

**PROJECT Governance**THE FORTNIGHTLY  
**INSIGHT**

24 June, 2024

**WORKSHOP ON “COUNTERING  
THREATS OF DISINFORMATION AND  
OTHER HARMFUL SPEECH IN FIJI**

12 June 2024

On June 12, 2024, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) partnered with the Fijian Elections Office (FEO) to hold a workshop entitled “Countering Threats of Disinformation and Other Harmful Speech for Elections in Fiji” in Suva, Fiji. The event convened 78 participants (31 women) election officials and other government officials, political party members, civil society organizations (CSO), and media representatives in an open, inclusive dialogue on the information integrity environment in Fiji. The event began with opening remarks from the USAID/Pacific Islands Mission Director, Zema Semunegus, and Ana Mataciwa, Supervisor of Elections for Fiji, to welcome participants and outline the goals of the workshop.

*(Continued on page 2)*

Multiple media outlets reported on the opening remarks, including the themes of this workshop: to enhance inter-institutional cooperation; strengthen the capacities of institutions and electoral actors; and begin to develop actions that assess and tackle the risks of disinformation that are detrimental to a credible, honest, and peaceful electoral process in Fiji.

Participants learned about the global disinformation ecosystem, including definitions, emerging trends, and resilient approaches other countries have used to combat disinformation and other harmful content, before learning about Fiji's legal frameworks governing these issues. Participants then heard firsthand from a group of panelists who had personally been affected by hate speech. Subsequently, participants worked in five groups to identify barriers and challenges online disinformation poses to the democratic and electoral process in Fiji (i.e. legislative, strategic, technological, operational, cooperative, etc.). These groups focused on five thematic issues: 1) Oversight, enforcement and regulations 2) Monitoring, communications and reporting/complaints mechanisms 3) Civic and voter education and awareness-raising 4) Countering harmful speech against vulnerable groups; and 5) Stakeholder mapping and coordination. Once the groups identified challenges, they worked to map potential solutions to address the identified threats going forward, prioritize potential solutions, and indicate which actor or actors would be instrumental in implementing these necessary actions.



Participants mapped barriers, potential solutions, priorities, and actors in their breakout sessions

The workshop concluded with participants presenting the findings from their respective working groups, followed by a collaborative effort to identify the top three priorities for each group. The selected priorities include:

- **Mainstream civic education and media literacy;**
- **Provide additional funding for media monitoring;**
- **Increase collaboration between the FEO and CSOs around voter education campaigns; and**
- **Review relevant legislation to ensure effective enforcement mechanisms.**

Many participants supported the work in combating disinformation and harmful content in Fiji via their social media channels, including representatives from the Rainbow Pride Foundation and the University of the South Pacific Students' Association. A follow-up meeting with the group will be planned to implement its proposed actions to combat disinformation and harmful content in Fiji. Due to the salience of the workshop, the government and the public are now eager to tackle this issue ahead of the anticipated municipal elections in Fiji.

## So what?

Disinformation and hate speech are increasingly real and immediate threats to Election Management Bodies (EMB) and the integrity of electoral processes globally. Disinformation poisons information environments, leading to voter mistrust in politicians, processes, and even election results. Disinformation sows doubt and division in societies, leading to societal polarization and political unrest. Unfortunately, Fiji is not immune to these rising threats to election integrity. With a relatively young constitution and government, Fiji must act swiftly and rely on the synergy between institutions, politicians, legal frameworks, civil society organizations, and youth. Some participants noted that this was the first time in 15 years that this diverse audience could be in a room together to strategize and discuss disinformation and the harmful effects of dangerous speech in a calm, constructive, and collaborative manner.





## PROJECT Governance - Project Steering Committee Meeting



13 June 2024

On 13 June, PROJECT Governance convened its regular project Steering Committee meeting, whose members comprise senior officials from PIFS, SPC, IFES, East West Center, CARE and USAID. The role of the Steering Committee is to provide strategic advice to the project management team on challenges and programming, to increase the overall effectiveness and impact of PROJECT Governance. The Chief of Party and Deputy COP provided two updates to the members – the first was a management update. This included reporting that the programme is on track in terms of both its financials and progress towards outcome and output targets. The second update was on the outcomes of the Mid-Term review, undertaken at the end of 2023 and through which actions were identified to further strengthen PROJECT Governance delivery.

A key theme of the discussion was how the successes to date have been built on the time taken by all implementing partners to build trusted relationships at the outset of the programme, and validate the programme design. It was noted that it is hard to capture the value of this inception phase, but that it is critical to the sustainable outcomes the programme seeks to achieve.

### So what?

The project management team received a range of feedback and suggestions from the Steering Committee members, which will help to improve the direction of the programme. The feedback was largely positive, with members remarking on the improvement in donor communications (with the launch of the Fortnightly Insight) and financial reporting and analysis. They also provided encouragement to continue discussions with USAID on a follow-on programme of work, that would build on the successes to date, and the inception phase where those trusted relationships were established as well as an understanding of priority areas and how PROJECT Governance may support. By ensuring a smooth transition to a possible phase two of PROJECT Governance, this process would not need to be fully replicated and would provide value for money for USAID in terms of their investments into the Pacific.



