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Strengthening justice across the Pacific

The Pacific Judicial Development Programme (PJDP) promotes the rule of law and strengthens the capacity of courts across the Pacific. In a region characterised by smallness, dispersion, diversity, and economic fragility, the programme provides a resilient and trusted support mechanism.

The PJDP commenced in July 2010 and will end in June 2015. It is funded by the New Zealand Aid Programme and implemented by the Federal Court of Australia.

Chief Justices of the Pacific, as part of the Pacific Judicial Conference, provide strategic overview. An Executive Committee of Chief Justices and National Coordinators provide strategic guidance and direction via regular governance leadership meetings.

The current phase of PJDP serves the judiciaries of Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Over time, the PJDP's development vision has evolved, from training and capacity building, to improving the responsiveness of courts to deliver services that improve the wellbeing of the communities they serve. Strengthened local leadership and management mechanisms are supported through the PJDP to promote justice.

Addressing PJDP at the Chief Justices' meeting in Auckland, March 2013 Rt Hon Dame Sian Elias, Chief Justice, New Zealand and Tokelau, highlighted the importance of leadership and learning elements of the PJDP. "All systematic learning and training opportunities are helpful. This session on judicial leadership provides a chance to reflect and learn from experts. Everyone here is a leader. There is no one touchstone for leadership, so we come many shapes and sizes. Everyone here has insights of value to impart and no one has nothing to learn."

Six toolkits that were launched in mid-2013 are an example of the practical, innovative approach of the PJDP. The toolkits provide information and practical guidance to assist partner courts to undertake ongoing judicial and court development. They support change by promoting the local use, management, ownership and sustainability of judicial development.

Rt Hon Patu F. M. Sapolu, Chief Justice, Samoa and Chair of the PJDP Programme Executive Committee, sees considerable value in the toolkits. "[They] are a most useful methodology for enlightening and educating the judiciaries and judicial services in the region of what needs to be done and how it is to be done for the enhancement and the improvement of the services provided by the Courts to the public."

Toolkits focus on developing or revising codes of judicial conduct; establishing national judicial development committees; conducting family violence and youth justice workshops; setting time-standards for case management; promoting access to justice and developing annual court reporting.

The annual court reporting toolkit was recently piloted in Tokelau, resulting in the publication of this judiciary's first *Judicial Annual Report* in 2012. It is planned that the toolkit will support the development of a further eight annual court reports in partner judiciaries across the region. This will improve transparency in judicial administration and the ability of citizens to understand their courts.

A 'Responsive Fund' also exists to target specific local needs. With small incentive-based grants, the fund empowers partner judiciaries to lead, develop, and manage their ongoing judicial and court development activities.

To date, 12 countries have submitted 32 applications under the fund and have successfully managed activities ranging from the development of handbooks and court manuals, to mentoring and training activities.

Recently the Responsive Fund supported mentoring for Justices of the Peace from the Cook Islands and gave them the opportunity to observe how a high performing court fulfils its duties, with the support of the Auckland

District Court. The group gained an understanding of the Pasifika Youth Court processes and approach. This exposure will now inform consultations to be undertaken on the benefits of such a process with relevant government, community, church, and chief/leadership stakeholders in the Cook Islands.

Ms Tangi Taoro, Senior Justice of the Peace and Cook Islands National Coordinator, describes the benefits.

"These activities have opened up the opportunity for the Cook Island Courts to look at a youth court system that can impact positively on helping the offenders improve their way of living after admitting to their offences, thereby reducing the increasingly high number of young offenders."

For more details about the Pacific Judicial Development Programme, and to access the toolkits, see: www.fedcourt.gov.au/pjdp

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CJ Patu Sapolu (Samoa); Dr Livingston Armytage (PJDP Team Leader); Mr John Allen (MFAT CEO); and CJ Dame Sian Elias (New Zealand & Tokelau) at the Chief Justices' Leadership Workshop in Auckland, March 2013.