

Return on training investment in parliaments: The need for change in the Pacific region

ABSTRACT

There is a growing agreement amongst development stakeholders that parliaments are among the most important engines for economic development and growth. They also establish the laws by which a society is governed. It follows then that any initiative aimed at building the capacities of parliaments across the world is of paramount importance. While there are a number of strategies that have been used to strengthen parliaments, training has been lauded as one of the most important for it has the potential to provide on-going capacities to parliaments. Accepting this argument, a number of training providers such as the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) have been actively engaged in providing training programs to Pacific parliaments targeting primarily MPs. However, even after providing these training programs for over a decade at a cost of millions of dollars, Pacific parliaments are still widely regarded as weak. This raises the question: Are training providers, training the right people? Using a multi-case design that includes five Pacific parliaments, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu, the author suggests that training providers in the Pacific region should give priority to parliamentary staff rather than members of parliaments.

As governance is crucial for determining development and economic growth (Pelizzo, 2010; Power, 2008), development stakeholders such as the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), have in recent years increasingly turned their focus toward promoting good governance in developing countries. Initially, these efforts were primarily concentrated on either executive governments and their departments and/or on civil society organisations (Beahan, Andrew, Bourne, & Callan, 2010; Hudson & Wren, 2007). However, the general recognition that parliaments hold a central position in the governance process (Hudson & Wren, 2007), has meant that parliamentary strengthening, otherwise referred in this paper as improving parliamentary performances, has been given priority in recent years. Note that parliamentary performance in this paper explained by the ability of parliaments to soundly perform their representative, legislative and oversight roles (Hudson & Wren, 2007, p. 4).

The rationale behind the need to strengthen parliaments stems from the impact parliaments have on promoting good governance through overseeing executive governments and their departments thereby improving their overall conduct (Beahan, et al., 2010; Pelizzo, 2010). This in turn is associated, among other things, with providing a smooth attainment of development and economic growth to relevant countries (Beahan, et al., 2010; Keuleers, 2004). This argument is consistent with a study by Beahan et al., (2010), which reports a strong correlation between effective parliaments, governance and outcomes that can reduce poverty and improve the living standards of citizens. Parliamentary strengthening can therefore be viewed as a necessary condition for both good governance and its many outcomes such as economic growth and development in countries around the world, including Pacific countries.

In a bid to promote governance in the Pacific region, parliamentary stakeholders such as the CDI have been for the past decade, attempting to strengthen Pacific parliaments through, among other approaches, providing training to members of parliament (MPs) in these parliaments (Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2011). In this sense, training is aimed at improving the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) of the main players in Pacific parliaments; MPs and parliamentary staff (Beahan, et al., 2010). This idea, supported by other international agencies such as the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), has also been echoed by the Parliament of Australia (2010), which has recently recommended that there be a coordinated effort aimed at formulating training programs to strengthen Pacific parliaments.

Despite massive spending, amounting to approximately 50 millions of dollars by international donors, including the Government of Australia, (Dinnen, 2004; Hayward-Jones, 2008; Hughes, 2003; Payne, 2007), efforts to strengthen Pacific parliaments have largely failed to produce desired outcomes. Indeed, even though Pacific parliaments have undergone training for over a decade, they are still widely considered by many political commentators (e.g. Larmour & Barcham, 2006; Meleisea, 2005; Morgan, 2005a; Pelizzo, 2010; Robert, Wright, & O'Neill, 2007) to be generally weak. Saldanha (2004, p. 32), indicated that the reason behind this

failure can be traced to the fact that most of training programs provided to Pacific parliaments are too "shallow and inadequate" to induce improved performance in parliaments. Seven years on, the interview results from the current study further confirm Saldanha's argument, as it is going to be demonstrated later in this paper.

