



PRESS RELEASE

Apia, Tuesday 16th November – VILLAGE FAMILY SAFETY COMMITTEES PILOT PROJECT LAUNCHED FOR 3 VILLAGES IN SAVAII.

The Office of the Ombudsman/National Human Rights Institution and its partners this week launched the Workplans for 3 participating villages in the Village Family Safety Committees Pilot Project for Savaii. The Village Family Safety Committees is a pilot project born out of Recommendation 20 of the National Inquiry into Family Violence 2018 Report by the Ombudsman Office which recommended the establishment of Village Family Safety Committees to assist the Village Fono and Churches in their villages with family violence prevention initiatives.

The Ombudsman in his remarks spoke on the Inquiry and how it recognized that Village Fono and Churches have critical roles to play both ongoing and in the early prevention of family violence, the Fono, are expressly responsible for "promoting social cohesion and harmony". The Family Safety Study conducted by the Ministry of Women Community and Social Development (MWCSD) also highlighted that the Village Fono should be leading prevention advocacy efforts to stop family violence.

The Village Family Safety Committee Pilot Project heavily takes on a community strength-based approach where building on the existing capacity of villagers is important and equipping them with knowledge and skills to take on this matter can, as a result, have a greater impact and will immensely contribute in assisting Village Fonos and Government with their family violence prevention efforts.

The Office and its partners have been working closely with 6 selected villages to pilot this project with approval from their Village Fonos. The villages of Savaii include Taga, Asau, and Saleia and Upolu include Vaiee, Lotopue, and Lalovi-Mulifanua.

The Office has consistently engaged with these villages throughout the year in various workshops as well as in the development of each of their Strategic and Workplans for 2020-2023. It was critically important to stress to the established Committees of the villages that the aim of creating such Committees is not to provide expert services, which is the task of service providers. However, they are established as eyes and ears of the Fono to report to the village council or police any family violence issues. They are equipped to act as an informational network to ensure that key messages by service providers and Government Ministries relating to family safety and impacts of family violence are continuously being echoed and shared with every family in villages. They would also work alongside partners in conducting their own family violence prevention awareness and be an informal referral pathway that can provide the first assistance within their respective villages to individuals and families requiring family violence services.

Each village work plan details some of the key activities the Committees intend to do within their own villages alongside their Village Fono and churches. They were designed based on issues and causes of family violence they saw as common within their own villages. The activities were

made not to focus only on women but to focus more broadly on youth, young couples, parents, children, men, and leaders.

Various activities in villages work plans include reviewing of their bylaws to strengthen family violence village laws and penalties, regular visits to families particularly vulnerable families, village cultural days to remind youths of principles and values of fa'asamoa that empathize on the importance of women and relationships, etc.

The Ombudsman Office with the support of its partners will continue to work alongside these Committees to ensure the success of this project. The launch of the Upolu pilot villages will be on 25 November 2020.

The Office acknowledges the support and commitment of all its partners including UNDP Spotlight initiative Samoa, SPC-RRRT through the Commonwealth, Sisters for Change, and UNWOMEN for making this possible.

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