

By Charlina Tone

A youth policy to improve the living conditions of young Samoans was officially launched at the To'oa Salamasina Hall, yesterday. The Samoa National Youth Policy 2011-2015 addresses a range of issues affecting young people between the age of 18 and 35.

The policy presents alarming statistics of unemployment and crime rates within this age group and the urgent need to alleviate these problems. Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Seletuta Visesio Pita said the policy is a review of the National Youth Policy 2001-2010 after consultations with stakeholders and the community.

“By identifying potential gaps and weaknesses, the National Policy aims to complement and reinforce the services currently being implemented by youth service providers across the public and private sector,” she said. Through this approach, the Policy will be able to centralize its focus on key areas that are crucial to the development of youth in all aspects over the next few years.

The key areas identified in the Policy are education and training, health, employment, law and justice.

The Policy makes it critical to invest in subjects and training programmes to equip young adults exiting the school systems prematurely to create career pathways for them.

Data confirmed that those staying longer in schools had better job opportunities than persons who dropped out. The 2006 Census records that 35 per cent of young adults aged 15 and 19 were not at school which totaled 6094 people. Of this total, 1140 already worked in paid jobs and 2048 were assisting in economic activities like subsistence production ventures.



The majority consisting of 2661 were engaged in home based work such as caring for the young and the elderly. “One of the key objectives of the policy is to advocate on behalf of youth for a more equitable allocation of resources and programs to target education interventions in particular community-based second chance education and vocational training for school drop

outs.”

Health was another key area of improvement in the Policy with 2006 Situational Analysis on Children, Women and Youth noting that the leading cause of disease among the youth are injuries and poisoning associated with smoking, alcohol consumption and suicide.

“These are alarming factors as these are preventable diseases and there is strong emphasis on individual behaviour and lifestyle choices.” The Demographic Health Survey 2009 confirmed that Sexually Transmitted Infections [STI’s] such as Chlamydia with 40.9 per cent prevalence rate amongst the age category of 15-24.

This is also captured in the Second Generation Surveillance of HIV infections and STI’s in 2008 which found that between one in five women are infected with an STI and these rates were particularly high in young women.

“The increase in the number of HIV cases in Samoa over the years require a stronger focus on the prevention and control of STI amongst the youth population.” In addition the rate of teenage pregnancy are relatively increasing amongst young women in the age category of 15 to 29 years.

“These factors indicate serious concern of high level of unprotected sex in young people. Mrs Pita said there is already an extensive national response to combat sexual reproductive health issues and it requires a strengthened focus on young people through effective partnerships with the health sector.

The Policy also identifies a need to improve employment opportunities in the agricultural sector. An average of 10,000 young people come out of the school system on an annual basis and a third of them were employed in the agricultural sector.

“This highlights a key area where our youth can be sustainably engaged in a way that generates niche employment opportunities and incomes. The Law and Justice Sector is highlighted in the Policy with the a slight drop in the number of imprisoned youths over 2005-2007.

“The 20 to 29 age group remains the most vulnerable.” They account for 43 per cent of those imprisoned by the District Court for 2005-2006, and 50 per cent of those imprisoned by the Supreme Court in the same period. Narcotic offences featured highly and closely followed by property offences.

“A few effective partnerships and related legal and regulatory reforms have seen some positive outcomes but the number of crimes being committed by youths remains on the increase.” The Ministry is working together with the justice sector to find ways to address these problems and giving closer attention to youth crime.

The new Policy aims to concentrate resource resources on only the key areas above that have been highlighted as pivotal for the development of young people in Samoa.

The launch of the policy coincides with this National Youth Week being celebrated in Samoa this week.

{backbutton}