





CHAPTER

8

Nuku'alofa,  
Tonga

# 8

## Chapter Eight: Nuku'alofa, Tonga

### 8.1 Introduction

This Urban Centre Case Study discusses youth crime and violence in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. The research team conducted focus groups discussions and interviews in Nuku'alofa with young people, government actors, village leaders and civil society organizations which provided the main basis for the findings. Additionally, a desk review of available reports and statistics was conducted. Drawing together these findings, this case study recommends a number of key actions to strengthen and support resilience among young men and women.

As defined by the *Tonga National Youth Strategy*, “youth” include young men and women between 15 and 34 years of age.<sup>314</sup> However, cultural definitions of youth include people that are single, have no children and are still living at home.<sup>315</sup> The Criminal Offences Act states that a person can be held criminally responsible from the age of seven to 12 years, as long as the court and/or jury can ascertain sufficient maturity of understanding and awareness of the crime.<sup>316</sup>

Most young people in Tonga are bound by family ties, faith, honour and tradition. In many ways, these traditional and social structures are preventing young people from becoming involved in crime and violence. However, as time passes a number of risk factors have emerged, including drug and alcohol abuse, high emigration rates and the breakdown of families. This has meant that some young people have become more susceptible to negative and self-destructive behaviour. Limited employment and meaningful activities restrict opportunities for young people to positively contribute to their communities. The ongoing tension between current and traditional social structures have made some young people feel more vulnerable and created a sense of displacement within their communities. Factors that promote resilience include: active engagement in youth services and activities; strong faith networks; and, a high general level of relevant education.



<sup>314</sup> The National Youth Strategy notes that this group was selected in accordance with the population census to facilitate statistical calculations; however, only Tonga youth 26 and under can represent Tonga at national and international level. MOTEYS 2007:4.

<sup>315</sup> FSPI 2009

<sup>316</sup> Criminal Offences Act 1988:17.

## 8.2 National Context

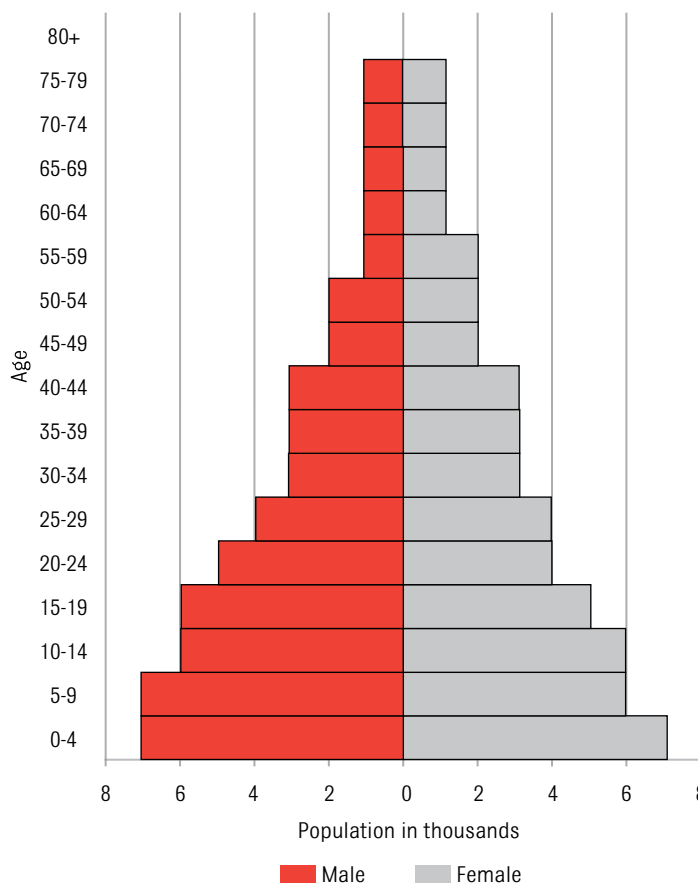
In 2010, Tonga was highlighted as one of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region making better than average progress towards the MDG objectives. The 2010 UNDP Human Development Index ranks Tonga 85 out of 169 making it one of the only Pacific island countries with a high human development ranking. The Kingdom's relatively positive ranking on the Human Development Index reflects a comparatively high gross domestic product per capita, good life expectancy, the lowest child mortality rates in the Pacific and near-universal literacy. Remittances from Tongans living abroad improve income distribution, assist in hardship alleviation, promote business activity and create larger investments in education.<sup>317</sup>

The population of Tonga is estimated to be 105,916 in July 2011, with a high rate of outward migration.<sup>318</sup> In the 1996-2006 census periods, the population growth rate was at 0.4 percent per annum. The number of Tongans who have migrated overseas to New Zealand, Australia and United States is estimated to be 150,000.<sup>319</sup> Tonga is a predominantly rural country, with 25 percent of the Tongan population living in urban settings concentrated in Nuku'alofa. The median age of the Tongan population is 21.4 years<sup>320</sup>, making Tonga a youthful population. Approximately one in five of the overall population is aged between 15-24 years old (Figure 8.1).

The Tonga 2006 Census states that 27 percent of females and 25 percent of males aged 15 years and older have secondary level qualification. An estimated eight percent have vocational/professional qualifications, with populations in the urban areas reporting better qualifications compared to the rural population. The literacy rate of 15-25 year olds was 98.4 percent for males and 98.8 percent for females mainly due to compulsory education and high enrolment rates.<sup>321</sup> Currently education is compulsory through to age 14, but a new policy has been discussed to raise this to age 18.

Health issues for young people relate mostly to sexual and reproductive health concerns. The incidence of HIV/AIDS in Tonga is low, however, misconceptions about the use of modern contraceptives has meant that sexually transmitted infections are increasing amongst the youth population.<sup>322</sup> Teenage pregnancies continue to be an issue in Tonga, with young mothers often facing stigma and shame from family members and community.<sup>323</sup> The issue

Figure 8.1 Tonga Population Pyramid



Source: United Nations Population Division 2009

<sup>317</sup> UNDP 2010.

<sup>318</sup> CIA 2011.

<sup>319</sup> Department of Statistics 2006.

<sup>320</sup> CIA 2011.

<sup>321</sup> Department of Statistics 2006.

<sup>322</sup> TFHA 2011.

<sup>323</sup> Havea 2007.

