Women and the privatisation of Samoa's coconut oil mill

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This case study of the privatisation of Samoa's coconut oil mill shows that foreign investment need not be a disempowering experience for women and their families, and explores why this is so. In this case foreign capital is supporting an industry which 'fits' and builds on the traditional smallholder production and use systems, which is a contrast to the more usual pattern of foreign investment featuring an introduced and highly specialised enterprise and requiring a centralised workforce. While Samoa is the focus, this study has wider implications because the coconut is central to every Pacific island economy.

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Much of the global literature about the effects of privatisation and foreign investment in developing countries highlights the economic and social perils this brings, including the exploitation of workers who work long hours for minimal wages; the disastrous social effects as workers (often males from rural areas) flood into the factory areas; and the perils of the 'fly away factory' which leaves communities considerably worse off than before. Reports show women to have been particularly exploited: they have been employed at the lowest level in the new enterprise and so work long hours for little pay and often in atrocious working conditions. Women have had little opportunity for advancement within what are usually male-dominated management structures and little avenue for redress of grievances. This has been the emerging pattern in the Pacific also. For example, the opening of the fish factory in Solomon Islands reportedly led to a dependency on wage incomes which in turn contributed to increased malnutrition as families neglected their subsistence gardening activities. Furthermore, the influx of males to the factory zone saw significant increases in the incidence of social diseases and acts of violence against women (Nelson and Tuara 2000). For women, the experiences of Fiji's garment workers match the worst cases of exploitation found anywhere in the world (see Druavesi 1994; Slatter 1991).

This case study of the privatisation of Samoa's coconut oil mill shows that foreign investment need not be a disempowering experience for women and their families and explores why this is so. In this case, foreign capital is supporting an industry which 'fits' and builds on the traditional smallholder production and use systems, which is a contrast with the more usual pattern of foreign investment featuring an introduced and highly specialised enterprise and requiring a centralised workforce. While Samoa is the focus, this study has wider implications because the coconut is central to every Pacific island economy. The coconut has a special place in the public mind as the 'tree of life' and 'money in the bank' to be used when necessary. Coconuts are a triple-use crop used for family needs, reciprocal exchanges and for income-generation purposes. In fact, since 1995 copra has become the major (and in some cases, only) source of income for many rural families due to the devastation of Samoa's major cash crop, taro, by leaf blight.

While the focus is on women's experiences, this paper highlights several development themes. First, there are the benefits of privatisation of a state-owned enterprise. Next, it points to the complexities of the privatisation process in small nation states such as Samoa which have a long history of government responsibility for development. This discussion includes issues such as the role of foreign investors and how they engage with government and on-the-ground management. In this case, the formalisation of privatisation agreements was not completed before new management took over— negotiations proceeded hand-in-hand with the practical task of getting the mill going. Third, the case highlights the significance of smallholder contributions to national economic security and in turn, the vital need for this micro-level contribution to be factored into national economic planning. Samoa's semi-subsistence systems are still the key economic and social safety nets for many rural families and prove extremely resilient to market forces. When backed by appropriate supports, this smallholder contribution has the potential to grow from small scale, to micro enterprise through to formal business venture. Finally, there are questions about women's workloads and status in these changing times. While women's potential empowerment through their involvement in strategic areas (production, management and marketing) of copra is shown, did this result in increases in women's workload? Did women carry out their new tasks in addition to household tasks, or was the family workload redistributed? Whether the rewards these women may have gained in terms of rights and status were sufficient to offset a greater workload warrants further research.

The coconut oil mill, May–December 1999

Samoa's national economy is dominated by agriculture (including forestry and fisheries) which is characterised by a substantial subsistence base that provides the major source of livelihood for over 60 per cent of the population and contributes about 40 per cent of GDP (Fairbairn Pacific Consultants and Kolone Vaai Associates 1995). As with other Pacific countries, agricultural production is vulnerable to factors such as natural disasters, pests and diseases, and fluctuations in world prices. Coconut products (coconut oil, copra meal and copra) have been Samoa's traditional exports, with taro becoming the major cash crop in the 1990s and fish gaining prominence more recently. Coconut oil, meal, copra and coconut cream accounted for 66 per cent of total exports in 1996 and 53 per cent in 1997, but they accounted for less that half that amount in 1997 and 1998 before the mill closed in 1999.

