Good morning All.

I am honored to stand before you all this morning and address you all as important stakeholders for the Second Consultative Meeting on the National Compulsory Services Program (NCSP). At the outset, I thank God Almighty from whom come knowledge and understanding for any worthwhile undertaking. I wish to acknowledge and thank the Marape-Rosso Government for the political intent provided for the NCSP and the Department of National Planning and Monitoring (DNPM), through Secretary Samuel and his team, for taking the lead to drive this agenda and providing the opportunity for stakeholders to be involved.

I understand that the First Consultative Meeting was held on 9 June 2023 and from the meeting records, I gathered that it was an extremely useful meeting with important contributions by various stakeholders that attended the meeting.

This Second Consultative Meeting, I am told is aimed at:
1) Appreciating the existing policies and programs relating to NCSP and possible resolutions by Stakeholders;
2) Establishing clarity between DNPM and Key stakeholders’ current policies/programs to ensure synergy on way forward; and
3) Appreciating policies and mechanisms needed going forward.

Ultimately, the meeting expects to:

1) Provide clarity of existing programs/policies/gaps that support NCSP; and
2) Advance collaborative work for umbrella policy formulation and way forward.

In Essence, the NCSP addresses a very important part of our population, the Youth. On this note, let me provide a context to the need for the NCSP from a research or data perspective. According to research by the NRI’s Education Research Program, there are telling baseline data or statistics for youth demography that our country (based on census statistics and Education Department) and they include:

- Out of about 100,000 enrolled in Grade 8, 65% transit to Grade 9, while the remaining 35% are pushed out;
- Out of the 60,000 – 70,000 from Grade 10, only 45% transit to Grade 11, while the remaining 55% are pushed out; and
• For 2019-2022, out of around 30,168 students that complete Grade 12 annually, only around 8,521 thousand are offered admissions at tertiary institutions, meaning around 19,557 (65%) are pushed out (based on DHERST data).

So, the numbers are telling us that although interventions like the Tuition Fee-Free Policy and Government Tuition Fee Subsidy are important interventions in as so far as the providing children or students with access to education, the opportunities for tertiary education is limited and there is a big question as to what happens to those pushed out of the education system. Here in lies the importance of the NCSP.

I understand that the main components of the NCSP are:

1) Ethics and character building as part of Integral Human Development in Youth;

2) Increased focus on entrepreneurship as part of Equality and Participation towards economic growth for empowerment through wealth creation;

3) Responsible focus in Formal Education Systems and Institutions in line with realistic job market needs as well as training for compulsory services and paradigm shift towards entrepreneurship; and
4) Harnessing and engaging youth bulge accumulating in the Informal Sector that’s a ticking time bomb for poverty, social and law and order issues.

In my respectful view, the youth can be viewed as problems or solutions depending how they are perceived and engaged in the society and economy. Should the youth be provided with positive opportunities to be meaningfully involved through programs such as the NSCP or create their own positive opportunities in entrepreneurship, then youth become the powerhouses for solution of economic and social problems.

On the other hand, if the youth see no positive opportunity or create no positive opportunity, then most often than not, they will be involved in or create negative opportunities for themselves such as the rampant criminal activities that are eating away the peace and security of our society and economy.

So, as we go through this consultative meeting, let us be mindful of the fact that we are presented with two very different scenarios. That is, the subject of our meeting today, our young people, can be either one of the following:

(1) A social and economic ticking time bomb that will explode out of control in our faces if we do not manage it well; OR
(2) An opportunity for us to shape a framework that will produce ethical and entrepreneurial citizens whether they are in the formal or informal sector.

Let us note the former but more importantly take action on the latter because we must believe that the NCSP is a mechanism to provide an environment for creating positive opportunity for the youth, whether those that have been recently pushed out of the education system or those already involved in the informal economy.

So, the presence of all the core agencies and stakeholders today and the views and strategies that you will present to make the NCSP work is of utmost importance because you become agents of change for the better and agents of positive opportunity for the youth.

With regards to the Formal Education System, it must educate with existing job markets in mind. It may be necessary to do a paradigm shift and to educate most of our youth to make use of resources already available for self-employment and to consider tools for development into entrepreneurs as opposed to job seekers. This is where we stem the tide of job-seekers and frustrations with limited jobs on-hand. Formal Education System through Religious Instruction (RI), cadetship training, guidance lessons, and other ethics and character-building programs must have the resilience to withstand peer pressure and forge their own productive, profitable and ethical pathways.
This meeting is a vital part of a collective, collaborative effort towards harnessing our youth and the future of Papua New Guinea through the NCSP.

Coming from a Research Institute, I wish to emphasise the importance of research and information for informed decision-making. That is that the NCSP and any related program or policy intervention must be based on research based data and information. The quality of every decision we make, depends on the set of information we possess at any one point in time so it pays to have good evidence based information to make good decisions. On this note, at the NRI, we look forward to the outcomes of the meeting and contributing to advancing the objectives of the NCSP, especially from a research perspective.

In closing, I thank the Department of National Planning and Monitoring for taking the lead role and facilitating the first consultative meeting and this second one now. We all must work together to make NCSP work. Together we can!

Thank you all and God Bless the Youth and God bless Papua New Guinea.