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Return on Training Investment in Parliaments: The Need for Change in the Pacific Region

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Despite substantial investment in training in Pacific parliaments, which has continued for more than a decade, parliamentary performance for many countries in the region has barely improved. Indeed, Pacific parliaments are still widely regarded as weak. The inability of training programmes to improve parliamentary performance in several areas of the Pacific led the researcher to query whether training providers are concentrating their resources on the right people. Using a multi-case design that used interviews in five Pacific parliaments—Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu—the author argues that training providers should give priority to parliamentary staff rather than members of parliaments.

1. Introduction

There has been substantial investment in the training of Pacific[1] parliaments for more than a decade, by donors such as the Australian Government and the United Nations Development Program (see Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), 2011; United Nations Development Program, 2011). However, despite considerable investment, parliamentary performance in the five parliaments that are the subject of this research, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Timor-Leste,[2] Tonga and Vanuatu, has hardly improved. Indeed, political researchers such as Larmour and Barcham (2006), Meleisea (2005), Morgan (2005*a*), Pelizzo (2010) and Robert *et al.* (2007) report that the performance of Pacific parliaments remains generally weak. According to Saldanha (2004, p. 32), a

[1]For the purposes of this study, the Pacific region excludes Australia and New Zealand due to their superior levels of democracy and development (Stringer, 2006, p. 569).

[2]Timor-Leste is included as it treated as a part of the Pacific region for administrative purposes by AusAID, a partner organisation to this project.

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significant reason for this can be traced to the fact that most of training programmes are 'too inadequate' to effect, in any meaningful way, improved parliamentary performance. Seven years on, the evidence collected in this research confirms Saldanha's argument.

One of the options that could be used to redress this failure is by improving design, delivery and evaluation of training programmes provided to Pacific Members of Parliament (MPs). However, in view of the high turnover of Pacific MPs in every election (Connell, 2006; Panapa and Fraenkel, 2008) and differences in local constitutional and cultural contexts, including language issues that vary throughout the region (Boege *et al*., 2008; Richardson, 2009), focusing training programmes on Pacific parliamentary staff in the first instance has the potential to produce a greatly improved training impact. This approach offers a longer-term solution to strengthening Pacific parliaments, because effective training of parliamentary staff, coupled with improved recruitment processes, could enhance their ability to provide improved technical support to MPs. It would also help address the problem of institutional memory that arises from the high turnover of MPs in Pacific parliaments. This would have the added advantage of allowing external organisations to concentrate more of their resources on supporting civic education, a proven approach to strengthening parliaments (Olson and Norton, 1996; Milner, 2002; Beetham, 2006; Hudson and Wren, 2007; Power, 2008).

This article examines the competencies of Pacific parliamentary staff, the average length of time Pacific MPs serve and the need to involve parliamentary staff in designing, delivering and evaluating training programmes provided to their respective parliaments. The article also argues that greater concentration on the training on parliamentary staff should involve the adoption of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table (ANZACATT) model. It should be noted that the author is not advocating the replacement of training programmes that already exist[3] in Pacific parliaments. Rather, he is arguing for an additional measure that complements existing training programmes by focusing, to a far greater degree, on the training of parliamentary staff. Importantly, while this article focuses on only the five case parliaments mentioned above, the arguments it raises are believed to be relevant to other developing countries in the Pacific region and beyond.

[3]CDI, for instance, supports research and analysis functions of parliamentary staff including the creation of good working relations between Pacific parliamentary staff and their MPs (Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2011).

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2. 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 and Provo, 2000) and in the Human Resources Development (HRD) field (as shown by authors including Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003; Tharenou *et al.*, 2007). The theoretical logic found in both fields of study suggests the existence of a positive relationship between training parliamentary actors, such as parliamentary staff and improvement in the performances of their respective parliaments (Orton *et al.*, 2000). Consistent with these theories, recent studies in the Ghanaian National Parliament (see Stapenhurst, 2004) and the Bangladesh National Parliament (see Hossain, 2004) indicate that training in parliaments can improve performances at both individual (MPs and parliamentary staff) and parliamentary levels.