An estimated 70 per cent of Samoa's copra is produced by smallholder family semi-subsistence units farming the family lands. The remainder is produced by a small number of private plantations and the government's WESTEC plantation. Women and girls have always been part of the family production unit:[1] copra-making is seen to be a good task for women as it is light work, is carried out around the homestead, and can be done alongside women's other family roles (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1987, 1991). The major support for copra farmers in the past decade has been the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, Fisheries and Meteorology's (MAFFM) coconut planting bonus scheme aimed at increasing the acreage under nuts: there has been little training in post-harvest activities or marketing. MAFFM's focus on taro leaf blight has drawn heavily on an already under-resourced research and extension service.

The mill

Samoa's Copra Oil Mill has had a chequered history. When the mill opened under government ownership and management in 1977 it was the largest in the Pacific, with four huge expellers which, it was proposed, would be kept working by importing copra from neighbouring Pacific countries. However, this dream of Samoa becoming the Pacific coconut oil hub was never realised. Instead, the mill mostly ran at a loss due to over-capacity and factors such as the dramatic swings in oil prices, the international commodities price structure (the Rotterdam Strike Price) and the sometimes convoluted and expensive method of copra collection by the Government Copra Boards. As a result of tree damage by Cyclones Val and Ofa (1990, 1991) the mill closed for almost three years in the early 1990s. It was re-opened in 1993 under management by a local private company renting from the government and ran until 1998, when it closed again due to severe financial difficulties.

Early in 1999 the Government of Samoa invited Oil Seeds Production New Zealand (OSP) to manage the mill. Government hopes were for the rejuvenation of the copra industry which had become the major cash earning option for many rural families. OSP's prime aim in taking on the management was to recoup funds owed them by the previous company. But at the same time, OSP expressed interest in purchasing the asset from the Samoa Government and operating independently. While the formalisation of the privatisation was not completed before OSP reopened the mill in May 1999, OSP assumed that the proven success of their management would facilitate a privatisation agreement. The lack of formal agreement raised problems such as OSP's legal right to be on the premises, and the use of the facility as collateral. It was also a factor in OSP's reluctance to invest too heavily in capital improvements or activities such as replanting schemes which would enable the industry to grow, because it did not have full access to the mill as proprietor. A flow-on effect was that during the time of this study the mill ran at only 50 per cent capacity.

The mill was one of seven dealers in coconut products during the time of this study. Competitors included the coconut cream factory, two agencies exporting copra, and a number of exporters of whole nuts. Drinking nuts and mature nuts for domestic use and local sale were the other main uses of coconut.

The privatisation vision

The mill was a marginal proposition when OSP took over in 1999. The buildings and machinery were in bad condition and there was a backlog of unpaid debts. Moreover, the workforce of almost 70 was demoralised: they had been off work for up to 4 months with the promise that 'the mill will reopen' and none had been paid. Samoa's copra farmers were wary of selling to the mill (some had not been paid for past sales) and plantations showed the effects of years of neglect: trees were overgrown, access roads were in poor condition, and dryers were broken. However, OSP believed that an injection of capital, backed by good practices, would turn the mill into a profitable enterprise. According to the Chief Executive Officer, the company's aim was to maintain integrity with the farmers by giving a good price for good quality copra, whether they were small or large producers. As well, transport, education, training, and loans would be provided, if necessary, to enhance production.

