

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON ASSOCIATIONS AND ALLIANCES
THE PACIFIC ISLANDS, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND ELECTORAL
ADMINISTRATORS' (PIANZEA) NETWORK**

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In addressing this topic I would like to focus on a number of ways in which the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators' Network (PIANZEA) has functioned for the benefit of its members in the last eight years.

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, as a follow up to a meeting organised in Honiara, Solomon Islands, by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

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.”

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

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. The AEC, as both a network member and a body involved in technical cooperation, is strongly of the view that without the PIANZEA Network, its work in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the Solomon Islands would not have been nearly as successful as it has been.

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 the Pacific Island nations 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. An especially encouraging development has been the strengthening of a dialogue between Micronesian electoral administrations.

From the viewpoint of donors, PIANZEA provides a useful focal point for regional electoral assistance activities, and a point of contact when regional needs are being identified. In the last twelve months, AusAID has provided substantial funding, under

its Pacific Governance Support Program, to enable the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance, and Elections (BRIDGE) course to be used in the Pacific. In June-July this year, a two-week Train the Facilitator program (TTF) was conducted at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, which was attended by participants from across the region. Feedback from the program was extremely positive, and further funding is available to enable specific BRIDGE modules to be taught by the newly-trained facilitators, either nationally (involving, in all probability, stakeholders other than just electoral administrators) or sub-regionally. As part of the broad network strategy a PIANZEA BRIDGE Advisory Group has been established to enable PIANZEA members to discuss their training needs and to develop a timetable for the running of BRIDGE courses across the network.

Programs like this have the potential to enhance professionalism in electoral administration in a region, not only by developing the skills and knowledge of participants, but also by giving them the sense that they are part of a broader family of supporters of democracy, which has standards which they are personally obliged to meet.

A second significant development in the Pacific has been the increasing use of a 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, and Tonga. When the GVRS was installed in Tonga in November 2004, an officer from the Solomon Islands Electoral Office who had previously worked on the system took part in the implementation. This reflected a widely-shared belief within PIANZEA that there are benefits in involving staff of the member organisations in such projects.

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.

Also contributing to the success of the network is that it has been possible to gain funding for the key activities such as the workshops. Without the assistance of organisations such as AusAID, IDEA, and NZAID, the capacity of the Network to hold regular face to face meetings would be limited, and its effectiveness would be significantly diminished.