Parliamentary staff are generally categorised into two major groups: procedural and administrative (Reynolds, 2003; Besly, 2010). As in other organisations, professional development of parliamentary staff has traditionally involved formal and/or informal training that takes place while parliamentary staff continue to perform their day-to-day duties and responsibilities (McClelland, 2006). However, unlike employees in other organisations, parliamentary staff, particularly those involved in procedural matters, perform a unique role and the nature of that role means that the training required does not build directly on the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) these staff acquired in previous occupations or professions (McClelland, 2006). For example, providing technical support to parliamentary chambers on matters such as parliamentary standing orders and chamber-related procedures is unique to the institution of parliament (McClelland, 2006). This reality, coupled with the fact that parliamentary staff require a degree of specialist KSAs to effectively and efficiently perform their roles and responsibilities (McClelland, 2006), necessitates that they be exposed to a thorough induction programme and continuous professional development. The latter is as important as the former as continuing professional development has been successfully used by many parliaments around the world to ensure that parliamentary staff have up-to-date specialised KSAs, which they in turn use to enhance the performance of MPs in their respective parliaments.

3. Research methods

This study, which broadly examines the design, delivery and evaluation of training programmes provided in five Pacific parliaments, was done using a multiple

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Table 1 Parliaments 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	Micronesian
Papua New Guinea	11	109	Modified parliamentary regime	Unicameral parliament	Melanesian
Timor-Leste	13	65	Semi-presidential regime	Unicameral parliament	Austronesian
Tonga	11	26	Hereditary constitutional monarchy	Unicameral parliament	Polynesian
Vanuatu	15	52	Modified parliamentary regime	Unicameral parliament	Melanesian
Total number of interviewees	63				

case design based on Yin's (2009) logic that treats cases as a series of experiments in which each case serves to confirm or disconfirm inferences drawn from others.

As shown in Table 1, the five parliaments that form the basis of this research were selected to generally reflect the major types of constitutional models, types of parliament (Banks *et al*., 2010) and the primary ethnic groupings within the Pacific region itself (Bartlett and Rodgers, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 63 MPs and 3 clerks. 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 seven training providers working for and/or on behalf of the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) and the United Nations Development Program, two of the main organisations responsible for capacity building in the sampled parliaments (Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2011; United Nations Development Program, 2011).

The semi-structured interviews were centred on finding whether training programmes provided to case parliaments resulted in a significant and positive impact on the performances of Pacific MPs and their respective parliaments. The interviewer also sought to explore if there are shared concerns among the

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interviewees, which could help to formulate strategies that could make training in the region more effective. To allow for triangulation (Yin, 2009), a comprehensive literature review covering parliamentary training in the region was undertaken.

4. The impact of training in performances of Pacific MPs and their parliaments

The outcome of the analysis shown in Table 2 suggests that training programmes in the five parliaments have largely failed to attain their intended objectives. Indeed, 49 of the 63 interviewees believe that training programmes in the region lack depth and fail to bring about a significant and positive change in the performances of MPs and case parliaments, respectively. As explained above, this outcome is consistent with Saldanha's (2004) observations that training programmes in the region are too superficial and therefore inadequate to effect any significant improvement in the way MPs perform their roles.

Various reasons were provided by the interviewees to explain the poor impact of training programmes in the case parliaments. These included, but were not limited to: failure of training programmes to consider differences in education and working experience among MPs; training sessions being viewed as too short and too irregular for them to have any impact; training being provided on ad hoc basis making them shallow; duplication of training programmes by training providers making training too monotonous; the lack of training needs assessment prior to preparing training content making training content too general and sometimes irrelevant to cultural and constitutional contexts; lack of rigorous training programme evaluations; 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 lack of adequate technical support from parliamentary staff.

Table 2 Training and performances of Pacific MPs and their parliament

Parliament	Number of MPs perceiving a significant impact of training on their performances	Number of MPs perceiving a significant impact of training on performance of their parliament
Marshall Islands	4	4
Papua New Guinea	1	3
Timor-Leste	2	11
Tonga	4	5
Vanuatu	3	1

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While different factors explain the failure of training programmes to have significant impact on 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 of all the case parliaments. It is not surprising then that, as reported below, large majority of MPs argued for more training programmes to be made available to parliamentary staff. This proposition forms the central theme of this article.

5. How should training be undertaken?

In recognition of the important role parliamentary staff play in ensuring the smooth operations of parliaments, Australia and New Zealand governments (arguably the most developed countries in the Pacific region) (Stringer, 2006), constantly expose their parliamentary staff to various forms of training programmes (McClelland, 2006; Johnson, 2008). Traditionally, training of parliamentary staff in these two countries took the form of on-the-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 among parliamentary staff required a more structured training programme and this in turn led to the formation of ANZACATT in 2001 (McClelland, 2006).