OSP divided management tasks between its Auckland base and a local team established for this purpose. All company and legal documentation was maintained by OSP in its Auckland office. OSP had sole responsibility for marketing mill products, however these decisions were always discussed with the Apia base. The local team, known as Oilseeds Copra Crushing Ltd (OCCL) was responsible for production decisions, again in consultation with the parent company. OSP lodged all operational funds with the local CEO, an Apia business consultant with a farming / business / teaching / copra background. OSP's financial input was at two levels. In order to get the mill running approximately T$300,000 was spent on repayment of debts of the previous company and T$220,000 on essential repairs (buildings, machinery and vehicles). OSP established a copra buying account in Samoa of around T$550,000. Once coconut oil was *en route* to New Zealand or other ports, OSP reimbursed this mill account. If there was a delay in shipping, OSP paid in advance so copra buying could continue, but unplanned-for slippages forced the company to find money from other sources so that copra farmers were not disadvantaged. (Note the lack of lease title meant OCCL could not negotiate bank overdrafts.)

Steps to achieve the vision

Management envisaged two key tasks. On the mill side, efficient operational systems had to be established and staff had to know how to use these systems. Mill repairs and maintenance were another priority. Second were measures to restore farmer confidence in the industry. The focus was on showing farmers that they could increase their returns through a) producing top quality copra which would fetch premium prices on the global market or b) growing their enterprise.

The mill

Staff were paid wages owing and guaranteed re-employment regardless of level of skill, experience or history. Some new staff were hired, priority being given to the appointment of a Rural Development Officer, a post seen to be a vital for a forward-looking organisation. Second, OCCL fine-tuned the mill's operational systems, emphasising strict recording, cross checking and personal responsibility. These organisational systems were devised in consultation with staff: in fact staff participation in decision making became the norm which was a change from earlier management which had been more of a top down approach, featuring male *matai* in senior posts. Staff training was a third strategy. On-the-job training was mandatory for all staff, from accounts, copra weighing teams, ground staff, process workers and chemists through to security staff who were trained in fire drill and safety procedures. An innovative cadetship system paired technical staff with juniors and some staff were sponsored into Polytech and other formal training courses. Fourth, management paid an attractive wage package for quality work: trainees received T$2.50 per hour and other workers T$2.90, which was higher than Samoa's basic hourly rates of T$1.60 per hour. Further, wage rates were tied to levels of expertise, reinforcing the value placed on a skilled workforce. Every staff member was responsible for keeping the factory clean and safe: staff repaired machinery, unhygienic drains and grasslands were cleared, mountains of broken equipment dumped and procedures were established to deal with factory wastes in a proper manner. Appropriate safety gear was distributed to workers. Fair treatment and good working conditions and remuneration produced a team that took pride in working together to produce a good product.

Women played an important role in the mill reorganisation. Women comprised 19 per cent of the total workforce and outnumbered males in the management posts: nine of the 15 posts of T$8,000 and over per annum were held by women (Table 1). This is in contrast to the usual picture of women's marginalisation into lower level, less well-paid positions. The post of Rural Development Officer was taken by a woman in her mid 50s who held a *matai* title. She was an exceptionally good communicator with a sound awareness of social and cultural procedures. In fact, some male workers commented that they found it easier to discuss their work with her than they would with a male supervisor. Over time, the Rural Development Officer became the key public relations spokesperson and negotiator for the mill, particularly in rural areas.

Youth was another characteristic of the new mill team: the majority of staff members were under 30 years with the majority of the female staff in their early 20s.

The farmers

Measures to restore grower confidence began with setting a fair price for copra and over time moved on to post-harvest training, transport and a loans service. A basic farm support system was tried on Upolu. This was modified for farmers on the island of Savaii where transport has always been a problem because farms are widely dispersed and because of the combination of road and sea transport required to get goods to the mill on Upolu.

Fair price

Global prices for copra were high in 1999, so conditions were favourable for the new management. At the same time however, OCCL was able to pay farmers above the prices paid by competing copra buyers because OCCL had the competitive advantage of OSP as international marketer—OSP found the best markets and protected producers by guaranteeing the price. The mill preference for dealing directly with farmers as much as possible so as to eliminate middlemen was another strategy to ensure producers received best returns for their product. Buying prices varied according to quality as follows

- T$800 per ton for copra with moisture content of 10 per cent or less
- T$750 per ton for copra with moisture content over 10 per cent
- no copra purchased if moisture content over 16 per cent
- an incentive of T$30 a ton for loads over 10 tons.

