

PROJECT Governance

THE WEEK'S INSIGHT

02 April, 2024



Participants of the Reflections workshop with
USAID Charge d'affaires, Lance Posey

RMI Post-Election Disability Survey Reflections and Review Workshop

27 – 28 March 2024



I am proud of the work that has been done because we firmly believe that responsive governance is built when institutions and policies are accessible, accountable, and responsive to all their constituents, especially disadvantaged groups.

His Excellency Lance Posey

From the 27-28 March, PROJECT Governance in collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs (MOCIA) Disability Office and RMIEA held a workshop that facilitated constructive dialogue among key stakeholders, including Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, to share survey findings, collaboratively develop actionable strategies for fostering inclusive electoral processes in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and to establish the Election Disability Access Working Group (EDAWG) as a driving force behind ongoing inclusive election activities.

US Charge d'affaires, Lance Posey opened the event saying, "The U.S. government, through the United States Agency for International Development or USAID, supports the RMI government's efforts to encourage all Marshallese citizens – including women, youth, and especially marginalized groups – to take an active role in democracy and seek accountability from the government, private sector, and their own communities. I look forward to hearing of the findings and recommendations of the rapid disability survey and the next steps of developing an inclusive elections strategy and workplan for implementation ahead of the next RMI national general elections as well as the establishment of the Election Disability Access Working Group."

(Continued on page 2)

Also as part of this workshop, Ms Anaseini Seinimioli, the Fiji Elections Office Director Operations and Chair of the Fiji Election's Accessibility Working Group was able to share with the Organisations for Persons with Disabilities and the RMIEA on the benefits of ensuring accessible voter materials to allow for inclusive participation to exercise the right to vote. It was an opportunity for Fiji to share the work done and support provided by SPC through its PROJECT Governance programme to make the 2022 general elections in Fiji accessible and inclusive.

The Participants used the workshop as an opportunity to collaborate, voice and establish a way forward for inclusivity during elections in RMI.

Snapshots from the workshop



Throughout these past few days, you have engaged in profound discussions, shared invaluable insights, and forged meaningful connections that will undoubtedly propel us forward in our collective mission to advocate for equality and empowerment in our electoral processes. I want to express my deepest appreciation to all the speakers, panelists, and participants who have contributed their expertise, experiences, and passion to this conference. We look forward to all the recommendations from this workshop so we can implement policy to continue to push for equity. Your dedication to championing the rights of persons with disabilities and promoting equity and inclusion in elections is truly commendable."

Hon Jess Gasper, Jr., RMI
Minister for Culture and
Internal Affairs

So what?

The survey evaluation and analysis crucial to the workshop were conducted by the PROJECT Governance team through a partnership with the University of the South Pacific (USP), ensuring rigorous and impartial assessment.

As a result of the reflections workshop, a working group was formed that will not only contribute to shaping an inclusive election strategy but will also establish the foundation for the establishment of the EDAWG, a driving force behind ongoing inclusive election activities in RMI.

This is the first time we have done a survey of this kind to gather data from and for persons with disabilities. This reflection workshop was really good, and we were glad that persons with disabilities were invited to take part and contribute towards analysing the findings of the survey. Also, I am happy that persons with disabilities could be part of the committee formed at the end of this workshop to make sure that all persons with disabilities are ready and provided accessibility to vote in the next elections. They are being prioritised and the formation of an elections committee will lead to a lot of changes to allow for greater participation for persons with disabilities in RMI."

Mr Kanjen Kumtak, Chief Executive
of the Marshall Islands Disabled
Persons Association



Representatives from NHRIs in Fiji, Samoa, and the Cook Islands at the HRCLD Workshop, Nadi, Fiji

Human Rights Community-Led Development in the Pacific - Progress Review Workshop

19-21 March 2024



By championing human rights, promoting good governance, and prioritizing people-centered development, we're creating a brighter, more inclusive future for all in the Pacific! Supported by USAID

