15 August. 2012. **Pilot project provides social services for the most vulnerable Elderly on Tongatapu and Ha'apai**

**During crises, households in Tonga have traditionally relied on support from extended family networks and strong community ties, which function as informal safety nets.**

Yet, with the growth of the cash economy, increasing rural-urban migration, and population growth, traditional informal safety net mechanisms have been weakening. As people move away from their communities to urban areas in search of better opportunities, community ties weaken. Also, as more people rely on wage income, they are at greater risk of losing their main source of livelihood during economic downturns, as many have done in the recent global economic crisis. More and more people are having difficulty meeting their basic needs.

Traditional informal safety nets may help some family members during occasional periods of hardship but are less suited to widespread hardship or successive shocks, thereby placing the most vulnerable of our Elderly citizens under greater strain.
In recognising this, The Ministry of Finance and National Planning in partnership with the Asian Development Bank and the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction has designed a programme of social services to meet specific needs of the most vulnerable elderly citizens in Tonga. The scope of the services to the Elderly will include Case Management, Home Care Visits, and Health Promotion. The pilot area will include the eastern and western districts of Tongatapu and the island of Lifuka.

The criteria to receive services are:

1. 60 years or older
2. Official Diagnosis and referral from approved medical doctor
3. Approval from social service selection committee

Ma'a Fafine moe Famili, a non government organisation, will be contracted by the Ministry of Finance and National Planning as the service provider. The European Union will also provide social service training to Ma'a Fafine moe Famili through their Technical Cooperation Facility fund so that they can better serve the elderly in Tonga. The Tonga Social Service Pilot (TSSP) programme will proceed for 12 months beginning in August 2012 and ending by August 2013. The eventual goal of the project is to handover the completed design and programme to Government for policy formulation, ongoing implementation and expansion of social services to the elderly, and further design of social services to other vulnerable groups.

Malakai H. Kaufusi, Project Manager for the Asian Development Bank, says that “This will be a historical first for the Government of Tonga to formally implement a system of social services in Tonga by partnering with a local NGO. This also gives the Government a unique opportunity to further design and develop a social service scheme that is culturally competent, fiscally responsible, and thematically supportive of ‘Helping Tongans to help themselves’.”

End

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Pilot project provides social services for the Ha'apai & Tongatapu elderly