Payment was immediate. Farmers bringing copra directly to the mill watched their goods being quality tested and weighed and were then paid. Copra that was collected by the mill trucks was not weighed until the owners were present.

Grower support systems

The cost effectiveness of the grower support systems OCCL introduced has yet to be analysed. In the company's view all extension support (training, loans management and copra pick-up) was part of the prevailing staff job descriptions. Only the purchase of one extra truck and petrol costs were additional to budget.

Table 1 **Oil mill workforce by sex, February 2000**

Level	Males	Females	Salary band (T$)
Manager	1	-	70,000
Deputy Manager (and RDO)	-	1	20,000
Chief Cashier	-	1	15,000
Day Leading Hand	1	-	15,000
Shift bosses (3)	3	-	12,000
Accountant clerks (2)	-	2	10,000
Office staff (6)	1	5	8,000
Copra weighers (4)	1	3	7,000
Security (4)	4	-	6,000
Copra gangs (8)	8	-	6,000
Shift workers (38)	38	-	6,000
Cleaner / tea lady (1)	-	1	6,000
Total	57	13	

Source: Oilseeds Copra Crushing Ltd, 1999.

Needs analysis. In the first months of operation the Rural Development Officer (RDO) visited all plantations supplying the mill and those that had previously done so. She discussed copra prices, regular supply and quality product, together with a review of the kinds of inputs farmers needed to get back into production. These visits confirmed a serious and long-term lack of farmer investment in coconut. The RDO found neglected crops, very few operational dryers, growers using a cocoa drying process for copra making (which produced an inferior product), and a lack of transport for produce. For example, many farmers had 'US aiga gifted' sedans, which were of little use in carrying agricultural loads. Farmers said they didn't have funds to address these production needs and so OCCL responded.

Training. Mill staff began visiting plantations on request, advising on topics such as dryer design and construction and drying practices that maximised quality. Farmers were also encouraged to tour the mill so they could see and understand the mill side of the coconut oil operation.

Transport. The mill introduced a twice-daily round-the-island farm-to-mill transport service for Upolu farmers. This free service proved so totally inadequate that farmers were asked to ring-in their quotas so that more adequate pick up routes could be planned. Subsequent farm visits showed some farmers had no way of transporting coconuts from their plantations. It was agreed that mill trucks could carry nuts from the plantation to the farm dryers: however, while the mill would pay transport costs for this service, farmers must pay driver wages.

Interest-free loans. A small loans service was the most innovative activity. In this system, after a qualifying time of six sales (six coupon vouchers), farmers were eligible to borrow the average of these six coupons. For example, if the coupon voucher average was T$610 per load (18 bags) that farmer could request a loan of T$600. The mill expectation was that this loan would enable farmers to increase production by 50 per cent (or in this case to 27 bags). This requirement reinforced the idea of farmers working to targets. While there was some flexibility, priority was given to loans that would increase production. The most

Table 2 **Loans to farmers, June–December 1999**

Total loans (including some second and third loans)	244
Range of loans	T$200–T$10,000
Loans by gender	208 males, 36 women

Source: Oilseeds Copra Crushing Ltd, 1999.

common loan requests were for funds to purchase more nuts to fill dryers, improve roads to vehicle stations, pay labour to increase loads, buy or hire a vehicle, and 'funding to continue copra production because all cash has gone on a *faalavelave*'. All requests were discussed with the RDO and CEO. Farmers could request a second or third loan, depending on factors such as loan purpose and repayment record.

A total of 244 loans were given out in a six month period (June–December 1999) ranging from small (T$200) through to larger loans (T$10,000) given to farmers taking up copra production as a business (Table 2). The table also shows 36 or 14.5 per cent of loans were taken out by women, which is contrary to usual loan data.