One of the options that could be used to redress this failure is improving the rigour in the design, delivery and evaluation of training programs provided to Pacific MPs. In the view of high turnover of Pacific MPs in every election (Connell, 2006; Panapa & Fraenkel, 2008) and distinctions in local cultural contexts, including language issues (Boege, Brown, Clements, & Nolan, 2008; Richardson, 2009) which vary throughout the region, focusing training programs on Pacific parliamentary staff in the first instance has the potential to produce a greatly improved training impact as it offers a longer-term solution towards strengthening Pacific parliaments. This is because, effective training of Pacific parliamentary staff would enhance their ability to provide improved technical support to MPs, would help address the problem of institutional memory that arises from the high turnover of MPs in Pacific parliaments and would enable parliamentary staff to act as trainers to Pacific MPs. In summary, the shortness of parliamentary careers in the region necessitates the need for competent, skilled parliamentary staff to assist in the training of MPs.

It is against this background that this paper examines the current approach to providing training in five Pacific parliaments, with some reference to other comparable parliaments. It does so by identifying, analysing and evaluating the competencies of Pacific parliamentary staff, the average length of time Pacific MPs serve and the need to involve Pacific parliamentary staff in designing, delivering and evaluating training programs provided to their respective parliaments. Ultimately, this paper argues for more concentration on the training on parliamentary staff in order to achieve a more significant impact on the training and performances of Pacific MPs and their respective parliaments. Importantly, while this paper focuses on the above mentioned parliaments, the arguments it raises are relevant to other developing countries both in the Pacific region and beyond.

The Theoretical Framework for Training Parliamentary Staff

The view that training parliamentary actors can potentially strengthen Pacific parliaments is strongly supported by the literature in both adult education and training fields (as depicted by scholars such as Delahaye, 2000; Peterson & Provo, 2000) and that in the Human Resources Development (HRD) field (as shown by authors such as Ahmad & Schroeder, 2003; Tharenou, Saks, & Moore, 2007). Indeed, the theoretical logic found in these fields of study suggests the potential existence of a positive relationship between training parliamentary actors, such as parliamentary staff and improvement in performances of their respective parliaments (Orton, Marcella, & Baxter, 2000). Consistent with these theories, recent studies in the Ghanaian national parliament (Stapenhurst, 2004) and the Bangladesh national parliament (Hossain, 2004) indicate that training in parliaments can improve performances at both individual (MPs and parliamentary staff) and parliamentary levels.

Note however that staff in parliaments are generally categorised into two major groups namely procedural and administrative parliamentary staff (Besly, 2010; Reynolds, 2003). Just like in other organisations, professional development of parliamentary staff has traditionally involved formal and/or informal training, while parliamentary staff continue to perform their day to day duties and responsibilities (McClelland, 2006). Nevertheless, unique especially to procedural parliamentary staff is the fact that unlike employees in other organisations, training in parliaments does not build on the knowledge that these staff may have acquired in their past academic endeavours (McClelland, 2006). For instance, parliamentary procedural staff who provide technical support to chambers and parliamentary committees, do not necessarily possess prior academic qualifications on parliamentary standing orders and procedures (McClelland, 2006). This reality coupled with the fact that parliamentary staff require some level of specialist KSAs in order to effectively and efficiently perform their roles and responsibilities (McClelland, 2006), necessitates that there be deliberate efforts aimed at exposing them to continuing professional development programs if training has to have significant impact on their

performances. The point here is that, continuing professional development has been successfully used in parliaments around the world to equip parliamentary staff with specialised KSAs which they in turn use to enhance performances of MPs in their respective parliaments.

How should Training be undertaken?

This paper has demonstrated why Pacific parliamentary staff, need access to more training and the theoretical framework underpinning the need for such a move. It is also important to address how the actual training could best be undertaken. Specifically, the author proposes the inclusion of Pacific parliamentary staff in the now Australian and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table (ANZACATT). Consequently, much of the discussions in this section will focus on ANZACATT. However, this approach should not be taken as advocating for a replacement of training programs that already exist in Pacific parliaments. Rather, the author is arguing for an additional measure that complements existing training programs that focus on parliamentary staff.