ANZACATT plays a central role in ensuring parliamentary staff in Australia and New Zealand are equipped with KSAs that can enable them to perform their duties effectively (Johnson, 2008; Besly, 2010). Specifically, ANZACATT was established to promote ongoing professional development of clerks and parliamentary staff in the respective countries and to enhance the knowledge and principles of parliamentary systems and procedures, including the administrative competencies necessary for the smooth operation of both parliaments (Johnson, 2008). In addition, ANZACATT publishes a bi-annual bulletin covering reports on procedural and administrative issues which are of interest to parliamentary staff (Johnson, 2008).

To achieve its objectives, ANZACATT trains parliamentary staff in two distinct but complementary ways, which the author suggests could be adapted and used for improving the performance of Pacific parliamentary staff. The first component of the ANZACATT model consists of a two-day annual seminar and workshop that provides an important platform for parliamentary staff to share professional experiences and the challenges they face in their respective parliaments (Johnson, 2008).

Creating an ANZACATT-like forum in which Pacific parliamentary staff can meet annually and address challenges that are relevant to their parliaments, increases the potential for them to perform their roles more effectively. This is because professional experience sharing taking place in such fora can potentially

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advance the KSAs pertaining to foundations and principles of parliamentary systems and procedures as well as administrative practices that parliamentary staff in Pacific parliaments ought to possess to ensure effective governance of human and material resources that are essential to the smooth operation of parliament (McClelland, 2006). The annual seminars are also expected to induce collegial exchanges among member Pacific parliamentary staff which if encouraged, could bring about sustained sharing of professional experience and knowledge (KSAs) on matter of common interest among members of parliamentary staff (Johnson, 2005; McClelland, 2006).

Importantly, the likelihood of success of the proposed annual seminars is high since they involve parliamentary staff from countries facing more or less similar challenges. This argument is consistent with the World Bank Institute's view (see O'Brien, 2011) that the south–south networks (networks among individuals from developing countries) are more likely to achieve better outcomes than the north–south networks such as that existing relationships between state and territory Australian parliaments and a number of Pacific parliaments (Pacific Parliament Network, 2011). This was evidenced in this study when most of the interviewed training providers and Pacific MPs admitted that generally the twin relations between state and territory Australian parliaments and a number of Pacific parliaments are not functioning desirably due to a big political, economic, social and cultural development gap between Australia and participating countries including PNG, Tonga and Vanuatu. Allowing for south–south relationships to be nurtured could therefore create an important platform in which Pacific parliamentary staff are given an opportunity to engage in discussions on matters of common interest, including fostering consultation and collaboration among members of parliamentary staff as a coordinated approach to training and development of Pacific parliamentary staff.

The second component of the ANZACATT model involves an ANZACATT-sponsored short course provided at the Queensland University of Technology, the Parliamentary Law, Practice and Procedure course (PLPP). This course covers fundamental topics in parliamentary studies including the effects of the constitution, separation of powers, membership of parliament, election and appeal mechanisms, structure and function of parliament, powers and privileges of legislative chambers, parliamentary/committees investigations, committee systems and parliamentary practice and procedures (McClelland, 2006; Johnson, 2008). Generally, the PLPP course is intended to introduce new parliamentary staff to basic issues pertaining to the way parliaments operate.

A basic course on parliamentary studies such as the PLPP could be introduced at the University of the South Pacific (USP), the biggest university in the region. This is important because, as explained previously, it is usually the case that parliamentary staff do not possess prior experience on basic matters regarding

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parliaments such as standing orders and procedures which they need to effectively and efficiently perform their duties. This type, of course, for other Pacific countries would provide a much needed induction programme for new Pacific parliamentary staff. Moreover, the use of a local academic institution such as the USP is important as it could help to remove a lingering concerns present in among many Pacific countries that such training programmes only serve to impose 'western values'.

In sum, the formation of ANZACATT-styled training model could transform the professional development of Pacific parliamentary staff as it introduced more in-depth and coordinated training programmes which supplemented in-house training that has traditionally been the mainstay in most parliaments in the region and beyond (McClelland, 2006). Importantly, a variant of the ANZACATT model is the best fit for training Pacific parliamentary staff as it provides a complimentary approach to training. Indeed, on one hand, the seminar component of the ANZACATT-like model provides a less structured and more flexible format of training. This is crucial as such a model is generally well received by adult learners (see Knowles, 1973; Merriam, 2001). On the other hand, the second component of the ANZACATT-like model, which involves a course on fundamental issues pertaining to the way parliaments operate, is important as it provides a more structured approach to training Pacific parliamentary staff particularly those who may lack basic knowledge of parliaments (McClelland, 2006).