Mr Roger Sydney

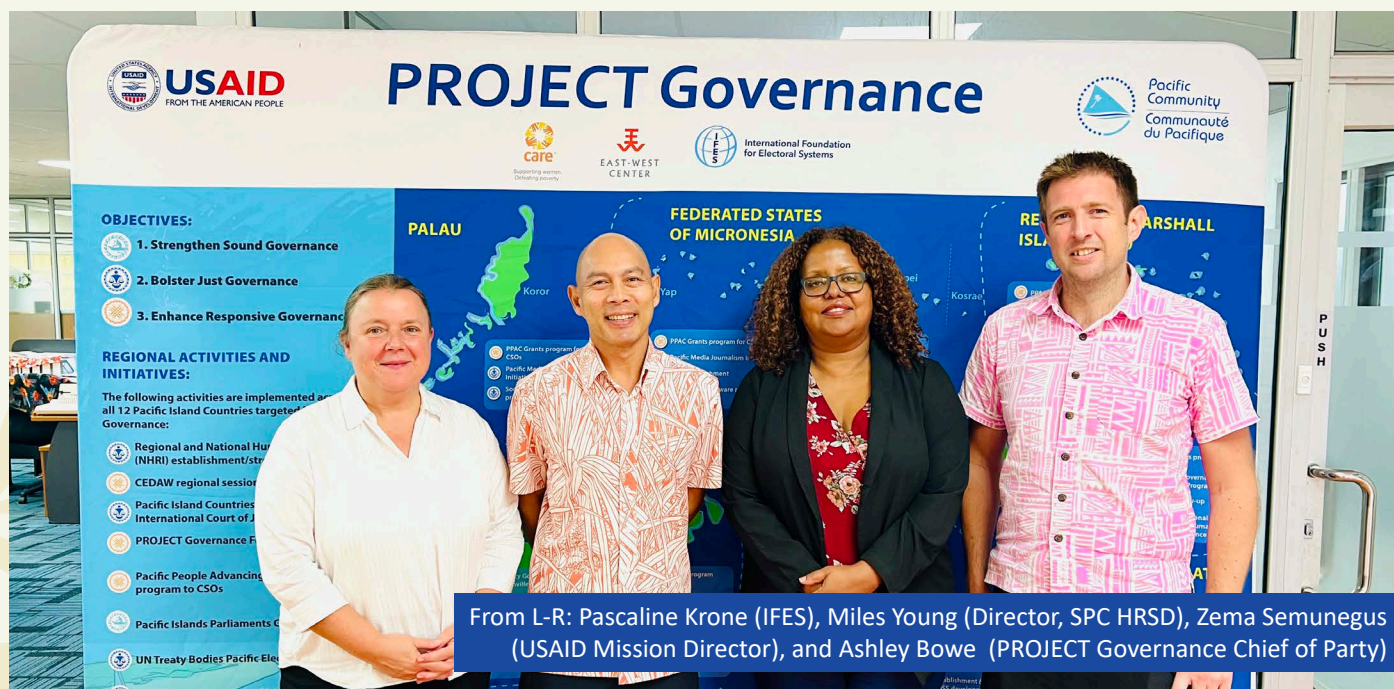
PROJECT Governance, in collaboration with The Asia Pacific Forum (APF), conducted a three-day workshop from March 19-21 for teams from the Cook Islands, Fiji, and Samoa. This workshop is part of a comprehensive three-year capacity development programme focused on Human Rights Community-led Development (HRCLD) in the Pacific. HRCLD aims to establish structures and processes within communities that empower individuals to address human rights issues affecting their lives. It also enables National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to fulfill their mandate by fostering self-reliant and respectful communities.

The workshop commenced with opening remarks from Roger Sydney, Deputy Mission Director of USAID Pacific Islands. Mr Sydney underscored the crucial role of supporting NHRIs in the Pacific region. He highlighted how community-led development projects, rooted in a people-centered approach, are vital for the Pacific's development.

Participating in the workshop were representatives from NHRIs in Fiji, Samoa, and the Cook Islands. The event provided them with a platform to exchange insights, discuss challenges, and share successes from projects that are community-led in their respective regions.

So what?