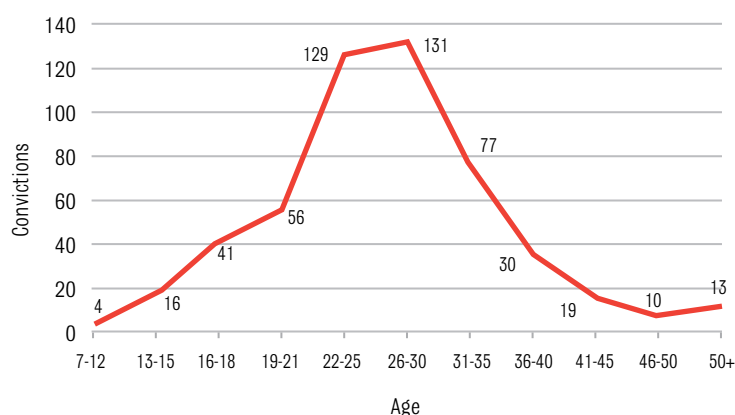
of youth suicide is also a serious concern. Between 1991 and 2001 attempted and complete suicides have fluctuated ranging from one completed suicide in 1995 to 13 in 2001. Studies have shown that while the causes of suicide tend to vary, it is most commonly triggered by some form of social conflict, particularly those arising from societal transition.<sup>324</sup>

Women in Tonga have good access to health and education services. There is now an increasing number of women engaged in economic activities, with more involved in waged employment within the labour force. However, women are still heavily involved with traditional activities such as *tapa* making, mat weaving, light agricultural work, and child rearing.<sup>325</sup> Women are increasingly playing an important role in the government; in 2005, women comprised approximately 46 percent of the civil service list. The major challenges for women in Tonga are land ownership, inheritance rights and issues of domestic violence.<sup>326</sup>

### 8.3 Young People as Victims and Perpetrators

Young people have massive potential, which needs to be harnessed for the benefit of Tonga's social, economic and cultural development. However, young men and women in Tonga face a range of challenges in accessing support and services from government, their communities and in some instances, their families. One of the most pervasive and problematic challenges facing young people is the impact of crime and violence on their development. Some young people are engaging in criminal activities, including assault, theft and domestic violence. At the same time, many young men and women are also at risk of being victims of crime, in particular, physical violence both inside and outside the home.

**Figure 8.2: Criminal Convictions by Age**



Source: Ministry of Police Annual Report 2005

#### **Common Crimes**

The Ministry of Police alongside other reports suggest that the largest numbers of juvenile offenders are convicted for theft, assault, breaking and entering, forgery, trespassing, conspiracy and inflicting bodily harm.<sup>327</sup> During consultations justice officials and other participants indicated consensus that the major categories of crime that involve young people include: shop break-ins; house break-ins; and drug possession (almost exclusively marijuana). The nature of these acts rarely involved firearms or aggravated assault, although in the past there has been a spate of assaults, armed robberies, burglaries and arson aimed especially at

Chinese shop owners. More recently, there have been a number of armed robberies, one in particular targeting a financial institution where an employee was wounded with a firearm. During interviews, concern was expressed that more and more weapons are being illegally trafficked to and through Tonga, potentially augmenting the rate of armed assault, but there is no data available to support this.

<sup>324</sup> Government of Tonga 2006.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> PPDVP 2009.

<sup>327</sup> MOTEYS 2007:9.



Statistics also show that the majority of crime is committed by young people aged between 15 and 34 years of age (Figure 8.2). Participants suggested that young men were often the main perpetrators of common crimes. Young women were occasionally reprimanded but it was mainly for drunk and disorderly behaviour, which usually did not result in a criminal charge. At the time of the initial interviews in June 2010 there was only a small population of female inmates in prison, mainly for embezzlement. No juvenile women offenders were incarcerated.

### **Inter-School Fights and Violence**

The most widely mentioned category of violence involving young people was inter-school fighting, which has a long history in Tonga. According to a 2008 report published by the Tonga Secondary School Principals Association on this issue, fighting occurs most often during sports competitions, in particular rugby matches. Records from the Ministry of Police show that fighting has become more widespread recently, occurring throughout the school year and during school vacations, which was not the case historically. For the past three or four years fighting has occurred mainly between two rival schools; however, the violence is now spreading to fights between other colleges.

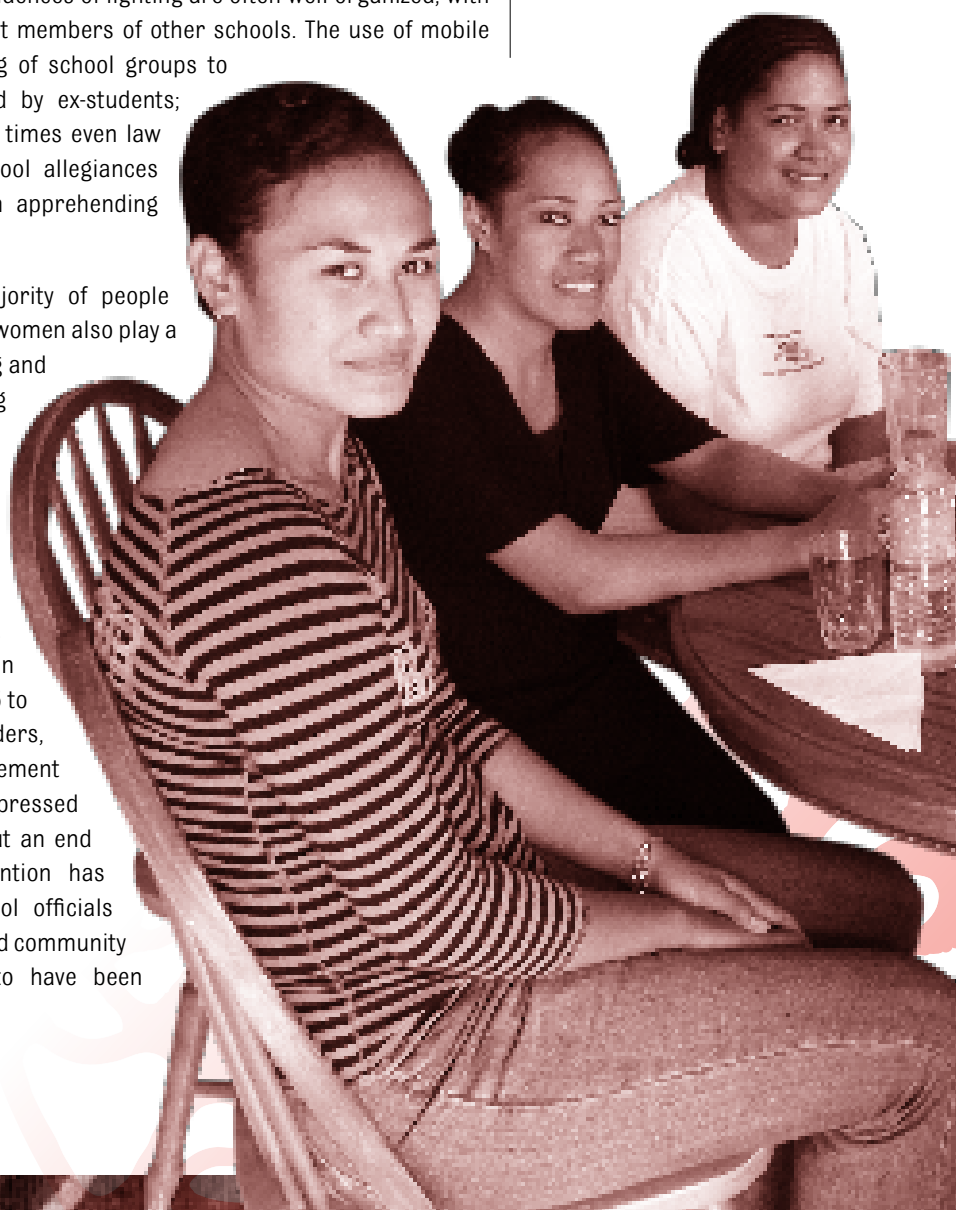
In-country consultations confirmed that incidences of fighting are often well-organized, with groups waiting at specific points to assault members of other schools. The use of mobile phones has facilitated the rapid gathering of school groups to engage in fighting. Fights can be fuelled by ex-students; older brothers, fathers and uncles, and at times even law enforcement officials with particular school allegiances (usually through deliberate negligence in apprehending those involved).

