



Regional Workshop for Pacific Parliaments

Modern Parliaments: The Pacific Perspective

7-8 November 2013

Nuku'alofa, Tonga

Outcomes Statement

On 7 and 8 November 2013, Speakers, parliamentarians and representatives from the parliaments of Australia, Bougainville, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Tuvalu, together with the representatives of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), met in Nuku'alofa, Tonga to discuss the evolving role of parliamentarians in a modern world. The meeting was made possible through substantial financial assistance from the Australian aid program, the IPU, UNDP and the Centre for Democratic Institutions.

The participants outlined several key issues of relevance to Pacific Island parliaments, including the professional development of parliamentarians, services for parliamentarians, international engagement and regional cooperation, and strategies for parliaments to improve their responsiveness to gender equality issues.

At the meeting, recognising the specific cultural circumstances and context of each Pacific Island nation, and responding to the changing regional environment, agreement was reached on the following key points to guide action in support of democratic development in the Pacific region.

Professional development of parliamentarians

1. Skills development needs to be ongoing throughout a parliamentarian's career and should be supported through both formal development opportunities such as workshops and seminars and through more informal channels, such as mentoring.
2. Development programs need to take into account the specific circumstances of each parliament and the environment in which the parliament operates.
3. Mentoring should be encouraged, so that parliamentarians have the opportunity to get advice from those who have experience with a particular issue, and mentoring programs should provide the opportunity for parliamentarians to access a range of mentors.
4. Specific areas of need in the Pacific include IT skills development, understanding of the legal framework in which parliamentarians operate, and training and development in the preparation of submissions and proposals that support community projects.
5. Recognise that individual parliamentarians may have specific training needs that are better supported through tailored training programs rather than activities that target large groups of parliamentarians.

6. Encourage Pacific parliamentarians to build networks of advisers within their communities who can assist them in better understanding issues of national significance.
7. Use subject matter experts to assist MPs to better understand the detail of specific issues they have to deal with as parliamentarians.
8. Establish a code of conduct for parliamentarians to guide them in their responsibilities as the elected representatives of the people.

Services for parliamentarians

9. Access to IT equipment is vital and should be part of the services provided to parliamentarians on their election to parliament, including at the minimum a phone and computer they can use for official parliamentary business.
10. Governments should involve local MPs in helping to define the priorities for service delivery in local communities.
11. Develop the capacity of parliamentary staff to provide research support to MPs, including through a well-resourced parliamentary library.
12. Pursue mechanisms through which MPs might be able to access suitable support staff to assist with community development in their constituencies.
13. In working towards an effective research service for Pacific parliaments, pursue the proposal for a regional research service supported by the Australian and New Zealand parliamentary libraries, as first trialled following the Meeting of Pacific Parliaments in August 2010.
14. Address the need for a constituency focal point for parliamentarians, such as a constituency office, to provide a direct access point for constituents to their elected representatives.
15. To seek an increase in the limited resources currently provided to parliamentarians to fulfill their representative functions, engage in a frank dialogue with governments.

Regional Engagement

16. Pacific parliaments should engage in discussions on key regional issues, such as Oceans Policy, and make resolutions to be further considered at regional forums and dialogues.
17. Recognising the ongoing support being provided to Pacific parliaments through the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), the Australian federal, state and territory parliaments, the New Zealand Parliament and the aid programs of the Australian and New Zealand governments, encourage continued cooperation among these organisations and institutions to ensure effective capacity building as part of a united effort in the region.
18. Recognise good examples of regional parliamentary cooperation and development such as the efforts of the parliaments of New Caledonia and Timor Leste.

19. Support the ongoing delivery of direct parliament to parliament initiatives through Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships to facilitate a cooperative approach to the development of parliamentary democracy throughout the Pacific region.

Gender-sensitive Parliaments

20. Promote the community outreach strategies of parliaments to ensure that all groups in society, men and women, are able to voice their concerns to parliamentarians.
21. Review existing laws so that they encourage gender equality. Where no policies or legislation exist, women's organisations could be included in the preparation of legislation for parliament to consider.
22. Develop and disseminate voter information and awareness campaigns on the issue of gender equality, not only to encourage women to vote, but to empower women and build their confidence to run for parliament. Gender equality awareness campaigns could also be promoted through school programs to showcase women's leadership abilities.
23. Enhance links between parliament and non-government organisations, including women's groups. One option could be to appoint a liaison or contact person at the parliament to work with these groups.
24. Encourage balanced media reporting of men's and women's parliamentary work on gender equality.
25. Women's caucuses can be effective in providing research and gender analysis of legislation, as demonstrated by the parliament of Timor-Leste.
26. With the goal of eventually establishing strong mechanisms for gender mainstreaming such as dedicated gender equality committees, existing parliamentary mechanisms be used to ensure that different groups are invited to make submissions and attend public hearings on proposed legislation.
27. Men should play a key role, and participate, in gender equality events, such as International Women's Day.
28. Acknowledge various options to increase the participation of women in parliament in the Pacific region, including by appointments (Tonga and the Cook Islands), reserved seats (Bougainville) guaranteed seats (Samoa), and legislative candidate quotas (Timor-Leste).
29. Encourage mentoring arrangements that involve both men and women in supporting women's participation in parliament.
30. Support cultural values and perspectives that recognise women's place in the houses of parliament. Momentum for change on gender equality in the region has already begun and parliamentarians have a responsibility to foster it.

8 November 2013