The HRCLD workshop provided the opportunity to build a cross-regional connection between the participants. It also offered an opportunity to evaluate the progress of each project based on the HRCLD approach and navigation principles. The workshop addressed specific challenges and considerations faced by HRCLD practitioners in the Pacific. This approach is intended to strengthen NHRIs and encourages other Pacific Island countries to adopt the programme for implementation.



Briefing and Roundtable Discussion with Donors

19 and 21 March, 2024 (Hybrid Event)

The PROJECT Governance team recently convened a hybrid briefing at the SPC Suva Office, hosting USAID Mission Director, Zema Semunegus and Senior Democracy and Governance Program Manager, Gerardo Porta on 19 March. The session featured presentations from PROJECT Governance Chief of Party Ashley Bowe and key representatives from implementing partners: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES); CARE; and East-West Centre (EWC), showcasing the programme's strategic objectives, ongoing projects, and transformative impact across the Pacific region. Ms Semunegus praised the team for their collaborative spirit, especially with keeping USAID involved and underscored USAID's steadfast commitment to the programme's success.

In a further display of engagement, Ms Semunegus, alongside representatives from DFAT, MFAT, EU, and Sida, actively participated—either in person or online—in a Donor Roundtable discussion organised by the Human Rights and Social Development Division (HRSD) at SPC on 21 March. This event provided a comprehensive overview of the divisions objectives and projects, emphasising the importance of a people-centered approach and fostering collaboration among donors. Ms Semunegus reiterated USAID's dedication to such an approach, highlighting its synergy with the organisation's overarching goals of mainstreaming and culture for development.

So what?

The convening of donors to showcase the division's impactful work presents a unique opportunity to demonstrate the far-reaching effects of our efforts across the Pacific. This gathering not only enhances donor visibility but also serves as a platform for sharing best practices and insights, showcasing how we effectively employ diverse tools and resources to ensure a people-centered approach in our work. This event serves as a testament to donors that their contributions are managed with utmost integrity and inclusivity, inspiring confidence in the future of our initiatives.



Central Tanna, an inspiration for Good Governance practice



13-14 March 2024

On 13 and 14 March 2024, CARE International in Vanuatu's Inclusive Governance Project facilitated a good governance workshop for the Loukatai Village Development Committee. Loukatai is situated in West Tanna Area Council. Loukatai is located outside of the official PROJECT Governance implementation site - Central Tanna Area Council.

Since their establishment in Central Tanna, citizens have been empowered to mobilise, identify different needs of the diverse people that make up their communities, prioritise these needs and pull together necessary resources to address them. The success of this governance model has been so significant that other Area councils have been petitioning for similar PROJECT Governance support.

Inspired and highly motivated by what village development committees in Central Tanna are doing, the people of Loukatai came together, voted in their committee members, and formally requested training support from CARE. To ensure minimal interference with planned project activities, the PROJECT Governance implementing team volunteered to provide the training after hours. The CARE team of local staff were able to provide much needed training for members of the Loukatai Development Committee to enhance their leadership, inclusive governance, development planning and prioritisation, and project management capabilities.

So what?

As a PROJECT Governance implementing partner with a long history of support to Central Tanna, CARE is collaborating with the Central Tanna Area Administrator to trial the village development committee governance model. If well established and functioning, it is anticipated that this community governance structure will bridge the gap between citizens, Area Councils, provincial governments, sector agencies, and other national government agencies and enable more efficient implementation of the Government of Vanuatu's decentralisation policy. PROJECT Governance will keep track of the Loukatai Village Development Committee's journey and seek out additional resources and opportunities to support other Area Councils that are keen on implementing the local governance model that is achieving a lot of success in Central Tanna.

Community Champions: Tales of Impact from the Pacific



Empowering women: Mary, a success story in community development



In the realm of community development, the empowerment of women stands as a cornerstone for sustainable progress. This success story from the CARE International in Vanuatu Inclusive Governance project, highlights the transformative journey of Mary Jack from Tanna. The story showcases her pivotal role in driving positive change and fostering inclusive development.