Ashley and Kate from PROJECT Governance along with representatives of the National human rights taskforce

## Paving the Way for Human Rights and IMPACT OSS in Kiribati



18-19 June 2024

From 18-19 June PROJECT Governance undertook a mission to Kiribati in response to a request to progress commitments to establish a National Human Rights Institution and to develop an i-Kiribati version of IMPACT OSS.

The workshop on 18 June was opened by the Secretary for Justice, and, the team spent the day with the Human Rights Taskforce and IT officers, which included representatives from 8 key ministries. During the morning the group discussed and agreed on how IMPACT OSS can be customised to meet the i-Kiribati needs. During the afternoon, discussions were held on the National Human Rights Institution, where members of the taskforce reaffirmed their commitment to establishment and discussed budgetary details.

On 19 June the PROJECT Governance team met with Secretaries from the President's Office, Ministry of Finance, Public Service Office and the Attorney General and the Leadership Commission, to discuss ways forward for both initiatives.

### So what?

Once Kiribati launches their version of IMPACT OSS, it will create a publicly available platform to showcase progress towards implementation of the National Development Plan, Sustainable Development Goals and human rights obligations. The tool will also streamline reporting processes, allowing more resources to be allocated towards implementation, and greater government and public oversight. In turn this will enable government to better analyse areas for increased focus and public accountability.

The work undertaken on the i-Kiribati NHRI provides the Human Rights Taskforce with the information it needs to develop a cabinet paper proposing a National Human Rights Institution and proceeding to the next stage of establishing, which will also be supported by PROJECT Governance when requested by the Taskforce and i-Kiribati government.





Ashley with the capacity assessment team at FHRADC Office, Suva, Fiji

## FHRADC Capacity Assessment Review



13 June 2024

From 17-21 June, the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) undertook a Capacity Assessment Review (CAR) of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (FHRADC). The CAR team consulted with all FHRADC staff and key stakeholders to assess progress made by the Commission since the Capacity Assessment exercise that was undertaken in 2020, and to make recommendations on next steps.

PROJECT Governance and USAID were part of this consultation exercise, represented by Chief of Party Ashley Bowe and Deputy Development Advisor Patrick Bowers. The discussions covered the range of support PROJECT Governance has been and continues to provide to the Commission, and areas where further assistance could be beneficial. Mr Bowe shared how PROJECT Governance has helped to develop and roll out a comprehensive Information Management System, including a complaints system for the Commission. The CAR team shared the feedback they had received from staff was very positive on this institutional tool, and that it was greatly assisting in streamlining their complaints handling, enabling them to identify trends in complaints and increasing their overall accountability and transparency.

### So what?

The CAR report will provide a series of recommendations on areas the FHRADC needs to focus on, in order to work towards achieving 'A' status as a National Human Rights Institution, and improving its overall effectiveness in the delivery of its mandate. This will provide a framework for development partner assistance that will be invaluable in ensuring future PROJECT Governance support is targeted at the priority areas of development for the Commission.



## PPAC's Capacity Strengthening workshop continues in Kiribati and Tonga



5-13 June 2024

On Tuesday, June 11th, as part of Phase 6 Capacity Strengthening, we engaged with two organisations and later followed up with a third on Friday, June 14th. The campaigns sponsored by PPAC Phase 6 include “Kindling Kiribati,” which provides \$500 AUD micro loans to women in Tarawa to help them start small businesses, achieving a 95% loan return rate. “BIMBA” focuses on advocacy to increase awareness of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression during key events like Human Rights Day and the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex-phobia, and Transphobia. Additionally, “KWIMA” is dedicated to increasing pathways for women in maritime careers by promoting early exposure to maritime opportunities in primary and secondary schools. These initiatives underscore the ongoing efforts to empower women, support LGBTQ+ rights, and enhance career opportunities for women in Kiribati.

During the Phase 7 Capacity Strengthening event held on June 12-13, seven participants from four organisations across Kiribati, including three newly shortlisted ones, engaged in a comprehensive two-day training. They explored the Six Steps of Pacific-Style Advocacy, a framework developed by the SPC PPAC team over six previous phases, focusing on successful human rights campaigns in the Pacific. Participants received coaching on their specific proposed campaigns, such as assessing the inclusivity of Kiribati’s national election, providing trauma-informed counselling training for nuns aiding domestic violence survivors, supporting women’s entrepreneurship through micro loans, and exploring handicraft business establishment in an outer island village. These organisations will submit their proposals for PPAC review by the end of June, with successful applicants receiving additional advocacy training and \$12,300 AUD (8,000 euros) in funding for a 12-month period. PPAC noted a significant increase in grant applications, from 5 to 15, indicating a growing demand for human rights advocacy in Kiribati.





