

O le 'ato lau niu

The coconut leaf basket

By Dr. Michael Fusi Ligaliga
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

The Samoan 'ato plays a vital role in the day to day affairs of a Samoan family. These baskets are usually made from the coconut fronds or Pandanus leaf. Both men and women had the responsibility to weave these baskets. Each basket utilized and implemented for a specific purpose. Men weaved baskets to carry heavy loads of harvest (coconut, taro, banana's) from the plantation. Women would weave baskets to house the food made in the traditional *umu* or oven. Baskets were also used to provide gifts for visiting families. In addition to this, baskets were also used to house tools such as fishing hooks, tattoo instruments.

O le 'ato (Coconut leaf basket) and Gender-based violence

In terms of a culturally appropriate framework to be used in the gender-based violence (GBV) space, the Samoan 'ato can provide potential space to discuss the interface between the Samoan culture and GBV.

Making the Samoan 'ato is done by:

1. Selecting the coconut fronds

Coconut fronds are selected from the coconut tree. Usually, the green leaves are used because they are more malleable.

2. Determine the size of the 'ato

The size of the 'ato is determined by its use and purpose. The size of the 'ato is then measured by counting the number of individual coconut fronds. The bigger the 'ato the more coconut fronds are used.

3. Weaving of the 'ato

As previously explained, the size of the 'ato is determined by the number of individual fronds. When weaving the fronds, two equal coconut fronds are created. For example, one frond will have 8 individual fronds and the other will have the same. The 1,3,5,7 fronds are



interlinked with the 2,4,6,8 of the second frond. The process continues until the basket is 90% woven.

4. Braiding the bottom of the 'ato

Structurally, the most important component is the braid at the bottom of the basket which will bear the full weight of the basket. This is done by weaving and braiding all of the individual fronds into a tight weave and tying it off at the end.

The final product is a robust basket ready to be used to fulfil important responsibilities within the family.



Figure 1 Samoan basket with Niu (Coconut)



Figure 2 Samoan basket used to house vegetables from plantation



Figure 3 Samoan coconut fronds used to cook fish



Figure 4 Samoan man carrying crops

Application of the Samoan 'ato to GBV

'Ato Samoa	Domestic/Gender-Based violence (D/GBV)
Both men and women weave	Both men and women contribute to addressing Domestic/Gender-Based violence
Selecting coconut fronds	Rather than generalizing and focus on a one size model, emphasis should be put towards specifics both culturally and socially.
Determine the size of the 'ato	Specificity is important when thinking of D/GBV. Each program, workshop, solution should be tailored made to the need of the individual and group. This process reinforces the previous proves of selecting coconut fronds.
Weaving of fronds Equal amounts of coconut fronds	The strength of a potential D/GBV program should ensure that there is balance culturally, services provided, funding etc.
Braiding bottom of 'ato 'Ato is not strong until ALL coconut fronds are braided together	While D/GBV impacts individual, for Samoan communities, it needs to be a collective effort, a coming together of resources, thoughts, expertise, funding etc.
Circular nature of the 'ato	The circular nature of the 'ato symbolizes the importance of communal council, <i>suālaupule</i> or consensus and the importance of meeting together to discuss and learn.

This publication was funded by Grant Number 90EV0430 from the Department of Health and Human services (DHHS); Administration for Children and Families (ACF); Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF); Family Youth Services Bureau (FYSB); Family Violence Division. The viewpoints contained in this publication are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views or policies of the Administration for Children and Families.

About the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV):

API-GBV is a national resource center on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in Asian/Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. We envision a world free of gender-based violence for communities with equal opportunities for all to thrive.

Visit our Resource Library (api-gbv.org/resource-library) for more factsheets, tip sheets, reports, training materials, and other resources.