Mary, like many women in the Leulik community in Central Tanna and other parts of Vanuatu, face many challenges due to existing barriers to women's empowerment like socio-cultural dynamics that contribute to inequality. Most notably, they have limited access to education, economic opportunities, health care and decision-making.

Through PROJECT Governance interventions and the focus on promoting women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes, Mary was elected to lead Leulik's village development committee. Mary is hosting discussions to formulate community development plans by assessing the needs and priorities of Leulik village, identifying potential projects for improvement and developing strategies to address those needs.

"This opportunity has enabled me to build a strong working relationship and trust with the chiefs and support from other male leaders in the committee," says Mary, who has begun mobilizing the community to work on their first project of building a community hall.

So what?

Mary's story reaffirms the transformative power of women's empowerment in community development and emphasizes the importance of collective action, partnership, and commitment to advancing gender equality and inclusive development plans. Mary is inspiring other women to champion the cause of women's empowerment in their own communities.



US Ambassador to Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Nauru and Tuvalu meets with Kiribati Grantees



20 March 2024

During her recent mission to Kiribati, US Ambassador to Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Nauru, and Tuvalu, Ms. Marie Damour, engaged with two project leads, Ruth Cross and Tiantaake Mariana, under the Pacific People Advancing Change (PPAC) programme, along with SPC HRSD's Country Focal Officer, Rabunna Bakineti. This engagement provided PROJECT Governance with the opportunity to acquaint the Ambassador with its regional initiatives and highlight significant strides made.

Both grantees presented on their projects and its impacts in Kiribati. The Kindling Campaign, led by Ruth in Kiribati, advocates for women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship, inspiring them to break barriers and strive for success. While, Kiribati Women in Maritime, spearheaded by Tiantaake, is dedicated to strengthening gender-based violence prevention in the Kiribati Maritime Sector, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for all. This engagement with the Ambassador underscores the international support and recognition for these vital efforts.

PPAC's advocacy capacity-building efforts empower Pacific Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) engaged in human rights issues, supporting their campaigns with training, mentoring, small grants, and regional dialogue. Together, these initiatives, funded by the Swedish Government through Sida and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), are driving meaningful change. The Ambassador was thoroughly impressed with the projects and opened pathways to achieve their future visions.

So what?

Engagements like these serve as valuable platforms for showcasing and raising awareness of impactful work being carried out across the region. They offer firsthand engagement opportunities, allowing Donors to witness and understand the work being accomplished with the support of their funding. Moreover, by placing people at the centre of these initiatives, such engagements serve as motivational drivers, inspiring grantees to undertake even more impactful work throughout the region.

The meeting with US Ambassador was incredible. It gave us the motivation to reach out to donors and learn more about US Embassy in Suva. KWIMA appreciates the continued support from PPAC and SPC on funding our ongoing programmes, especially the outreach programmes to the community, and lobby meetings with our targeted stakeholders.

Tiantaake Mariana



The Tikopia Cultural Dancers and Banner for the Youth Democracy Festival

Solomon Islands Civic Empowerment Network & Youth Democracy Festival



23 March 2024

On March 23, in lieu of its upcoming elections, Solomon Islands hosted a Youth Democracy Music Festival to launch the IFES led Facebook page, UME4Democracy. The festival attended by approximately 200 young people featured popular music artists including Young Davie, Kayler, Joe Briz and Wendy and social media influencers like SoloBoy and Milky with a good online following. IFES also cooperated with the Solomon Islands Election Commission (SIEC) to set up a mock polling station which was highly successful with over 100 potential voters going through step by step with explanations, particularly on the various ballots issued in these elections.

The Chief Election Officer, Mr. Jasper Anisi gave an informative speech on stage to the youth attending the event explaining the changes for these joint elections. This speech was followed by traditional dance by the Tikopia Cultural Dancers who were all youth voters.

The members of the Civic Empowerment Network recorded videos of all speeches and performances and the mock polling station step by step and also conducted interviews with youth voters to see what they learned. These video clips will be edited into engaging educational and motivational content to post daily on the UME4Democracy Facebook page over the next few weeks. The festival was launched to boost the number of followers to maximise outreach in the lead up to election day April 17.

