

Entry Details

'Ie Samoa Inventory

Intangible Culture Heritage

Reçu CLT / CIH / ITH

Le - 3 AVR. 2018

N° 0179

1. Identification of the ICH Element**Name of ICH element:** 'ie Samoa (fine mats)

The *'ie Samoa* is a special finely hand-woven mat that is fastened at the hem with a row of bright red feathers and a loose fringe on one end. Traditionally woven with fine strippings of the pandanus plant, the final product is silk-like in nature. Its shiny coppery color adds to its value as it is a testament to its age and the natural bleaching process it undergoes from the sun and seawater.

The length of *'ie Samoa* is traditionally 12x9 aga or handspans of the weaver. This demonstrates its high level of intricacy as each woven strand measures as little as one millimeter in width. Therefore, the production of a single *'ie Samoa* can take up to several months and even years depending on the length of the fine mat. Nevertheless, the *'ie Samoa* is more than a cultural product of exceptional skills, its true value is demonstrated in its use as an exchange valuable in traditional ceremonies and rituals that serve to reaffirm kinship ties and strengthen community wellbeing.

More colloquially known as *'ie toga*, the *'ie Samoa* is displayed and exchanged at festive celebrations or important gatherings such as weddings, funerals, or religious ordinations. The giving and receiving of the *'ie Samoa* contributes profoundly to the maintenance of social structure and is an integral part of the Samoan culture. As objects of the highest cultural value, this traditional art form lies at the foundation of Samoa's rich intangible cultural heritage.

Domains constituted by the element as defined by Article 2.2 of the Convention:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of ICH
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals and festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional craftsmanship

Communities concerned:

The entire population of Samoa recognizes the *'ie Samoa* as part of its cultural heritage. It has been identified that there are 95 active *falelalaga* or weaving houses that produce the majority of the fine mats being woven today. These villages are located around the two main Samoan islands of Upolu and Savaii, as well as the island of Apolima.

Although the production of *'ie Samoa* is practiced around the nation, the ceremonial exchange of *'ie Samoa* is not restricted within the country's borders. Often these cultural products are exchanged amongst family relations and village communities in Samoa and overseas.

Geographic location:

The exchange of fine mats is not centralized to a specific geological location or range, but is practiced throughout the country. The distribution of *'ie Samoa* is therefore not bound to a particular region, but is in fact as mobile as the Samoan people. This is true for the exchange of fine mats continues to occur in traditional ceremonies around the world. The *'ie Samoa* is representative of this mobility as the histories of how and why each mat came to a particular place is often recorded in the knowledge of the beholder. The *'ie Samoa* is sometimes given a name to further record its history and mobility.

2. Characteristics of the ICH Element**Bearers and practitioners of the element:**

The *'ie Samoa* is not a cultural element that is restricted to a particular age or gender, but is inclusive of all community members from the time of its production, to the time it is ceremonially exchanged. Therefore the bearers and practitioners of the element vary depending on the stage at which the *'ie Samoa* is undergoing.

In terms of the production stage, the fine mat has been woven by the women of Samoa for centuries and is considered a strong marker of their identity and status. Women of the village gather in the weaving house where they collectively work on weaving their fine mats with the encouragement and support of the other women. Often there will be a woman who is considered a master weaver or *matuau'u*. She takes on the responsibility of mentoring the other women on how to improve their weaving skills and techniques. Today there is an increase in young weavers in their 20s and even male weavers.

Transmission of the element:

The knowledge and skills around weaving the fine mat and its ceremonial exchange are transmitted through observation and practice.

Today, the knowledge and skills around the weaving practice has developed as women and master weavers have established fine mat committees within their villages, which allows them to meet and exchange ideas of best practice for weaving, as well as to discuss opportunities for strengthening transmission of this art form.

The male bearers of ceremonial exchange primarily transmit their knowledge and skills on how to perform a traditional ceremony through experiential learning. Traditional gifting is done openly and publicly. Therefore, by participating and observing traditional ceremonies, a Samoan chief or untitled man will know their role and what is expected of them. There are also publications to assist orators in ensuring their speeches are culturally appropriate.

Language involved:

The Samoan language is heavily involved particularly in the ceremonial exchange of 'ie Samoa. Orators use the Samoan language of respect or *gagana fa'aaloalo* which is protocol for cultural events.

Relevant organizations in safeguarding the ICH element:

- Fine Mats Steering Committee ('Ie Samoa Committee)
- Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development (MWCSO)
- Women in Business Development Inc. (WIBDI)
- Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC)
- National University of Samoa (NUS)

Viability:

The 'ie Samoa was considered in need of urgent safeguarding in recent years as Samoan women no longer weaved the 'ie Samoa with strippings of 1mm in length, as it had been done by our ancestors. Instead weavers were weaving the 'ie Samoa with thick strippings and decorating it with feathers as if it were a traditional 'ie Samoa. However, over the last 30 years, due to the significant work of WIBDI and MWCSO the art of weaving 'ie Samoa has been revitalized. It is celebrated every year at the Annual Exhibition of Fine Mats or *fa'alegapepe*. This event corresponds with the National Day of Women to celebrate Samoan women as cultural producers and income earners. The 'Ie Samoa Committee, which is chaired by the Honorable Prime Minister plays a significant role in the promoting of fine quality 'ie Samoa today.

The ceremonial exchange of 'ie Samoa remains strong as it is ensured through its unwavering reverence and continued practice by the Samoan community, both in Samoa and in the diaspora. For centuries, the people of Samoa continue to uphold the 'ie Samoa as the item of utmost value, preferred even over money. Today certain elements of Samoan traditional ceremonies have been replaced with western goods, but the exchange of 'ie Samoa remains pivotal to all *fa'alavelaves* or Samoan ceremonial occasions.

Photos



Video

No video associated.

Resources

Monitoring Safeguarding Status

No safeguarding status report associated.

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