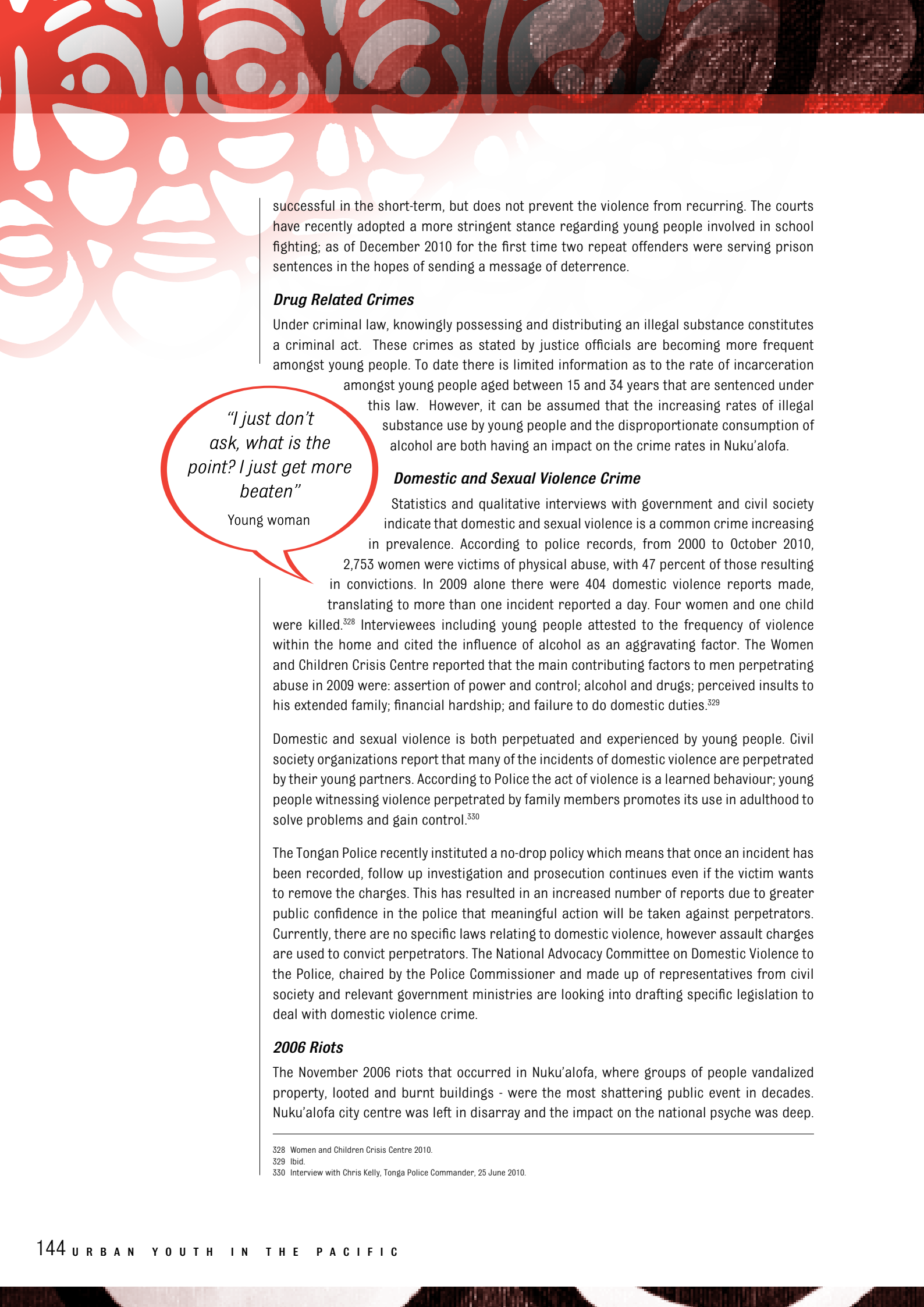
While young men make up the vast majority of people involved in the inter-school violence, young women also play a role. This includes encouraging, supporting and provoking fights but only rarely becoming physically involved. Young women as well as older female relatives encourage the young men through appealing to their sense of pride and masculinity.

Police are trying to take a proactive role in addressing this particular form of violence. It was reported that in one incident alone in 2010, police arrested 75 young men aged 15 to 18 years. During consultations, church leaders, school principals and teachers, law enforcement officials and community members expressed general frustration with the inability to put an end to this phenomenon. Significant intervention has occurred with church leaders and school officials participating in reconciliation processes and community discussions with parents. This seems to have been

*"It's a pride  
in our school, if they  
get me I will get them for  
sure or someone from  
that school"*

Young man





successful in the short-term, but does not prevent the violence from recurring. The courts have recently adopted a more stringent stance regarding young people involved in school fighting; as of December 2010 for the first time two repeat offenders were serving prison sentences in the hopes of sending a message of deterrence.