In addition to creating a variant of ANZACATT training model in the region, Pacific parliamentary staff should be exposed to programmes (potentially from the USP) that can prepare them to be trainers of their MPs. This should necessarily include training on how to design, evaluate and review training programmes aimed at Pacific MPs. This will ultimately enable Pacific parliamentary staff to assume the role of trainers in their parliaments in the near future, thereby addressing the issues of cultural and constitutional conflicts during traditional training programmes brought about by the use of external trainers in Pacific parliaments, many of whom have reportedly not taken such matters into account when designing the training programmes they offer to Pacific parliaments.

Furthermore, Pacific parliaments need to address the issue of the quality of parliamentary staff that they recruit. This is because Pacific parliamentary staff are usually few and, as Morgan (2005*a*) points out, largely incapable of doing their job effectively. A common problem is that Pacific parliaments' staff are generally recruited on the basis of patronage (see Mellor and Jabes, 2004; Morgan, 2005*a*). In contrast, in Australia's national and state parliaments staff are recruited in accordance with public sector guidelines, which involves advertising for positions where applicants are required to meet certain minimum criteria in order to be called for interviews and merit selection applies (Johnson, 2008).

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Improved recruitment policies similar to those in neighbouring Australia and New Zealand (Johnson, 2008) could therefore prove crucial in attracting quality parliamentary staff.

In sum, the majority of the interviewed cases MPs concur with the central argument of this article that parliamentary staff need to be exposed to more training programmes. Indeed, according to the case-by-case analysis conducted for this study, eight of 13 Marshallese MPs, seven of 11 PNG MPs, 10 of 13 Timorese MPs, seven of 11 Tongan MPs and 10 of 15 Vanuatu MPs strongly advocated the need for urgent change in the way training programmes are provided in Pacific parliaments by arguing for more training programmes to be made available to parliamentary staff. The benefits of concentrating training on Pacific parliamentary staff are discussed below.

6. Benefits

This section identifies and analyses the improved competencies (KSAs) that could be acquired by Pacific parliamentary staff as a direct result of being exposed to continuous professional development. These competencies include the ability to: provide improved technical support to MPs; provide greater institutional memory to parliaments; enhance the capacity of parliamentary staff to actively engage in designing, delivering and evaluating improved professional development programmes intended for Pacific MPs; and the potential for external organisations to invest more resources towards civic education. These are discussed in detail 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 (Romzek and Utter, 1997). In turn, since MPs are central to the operation of parliaments (Kunnath, 2011), improvement in their effectiveness is expected to enhance the general performance of their parliaments (Romzek and Utter, 1997; Besly, 2010).

In relation to technical support, parliamentary staff 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 (Thomas, 2003; Besly, 2010). 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 advice on parliamentary procedure and practice 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

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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 where according to Romzek and Utter (1997), virtually nothing is done by the Congress men and women without parliamentary staff. Although the situation in the US Congress is not comparable with 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 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 is continuity of service (Thomas, 2003). As indicated 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 (Romzek and Utter, 1997; Besly, 2010). For instance, parliamentary staff in the Australian Parliament 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 MPs lose their re-election bids, which, given the shortness of most parliamentary terms, is problematic to the smooth running of a parliament. This is especially important in Pacific parliaments as they experience some of the highest rates of MP turnover in the world, averaging at more than 50% in each election (Morgan, 2005*b*; Connell, 2006). The need to train parliamentary staff to counter the effects of the high turnover of MPs was strongly argued by the majority of training providers interviewed who expressed their frustration about potentially wasted training on MPs as usually, most of them are not successful in their re-election bids. Their arguments were also reflected by one of the interviewed Timorese MPs who pointed out that training programmes should be concentrated on 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 programmes intended for Pacific MPs in terms of both 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

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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 programmes 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'. These suggestions are consistent with the argument by Belisle and Joseph (2009) who point out that the use of external trainers in parliaments should be discouraged as it may provide artificial and unsustainable results since the expertise and inspiration is not internally driven. However, given the current inadequacy of capacities (KSAs) among most Pacific parliamentary staff, external trainers should be allowed to continue to provide training in Pacific parliaments with the view to equipping parliamentary staff so that they can take over training duties in the foreseeable future.

