and procedures take into account capacity of farming community to access and utilise such funds.

***2. Likelihood of PC position not attracting suitable candidates at salary rate proposed by PSC.***

- Consider recruitment of a consultant to perform the PC function on annual contracts based on program needs.
- Consider direct AusAID funding of the position to avoid further delays with PSC.

## **Recommendations**

The Steering Committee is invited to note the report and provide guidance on the following issues:

1. Appointment of the PC;
2. Guidelines and Eligibility Criteria for PSSF-SATFP private sector applications (including the maximum amount allowable to each applicant)
3. Recruitment of a Procurement Officer who could act as Project Coordinator as necessary.