### ***Drug Related Crimes***

Under criminal law, knowingly possessing and distributing an illegal substance constitutes a criminal act. These crimes as stated by justice officials are becoming more frequent amongst young people. To date there is limited information as to the rate of incarceration amongst young people aged between 15 and 34 years that are sentenced under this law. However, it can be assumed that the increasing rates of illegal substance use by young people and the disproportionate consumption of alcohol are both having an impact on the crime rates in Nuku'alofa.

*"I just don't ask, what is the point? I just get more beaten"*

Young woman

### ***Domestic and Sexual Violence Crime***

Statistics and qualitative interviews with government and civil society indicate that domestic and sexual violence is a common crime increasing in prevalence. According to police records, from 2000 to October 2010, 2,753 women were victims of physical abuse, with 47 percent of those resulting in convictions. In 2009 alone there were 404 domestic violence reports made, translating to more than one incident reported a day. Four women and one child were killed.<sup>328</sup> Interviewees including young people attested to the frequency of violence within the home and cited the influence of alcohol as an aggravating factor. The Women and Children Crisis Centre reported that the main contributing factors to men perpetrating abuse in 2009 were: assertion of power and control; alcohol and drugs; perceived insults to his extended family; financial hardship; and failure to do domestic duties.<sup>329</sup>

Domestic and sexual violence is both perpetuated and experienced by young people. Civil society organizations report that many of the incidents of domestic violence are perpetrated by their young partners. According to Police the act of violence is a learned behaviour; young people witnessing violence perpetrated by family members promotes its use in adulthood to solve problems and gain control.<sup>330</sup>

The Tongan Police recently instituted a no-drop policy which means that once an incident has been recorded, follow up investigation and prosecution continues even if the victim wants to remove the charges. This has resulted in an increased number of reports due to greater public confidence in the police that meaningful action will be taken against perpetrators. Currently, there are no specific laws relating to domestic violence, however assault charges are used to convict perpetrators. The National Advocacy Committee on Domestic Violence to the Police, chaired by the Police Commissioner and made up of representatives from civil society and relevant government ministries are looking into drafting specific legislation to deal with domestic violence crime.

### ***2006 Riots***

The November 2006 riots that occurred in Nuku'alofa, where groups of people vandalized property, looted and burnt buildings - were the most shattering public event in decades. Nuku'alofa city centre was left in disarray and the impact on the national psyche was deep.

<sup>328</sup> Women and Children Crisis Centre 2010.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Interview with Chris Kelly, Tonga Police Commander, 25 June 2010.



The riots left eight people dead and at least 60 percent of the city centre destroyed with a bill of up to USD 75 million.<sup>331</sup>

Following the riots, several groups of people stood accused; from politicians who were against the monarchy, to pro-democracy supporters, to anti-Chinese groups and elements within the military.<sup>332</sup> Security forces detained 1,200 people, mainly young men between 18-35 years of age.<sup>333</sup> Although the crimes committed by the young men during the riots were arguably opportunistic, nonetheless, it is of concern that these young people were so willing to engage in such destructive behavior.

## 8.4 Institutional Responses in Support of Youth

There are a number of structures in place to support young people; these include effective cooperation between the justice sector and non-government organizations. Other structures assist with prevention strategies by giving young people opportunities to actively participate in a different range of activities. That said there are still gaps in institutional approaches particularly in the area of rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.

### *Political Institutions' Engagement with Youth*

The last few years have seen major democratic reforms enacted and implemented in Tonga. At the time that consultations were being conducted for this study, Tonga was preparing for the November 2010 general election. It was evident through interviews with government officials that young people were considered a key target group for education in the election. The Prime Minister's Office specifically planned to engage with young people and educate

<sup>331</sup> <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2006/11/2008525122925975337.html>

<sup>332</sup> Elements within the military were not prosecuted but were subject to civil claims for damages as result of unlawful assaults. Email from Tonga Government Official. 5 May, 2011.

<sup>333</sup> FSPI 2009.



them about electoral law and practice, the importance of free and fair elections and the power they wield by voting.

The November 2010 election has constituted a new Legislative Assembly, and has more members elected by the common people, than Nobles or appointees of the King. In a parliament of 28, 17 members are People's Representatives, nine are Nobles Representatives and two, including the only woman in parliament, were appointed by the King on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Women constitute almost half of the electorate and since 1951 have had the right to vote and stand for election, but have had very limited success in being elected to the national parliament.

Notably, the legislative branch has historically been dominated by older male members of the Tongan community, with the result that young people's voices are not regularly heard in national decision-making forums. Despite this, there has to date been no consideration of whether it would be useful to reserve any seats for young people in the national legislature. In a very positive move however, the new Legislative Assembly has a number of new parliamentary committees, and the new Social Services Committee is specifically mandated to look at youth issues. This opportunity should be seized by youth advocates as a channel to get youth issues onto the national legislative agenda.

It is also positive that Tonga is recognized as having the best Youth Parliament programme in the entire region. The Tongan National Youth Congress (TNYC) has organized the Youth Parliament for a number of years. Consultations with former youth parliamentarians demonstrate that young people are active consumers of information and current happenings in Tonga and are interested in being active in civic affairs. The youth parliamentarian role in Tonga is an excellent example of ways in which young people can make meaningful contributions at the highest levels of society, when given the chance.



### Government Youth Policies

The *Tonga National Youth Strategy 2007-2012* (Table 8.1) provides a guiding framework for government agencies and youth stakeholders by identifying priorities for youth development. The Secretariat for the Pacific Community played a significant role in helping the Government develop the *National Youth Strategy*, which has five key pillars. The Strategy states in summary that: "The young people of Tonga have strengths and talents and must be given the opportunities to exploit them for their benefit and well-being as well as the improvement of their families and communities. Young people must be given the opportunities and 'choice' to develop skills and competencies in a wide variety of areas in order to secure and retain employment, fulfill leadership positions and perform essential services."<sup>334</sup>


**Table 8.1 Key Issues and Actions in National Youth Strategy**

Key Issue	Action
Employment Creation	Economic hardship is eliminated through targeted and equitable employment and income generating opportunities.
Skills Development	All young people are provided with educational opportunities which develop their talents and abilities, and help ensure a prosperous future for individuals and communities.
Healthy Living	All youth of Tonga are empowered to practice healthy lifestyles and behaviour through accessing high quality health education, life-skills training and youth-friendly health services.
Community Service	The value of community service is recognized at all levels of society and young people are encouraged to play an active role in community development.
Participation and Advocacy	National pride is fostered and the full participation of young people in decision making and the development of their communities encouraged.