Background on UME4Democracy:

Building on a series of workshops facilitated by IFES in September, December and March supported by USAID, targeting youth voters on topics such as civic empowerment and participation, understanding elections and using critical thinking to counter disinformation, IFES convened a group of civil society organisations (CSO), organisations of persons with disabilities (OPD), women and youth networks, social media influencers and creative artists to form the new Civic Empowerment Network with the Facebook page UME4Democracy. This online network is targeting youth voters to be motivated by democracy and know their rights and responsibilities, how to vote in synchronised elections and to be aware of disinformation around elections and check for trusted sources of information before sharing online.

Mock Polling Station

*Explaining voting steps**Checking your name on the voter list**Issuing two ballots in a joint election**Explaining that every vote is secret**Putting the right color ballot in the right box*

To help design content for the Facebook page, UME4Democracy, IFES had a design session on December 5, 2023 with 17 youth (six women, one person with a disability) to create a network name, logo, slogan and develop some key messages.

The focus of the campaign was envisioned to raise awareness about the importance of democratic rights and responsibilities, the changes in holding synchronised elections for the first time and a how-to-vote step-by-step guide, the dangers of misinformation and disinformation, how to recognise it and check for trusted sources of information.



“

New and different experience for me. This mock election allows me to be ready to vote.

Melanie
18 Years Old
(First time voter)

So what?

With increasing time spent on social media platforms and with competing subjects like sport, music, news, celebrities, the challenge to catch youth attention is to make democracy and elections engaging, increase followers and sustain the conversation over time. Using an event like this youth democracy music festival has helped create a buzz. Our partner social media influencers can capitalise on this buzz to promote key messages about democracy and elections. Bringing youth together on a platform such as UME4Democracy allows them to interact share and learn about the importance of inclusive democracy while building a democratic culture and increase critical thinking skills to be resilient to disinformation beyond elections and encourage long-term participation in political and civic life.



FHRADC Director meets with Key Stakeholders



26 March 2024

On Tuesday 26 February, PROJECT Governance hosted a roundtable lunch between Ms Loukinikini Lewaravu and key stakeholders of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (FHRADC), for which she has recently been appointed as Director. The guests included:

- Graham Leung, lawyer, former Commissioner of the FHRADC and President the Fiji Law Society
- Elizabeth Reade-Fong, University of the South Pacific
- Salote Kaimacuata, Child Protection Specialist
- Wylie Clarke, lawyer, current President of Fiji Law Society

The discussion covered feedback from guests on what the Commission has done well in the past, where it needs to strengthen and strategies for delivering on its mandate.

I found the dialogue very useful. The views and experiences shared helped: expand my understanding and appreciation of why the Commission is committed under its current Strategic Plan to strengthen its credibility; inform future relevant interventions and strategies to strengthen our credibility. And incredibly, in the end, the dialogue developed opportunities for partnership, support and collaboration to not only help support human rights for our communities but also strengthen the Commission's credibility.

Ms Loukinikini Lewaravu

So what?

The reputation and credibility of the FHRADC has rarely been lower in its history. Public perceptions are critical to any Human Rights Commission's operations – without it, independence is undermined and it is not truly accessible to all. Further, the Commission took the bold step of appointing a non-Fijian in the role of Director. This important conversation, behind closed doors, enabled Ms Lewaravu to build important relationships, discuss her plans for the Commission and deliberate on strategies for the office regaining public confidence. Further, it opened up possibilities for collaboration with agreement reached on the FHRADC speaking at an upcoming international Law Society Event and exploring opportunities to partner with PROJECT Governance on the rollout of human rights education in Fiji.



The “Friends of Community Governments Kibung” in session

PROJECT Governance comes to a ground-breaking Bougainville Government gathering



12-13 March 2024

During 12-13 March 2024, CARE International in PNG’s PROJECT Governance joined the Autonomous Bougainville Government at a first-ever event, the “Friends of Community Governments Kibung”. CARE had been invited to set up a table by the Department of Community Governments and District Affairs to help showcase cooperation between that Department and civil society. CARE also sponsored the participation of the Chairlady and male Manager from Hagogohe, one of the eight local governments with which PROJECT Governance is engaged.

