

Courts improve and accountability

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CJ OK: Chief Justice His Honour Patu Tiava’asue Falefatu Sapolu taking part in a leadership workshop in Auckland. Similar meetings are now being held in Brisbane.

Samoa is among 14 Pacific countries showing marked improvements in the way courts of justice and the public work together, according to recently released court performance data.

Pacific courts are more accountable and transparent in 11 of 15 key indicators studied under the Pacific Justice Development Programme.

“When we compare data from the 2011 PJDP Baseline Report the findings are extremely encouraging,” said PJDP Chair and Chief Justice of Samoa, His Honour Patu Tiava’asue Falefatu Sapolu, “particularly in the areas of case management, accessibility and complaint handling.”

Over the past two years PJDP has supported judicial officers and court staff in 14 Pacific countries to collect, analyse and publish data for annual reports that track their progress, according to Bruce Phillips, the Director for Public Information at the Federal Court of Australia, one of two donor partners.

“This is the first time data of this kind has been available and is aimed at encouraging high standards, accountability and transparency in the Pacific.”

There are some encouraging changes occurring in the Pacific, he said in a press release.

Samoa is now offering free online legal advice to clients and information about the Court’s complaint process.

Three of the 14 PJDP countries produced an annual report for the first time during the last year: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Tokelau.

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The public can access all three of these annual reports through national websites as well as on the regional Pacific Legal Information Institute (PacLII) website:

There is improved public access to court Annual Reports.

In 2012, nine of the 14 PJDP countries have produced or contributed to an annual report that is now publicly available in the following year compared to only one PJDP court in 2011.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau and PNG have all undertaken client satisfaction surveys over the last two years and have shared their experience of undertaking these surveys with other PJDP judiciaries.

Client satisfaction surveys allow judiciaries to understand the degree to which clients are satisfied with the services provided by the court and receive feedback on the areas where clients think the court could improve their service, said Mr. Phillips.

The Programme supports judicial development and institutional strengthening in the form of technical assistance delivered through capacity-building, leadership fora, toolkits and pilot projects.

Activities now also focus on promoting better public awareness, access, and delivery of services by the courts.

Through this, justice outcomes for beneficiaries at the regional, national and local levels will be improved.

The PJDP is implemented by the Federal Court of Australia with funding and support from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, promoting justice, the rule of law and good governance across the Pacific region.

Representatives from these Pacific countries are in Brisbane for annual Leadership Meetings as well as the launch of the 2012 Court Trend Report that provides 24 recommendations on how courts report on case management issues, transparency and accountability measures, information on accessibility and affordability of courts for all citizens and procedures for handling complaints concerning judicial offers and court staff.

Chief Justice Patu Sapolu stated that this report shows improvements in almost all key indicator areas.

In 2011, the Chief Justice developed and approved the performance indicators as they have the social and cultural knowledge on the issues faced by their courts and they are best placed to identify where changes and improvements are required and can be made".

Strengthened governance is essential to ensuring better access to justice and public confidence in the courts.

The indicators assist the courts in the Pacific to measure their performance against agreed areas and enable the courts to be seen as being responsive to issues arising in their countries.

PJDP partner courts are Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.