Training Pacific parliamentary staff to take over the mantle of training Pacific MPs has the potential to make training programmes cheaper for donor countries/agencies and more demand driven as providers would be local parliamentary staff already on the pay roll of Pacific parliaments. Training programmes could more easily be demand driven because as part of the parliament, parliamentary staff have the potential to better identify areas of weakness in their parliaments that training programmes could address. This is important since during interviews, MPs from all five Pacific parliaments repeatedly expressed their frustrations with the fact that most training programmes 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 programmes design so as to avoid gaps'. The view by Pacific MPs about ad hoc driven training programmes is also reflected by Saldanha (2004) who points out that training programmes 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

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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 programmes 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 Tetum 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 therefore follows that the use of parliamentary staff who 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 programmes provided by 'competing' training programmes that are offered by international organisations in Pacific parliaments. As one of the training providers 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 programmes are duplicated or not'. Evidence that supports this disturbing statement is found in the considerable number of interviewed Pacific MPs complaining during interviews that they are tired of being repeatedly taught about standing orders. For instance, one of the interviewed Marshallese MPs pointed out that duplicated training programmes 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 (parliament)'. Arguably, the use of parliamentary staff as trainers can easily remove the duplication of training programmes and eliminate the 'competition for funding' that currently keeps various international organisations 'busy', to borrow the phrase used by one of their own.

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Also, training Pacific parliamentary staff may effectively enhance their ability to constantly monitor, evaluate and eventually assist in reviewing training programmes 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 programme available in Pacific parliaments is probably the single biggest reason why the impact of training programmes in the parliaments is negligible. This is because the same programmes, 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 programmes is to say the least poor. The training of parliamentary staff to monitor, evaluate and review training programmes will thus enhance the potency of these programmes in the longer run.

Interestingly, a number of training providers (four of seven) also supported the idea of trainers in Pacific parliaments to be locals. Their major argument is based on the need for external organisations to allocate most of their resources in investing on civic education which is important for strengthening parliamentary democracy as previously alluded to (Olson and Norton, 1996; Milner, 2002; Beetham, 2006; Hudson and Wren, 2007; Power, 2008). For instance, the deputy director of one of the organisations that support parliamentary strengthening efforts in the Pacific region suggested that the lack of local trainers hinders the long-term ambition of his organisation of moving their efforts from parliaments to broader communities in Pacific countries by investing on civic education. The rationale for such a move is that an informed public can induce optimal policy choices through both electing better candidates (MPs) and scrutinising their decision making while in parliament (Milner, 2002). Equipping Pacific parliamentary staff to take over training in parliaments can therefore pave a way for these organisations to improve civil literacy, thereby improving parliamentary democracy in the region.

In sum, the literature covering Pacific parliaments overwhelmingly supports the idea of training parliamentary staff in the region (Morgan and Hegarty, 2003; Mellor and Jabes, 2004). Indeed according to Morgan and Hegarty (2003), more emphasis should be placed on the possibility of involving more Pacific parliamentary staff in designing training programmes. They further argue that when strengthening the capacity of Pacific parliaments, not just MPs but parliamentary staff should be included (Morgan and Hegarty, 2003). This is because the reliance of international experts in some Pacific parliaments is neither sustainable nor desirable (Mellor and Jabes, 2004).

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7. Conclusion

This study reports findings that explain why, despite the provision of various training programmes to Pacific MPs, their performances have not significantly improved. Because there is a 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, this study has argued for a re-think of training strategies. Specifically, it argues for a change in approach. Rather than concentrating overwhelmingly on MPs, future training programmes should significantly increase training provided to Pacific parliamentary staff so as to enable them to more ably assist MPs to perform their duties more effectively. The study also points out that such a move can also be beneficial to parliamentary democracy in the Pacific region as it could allow external sponsors to concentrate their resources on supporting civil education, which has been proven to be one of the most potent approaches in strengthening parliaments.

In addition, the article argues that training should be accompanied by improved recruitment processes for future Pacific parliamentary staff. This will help to ensure that future staff have basic KSAs that are necessary for them to ably perform their roles. This is consistent with the HRD literature (e.g. Brunnelo and Nedio, 2001) that higher educational background enhances the ability of potential employees to not only seamlessly assume their roles but also learn better when exposed to training.

The argument for availing more training to Pacific parliamentary staff, should not, in any way, be interpreted as arguing for less access to training for Pacific MPs. Instead, the point this study 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 MPs and not parliamentary staff who are the main actors in parliaments and Pacific parliaments are no exception to this conventional understanding.

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