### Youth Institutions and Key Organizations

The Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sports (MOTÉYS), which was established in 2006 and became operational in 2007, has the mandate for youth affairs and development in Tonga. MOTÉYS is responsible for the overall coordination and implementation of the *National Youth Strategy* and other policy issues that relate to young people. The Ministry successfully undertook a review and streamlining of the *National Youth Strategy*, which was approved in 2007. At present, MOTÉYS main task is to implement the *National Youth Strategy*, which requires the involvement of all stakeholders and effective coordination, particularly given that some of the Strategy's areas of focus are outside the mandate of the Ministry. The Ministry has recognized the need to engage a wide range of stakeholders and the challenges this poses for coordination. To this end, it formed the Youth Stakeholder Forum in November 2007, an umbrella mechanism with representation from key agencies, non-government organizations and other actors working on youth issues. The strategy behind this was to provide strong partner organizations to assist MOTÉYS implement its mandate and better serve young people. However, the Forum has not met regularly enough to be effective and struggles to discuss substantive issues and cooperation strategies to actively assist with youth programming.

334 MOTÉYS 2007:8.



The key civil society entity that works on youth issues is the Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC). The Ministry of Education established the TNYC in the mid-1980s as the umbrella organization for youth groups in Tonga. Given its initial mandate to work with village-level groups, this organization is particularly effective at working at the grassroots level. In addition, TNYC has developed into a competent youth civil society organization, influencing policy at the national level and serving as a regional model for effectively implementing youth programming in the Pacific. TNYC is particularly good at working with at-risk young people and provides significant training and programmatic opportunities, including sponsoring the National Youth Summit every two years, running a Young Women's Caucus for female entrepreneurs and hosting the Tongan branch of regional schemes such as Future Farmers and the National Volunteer Scheme. In addition, members of the TNYC noted that there is a wealth of training opportunities for Tongan youth, many of which are facilitated through the Congress. Until the beginning of 2011, contact between the TNYC and MOTEYS was limited, however, recently representatives have met regularly to begin work on the next *National Youth Policy*. This was viewed as a positive development by both parties.

The Civil Society Forum is an umbrella organization for civil society actors in Tonga, and participates in the Youth Stakeholders Forum to bring the perspectives of its membership regarding youth issues to the attention of policy-makers. The Civil Society Forum's membership includes organizations such as the Tonga Family Health Association, the Women and Children Crisis Centre Tonga, and other organizations that are working on issues that relate to young people's health, education and employment.

The Salvation Army provides a three-month rehabilitation counselling course focused on dealing with drug and alcohol addiction, anger management and life skills. The organization works closely with the Ministry of Justice, the court system and other youth stakeholders to provide services to juvenile offenders and other at-risk youth. Most young people who participate in the Salvation Army's programmes do so as part of their court mandated rehabilitation under the Criminal Offences Act.

Tonga Lifeline, which is hosted by the Free Wesleyan Church, works with marginalized young people. The Church provides a 24-hour hotline, counselling services, a temporary dormitory and casework support for at-risk youth through its ministry. Lifeline's staff work with the Ministry of Police and through a wide network of local ministries to support young people mediate conflict and "reconnect" them to their culture and community. A primary aspect of the programme is to rehabilitate youth who are on probation. These young people are offered the opportunity to participate in a three-month training programme focusing on life skills, values and self-esteem. Participants receive a certificate of completion at the end of the programme and participate in a Tongan feast, which includes their parents and community members. When their individual training is completed, they are referred to their community churches through the National Forum of Churches so that they have access to ongoing support.

The Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) is "committed to the elimination of violence against women and children who are victims/survivors of domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, and all forms of child abuse and will work towards the elimination of all forms of violence in Tonga." It provides 24-hour counselling and transitional housing for those in high-risk situations, undertakes advocacy, carries out research, and provides legal assistance. Its Male Advocacy Group meets regularly to design strategies to prevent violence against women, including by young men. Advocates perform outreach services at

*kava* ceremonies. It also works with the Domestic Violence Unit of the police. The Tongan National Centre for Women and Children (TNCWC) is another organization that is mandated to eliminate violence against women and children and works with WCCC and the Police.

### **Justice Institutions and Policies**

During consultations several participants noted the fact that there is no criminal code or law specifically pertaining to juvenile offenders. There are general provisions for adult and youth offenders to attend counselling and rehabilitation services in the Criminal Offences Act.<sup>335</sup> However, there are no formal allowances for lighter or non-custodial sentences to encourage rehabilitation. Basically the judge can use his or her discretion when sentencing. Young offenders are currently charged the same as adults under the relevant legislation depending on the nature of the crime with consideration for the age and maturity given in sentencing.<sup>336</sup> There have been calls by officials within the justice sector for the establishment of a youth justice system based through a juvenile offenders act. This would allow the system to better handle juvenile offenders based on the success of the Youth Diversion Scheme (see In-Focus 8.1) established after the November 2006 riots. A system was conceptualized based on the Samoa model, however, resource constraints limit the advancement of this proposal.<sup>337</sup>

*"These guys  
right here really  
could make a difference  
-- if they got the resources  
they needed"*

Juvenile justice worker

Lastly, community policing is a major focus of the Tonga Police's *2009-2013 Strategic Plan*. As part of this initiative police regularly visit primary and secondary schools to talk to young people about safety, child abuse, crime prevention, and drug and alcohol abuse. Police officials stressed the necessity of teaching young people at a very young age about not engaging in violence, whether inter-personal, inter-family, inter-school or criminal. The Police are pursuing this goal through the framework of promoting safer communities.<sup>338</sup>

## **8.5 Supporting Young People: Reducing Risk and Increasing Resilience**

In traditional Tongan society the roles and responsibilities of young people are defined by culture, values and traditions. The economic and social changes brought about by globalization have impacted on all levels of society, including family dynamics which in turn has impacted on the situation of young men and women. These changes are occurring at a much faster rate than ever before and pose great risks to the youthful population, in particular in the area of crime and violence. Nonetheless, participants in consultations expressed the belief that young men and women largely play positive roles in their communities, through active memberships in church groups, engagement in education and other opportunities.

### **In-Focus 8.1: Youth Diversion Scheme**

In the aftermath of the 2006 riots, the Ministry of Justice established the Youth Diversion Scheme. Under the Scheme offenders aged seventeen and under were diverted at the discretion of the court. This potentially replicable programme model was based on a restorative justice approach and stressed community and parental involvement. The programme centred on holding a meeting with Ministry staff, offenders and their families to develop a work plan for rehabilitation. Restorative measures including seeking forgiveness and compensation to victims were part of the scheme too. The work plan was monitored by Ministry staff, with cooperation from the Salvation Army. Once the young person completed their work plan their criminal record was expunged.

