

An Overview of my Leadership in Action Project with Grow Asia Pacific

The Project Goal:

Assisting in the implementation of sustainable farming practices, the provision of wider market access and increasing the resilience of farms to natural disaster in order to support the livelihoods of communities in the Pacific.

Project Objectives:

1. Evaluate the success of the current project running in Samoa by the end of the 6-weeks. Accomplishing this will benefit the NGO by providing feedback from an external member with a viewpoint from another country.
2. Help raise awareness of the struggles of farmers in the Pacific region and encourage people to buy their chocolate in order to provide funds for future relief missions in the Pacific. Accomplishing this goal will help the NGO spread awareness of their cause in New Zealand and also increase their funding in order to implement the next projects in the Pacific.
3. Learn more about climate-smart agriculture by gaining hands-on practical experience during the 6 weeks. By accomplishing this I will gain more knowledge to supplement my future research and align with my career aspirations.

Outcomes:

- ❖ Work with colleagues in Samoa to conduct an internal review of the aid project.
- ❖ Carry out research and gather information to create information boards to supplement an ongoing agritourism project in Samoa.
- ❖ Collate information about the control of cacao pests and diseases in Samoa to inform local farmers and assist them in their mitigation and responses.
- ❖ Write a summary report of my learnings during the time spent with the NGO and thoughts about their programmes in order to supplement their future implementation.

An Update from the first half of my Leadership in Action Project:

Auckland and Christchurch:

After a long journey across the world I arrived in Auckland to be greeted by my colleagues in the Auckland office. We got started by going over the structure of GAP and SPS Biota, a supporting company. I learnt about their programme in Samoa and prepared for my trip into the field next week working on the implementation of a cocoa traceability scheme, which is one of the current missions.

Following a fleeting visit to Auckland I flew down to chilly Christchurch, finding I acclimatized very quickly having lived in England all my life. Here not only did I try my first ever cacao bean, but I got stuck into researching information in order to create storyboards for the Koko trail, another scheme within the Samoan Cocoa Export Improvement Programme. I also had the opportunity to visit the Rautini Trading House where beans and coconut sugar are stored, having been imported from the Pacific islands before being distributed out to buyers such as chocolate makers and bakers.

On a less formal and more touristic note, whilst in Christchurch I was also able to venture into the Waipara region visiting vineyards and trying the best of New Zealand's wine. My colleague was also kind enough to take me to Castle Hill which was recognisable from the Great Battle in the film Narnia, as well as journey out to Arthur's Pass and the Sheffield Pie shop which definitely lived up to its name.

Samoa:

As we approached Savai'i by ferry I was in awe of its beauty and can understand why the Pacific islands often get referred to as paradise. The sea was bluer than I ever imagined possible, green trees lined the roads and the Samoan houses were painted bright cheerful colours, reflecting their sunny culture.

We spent some time settling in at Vaimoana resort in Asau before heading over to the Savai'i cocoa processing facility across the road where the Samoan Cocoa Livelihood Improvement Programme is based. This was my first experience of seeing the process behind turning a wet cacao bean into dry cacao beans ready for the chocolate production process. The following days were spent interviewing growers and visiting their farms which was an eye-opening experience. It was clear that those who were most passionate and put a great deal of thought and effort into their farms reaped the benefit through bountiful harvests and fine yields.



The week I spent in Samoa was an important leadership learning opportunity as reading about aid schemes is very different to seeing first-hand the challenges presented during implementation. Cross-cultural barriers can cause tension, particularly when rigid 'western' standards clash with the more relaxed, subsistence farming systems that Samoans are used to. I learnt a lot about the kind of leader I intend to be, with compassion and understanding being of

upmost importance, however this is not always the approach I found other leaders took and I was aware of the complications that other leadership styles raise. It allowed me to improve my own leadership skills, communicating through language barriers with individuals whose culture is unique but more importantly valuable to them.

Furthermore, it allowed me the chance to witness the generous, friendly way of life that Samoans are known for. Many people revolve their lives around caring for and supporting their families and communities, with kindness being a key quality. A farmer said to me “We are Samoans... we are resilient. When a disaster strikes we are not sad that we lost our homes, we are happy to be alive!” and this was clear to see. The work that GAP undergoes does not go against these cultural beliefs but takes them into account, whilst offering solutions for issues faced by Samoans in their current systems.

Overall, my experience in Samoa taught me a great deal and is an experience I will never forget.