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CONSUMER PROTECTION AWARENESS PROGRAM UPOLU & SAVAII

OUTCOME REPORT

Background:

The Office of the Regulator (OOTR) in Samoa conducted a first-time collaborative consumer protection roadshow with the local Telecommunication Service Providers (Digicel Samoa and Vodafone Samoa) for both Upolu and Savaii. The collaborated awareness program aimed to empower consumers of their rights and understanding the complaint handling processes for the OOTR, as well as the telecommunication service providers (Telcos). This year's program focused on telecommunication services with other regulated services planned to be rolled out later in the year and coming years. This initiative also aimed to improve the communications between consumers, OOTR, and telcos; provide consumer education on generic services offered by telcos to bridge the consumer expectation gap; efficient complaint resolution, a more informed consumer base, and fostering trust within the telecommunications sector.

Objectives:

The main objectives of the awareness program were:

- i. Increased public awareness of consumer rights in the telecommunications sector;
- ii. Improved understanding by consumers of the complaints handling and dispute resolution processes;
- iii. Enhanced communication and collaboration between consumers, the OOTR, and telecommunication service providers;
- iv. More efficient resolution of consumer complaints within the telecommunications sector;
- v. Increased number of complaints received for better assistance in the monitoring role of the Regulator;
- vi. A better-informed Samoa.

Participants:

A total of 13 districts were chosen and invited for the first roll-out program in both Upolu and Savaii. The participants from the community included Pulenuu, Sui tamaita'i, faafeagaiga and faletua, various matais, aumaga, aualuma and autalavou.

CONSUMER PROTECTION AWARENESS PROGRAM ROADSHOW			
UPOLU & SAVAII			
No.	DATE	DISTRICTS	VENUES
1	Tuesday 4 June 2024	Falealili 1	Village Hall, Poutasi
2	Thursday 6 June 2024	Aleipata Itu I Luga	EFKS Hall, Lalomanu
3	Friday 7 June 2024	Lefaga & Faleseela	Fale o le Komiti, Gagaifolevao
4	Monday 10 June 2024	Aiga I le Tai	Methodist Hall, Salua
5	Tuesday 11 June 2024	Sagaga 4	EFKS Hall, Lotosoa
6	Tuesday 18 June 2024	Vaisigano 2	Sataua - Metotisi Hall
7	Wednesday 19 June 2024	Gagaifomauga 3	Sasina - Fono Faavae
8	Thursday 20 June 2024	Faasaleleaga 1	Sakalafai - Metotisi Hall
9	Friday 21 June 2024	Satupaitea ma Palauli 3	Satupaitea - Falekomiti
10	Thursday 27 June 2024	Anoamaa 1	EFKS Hall, Falefa
11	Thursday 27 June 2024	Vaimauga 1	Tina ma Tamaitai Falekomiti, Laulii
12	Friday 28 June 2024	Falelatai	EFKS Hall, Siufaga
13	Friday 28 June 2024	Faleata 1	EFKS Hall, Alafua

The Regulator, Afioga Lematua Gisa Fuatai Purcell delivered a keynote address on behalf of the Minister of Communication Information and Technology, Hon. Poumulinuku Onosemo, emphasizing the significance of the awareness program. Presentations of 20 minutes or more were presented by each representative from the OOTR, Vodafone, and Digicel company on their roles, functions, and services pertaining to consumer protection.

Discussion:

After the presentations, a Question and Answer (Q&A) session was provided. Numerous issues and complaints were raised during the Q&A session. The key issues raised included high electricity costs, particularly for churches, and challenges with telecommunications services, such as poor signal, rapid data depletion, and inadequate customer service. Participants emphasized the need for clear and accessible information about promotions and pricing, including Samoan translations.

Telecommunications emerged as a primary area of concern. Consumers expressed dissatisfaction with service quality, affordability, and transparency. Issues such as frequent outages, slow Internet speeds, inaccurate billing, and unresponsive customer service were prevalent. The competitive landscape was also a focus, with allegations of limited choices and unfair business practices.

A critical gap identified was consumer awareness of rights and available remedies. Many participants struggled to understand contracts and the complaint process, highlighting the need for improved consumer education and stronger regulations.

Online safety was another significant topic, with parents expressing concerns about children's exposure to inappropriate content. Collaborative efforts between the OOTR, the Ministry of Communication Information and Technology, and service providers aim to address this issue through filtering systems and parental control recommendations.

The program was well-received by Samoan residents, many of whom were unaware of their consumer rights and the role of the OOTR. The initiative fostered communication between consumers and telecommunication companies, laying the groundwork for service improvements and enhanced consumer protection. The cooperation of Digicel Samoa and Vodafone Samoa in supporting this program was instrumental in its success.

Conclusion

Overall, the program served a valuable purpose. The Consumer Protection Awareness Program roadshows concluded with great success and gathered overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants in both Upolu and Savaii. It raised awareness about consumer rights and the role of OOTR in regulating electricity and telecommunication services in Samoa. Many participants expressed appreciation for the program and the opportunity for the first time to learn about the laws that protect them as users of these services. It's important to acknowledge that these services play a vital role in communication and can be incredibly beneficial. However, it's also crucial to recognize the potential problems that can arise from misuse.

By facilitating communication between consumers and telcos, the program helped address existing issues and pave the way for improvements in service delivery and consumer protection. This program also marked the faithful work relations and support of the telcos, Digicel Samoa and Vodafone Samoa to government initiatives and programs in protecting its beloved Samoa.

End

Annexure: Group photo of Participants

Day 1: Falealili



Day 2: Lalomanu



Day 3: Lefaga & Faleseela



Day 4: Aiga I le Tai



Day 5: Sagaga 4



Day 6: Vaisigano 2



Day 7

Gagaifomauga 3



Day 8 Faasaleleaga No.1



Day 9: Satupaitea ma Palauli 3



Day 10: Anoamaa 1



Day 11: Vaimauga 1



Day 12: Falelatai



Day 13: Faleata 1



Program team:

OOTR

- Regulator – Lematua Gisa Fuatai Purcell
- Regulatory and Consumer Services team – Lemalu Venus Iosefa-Salanoa
 - Peti Farani – Principal Regulatory and Consumer Officer
 - Faatalatala Iuli – Principal Regulatory and Consumer Officer
- Legal Services – Li’o Angeline Seiuli
- Technical Division – Su’a Aulaga Faumuina
 - Laufiso Alex Ah Poe – Principal Technical Officer
 - Kingsley Leavasa – Snr IT Officer
- Corporate Services – Patea Pio Bell (driver)
- Executive Assistant – Fialupe Ueese

Vodafone Samoa

- Leuo Alani Faiiai – Chief Technical Officer
- Lemalu Ietitia Sanerivi – Sales and Marketing and Communication
- Eme Sititi Karegua

Digicel Samoa

- Tupu and Rasela – Technician and Customer Care