<sup>335</sup> Section 24(3)(d) of the Criminal Offences Act. "The court may also impose conditions during the period of suspension of sentence, including a requirement that supervision by a probation officer or another responsible member of the community takes place. A breach of such conditions may, upon application, result in the rescission of the suspensions order."

<sup>336</sup> Most youth offenders are charged under one of the following four acts: Criminal Offences Act, Illicit Drugs Control Act, Intoxicating Liquor Act or the Public Places Act.

<sup>337</sup> Ministry of Justice 2011. Personal email with official. 11 April 2011 and interviews.

<sup>338</sup> Tonga Police 2009 and interviews.

### ***Growing the Employment Opportunities for Youth***

The issue of unemployment was the highest risk factor mentioned by participants during consultations and was supported by youth respondents in the 2009 *Youth and Mental Health in Tonga* study as being the principal contributing factor in young people who develop short-term mental illness. The Tonga 2006 Census reports that while a high percentage (57 percent) of the Tongan population 15 years and older was economically active, only a relatively small proportion (37 percent) received regular paid income.<sup>339</sup>

*“Support should go in the direction of helping coordination through the Youth Stakeholders Forum or other central mechanism. It would be better to pool resources and have a master plan to assist with... [issues such as] self-employment, micro-enterprise development, marketing products, etc.”*

Young entrepreneur

Young men and women interviewed associated unemployment with feelings of being “useless” to the family, as it means being unable to help with financial obligations and expectations. The guilt associated with being economically dependent on family members was mentioned by young people as having a negative impact on their self-esteem and therefore on their lifestyle choices, with the result that it motivated some young people to commit crimes, such as theft to gain money and/or luxury items such as mobile phones and MP3 players. Participants in the study also highlighted that unemployment amongst young people had resulted in many of them migrating (in some instances illegally) to New Zealand, the U.S and Australia to find work and send remittances to support family members. It was also suggested that some young women were also opting to get married sooner than expected to a working man in the hopes that the husband would also be able to provide for her family.

In 2010, the economy contracted by 1.2 percent and it is forecasted to grow by only 1.4 percent in 2010-11.<sup>340</sup> Given this reality, expanding the employment sector for young people will be a challenge in the short-term at least. Nonetheless, some activities are laying the groundwork to enable young people to take up employment opportunities in the future. As an example, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in partnership with the Secondary Schools Principals Association and the Ministry of Education with sponsorship from the private sector held for the first time the Youth in Business – Dream Big Challenge 2010. This competition involved students from nine local high schools plus a commerce teacher designing a business plan for a product. Each school received a mentor from the private sector who volunteered their time and expertise. From these nine schools, a final four schools were chosen in late May 2010 and each given real seed money to invest in their business. The winning high school was announced at a ceremony in the following September with judging based on financial reports, presentation and marketing strategies. The team then travelled to New Zealand in November to meet with successful business people and see firsthand the fruits of entrepreneurship.<sup>341</sup>

The TNYC also runs another initiative called the Future Farmers of Tonga project supported by the Tonga Development Bank. It encourages young people to take up agriculture using new techniques such as organic farming. Farmers are set to get international organic certification in 2011. These types of successful programmes that encourage youth employment need to

<sup>339</sup> Labor force Survey 2003

<sup>340</sup> ADB 2011.

<sup>341</sup> Interviews with Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry on 24 June 2010 and 7 April 2011. Also Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2011.



be given further support so that they can be expanded throughout Tonga. Wherever possible, creating special opportunities for youth at risk to participate in these types of programmes is recommended.

### ***Improving the Quality and Relevance of Education***

While school enrolment rates are high in primary school, rates rapidly decline after the age of 15.<sup>342</sup> The education system is highly academic and gaps between the educational outcome and employment opportunities have been noted by the government. Stakeholders consulted highlighted the imperative for education and training to be aligned to current employment needs. Specifically there needs to be development of more informal employment opportunities as well as providing young people with a wider range of educational choices to enable them to acquire necessary work skills in all sectors.

A survey undertaken by the Asia Development Bank in 2007 identified a number of key constraints to improving the quality and relevance of TVET in Tonga. This included a shortage of skilled teachers/trainers in TVET providers and inadequate funding for initiatives in sectors with economic potential such as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. Adding to this was the lack of support from parents who buy-in to the stigma of vocational training and continue to encourage young people to choose the path of formal education, despite the fact that there is a lack of skilled tradesmen and women in Tonga.

In an effort to meet the need for more investment in technical, vocational and life skill development, MOTEYS offers a walk-in Training and Education Centre with trained staff to direct clients to employment, vocational and training opportunities. With the support of a recent AUD 7 million grant from AusAID and New Zealand Aid Programme, the Ministry is also committed to building the capacity of TVET centres, including offering programmes with international accreditation.<sup>343</sup> To improve the quality of education, the Ministry of Education, Women and Culture has also set up a Quality Assurance Control Office which monitors improvement in education through Minimum Services Standards for Schools, which set benchmarks that schools must meet.<sup>344</sup> There have also been discussions about creation of other education programmes, such as performing arts programmes to increase youth participation and development.<sup>345</sup> There have also been discussions about sports as a career option for women, in light of the fact that the 2008 Olympic Games first qualifier for Tonga was a young female.<sup>346</sup>

### ***Tackling Substance Abuse***

The 2009 *Youth and Mental Health in Tonga* study highlighted that a number of young people are involved in illegal activities such as substance abuse as a means of asserting their identity.<sup>347</sup> These substances include alcohol, tobacco, magic mushrooms, *fafangu* or *datura*, *kava*, methylated spirits, marijuana and glue sniffing.<sup>348</sup> However, alcohol, in particular, has been linked to greater involvement in crime and violence. Ministry of Police officials recognize

*"Kids are getting drunk, addicted to alcohol and then crime becomes a habit, parts of their needs... [for multiple re-offenders], they do not care about reputation and are not scared of prison. Their conscience and feelings become numb"*  
Community member

<sup>342</sup> Ministry of Finance and National Planning 2010a.

<sup>343</sup> AusAID 2009.

<sup>344</sup> Ministry of Finance and National Planning 2010a.

<sup>345</sup> Tonga National Youth Strategy 2007 - 2012 cited in FSPI 2009.

<sup>346</sup> FSPI 2009.

<sup>347</sup> FSPI 2009: 27.