There was no repayment schedule or time limit for loans. Repayments were deducted from sale loads and related to the size of loads. OCCL had few problems with repayments because farmers wanted to continue trading and farmers were well known to the RDO and CEO. At the time of writing, one farmer was behind on payments for medical reasons, one had passed away and one had moved to another district. Other reasons for slow repayment include

- weather—copra collection is difficult in wet weather
- *sa*—a church has placed a prohibition on the collection and sale of copra: this could last up to a month
- competition—the farmer had been selling to one of the other seven buyers operating in Samoa.

Of further note is that a local bank expressed interest in taking over this loans service. Such a move would assist farmers build up a formal loan record, which could be their first step to entering into and operating within the formal financial economy.

Other benefits. Free copra bags were supplied to all farmers. The mill also purchased firewood from farmers to stoke the mill fireboxes. This was necessary because the adaptation of the mill fire boxes by earlier management meant coconut husks (the ideal) could not be used in firing. The mill kept records of purchases to ensure farmers were selling their own wood and also to reduce the temptation for unsustainable logging.

Savaii island

Copra collection for farmers on the island of Savaii has always been difficult given the physical spread of farms and the requirement for both road and sea transport to get copra to Upolu. Two collection strategies were tried for Savaii. In the first, the mill set up a depot at Salelologa staffed by manager, cashier, driver and six workers. Farmers brought their copra to the depot (or it was collected by the mill truck) and the depot staff shipped it by 7-ton load to the Vaitele mill. This system did not work well because there were too many variations in personnel. The commissioning of collection agents (five) was a second strategy trialled. Each agent was supplied with start-up capital (ranging from T$5,000 to T$10,000), bags and free transport from the Salelologa wharf to Vaitele. The mill also

Table 3 **Samoa's export summary for 1999, by commodity (T$)**

	Fish (1)	Copra (2)	Coconut cream (3)	Beer (4)	Coconut oil (5)	Copra meal (6)
Jan	1,166,270	1,386,720	439,024	194,264	-	-
Feb	1,840,672	-	283,040	179,944	-	-
March	1,197,313	1,342,250	385,408	270,220	-	-
April	1,399,679	-	580,729	273,203	22,796	-
May	3,540,444	740,950	505,596	202,024	-	-
June	5,101,475	107,000	609,033	333,708	104,167	10,417
July	4,444,295	77,458	556,169	235,584	348,435	12,965
Aug	5,615,570	-	551,787	467,986	417,707	32,678
Sep	2,990,726	1,352,575	358,570	287,603	444,325	20,241
Oct	3,747,825	-	326,547	280,489	511,238	16,557
Nov	4,222,743	862,875	406.643	368,313	460,909	12,897
Dec	2,092,984	-	347,671	227,623	502,351	32,839
Total	38,359,996	5,869,828	5,351,217	3,320,961	2,811,928	138,594

Note: Samoan Tala = US$3.318
Source: International Department, Central Bank, Apia, December, 1999.

paid an extra T$30 per ton transport for Savaii copra. These agents were regarded as a separate business: the mill had no say in how they organised their business, how much they paid the farmer, or what terms were extended to the farmer.

Realising the vision

Farmer response to these incentives was beyond all expectations and resulted in considerable national, community and family benefits.

National

In these eight months of operation, exports of coconut oil and copra meal almost reached their former prominence—which is a significant achievement since the mill was starting from a 'stop' situation. Mill exports reached fifth and sixteenth placing, respectively, on the national list (Table 3).

In addition to export gains, there were other 'national' benefits from this privatisation, such as electricity payments (T$17,000 per month) water rates and telephone, the purchase of oil and gas and expenses relating to mill maintenance and repairs. Job creation and livelihood security are another category of national benefit: to the almost 70 salaried mill employees can be added the number of families who relied on income from copra for their livelihood.

Community

Community gains are seen in the tremendous increase in copra production throughout this period and the income generated (Table 4). From May to December 1999 copra production increased from 21,555 pounds to around 350,000 pounds and customers increased from 38 in May to 610 in September back to just under 600 in December. Whether from individuals or agents, these sales saw almost T$350,000 per month going back into rural areas as copra became an assured source of income once more. Having the mill option also reinforced farmer self-determination: they decided whether they wanted to make copra, how much to make and when to sell.