In recognition of the important role parliamentary staff play in ensuring the smooth operations of parliaments, Australia and New Zealand governments, which are arguably the most advanced countries in the Pacific region (Stringer, 2006), constantly expose their parliamentary staff to various forms of training programs (Johnson, 2008; McClelland, 2006). Traditionally though, training of parliamentary staff in these two countries has mainly been in the form of on-job training with career progression determined largely by the longevity of a particular staff member's career (McClelland, 2006). However, the need for creating specialised KSAs amongst parliamentary staff has necessitated the need for more structured training programs in the two countries and that need resulted into the formation of ANZACATT in 2001 (McClelland, 2006).

Generally, ANZACATT plays a central role in ensuring parliamentary staff in Australia, New Zealand are equipped with KSAs that can enable them to soundly perform their duties (Besly, 2010; Johnson, 2008). Specifically, ANZACATT was

established to promote ongoing professional development of clerks and parliamentary staff in Australia and New Zealand and to enhance the knowledge and principles of parliamentary systems and procedures including the administrative competencies necessary for the smooth operation of the said parliaments (Johnson, 2008). In addition, ANZACATT publishes a bi-annual bulletin covering reports on procedural and administrative issues which may be of interests to parliamentary staff. (Johnson, 2008).

The formation of ANZACATT revolutionised professional development of parliamentary staff in Australia and New Zealand as it fostered the realisation of the need to have additional and more coordinated training programs to supplement in house training programs that traditionally have been the mainstay in the two parliaments (McClelland, 2006). To achieve its objectives, ANZACATT trains parliamentary staff in two distinct ways, which the author suggests they could extend to benefit Pacific parliamentary staff, should ANZACATT accommodate them in their programs. These are addressed in more detail below.

Firstly, ANZACATT provides a two-day annual seminar and workshop to its membership (Johnson, 2008). This seminar covers some important areas such as parliamentary procedures, practices and management as well as administrative matters (Johnson, 2008; McClelland, 2006). It also provides an important platform for parliamentary staff to share unique experiences and the challenges they face in their respective parliaments. The point here is that, if invited to these seminars, Pacific parliamentary staff would not only be able to learn about issues pertaining to parliamentary procedures, practices, management and administration but also be able to share their experiences with their counterparts from more advanced parliaments who may potentially assist them to better address their daily challenges.

Secondly, ANZACATT sponsors a short course in Parliamentary Law, Practice and Procedure (PLPP) which is conducted at the Queensland University of Technology (Johnson, 2008). The PLPP course covers areas such as the effects of the constitution, separation of power, membership of parliament, election and appeal, structure and function of parliament, powers and privileges of legislative chambers,

parliamentary/committees investigations, committees systems and parliamentary practice and procedures (Johnson, 2008; McClelland, 2006). Apart from the legislative drafting course provided at the Athabasca University in Canada, the PLPP course is the only known formal course provided to parliamentary staff, the world over (McClelland, 2006).

As a requirement for being awarded a certificate, parliamentary staff admitted to the PLPP course, are generally assessed by tutorial questions, presentations as well as being expected to write a research paper of up to 5,000 words (McClelland, 2006). The successful completion of the course has been since 2006 credited towards a Graduate Certificate in Law at the Queensland University of Technology and in other Australian Universities (Johnson, 2008). Once again Pacific parliamentary staff could benefit from making use of the PLPP course. Importantly, this course will not only equip Pacific parliamentary staff with some much needed specialised parliamentary expertise (KSAs), but also it can potentially reverse the high turnover of Pacific parliamentary staff in search of more attractive jobs that, among other things, provide studying opportunities for the Pacific region (such as Morgan, 2005a) seem to suggest.

It is important for Pacific parliamentary staff to be allowed to attend both the annual seminars and the PLPP course as the two are complimentary. While the two days annual seminars are less formal and flexible, the PLPP course meets academic standards by virtue of being more structured with pre-determined measures of desired outcomes (McClelland, 2006). Whereas the seminars serve to provide a less formal and flexible, adult education style of learning, the PLPP course provides for measurable outcomes that can be used to assess the actual level of KSAs transfer that participating parliamentary staff manage to absorb by the end of the course.

