

Pacific judiciary looks to tech development

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Pacific Judiciary hopes technology will reduce the distances and remoteness between islands.

TRANSCRIPT

An aid programme working to improve the quality of justice in Oceania is looking to use a more technological approach to supporting courts in the region.

The New Zealand funded Pacific Judicial Development Programme has been working in 14 Pacific Island countries since the 1990s.

The Programme's team leader, Livingston Armytage, says about three quarters of judicial officers in the Pacific have no formal legal training and many litigants are going to court with no legal representation.

Mr Armytage told Koroï Hawkins countries have their own unique problems but the distance and remoteness of communities needing justice is universal.

LIVINGSTON ARMYTAGE: When you look at the objectives of the Pacific Judicial Development Program, it's looking at promoting, improving the quality of justice that is available to citizens across the Pacific and to promoting the rule of law whatever that means. So it means different things in different countries and we're doing this, if you were to ever, you or your listeners were to google the words PJDP toolkit, you'll find yourself on a page of PACLII and the Federal Court which, on which we publish a whole range of toolkits. And these toolkits are designed for use by local actors. So that they can just draw these down whenever, of course, they've got access to email, which isn't always the case. But they can use these toolkits whenever they want or need. And so to promote access to justice is a toolkit. So how to get courts to be more focused outwardly on the needs of the communities they're serving. There's a toolkit on designing and introducing codes of judicial conduct. There's a toolkit on annual reporting. There's a toolkit on enabling the rights of unrepresented litigants. And why I answer your question in that way is to point out the range of different solutions that we've been developing to improve the quality of justice across the region.

KOROÏ HAWKINS: And it sounds like a lot of work that you have been doing and still need to do, what's ahead for the future?

LA: What lies ahead is more of the same, building on what's working, there will be a new design, which means that people across the region, the judges, the users of the courts, the bar will be consulted again about what they need right now in 2015. And the program will I

believe, I anticipate continue to evolve. But I think it will evolve in the direction that I highlighted, in other words doing whatever it takes to improve the quality of justice across the region. In other words, it won't necessarily just be training as it was originally. It could be looking at how information technology can support the delivery of services remotely for example, which is a project that we are currently launching with assistance from an American expert.

KH: And just to wrap it all up maybe a little bit more on that new project?

LA: What we want to do now under the leadership of the chief justices of the region, is to explore intelligently how information technology can overcome the, you know, burdens of physical distance. The burdens of smallness and remoteness and yet still recognise and consolidate the diversity that exists in each different island. I've travelled and lived a lot in the region and I recognise of course that web-based delivery still has more perfections to be made. You know, I was working on Palau last year and found that the email only worked half the time. And you know even in a large jurisdiction like Samoa, there is sometimes quite limited email so we need to look at what services can be used and offered remotely. Can we provide mentoring support through remote networks? Should we have what Americans like to call webinars which are remote seminars and workshops where people in five or six different islands are sitting participating in a seminar or workshop that's actually been transmitted by satellite. So in the States they've been working with these technological applications for over the last ten, fifteen years and what we want to do is to harness that experience, bring in this expert and then to make sure that he understands the needs, the nuances, the diversity of the region. We'll then induct him into the region so he visits quite a number of different countries understands the local conditions, needs so on. And then he can provide us an advice, give us a report in time for the next meeting of our Chief Justices, which is scheduled for late in April. And at that time, trusting that the report is a compelling one, they'll then be able to provide some strategic direction on how we should then invest further in the use of technology to support the remote delivery, in addition to the face-to-face delivery, of support to courts across the region.



The Pacific Judicial Development Programme is exploring ways to bring justice to remote communities.