The predominantly small-scale nature of sales (Table 5) suggests copra earnings were reasonably evenly spread amongst village families. Over 50 per cent of mill purchases comprised 12 bags or under while the larger sales were from agents, who in turn were purchasing from small producers.

Other gains were seen in farmer initiatives to grow their copra enterprise including

- rebuilding copra dryers
- increasing production
- farmers buying in nuts for processing
- farmers purchasing trucks and/or extending storage facilities so as to start their own copra agencies.

Farmer comments reinforce the vital importance of income from copra sales to the family budget. They said 'this is our money for school fees', 'we need this money for our White Sunday'; 'this is the only cash income we have in our family now'; and, 'we will make a better house for our family with this money'. Anecdotal reports indicated youth were returning to the rural villages 'to do copra'. But more, just having the mill running helped bolster national feelings of wellbeing, because copra and coconuts are central to the Samoa psyche and way of life

> …there is something about copra and coconut oil…Samoans have always done this, we know how to do it…we like doing this…not like new crop. It's like, if copra is going well, Samoa is

Table 4 **Copra purchases, May–December 1999**

	Volume (pounds)	Customers[1] (number)	Value (T$)
May	60,354	38	21,555
June	649,828	214	232,081
July	969,966	596	346,416
August	1,084,776	512	387,420
Sept	1,050637	610	375,227
Oct	830,533	535	296,618
Nov	870,577	501	310,920
Dec	851,256	577	304,020

Note: [1] These range from customers selling two bags a week through to agents purchasing from small producers.
Source: Oilseeds Copra Crushing Ltd, 1999.

Table 5 **Copra purchases, 15–20 February 2000**

Range by size	Number of sellers
Under 6 bags (500 lbs)	15
6–12 bags	32
12–100 bags	48
Over 100 bags	6

Source: Oilseeds Copra Crushing Ltd data, 2000.

Table 6 **Copra customers by gender, February 2000**

	Customers by gender
Male	43
Female	14
Agents	4
Total	57

Source: Oilseeds Copra Crushing Ltd data, 2000.

> going well (personal communication, copra producer, January 2000).

There were also gains for the investing company. In this period, OSP was able to pay off all creditors and begin running its daily operation without debt. However, the original capital input by OSP represents a debt to be paid. The ability to do so will be important to the success of the privatisation venture.

Women's participation

The privatisation of the copra mill enlarged women's choices not only by increasing their income generation options but also by enabling them to build up a work record, by opening up new career paths, and by teaching new skills and attitudes women could use in the home, market and workplace.

Women were very visible in the mill workforce, comprising a quarter of the total and outnumbering males in the top management posts. Women were the mill 'face' as it were: the RDO was a woman, female staff weighed the copra, tested for quality, recorded purchases and made out the payment vouchers and all transactions relating to wharfage and shipping were carried out by female accounting and administrative staff. These female employees were highly visible role models for both urban and rural women and girls. Having females in strategic posts also helped make the mill systems more accessible to women and helped the mill adapt its systems to women's needs. For example, women and girls comprised over 50 per cent of the family copra production team. However, women did not confine their activities to making copra. Table 6 shows 14 (just over 25 per cent) of 57 customers selling to the mill and collecting the copra cheques in the month of February 2000 were women. This data suggests these women were involved in production and use decisions and the likelihood that they had a say in deciding ways cash would be used.

Women also used the loans scheme to develop their credit knowledge and establish a loans record. As noted earlier, 14.5 per cent of the mill loans were to women (see Table 2). However, in a further 11 cases where loans were taken out by males, both the husband and wife discussed the loan with the RDO. When asked why women were so involved in loan negotiations, one male farmer said: 'She is good at this' and another commented 'the RDO is a woman. She [my wife] can talk with the RDO'. The RDO's opinion was that males didn't like asking for loans.

