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Concept Note

Support for the Fiji Parliament from 2017 onwards

Background

The Parliament of Fiji was created following independence in 1970. The parliament replaced the former Legislative Council that was the legislative arm of government in the pre-independence period. The parliament's role has been interrupted as a result of coups on a number of occasions since 1970 including in 1987, 1992, 2000 and 2006.

In September 2013, the President of Fiji assented to the country's new constitution that provided for a unicameral 50 seat Parliament elected through a one national constituency proportional representation open list system of voting.

A general election was held in September 2014 and the new Parliament met for the first time in October 2014. Around 90% of the MPs were new to Parliament as was the Speaker and the vast majority of the Parliament secretariat staff.

The Governing Fiji First party secured 32 seats in Parliament with opposition parties SODELPA and NFP securing 15 seats and 3 seats respectively. The Parliament adopted new Standing Orders that provided for the creation of 6 Standing Committees that have both a legislative and oversight function.

The Parliament term is 4 years with the next election scheduled for 2018.

Fiji Parliament Support Project (Jan 2014 – Dec 2016)

Following the announcement of a return to Parliamentary democracy, UNDP designed a project to provide assistance in creating and supporting the new Parliament.

The Fiji Parliament Support Project (FPSP) is a three year project designed to provide support to the Parliament of Fiji in two inter-linked phases. The first phase from January-September 2014 provided support to the Government of Fiji and the Fiji Parliament as it prepared for the resumption of parliamentary democracy. The second phase of support started soon after the national election on 17th September 2014 and will continue until December 2016. This second phase is aimed at supporting the Parliament to undertake its legislative, oversight and representation functions effectively.

The UNDP project is supported and funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), European Union, Government of Japan, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and UNDP. In addition, the project also receives 'in kind' technical support from the Australian Parliament's Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships programme (PPP). In total the budget for the 3-year project is approximately USD\$4 million. The project steering committee consists of UNDP, the four project donors and the Parliament which is represented by the Speaker and the Secretary General.

The focus of FPSP has been on:

- a) **Infrastructure and Hardware Support** – Activities in this focus area assisted in ensuring that the Parliament was ready and operational following the September 2014 elections;
- b) **Strengthening the Capacity of the Parliament Secretariat** – This has been a major component of the project ensuring that parliament staff are well trained and capacitated to provide support to Members;
- c) **Parliamentary Procedures, Processes and Policies** – Activities in this area focused on providing technical assistance in developing the legal framework for the operation of Parliament and ongoing procedural support and advice to the secretariat;
- d) **Member of Parliament development** – A significant number of activities have been implemented under this focus area of work with intensive induction training for MPs followed by a programme of professional development;
- e) **Research and Analysis** – The project provide support to the Parliament Research and Library division in their work supporting MPs in their parliamentary duties;
- f) **Support to Key Parliamentary Committees** – Significant technical assistance and capacity building has been provided to the Parliament’s six standing committees;
- g) **Cross-party communication and dialogue** – The project has facilitated formal and informal opportunities for MPs to have cross-party dialogue on key issues;
- h) **Outreach** – The project is providing support on a cross-party basis to MPs to increase interaction between MPs and the public. In addition significant support has been provided in developing and implementing a Parliament outreach strategy that includes outreach visits by Parliament and high profile public debates such as the series of Speaker’s Debates.

The 2014 and 2015 project annual workplans that highlight the main activities and impact of the project are available from UNDP upon request.

The project has surpassed expectations in terms of impact and delivery. The project mid-term evaluation conducted in September 2015 noted that *“the evaluator is of the opinion that the project has played an important and strategic role in establishing and coaching the new Fiji Parliament ... [and] the project is a model project for UNDP, amongst others, because it has been conducted at the right moment, with the right approach and by the right persons”*.

The financial delivery of the project was 98% in 2014 and 96% in 2015.

A new project for a new situation - FPSP Phase II

With the FPSP project due to end in December 2016, there has been discussion by the project steering committee on the need for continued support for the Parliament and parliamentary work beyond December 2016.

The project mid-term evaluation noted that – *“Following the closure of this (first) project in December 2016, we recommend a second phase. The current three year project can be considered as the initial project phase aimed at supporting the creation of a new Parliament. The second project phase will be*

focused towards the further institutional development of the Parliament and accompanying it through the 2018 elections transition period. Therefore, we recommend that the second phase of the project has a four years time-span: January 2017 to December 2020.”