Finally, in addition to inviting Pacific parliamentary staff to attend ANZACATT programs, parliamentary training providers in the region should prepare these staff to be trainers of their MPs. This should necessarily include training on how to design, evaluate and review training programs aimed at Pacific MPs. To avoid cultural conflicts and other issues that could compromise effectiveness of these training

programs, training providers should at all times seek to as much as it is practically possible engage Pacific parliamentary staff in designing the programs.

Research Methods

This study which broadly examines the design, delivery and evaluation of training programs provided in Pacific parliaments, was done using a multiple case design (Yin, 2009). It uses Yin's (2009) logic that treats cases as a series of experiments in which case each case serves to confirm or disconfirm inferences drawn from others.

The study has included a total of five Pacific parliaments. These included, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu parliaments. As table 1 below shows, the parliament studied were selected to generally represent, the major types of constitutional models, types of parliament (Banks, Muller, Overstreet, & Isacoff, 2010) and the main ethnic groupings within the Pacific region itself (Bartlett & Rodgers, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 63 MPs and three clerks from the above mentioned Pacific parliaments. For the sake of consistency, only MPs from lower houses were interviewed. In addition to MPs and clerks, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with training providers working for and/or on behalf of the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), two of the main organisations responsible for capacity building in the sampled Pacific parliaments (Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2011; United Nations Development Program, 2011).

The semi-structured interviews were centred on finding whether training programs provided to case parliaments resulted in a significant and positive impact on the performances of Pacific MPs and their respective parliaments. The interviews sought to find if there was a common ground on which strategies could be devised to

make training more effective in the region. To allow for triangulation (Yin, 2009), the study made use of literature covering parliamentary training in the region.

Table 1: Parliament Studied

Country Name	Number of Interviewees (MPs)	Total Number of MPs in a Parliament	Type of Regime	Type of Parliament	The Main Ethnic Makeup
Marshall Islands	13	33	Modified parliamentary system	Bicameral parliament	Micronesia
Papua New Guinea	11	109	Modified parliamentary regime	Unicameral parliament	Melanesia
Timor-Leste	13	65	Semi-presidential regime	Unicameral parliament	N/A*
Tonga	11	26	Hereditary constitutional monarchy	Unicameral parliament	Polynesia
Vanuatu	15	52	Semi-presidential regime	Unicameral parliament	Melanesia
Total number of Interviewees	63	*The inclusion of Timor-Leste in the sample is based on the fact that it forms a part of Pacific region as per AusAID, a partner organisation to this project.			

Following Creswell's approach (2009), content analysis was used to interrogate the collected data based on themes such as effectiveness of training in impacting performances of MPs and their respective case parliaments. Also, using Freeman's methodology (1983), performances were measured by the extent to

which perceptions of MPs provided reliable and valid measures of MPs' performances and that of case parliaments, including reasons that contributed to such performances. The data was therefore analysed by carefully observing patterns that emanated from multi-case examination.

The Impact of Training in Performances of Pacific MPs and their Parliaments

The outcome of the analysis shown by Table 2 below suggest that training programs in Pacific parliaments have largely failed to attain their intended objectives. On average, 76% of the interviewees believe that training programs in the region lack depth and fail to bring about a significant and positive change in the performances of MPs and that of their respective parliaments. As explained above, this outcome is consistent with Saldanha's (2004) observations that training programs in the region are too shallow and inadequate to effect any significant change the way MPs perform their roles.

Table 2: Training and Performances of Pacific MPs and their Parliament

Country (Parliament)	Percentage of MPs Perceiving a Significant Impact of Training on their Individual Performances	Percentage of MPs Perceiving a Significant Impact of Training on Performance of their Parliament
Marshall Islands	38	31
Papua New Guinea	9	23
Timor-Leste	15	15
Tonga	36	45
Vanuatu	18	7

Various reasons were provided by the interviewees when attempting to explain the poor impact of training programs in the case parliaments. These included, but were not limited to: (i) failure of training programs to consider differences in education and working experience amongst MPs (ii) Training sessions being viewed as too short and too irregular for them to have any impact (iii) training being provided on ad hoc basis making them shallow (iv) duplication of training programs by training providers making training too monotonous (v) the lack of training needs assessment prior to preparing training content making training content too general and sometimes not relevant to cultural and constitutional contexts (vi) lack of rigorous training program evaluations (vii) language barriers for most MPs who are not fluent in English, the language that is mostly used by training providers when delivering training to Pacific parliaments and (viii) lack of adequate technical support from parliamentary staff.