<sup>348</sup> UNICEF 2001

the availability of alcohol as a serious problem, reporting that there are currently 265 liquor outlets in Tonga, up significantly from five years ago. While there are significant efforts to monitor licensing, it is all too easy to sell alcohol illegally. However, since the introduction of the Intoxicating Liquor Amendment Act 2010 there is stricter control on attaining liquor licenses. Adding to this, justice officials also stated the correlation between substance abuse and the increasing number of drug related charges amongst young people. Justice officials mentioned the number of drug-related charges amongst young people has increased, due to the proactive enforcement of the Illicit Drugs Control Act.

### ***Opportunities for Meaningful Activity***

Limited organized activities, such as volunteering, sports and other recreational programmes for young people who have finished or dropped out of school was also highlighted as a key risk factor. Other than local youth groups and church based activities, perceived options for meaningful activities were limited, with young women having even more limited activities than young men. According to participants consulted during this study, the perception of limited organized activities created a feeling of “boredom” and facilitated, in their view, participation in crime and violence. Creating more meaningful activities for youth to engage in was therefore highlighted as a key resilience factor for youth.

*“In  
Tonga, young  
people don’t have the  
right to stand up, speak  
out or argue”*

Young woman

At the same time, participants also highlighted the positive roles that some young people already play in society, which demonstrates the potential for youth to be responsible and effective in decision-making processes. Within the family unit, young men and women perform tasks including cooking, cleaning, shopping, caring for the sick, caring for younger siblings, minor household repairs and other household activities.<sup>349</sup> Within the community, young people are active members of youth groups in churches, youth councils, other youth organizations, sports and cultural events. At the national level, youth participated in the National Youth Parliament, the drafting of the national youth policy and national and international sporting events.

Recently, several activities for youth have been undertaken at the national level including the Inspiring - Young Emerging Leaders Programme (I-YEL) by WCCC. I-YEL aims to encourage, prepare and challenge young people from diverse backgrounds to be advocates for human rights, especially women and children’s rights with the overall goal of eliminating violence against women and children. The Programme promotes leadership development, career exploration and goal setting.

The ‘Ola Fou’ Pasifika Youth Development Project implemented by Praxis has been providing training to youth workers to develop leadership skills, promote indigenous approaches to youth development, improve research abilities, and gain recognized qualifications in Tonga, as well as Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands. These programmes should be further supported by the Government and/or development partners for replication so as to contribute to the overall opportunities for young people.

### ***Family Challenges***

Young people consulted felt that lack of parenting skills within their own families was another push factor for young people to be involved in crime and violence. Respondents saw

349 2003 Labour Force Survey

the role of the parent and family as important for young people growing up who needed support, guidance and counselling. Due to modernization, the traditional method of parenting, which relied on support from extended family members and wider community members, is breaking down, leaving young people with less family support to enable them to positively manage the greater freedom and liberal attitude of modern society.<sup>350</sup> According to participants consulted, parents and schools rarely educate their children in life skills, each arguing that it is the role of the other. When parents and educators do not discuss such issues openly, young people tend to become secretive because they fear punishment from parents or educators who disapprove of their behaviour. This increases the likelihood of engaging in high risk behavior, including substance abuse and unsafe sex. Stakeholders also highlighted that there is a lack of guidance for parents who have difficulty raising their children. Parent absenteeism was also highlighted by the *Youth and Mental Health in Tonga* study in 2009 as a cause of mental stress for youth.<sup>351</sup>

*"I couldn't make it without my parents' help. Parents here will make a big, big deal [out of mistakes], but will help you in the end"*

Young man

Migration of family members is also having an impact on the environment that young people are growing up in. Migration is seen to have an impact on the family structures (creating single parent headed households), family support systems, parent-child relationships and spousal/partner relationships. In many cases, when one or both parents leave for abroad for work reasons, children are often left in the care of relatives. Young people consulted felt that these relatives sometimes lack the concern that a parent has toward their own child. Young people also felt that they were less obliged to listen to other relatives and felt that relatives were often too busy looking after their own immediate families to be concerned about them. This increases the vulnerability of young people in these situations, who sometimes end up turning away from their families toward friends and outside role models, who may have a negative influence on them.

<sup>350</sup> Government of Tonga 2006:39.

<sup>351</sup> FSPI 2009.





### ***Societal Challenges***

Another widely expressed push factor for young people to become involved in crime and violence was the shifting norms of Tongan culture and the way in which traditional society was changing due to the influence of globalization, urbanization and external values. The transition to adulthood for many young people today is vastly different to the transition experienced by their parents. Previously, young peoples' place and role in their communities was defined by tradition and social rank. Both young women and young men played important roles in traditional ceremonies and other aspects of life. However, these roles have become less important in modern times and new expectations linked to pressure to succeed in modern education, formal employment and other areas have created new demands on young people in Tonga, leaving them confused.

It was interesting to note that in the *Youth and Mental Health in Tonga* study, young respondents had very negative perceptions of development and change in society, linking development to 'increasing unemployment', 'dropping out of school', 'drugs and substance abuse'.<sup>352</sup> The ongoing conflict and stresses between traditional and modern social structures and values increases the vulnerability of young people and leads to a feeling of displacement. Some seek to express themselves in a meaningful manner, while others, frustrated when they fail to realize their aspirations, resort to crime and other unacceptable and risky behaviours.

In addition, participants consulted felt that young people need to be taught *anga' fakatonga* (the Tongan way) as a way to build resilience in young people. *Anga' fakatonga* is a defining element of the Tongan identity. It is a fundamental attitude and behavior that is taught to Tongan children and is expected to be practiced and passed to their children as well.<sup>353</sup> *Anga fakatonga* emphasizes most highly the importance of family more than any other entity, but also stresses the importance of kinship, community, respect, discipline, generosity, loyalty, and obedience to parents, elders and authority.<sup>354</sup> Respect is a basis for all Tongan relationships. Within the Tongan family, children display their love (*ofa*) to their family through obedience and conformity to the orders and counsels of their parents and elders. Notably, during consultations, many juvenile offenders expressed remorse at having brought shame to their families and damaging their family's and community's reputations, stating that this was the single most important factor that would deter them from committing further criminal acts in the future.

Finally, Tongan justice officials as well as a number of other community organizations commented on the issue of criminal deportees in Tonga. From 1998 to 2008 approximately 358 criminal deportees have arrived in Tonga from the U.S., New Zealand and Australia. However, significant missing and withheld data from the deporting countries make it difficult to determine how many criminal deportees currently reside in Tonga.<sup>355</sup> In Tonga several participants cited conflicting views on how widespread the involvement of deportees in criminal activity actually is. Consultations with deportees resulted in the expression of frustration at being stigmatized, asserting that deportees were the first group of people to be blamed for any disruptions or criminal activity in Tonga.