Project Officers, Ruthy Sawa and Francis Semoso, reported that the kibung [meeting] was extremely useful for both information sharing and networking. Other development partners also participated in the event, which was held in the beautiful village of Malasang. Ruthy made a short presentation about how PROJECT Governance is promoting gender equity by strengthening respectful collaboration among the women and men who lead local government.

Some Chairladies, who were in attendance, shared positive experiences they have had with CARE, and spoke warmly of its recent Leadership and Team Building Workshop. The Department’s Secretary, Belinda-Maree Gara, praised the contributions CARE has made to inclusive governance in Bougainville over the years.

So what?

Going forward, PROJECT Governance will work even more closely with the Bougainville Department of Community Government and District Affairs. At an organisational level, CARE is drafting a simple Memorandum of Understanding with the Department to capture this complementary working relationship. With PROJECT Governance’s support, CARE will continue to promote gender transformative leadership.



PER Workshop participants gather outside of the workshop venue

Republic of Marshall Islands Electoral Administration Post-Election Review Workshop



14-15 February 2024

Through the PROJECT Governance programme, IFES supported the Republic of Marshall Islands Electoral Administration (RMIEA) to hold a Post-Election Review (PER) Workshop on February 14 and 15, 2024. The purpose of the PER Workshop was to provide an opportunity for the RMIEA and key government and non-government stakeholders to assess the challenges and opportunities arising during the 2023 General Election, held on November 20, and identify potential areas for reform of electoral processes to support the ongoing improvement of elections in RMI.

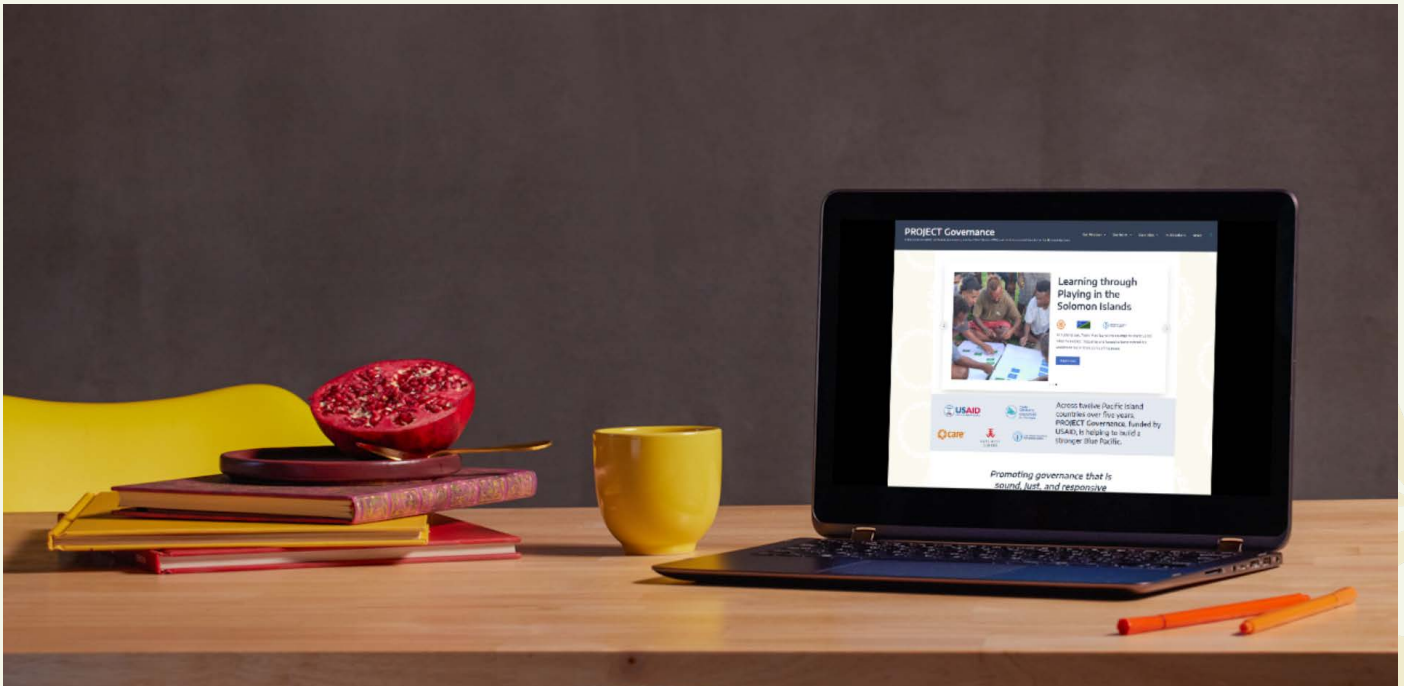
On Day 1, participants examined achievements and challenges and put forward recommendations across key areas of the election operation. The Honorable Jess Gasper Junior, Minister for Culture and Internal Affairs, delivered the opening address on Day 2, which focused on an external review of the election. Overall, key themes discussed included: postal voting, voter registration, election financing, procurement and logistics, voter awareness, youth engagement, voting for confined voters, election day voting procedures, counting and results, procedures and training, institutional development, inter-agency coordination, and the roles of candidates, poll watchers, and authorised representatives. All participants were invited to complete a survey tailored to the type of stakeholder (internal/external) and survey results are currently being analysed to determine next steps.

