



Press Release
19 February 2021

Community members from Fatuqueru Village appreciated the attendance of Public Defenders and conveyed their concerns about the high number of cases of child neglect, rape and sexual abuse in their village.

On 11 February 2021 JSMP disseminated information to members of the administrative structure in Fatuqueru Village, Railaco Administrative Post, Ermera Municipality. This dissemination of information activity was attended by sub-village chiefs, village support staff, women's delegates, members of the LGBTIQ community and disabled persons. There were 25 participants, comprising 11 women and 14 men.

The material presented during this dissemination of information activity focused on the role of public defenders in general and the Law Against Domestic Violence, access to formal justice, what constitutes domestic violence, the legal process and how to refer cases of gender-based violence.

The aim of disseminating this information was to share information and increase the knowledge of members of the village administrative structure and community members regarding access to formal justice including the role of public defenders in general and their roles in relation to the Law Against Domestic Violence.

“JSMP believes that the participation of public defenders in JSMP’s information dissemination activity is very important, because to date many communities don’t have a good understand of the role performed by public defenders in general as well as the role of public defenders as provided for in Article 25 of the Law Against Domestic Violence in assisting victims,” said the Executive Director of JSMP, Ms. Ana Paula Marçal.

In the first session Marcia Sarmiento provided a thorough explanation about the role and nature of public defenders, including their work in relation to the rights of women and children. In relation to the role of public defenders in providing legal assistance free of charge to the vulnerable, she suggested for community members to make a complaint to the Office of the Public Defender if public defenders ask for money. She also told participants that the door of the Office of the Public Defender is always open, and public defenders are ready to provide assistance in a range of cases, including land disputes or cases involving women and children, such as divorce, neglect etc.

In the question and answer session, the most common problem that was raised by participants related to what happens to pregnant women when the father of the baby does not want to take responsibility and neglects the child, and the role of public defenders in finding these fathers and the rights of children in cases of divorce. Also, participants raised concerns about cases characterized as domestic violence where women are often the victims.

In response to these concerns the public defender explained that the Office of the Public Defender has many resources to identify fathers by investigating paternity and if a man denies being the father of a baby then a DNA test can be conducted to establish paternity. Also, the public defender provided an explanation about their role in supporting victims in cases of domestic violence according to the Law Against Domestic Violence.

The participants were very happy with the presence of the public defenders because they travelled to their village to share information about the work of public defenders, because they didn't understand the difference between public defenders and private lawyers. They also asked for the public defenders to share the same information to those living in remote areas.

In the second session JSMP explained about access to formal justice, and the participants expressed concerns about the high number of cases involving rape and abuse sexual in their village. In response to these concerns, JSMP explained how to make a complaint in such cases, and also shared the findings of JSMP monitoring at the courts in relation to cases of rape, the sexual abuse of minors as well as other cases characterized as sexual violence where most of the victims are women. In the last session JSMP also shared information about its work in supporting women and children who are victims, as well as access to formal justice.

Fatuqueru Village Chief, Mr. Ricardo M. Soares, in his opening and closing speeches said that he was very happy that JSMP and the public defenders came and provided information about the role of public defenders and how to access formal justice and refer cases, because cases of domestic violence and rape are prevalent in their village, but they don't really know how to process these cases in accordance with the formal system.

Public Defender Marcia Sarmiento in her speech said that she was very happy to share information about the role of the public defender to communities, because to date many communities don't understand the role of public defenders, therefore by disseminating information communities can gain knowledge about the role of public defenders. In addition, Marcia also thanked JSMP for involving the Office of the Public Defender in its dissemination of information activity because this sharing of information is very positive because they are able to meet with communities in person to explain the role of the Office of The Public Defender.

JSMP observed that all of the participants were interested, and they listening intently and engaged in active discussion when they heard the explanations provided by the facilitators.

This dissemination of information activity was made possible with the support of the Spotlight project via UNDP and the European Union.

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