While as shown above, different factors explain the failure of training programs to have significant impact on the performance in Pacific parliaments, the case by case analysis suggests that the inability of Pacific parliamentary staff to provide sound technical support and advice to MPs is a common feature to all the case parliaments. It is not surprising then that 77% of the interviewed Timorese MPs, 67% of the Vanuatu MPs, 62% of Marshallese MPs, 64% of Tongan MPs and 64% of PNG MPs strongly advocated the need for urgent change in the way training programs are provided in Pacific parliaments. Specifically, these MPs advocate for more training programs to be made available to parliamentary staff.

Why Pacific Parliamentary Staff ought to get access to more Training? The Benefits

Several themes that capture the benefits that can be associated with allowing training programs to target more parliamentary staff in Pacific parliaments have been identified. Consequently, this section identifies and analyses the potentially improved competencies (KSAs) that can be acquired by Pacific parliamentary staff as a direct result of being exposed to continuous professional development. These competencies include the ability of Pacific parliamentary staff to: (i) provide technical

support to their MPs (ii) provide institutional memory to parliaments and the ability of Parliamentary staff to (iii) actively engage in designing, delivering as well as evaluating improved professional development programs intended for Pacific MPs. These competencies are discussed in details below.

The rationale behind training parliamentary staff stems from the fact that when well equipped with specialised KSAs, they can potentially enhance the ability of MPs to perform their duties and responsibilities more effectively and thereby strengthening the parliaments they work for (Romzek & Utter, 1997). This is because parliamentary staff, equipped with specialised KSAs, can provide technical support to MPs and the much needed continuity or institutional memory to parliaments (Besly, 2010; Romzek & Utter, 1997).

With regards to providing technical support, parliamentary staff such as those in Pacific parliaments, can use their expertise (KSAs) to ensure that legislative processes undertaken by MPs run smoothly. One of the ways they can do this is by providing non-partisan confidential advice to MPs (Besly, 2010; Thomas, 2003). For instance, Besly (2010) states that all principal parliamentary players in the Australia's House of Representatives such as ministers, shadow ministers, other members of the opposition, backbenchers and independent MPs, draw parliamentary law advice from the Office of the Clerk. This seems to be a common practice for parliamentary staff in most other parliamentary democracies. For example, parliamentary staff in Canada, through the Office of the Clerk of House of Commons are also responsible for assisting MPs including the speaker on matters concerning interpretation of rules, precedents, practice and all other parliamentary procedural matters including keeping the records of all parliamentary proceedings (Besly, 2010). The central position of parliamentary staff is even more pronounced in the US' Congress in which case according to Romzek and Utter (1997), virtually nothing is done by the MPs exclusive of parliamentary staff. While the situation in the US' Congress is not comparable to most other parliaments in the world, it remains that when equipped with specialised KSAs, parliamentary staff such as those in the Pacific parliaments can play an important role in ensuring the smooth functioning of parliaments across the world by the virtue of providing technical support and advice to MPs.