Through collaborative efforts and open dialogue, we can lay the groundwork for a more robust and inclusive electoral process that truly reflects our people and our republic.

Hon. Jess Gasper Junior

So what?

For the 2023 General Elections, the RMIEA implemented several process improvements. The new national government included election of four female senators to the Nitijela for the first time and women comprise approximately 20% of elected representatives to local councils. While every election has its successes and challenges, a PER workshop is a useful tool for assessing results and determining processes for improving future election cycles. Key challenges identified during the PER Workshop included the level of voter turnout (based on unofficial data), administration of postal voting for non-resident voters, logistical challenges, and efficiency and consistency of polling and counting operations. The RMIEA and associated ministries will now be able to take this feedback and compile recommendations to address priority challenges for the next electoral cycle. By conducting the PER Workshop in a timely and inclusive manner, the RMIEA will be able to start implementing identified improvements well ahead of the next general elections, scheduled for 2027.



PROJECT Governance Website goes Live

01 April 2024

On April 1, 2024, PROJECT Governance launched its project website www.projectgov.org. The site, developed by EWC with collaboration from SPC, CARE and IFES, shares USAID and the partnership's vision for Sound, Just, and Responsive Governance in the Pacific. The site explains these three core governance concepts and illustrates how the project works to strengthen them in the 12 participating Pacific Island nations across a wide range of activities.

Users can find profiles sharing the personal stories of Pacific people making change in their communities, and highlights of the project events and activities that support them. The site will also host all project publications, measures of project effectiveness, and a calendar of upcoming events.

So what?

As PROJECT Governance moves into the second half of its five-year term, the preparation and planning performed in the first half is delivering sustainable, responsive programming built with local partners. The PROJECT Governance website will be the unified platform to underly social media communications, inform regional participants and partners of upcoming activities, share project accomplishments to a global audience, and preserve a record of the project's impact in the Pacific.



Snapshots.



*Mission Director's visit to the FHRADC
Lautoka Office*



*PPAC grantees presenting to US Ambassador
during her mission to Kiribati*



HRSD Donor Roundtable, Suva, Fiji

MARK THE DATE

11-15 April (Tentative):
Disability Statistics Annual
Workplan Workshop -
Suva, Fiji

29 April-3 May:
Pacific Youth Council
Convening, Fiji

10 April:
Launch of the Open Access
Generation Facebook
campaign managed by a group
of young individuals who
advocate for open data access
and data transparency in the
Pacific - Fiji

12 April:
Open Government Partnership
(OGP) – one day workshop by
the communications strategy
technical working group co-
chairs - PNG

17 April:
IFES Team deployed to support
the first nationwide joint
elections - Solomon Is