In line with this recommendation, UNDP proposes to develop a new project in line with the following:

Project basis and timeframe

The new project will build on the success of the FPSP but the focus will also reflect the new political and institutional reality in Fiji. While FPSP was developed and commenced at a time when there was no Parliament in Fiji, the new project will be implemented at a time when there is a need to provide strengthening and ongoing capacity development for an institution already in existence but during a crucial period of transition from one Parliament term to the next.

The proposed timeframe for a new project is in line with the recommendations of the FPSP mid-term evaluation. The new project will run from January 2017 to December 2020. This four year timeframe allows for continued support to this Parliament term as well as just over 2 years of support following the next general election in 2018.

Opportunities and risks

The new project is being developed in a lower risk environment than time when the current FPSP project document was being developed. In 2013 and early 2014 it was unclear how the political transition process would develop and the dynamics in which the new parliament would operate.

The new project will be developed in a much clearer environment where a legislature already exists and is operating and where there has already been an evaluation of the support being provided by development partners to the legislature. However, due to the very nature of the political environment in which the legislature and any support project will operate, a new project will not be risk free. In particular, the proposed timeline of the project spans a general election and the post-election environment in late 2018 that could have a significant impact on the workings of the legislature. While the project recognizes these risks, it is also one of the key reasons that such a project is needed. The Parliament in Fiji remains a new institution that would benefit from ongoing support, especially at times of political transition in the period leading up to and post-election.

Project Focus

To reflect the operating environment and developments since 2014, the new project focus will be different to that of FPSP. While FPSP was a Parliament creation project that focused on assistance in creating a new institution and its initial operation, the new project will be more targeted in the areas in which it operates and it supports the current Parliament.

a. Increased focus on Standing Committees

Based on the FPSP experience working with the Parliament Standing Committees since early 2015, it is proposed that the new project focus on supporting all six Standing Committees with their legislative and oversight mandates. This support will be both through the Committees unit and the Parliament’s research and library services unit that provides important support to the Committees.

b. Continued focus on mainstreaming development issues in the work of the Parliament

The FPSP project has successfully managed to ensure that parliament has engaged with the Sustainable Development Goals and key development issues. The new project will continue to work with the Parliament to ensure that the SDGs and development issues are mainstreamed across the Parliament's work

c. Building secretariat capacity

The new project will build on the secretariat professional development programme developed by FPSP to ensure that the Parliament staff are given exposure to other parliaments in the region and build their capacity to provide high level support to Members.

d. Induction and Professional Development of MPs

The new project will continue to provide MPs with professional development opportunities both in Fiji and with other parliaments. These events provide for both professional development and opportunity to network on a cross-party basis. Following the 2018 election, the project will provide significant support to the Parliament to implement an in-depth induction package of support and training to MPs.

e. Parliament Outreach & Citizen Engagement

FPSP has focused heavily initially on providing support to the Parliament's outreach and community engagement work. This has been particularly important for a new institution and in a context where no legislature operated for 8 years. The next project will provide continued support to outreach but will focus on traditionally excluded groups such as women and youth. In addition, based on the feasibility study conducted, the project will provide support for the establishment of a pilot Parliament satellite office to allow increased exposure for Parliament and increased interaction with citizens outside of Suva.

f. Direct work between UNDP and CSOs to facilitate stronger engagement of CSOs with Parliament

In order for the Parliament to operate effectively, citizens and civil society need to be engaged with the legislature. The new project will work directly with CSOs to provide capacity to better engage with Parliament Committees during the legislative process and when undertaking their oversight functions. In addition, the project will provide support to CSOs to facilitate information exchange in the sector on the work that Parliament is undertaking to allow for a more informed and engaged civil society.

Project Scale and budget

Based on current project operating costs and activities, it is estimated that the new project budget will be in the region of USD\$5m over the 4 year length of the project, i.e. approximately USD\$1.25m per year. In line with the UNDP project development processes, a full and detailed 4 year results and resources framework that includes multi-year budgets will be developed when the full project document is being developed.

Next steps and timelines

UNDP will discuss this concept note with key stakeholders including the Parliament and development partners. Based on the feedback provided, UNDP will decide whether to move forward in developing a full project document based on this concept note.

It is envisaged that consultations on the concept note will take place in May and June 2016 with a decision on how best to proceed to be taken by the FPSP Steering Committee at its meeting in June 2016.

The full project document should be developed by Quarter 3 of 2016 in order to ensure that the new project will start on 1st January 2017, thus allowing for a seamless transition from FPSP to the new project.

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