Another possible benefit that can be realised from increasing training to Pacific parliamentary staff stems from the fact that they can potentially represent continuity or institutional memory in Pacific parliaments (Thomas, 2003). As rightfully suggested by Romzek and Utter (1997), parliamentary staff represent continuity in parliaments in that their careers are more stable than MPs as they are not subject to re-elections. This continuity is important as it provides adequate competencies necessary to counter-balance expertise readily available in executive governments (Besly, 2010; Romzek & Utter, 1997). For instance, parliamentary staff in Australia's Senate are responsible for managing parliament's resources such as libraries (Besly, 2010). Similarly, Reynolds (2003), reports that parliamentary staff in the Northern Ireland Assembly provide institutional memory to both the MPs and the Northern Ireland's public on matters pertaining to parliaments. The point here is, as custodians of institutional memory, parliamentary staff provide a cushion for lost KSAs when experienced MPs lose their re-election bids given the potential shortness of parliamentary careers. This role may be especially important in Pacific parliaments as they experience one of the highest rates of turnover in the world averaging at more than 50% in each election (Connell, 2006; Morgan, 2005b). The need to train parliamentary staff to counter the effects of the high turnover of MPs was roundly supported by the training providers interviewed who expressed their frustration about potentially wasted training they time and again invest in MPs who then do not win a seat at the next election. Their arguments were also reflected by one of the interviewed Timorese MPs who pointed out that training programs should be concentrated to parliamentary staff. He stressed that, "training MPs cannot help significantly because of high turnover in the parliament".

Increased training of Pacific parliamentary staff can also ensure that there is sustainability and local ownership of training programs intended for Pacific MPs both in terms of design and delivery. In other words, training of parliamentary staff can be used as a means to prepare them as future trainers in Pacific parliaments should the current foreign-supported arrangements be considerably reduced or cease to exist. This idea is strongly backed by Morgan and Hegarty (2003), who argue that for the sake of sustainability of training programs in Pacific parliaments, training providers

should aim to develop training templates that can be easily used by Pacific parliamentary staff who should in turn train MPs in the Pacific region. This argument is consistent with suggestions provided by one of the prominent Pacific parliaments' trainers who pointed out during interview that "external providers should aim to equip locals. The aim should be sustainability of the programs". In addition, the argument was echoed by one of the interviewed Pacific parliaments' clerks who pointed out that "Training MPs alone does not allow for retention of knowledge in parliaments. If trained as trainers, parliamentary staff can help in ensuring sustainability in Pacific parliaments".

Training Pacific parliamentary staff to take over the mantle of training Pacific MPs, has the potential to make training programs cheaper and more demand-driven as providers would be local parliamentary staff already on the pay roll of Pacific parliaments. Training programs also will be demand-driven because by being part of the parliament, parliamentary staff, have the potential to better identify areas of weakness in their parliaments that training programs could address. This is important since during interviews, MPs from all five Pacific parliaments repeatedly expressed their frustrations on the fact that most training programs are given on ad hoc basis using training materials that may apply to advanced parliaments such as those in Australia and New Zealand but not necessarily to Pacific parliaments.

Reflecting this argument, one of the interviewed Tongan MP lamented that training provided to them is "too general because it is highly borrowed from New Zealand and Australian model of parliaments". This sentiment was again expressed by one of the prominent trainers in the region who pointed out that, "training should be tailor-made for specific parliaments and this is the major reason as to why locals should be involved in training programs design so as to avoid gaps". The view by Pacific MPs about ad hoc driven training programs is also reflected by Saldana (2004) who points out that training programs provided to Pacific MPs are designed and delivered without training needs assessment being conducted. The presence of unique features within each Pacific parliament, suggest that local trainers such as parliamentary staff may be in a better position to understand MPs needs and to address them during training delivery sessions than external trainers. Transferring or

initially involving Pacific parliamentary staff in designing training programs is a way forward.

In addition, Pacific parliamentary staff have an advantage over external training providers in that they are locals. This can be explained in two ways. Firstly, the ability of parliamentary staff to speak local languages such as Tetun in Timor-Leste or Bislama in Vanuatu has the potential to ensure that Pacific MPs understand fully what is being delivered during training sessions. Indeed interviewed MPs particularly those from Timor-Leste and Vanuatu, overwhelmingly pointed out language (English) barriers as one of the biggest hindrances to them acquiring KSAs during training sessions. For instance, one of the interviewed Vanuatu MP suggested that, “external trainers should pass their materials to local trainers who speak Bislama to conduct it because that is the only language that all of the MPs understand fully”. It follows therefore that the use of parliamentary staff that are fluent in the local languages would be extremely beneficial. Secondly, being familiar to MPs in their parliaments, parliamentary staff may provide for the best possible trainers. This is because MPs may feel more comfortable asking questions during training sessions than they would with a complete stranger speaking in a language foreign to them. Indeed one of the interviewed Vanuatu MPs lamented that he could not understand anything from the training session and was shy to ask any question because “it was given in English” while he is a French speaker.