A number of women, including four solo parents, used mill services to set up their own copra businesses: they used the loans to purchase nuts from other village families and from nearby villages for processing. As described by the RDO

> …usually they [women] ask their own families in the next village…then they take back the nuts in the bus, or they ask the Mill to help transport. Men will not ask like this, but women don't mind asking their families.

Factors encouraging women's participation

Management. The nature and timing of the privatisation no doubt influenced women's participation. This was a period of considerable change for the mill, and hence a time of flexibility and openness to ideas. At the same time, the priority that management gave to on-the-job training and job performance presented women with opportunities they would not have had in the public sector because, although all women employees had a good secondary education, only one had a tertiary qualification. When asked how women had come to dominate management posts, the CEO said he had recruited workers with a sound education and 'who were trainable'. His view was that this had resulted in a large number of women because 'there seems to be a much larger pool of better educated girls available in the workforce than males…the standard of education of males applying here for jobs has been low' (personal communication, CEO). The way in which women's educational levels relate to the availability of secondary education warrants further research.

The enterprise. The tradition of Samoan women doing copra may have facilitated women's participation. Recent studies of the geography of labour market processes propose the social construction of occupations themselves as gendered. Phillips (1998) comments that there is little wonder that women occupy 95 per cent of the jobs in the Fiji garment industry because 'it [clothing work] is perceived as being women's work'. In the same way, the acceptance of women in mill management posts may have been supported by the public perception that copra is women's work.

The women. It may be that the women in this case were a particularly skilled, confident and competent group.

All told, this privatisation venture offered opportunities for women's empowerment. However, if women were doing this work in addition to other family roles, it raises the question of whether the rewards these women are reaping in terms of rights and status are sufficient to offset the increased workloads. Like other Pacific women, Samoan women are confronted by the dichotomy between traditional ideals about women's work and the practical reality of surviving in an increasingly monetised and individualist society, where the traditional base may be losing its meaning. As new jobs—such as copra making and paid employment—are often undertaken in addition to women's customary tasks, many women are finding the extra workload an intolerable burden.

Conclusion

The potential for a privatisation venture to be an empowering experience for women as producers, managers and marketers has been demonstrated. So has women's contribution to family, community and nation and ways this can be supported.

The benefits for development of privatisation of a state-owned enterprise are also clear. In this case, foreign investment was supporting an industry which 'fits', builds on and increased the efficiency of the traditional smallholder system. Investing in an industry based on family systems (and traditional crops) has obvious benefits, not least of which is that these family systems have the capacity to absorb less desirable effects should the industry 'fold'. The case has shown quite compellingly the significance of this smallholder contribution to national economic security and the importance of factoring this micro-level contribution into national economic planning. When backed by appropriate and timely support, this smallholder enterprise returned over T$300,000 per month to the rural economy. The rejuvenation of income-earning options such as this for rural communities is a key development issue in every Pacific country. Further, the range of extension support provided by OCCL is a model for other government and private sector developments.

Further efforts to privatise this state-owned enterprise are unclear. In March 2000 the Samoa Government withdrew its arrangement with OSP and opened privatisation up to a tendering process.

The short period covered by this case study (May–December 1999) makes generalisations difficult. The fact that copra prices were high during the period of this study also affects comparisons. However, the study does raise several areas for further investigation including

- analysis of the impact of the mill work experience on the lives of this group of women
- a cost-benefit analysis of the support systems the mill provided
- factors contributing to the success of the mill under privatisation compared with

the period when the mill was a state-owned enterprise
- an economic analysis of the current and projected financial position of the company.

Note

[1] Copra making involves: a) planting trees and maintaining them; b) picking the nuts and carrying them from the plantation to the homestead; c) cracking the nuts open and scooping out the meat; d) drying the meat in the sun or in a wood-fired driers; and e) selling copra to the mill for processing into oil, or to firms for export as copra. Traditionally Samoan women and girls have helped collect nuts and make copra. Women also make small quantities of coconut oil for family use and sale.

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