



## **PIANZEA NETWORK**

### **THE PACIFIC ISLANDS, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATORS NETWORK**

Presented by Kevin Bodel, Director Funding and Disclosure Section, Australian Electoral Commission at the Global Electoral Organisation Conference Washington USA.

#### **Background**

PIANZEA was founded at a conference held at the Warwick Hotel in Fiji in 1997. The Conference was organised by the AEC, with funding from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the New Zealand Chief Electoral Office.

It is worth emphasising that the development of a network to flow from the conference was not an imposed objective of the conference: the participants themselves concluded that such an initiative would be worthwhile, and drafted PIANZEA's founding document, The Warwick Declaration, which states that:

“... it is indeed our joint commitment to continue and maintain in the Pacific spirit, a close association of Pacific Electoral Administrators with a view to establishing a networking arrangement to facilitate and encourage the free flow of electoral information among member countries and to provide assistance where possible.”

#### **Members**

The election administrations of the following countries are recognised as being members of PIANZEA:

American Samoa, Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, the Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna. There are also two associate members: East Timor's Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration; and the Pacific Institute for Advanced Studies in Development and Governance, University of the South Pacific.

## **Objectives**

In pursuance of the goal identified in the Warwick Declaration, PIANZEA has a number of objectives. These are:

- to encourage the development and sharing of materials and other resources between member countries, in particular those countries which are geographically close, have similar challenges and perhaps share close cultural and historical associations;
- to maintain regular dialogue so as to exchange information, share ideas and to encourage one another in common tasks;
- where possible to exchange officers and arrange staff placements for electoral staff to gain experience, assist one another in different work environments and to learn from exposure to different systems and practices;
- to develop programs (multilateral and bilateral) to encourage study tours and visits during electoral events, thereby providing opportunities to learn from exposure to different systems and practices;
- to provide technical assistance with the view to encouraging capacity building in areas of need; and
- to meet together as a conference every eighteen months to two years at a time most suitable to all members.

## **Activities and Networking on a Regional Basis**

As PIANZEA has become more and more established, the potential benefits for its members have also become more apparent. Two, in particular, reinforce each other. As people get to know each other better, the organisation of cooperative activities becomes much easier. At the same time, the conduct of cooperative activities strengthens the underlying relationships further, enhancing the networking.

One reason why PIANZEA is of particular value to its members is that most of them, individually, are relatively small organisations. While Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea have long-established electoral bodies, in Pacific Island countries, the organisation of elections tends to be the primary responsibility of only a few people in each country. This makes it challenging to undertake substantial cooperative activities, for example training, in an individual country, but at the same time presents an opportunity for regional programs which can not only develop skills simultaneously in a number of different countries, but can also enhance links and networking by bringing people together.

## **PIANZEA and BRIDGE: "South-South" Cooperation**

A significant development in the Pacific has been the extensive use of the Building Resources In Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) Project by the PIANZEA Network. BRIDGE has been a key tool used by PIANZEA to pursue a strategy of developing local capacity across the region to enable; the development and delivery of courses; provision of technical assistance; observation of elections and of course the professional development of electoral administrators.

Broadly, the approach used by PIANZEA has been to conduct a small number of BRIDGE Train the Facilitator courses at a central location with participants coming from all over the Pacific region. These courses have been facilitated by the AEC. This has been followed up by the conduct of BRIDGE courses in specific countries using those semi-accredited facilitators supported by fully accredited AEC Facilitators. The final phase has been the conduct of BRIDGE courses in those countries independent of the AEC, fully localising BRIDGE.

A new development has been the conduct of sub-regional BRIDGE programs by countries which have similar cultures, historical backgrounds and who face the same challenges. For example the BRIDGE Voter Registration Module was conducted in February 2007 for EMB staff from Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The objective in conducting this course was not only to learn about voter registration but also to initiate Melanesian solutions to some very Melanesian problems with regard to voter registration.

Is this approach working? It is early days yet but in the last 18 months we have seen three Pacific Islanders writing curriculum for BRIDGE Version 2. We have also witnessed Pacific Islanders from one country assisting their colleagues in another country in conducting BRIDGE courses and providing technical assistance at electoral events. Along with the reduced reliance on Australia, perhaps the key indicator that capacity is really being built was demonstrated in December 2006 when a BRIDGE Facilitator from the Solomon Islands conducted a BRIDGE course for AEC staff in Australia, two years after she herself had been a participant at an AEC facilitated BRIDGE course in the Solomon Islands.

A second significant development in the Pacific has been the increasing use of a computerised Generic Voter Registration System (GVRS), developed by the AEC. To date this has been used in one form or another in Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Most recently, at the completion of the installation of the GVRS system in Vanuatu, large number of duplicate electors and dead electors were identified and removed from the voter register; a first since Vanuatu's independence in 1980.

A third significant development is still in its early stages and that is the development of civic education and voter education programs using "BRIDGE style" methodology. This was tried fully on a national scale in the Solomon Islands in 2005/6 when just under 50% of the country participated in an intensive face to face participatory program of civic and voter education. In under 12 months every ward in the country was visited twice with remote villages across 900 islands doing activity based

learning. One of the key indicators of the success of the program was nationwide, in a highly illiterate society, with the introduction of a new polling process, where written ballot papers were used for the first time, and with high turn out rates, the formality rate was 98.5%.

Of the 262 people working on the program only two were from the AEC. The program was written, implemented and managed by Solomon Islanders. Almost all the key people conducting the program had been exposed to BRIDGE or were trained BRIDGE Facilitators. Some of those people are now assisting their colleagues in the Pacific with civic and voter education and training of electoral administrators.

### **Why PIANZEA works**

It is worth emphasising that PIANZEA has no constitution and no formal structures: it is underpinned purely by the goodwill and cooperative spirit of the participants. While the AEC has provided a secretariat service for the Network, the role of the Secretary is one of facilitating activities, rather than providing formal leadership.

The PIANZEA Network was established by the members as a response to a need for increased communication and activity between the countries of the Pacific. There is a close match between the input required of the members and their capacity to provide such input.

PIANZEA has been in existence for ten years and it is still early days. There is still much to do but we believe we are on the right track by using our Network to build real capacity in our region. Specific acknowledgement must be given to the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) who have not only funded much of this activity but has worked closely with PIANZEA to support these ideas and approaches to building capacity in the Pacific region.

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