Criminal deportees in Tonga are mainly young men aged between 25 to 35 years; however there are documented cases of young women also being deported back to Tonga. The

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<sup>352</sup> FSPi 2009.

<sup>353</sup> Morton 1996: 20.

<sup>354</sup> Hansen 2004.

<sup>355</sup> Pereira 2011.



time spent abroad ranges from 5 to 36 years either in the United States, Australia or New Zealand. The criminal offences range from conspiracy to armed robbery.<sup>356</sup> Many of the deportees face a number of challenges accessing employment and housing options. They have limited connection to social safety nets that is vital in the Pacific. A number of deportees have physical and psychiatric disabilities which further impede in their reintegration and adds to their stigmatization. The rates of recidivism and the impact on the communities are unknown at this stage.

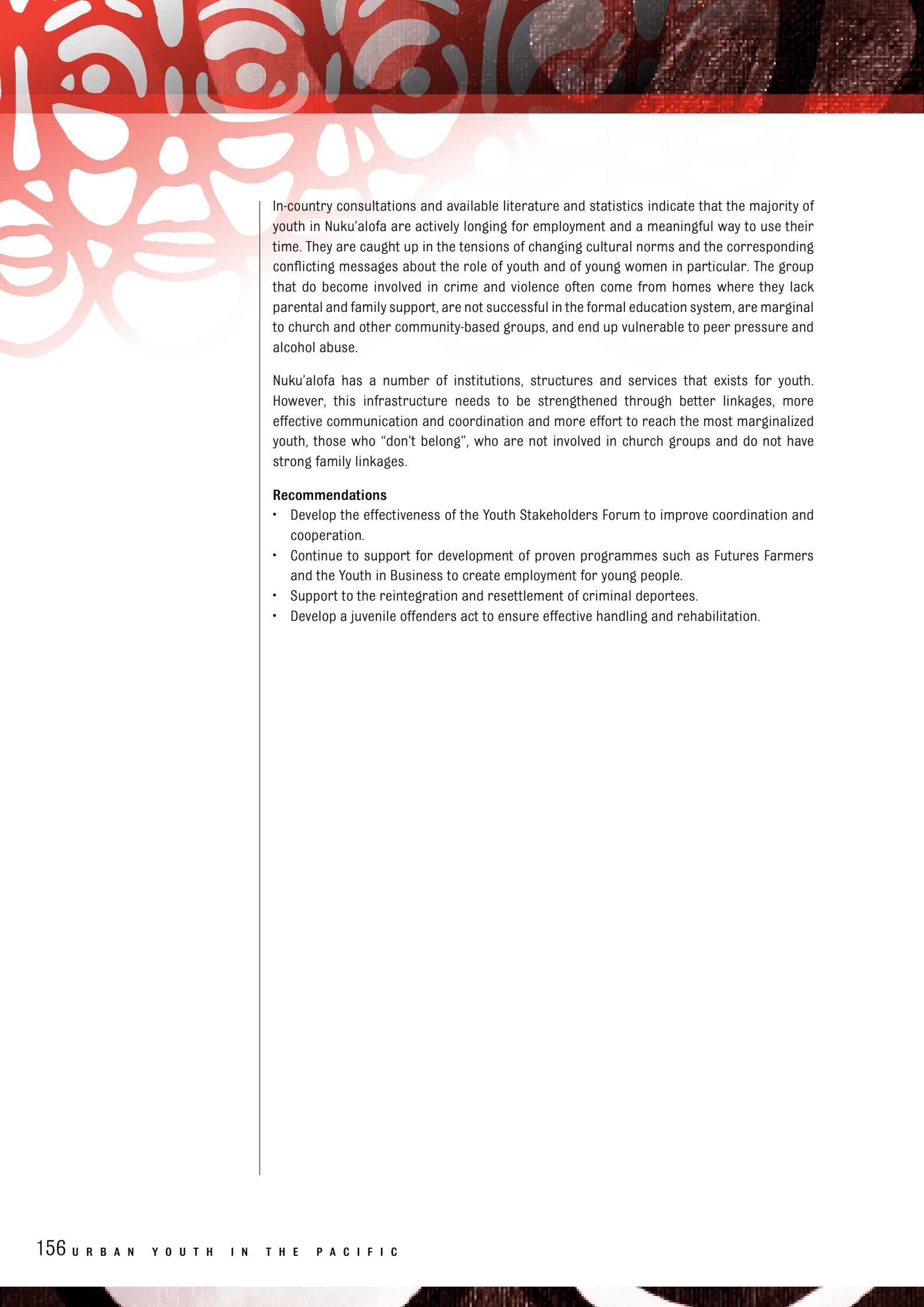
The issue of criminal deportees in Tonga has been tackled by government and a number of civil society organizations. However, to date Tonga continues to require further coordination and assistance to be able to address the adequate reintegration and resettlement of those deported back to Tonga.

## 8.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The majority of young people in Nuku'alofa and surroundings are not involved in crime and violence. A number of resilience factors deter youth from the path of crime and violence and enable them to engage meaningfully in society. These include strong faith networks, opportunities for meaningful engagement including training and employment, and Tonga's high level of literacy and education, which enable students to focus their attention on social and political concerns in the world around them. Furthermore, the traditional collectivist structure of Tongan society, the importance of family reputation, the support of parents and extended families, a strong sense of Tongan values such as family honor and reputation and effective use of traditional structures to manage conflict and support young people to negotiate the complex path to adulthood were also very important enabling factors for success.

<sup>356</sup> Pereira 2011





In-country consultations and available literature and statistics indicate that the majority of youth in Nuku'alofa are actively longing for employment and a meaningful way to use their time. They are caught up in the tensions of changing cultural norms and the corresponding conflicting messages about the role of youth and of young women in particular. The group that do become involved in crime and violence often come from homes where they lack parental and family support, are not successful in the formal education system, are marginal to church and other community-based groups, and end up vulnerable to peer pressure and alcohol abuse.

Nuku'alofa has a number of institutions, structures and services that exists for youth. However, this infrastructure needs to be strengthened through better linkages, more effective communication and coordination and more effort to reach the most marginalized youth, those who “don't belong”, who are not involved in church groups and do not have strong family linkages.

#### **Recommendations**

- Develop the effectiveness of the Youth Stakeholders Forum to improve coordination and cooperation.
- Continue to support for development of proven programmes such as Futures Farmers and the Youth in Business to create employment for young people.
- Support to the reintegration and resettlement of criminal deportees.
- Develop a juvenile offenders act to ensure effective handling and rehabilitation.

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