Discussion with Manase

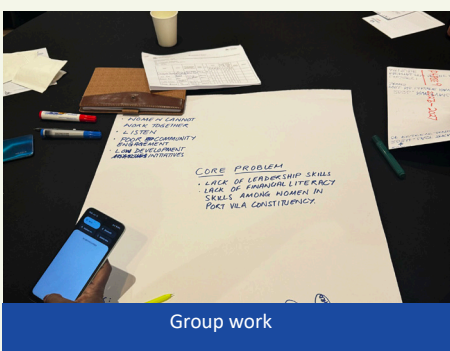


Group work

On Wednesday, June 5th, collaboration took place with two PPAC Phase 6 grantees. The Tonga Leitis Association (TLA), an advocate since 2019 for diverse SOGIESC issues in Tonga, successfully advocated for amending the Tonga Criminal Offences Act to broaden the definition of rape. Their current focus involves conducting a comprehensive study on civil society organisations' views towards establishing a national human rights institution (NHRI) in Tonga, aiming to present findings to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for government support. Meanwhile, the Melino moe Ofa Women Development Group, established post-2022 Tonga volcano eruption, used their Phase 6 grant to foster collaboration between governments and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in disaster preparedness. They are now applying for Phase 7 funding to strengthen their community disaster risk management efforts and amplify PWD voices locally. These initiatives reflect ongoing efforts to enhance rights advocacy and disaster resilience in Tonga.



Manase Vaoahi from Tonga Leitis Association (middle) - Phase 4-6 grantee. Plus Lupe (officer, SPC PRO), Director Elsie (PRO), me and Vika (SPC Tonga CFO)



Group work



Phase 7 shortlisted organisations



Phase 6 grantees - Kiribati Women in Maritime Association (KWIMA)

## So what?

These activities reflect a broad commitment to strengthening community capabilities and advocating for human rights in the Pacific region. They empower marginalised groups through targeted initiatives and demonstrate the positive impact of sustained, strategic support. Additionally, these efforts helped PPAC build capacity, ensure proper reporting, strengthen proposals, increase the success rate, and foster more collaborations between grantees. This comprehensive approach not only addresses diverse community needs but also enhances the effectiveness and reach of human rights advocacy in the region.



## Six Journalists Selected for the FIRM to Attend EWC International Media Conference



23 June 2024

The East-West Center and Report for the World's partner newsrooms recently selected the six journalists that will be part of PROJECT Governance's Financial Investigative Reporting and Mentorship Initiative (the FIRM):

- **Meri Radinibaravi – The Fiji Times (Fiji)**
- **Aisha Azeemah – Islands Business (Fiji)**
- **Julie Badui Owa and Charmaine Poriambep – Inside PNG (Papua New Guinea)**
- **Ronald Flier Toito'ona – In-depth Solomons (Solomon Islands)**
- **Siosifa Pomana – Talanoa 'o Tonga (Tonga)**

This week, these financial investigative journalists, along with five of their editors will attend the 2024 East-West Center International Media Conference in Manila, Philippines, which will include a session to officially launch the FIRM initiative. The conference will also feature panels of the selected journalists and representatives from the East-West Center, Report for the World, and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project.

As part of the FIRM, these journalists will also receive specialized and targeted professional development and mentorship services over three years that focus on enhancing financial investigative reporting skills, sharing information on journalism safety, cyber security, and visual journalism, as well as encouraging international collaboration on story design and reporting.

### So what?

Independent media is key to promoting sound, just, and responsive governance by demanding transparency and holding leaders accountable on issues that affect public policy and public trust. By partnering with local independent news organizations in the Pacific through the FIRM initiative, PROJECT Governance is boosting their capacity to shed light on financial matters that can have major impacts on a country's economic and political systems. Additionally, as part of the 2024 International Media Conference, these journalists will have a platform to discuss and exchange ideas about some of the most pressing issues in financial investigative journalism while also gaining access to a diverse network of journalists and media personnel from across Asia, the Pacific, and the US.



## Snapshots



*Meeting with SPC's Polynesian sub-regional office*



*EWC International Media Conference 2022*



*Ash with the Capacity Assessment Review team at FHRADC*

## MARK THE DATE

### 23-26 June:

FIRM journalists attend International Media Conference in Manila

### 27 June:

Presentation to the UN Treaty Body Chairpersons Annual Meeting, United Nations, New York

### 28 June:

Side event to the UN Treaty Body Chairpersons Annual Meeting on Pacific Follow-Up review experiences, United Nations, New York

### 3 July:

Side event to the High Level Political Forum, on Digitalisation of Human Rights and SDG Monitoring, United Nations, New York

### 3-5 July:

IFES Youth Civic Education Training, Suva, Fiji

### 4-9 August:

Public Information Officer (PIO) Workshop; Palau