Another benefit that can be realised from engaging parliamentary staff as trainers can be explained by the need to avoid duplication of training programs provided by ‘competing’ training programs that are offered by international organisations in Pacific parliaments. As one of training provider put it, “the problem here is that training providers compete for funds so they can provide training in Pacific parliaments. The emphasis is on getting funds at the expense of other training providers therefore it does not matter whether training programs are duplicated or not”. As evidence to this astonishing statement, considerable number of the interviewed Pacific MPs complained during interviews that they are tired of being taught about standing orders. For instance, one of the interviewed Marshallese MP pointed out that duplicated training programs on standing orders and codes of

conduct are frustratingly too general. He further argued that standing orders and codes of conducts are “very different across parliaments in the world and therefore when training, training providers have to ask themselves how their materials apply to the Nitijela”. Arguably, the use of parliamentary staff as trainers can easily remove the duplication of training programs and eliminate the ‘competition for funding’ that currently keeps various international organisations ‘busy’, to borrow the phrase used by one of their own.

Also training Pacific parliamentary staff effectively may enhance their ability to constantly monitor, evaluate and eventually assist in reviewing training programs provided to Pacific MPs. As one of the interviewed Timorese MPs argued, “There must be a mechanism to constantly measure the performance of the parliament to be in place for there to be improvements in performances of MPs and parliament”. It should be noted that the lack of monitoring, evaluation and review mechanisms in training program available in Pacific parliaments, is probably the single biggest reason why the impact of training programs in the parliaments is negligible. This is because same programs, which have over the years failed to produce any significant impact in the region, are recycled year in year out. It is not, therefore, surprising to see that the impact of these programs is to say the least poor. The training of parliamentary staff to monitor, evaluate and review training programs will thus enhance the potency of these programs in the longer turn.

In sum, the literature covering Pacific parliaments overwhelmingly supports the idea of training parliamentary staff in the region (Mellor & Jabes, 2004; Morgan & Hegarty, 2003). Indeed according to Morgan and Hegarty (2003), more emphasis should be placed on the possibility of involving more Pacific parliamentary staff in designing training programs. They further argue that when strengthening the capacity of Pacific parliaments, not just MPs but parliamentary staff should be included (Morgan & Hegarty, 2003). This is because the reliance of international experts in some Pacific parliaments is not sustainable (Mellor & Jabes, 2004).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explain why, despite the provision of various training programs to Pacific MPs; their performances have not significantly improved. Because there is high turnover of MPs in every election in the Pacific region, coupled with factors such as language barriers and cultural issues that inhibit the smooth transfer of KSAs to MPs during training provider forums, this paper has argued for a re-think of training strategies. Specifically, it argues for a change in approach. Rather than concentrating primarily just on MPs, future training programs should significantly increase training provided to Pacific parliamentary staff so as to enable them to more ably assist MPs to perform their duties effectively.

One has to acknowledge the fact that the difficulties of culture and language barrier that face Pacific MPs during training may also arise when training Pacific parliamentary staff. It is thus suggested that training providers should try to address these issues in a comprehensive way and in consultation with Pacific parliamentary staff in order to find an effective way to overcome these pertinent issues in designing and delivering future programs.

The argument for availing more training to Pacific parliamentary staff, as raised in this paper, should not, in any way, be interpreted as arguing for less access to training for Pacific MPs. Instead, the point that this paper is making is that training MPs can only yield maximum outcomes if their acquired KSAs are complimented with adequate technical support from parliamentary staff. In other words, equipping Pacific parliamentary staff is only valid up to the point where their acquired specialised KSAs, can augment those that MPs already possess. This is important because in the end, one has to argue that it is MPs and not parliamentary staff that ultimately are the main actors in parliaments and Pacific parliaments are no exception to this conventional understanding.

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