



In advance of the 2010 political reforms, the Legislative Assembly started working on developing its public outreach capacity. The Assembly recognized the importance of ensuring that the public and other key stakeholders were aware of the reforms and more specifically, of the role envisaged by the parliament in the reform. In 2010 then, with the support of donors, the Legislative Assembly employed an Education and Public Outreach Officer, as part of the Secretariat's Reporting Division. Since that time, the Secretariat has been implementing two key programmes, described below.

1. Background Information on Outreach and Schools Programme

The first phase of the Education Program was initiated as part of the Political Reform Project that was administered by the Prime Minister's Office. Funding for the program came from a donor, and was limited to the 2010-2011 financial year. The Education Program is primarily targeted at school students and was a direct response to the increasing number of student enquiries regarding school assignments and projects.

In liaison with the Ministry of Education, it was identified that a new curriculum be introduced in the Form 2 syllabus, "Tongan Society and Culture"; a significant component focuses directly on the political system and the Legislative Assembly. "Tongan Studies" in Form 5 also covers aspects of the Legislative Assembly.

Initial inquiries and a survey conducted by the Legislative Assembly's Education and Public Outreach Officer confirmed that both students and teachers were either confused or did not have a basic understanding of the functions of the Assembly. The Education Program therefore aims to fill this information gap.

After consultations with the Ministry of Education, it was proposed that the Education Program be focused on teachers instead of students.

1.1. Public Outreach Program

The political reform of 2010 will only be effective, if the work of the Assembly is more transparent. Presently, many Tongans believe that the Legislative Assembly is 'out of touch' with the people. It is felt that there is a significant disconnect between the Parliament (and Leaders) and the people. It is therefore essential that in moving forward under the new political reform system, there is a stronger relationship and more interaction between the people and their leaders.

The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga strongly feels that the Legislative Assembly should have a closer relationship with the people and that a Public Outreach program should be implemented to generate awareness of:

- (1) The general public of the functions of the Assembly under the political reform system, their connection/relationship to the Assembly, the role they play in holding the members accountable and their role in the law-making process;
- (2) MP's relationships with their constituency and the importance of community consultation;
- (3) Media, NGOs etc on their important roles in the law making and oversight process.

It is also important to provide public awareness campaigns on the importance of voting, good governance and the rule of law.



The project has been running smoothly despite some setbacks. For the first time the opening of Tonga's Legislative Assembly was live on the World Wide Web. Radio was the only medium that was normally used but now the Tonga Diaspora can view the opening as it happened. There is ongoing plan to stream live some of the debates but we are seeking to set up an extra server to cater to the large amount of traffic that we will attract once streaming is up and going.

We have also managed to keep the public updated through weekly radio and television programs on any developments and news from the Legislative Assembly. During the MP's one-week induction program, the public was updated on a daily basis through a radio and television program on the topics that were covered during the induction. After the Induction, more in depth programs on issues that were covered such as the process of law making, committees, impeachment processes among other topics were covered on a daily basis. Work on the Parliamentary brochure and Parliamentary terms have been completed and have been distributed and a guideline for the Hansard.

Public engagement is restricted by the budget that is allocated to the project. The available budget only allows school visits and no contact with the wider population apart from the television and radio programs. We need to conduct workshops in the outer islands and the main island, which is a more effective way as we have seen with the election campaigns.

1.2. *Television Program and Radio Program*

In order to comply with the Communication Strategy, using the media is the only media that will reach the rest of the country given the budget that we have. The Television and Radio Programs have been divided into two categories with one focusing on the Education program and the other on the Outreach program. The Education program is tailored to target students and the age group of between 10 to 25 years of age. The Outreach program looks more at engaging the general public in the lawmaking process in light of the recent political reforms and publicizing the work of the House in a more transparent manner. It also looks at in-depth discussions of issues, not just the functions and working of the Legislative Assembly but topics of interest that arises from discussions in the House. These programs are being broadcast on both Radio and Television.

After visiting the outer islands, we noticed the influence that local FM stations have on students and also the youth population. We are now trying to arrange for the radio programs that are played on the AM station here in Nuku'alofa to be sent to these FM stations for rebroadcast. The aim is to tap into their audience as well.

However due to financial constraints the Legislative Assembly's Television and Radio Programs ceased in August 2012. Radio and Television is vital to the outreach program because of Tonga's Geographical landscape. There is hope that under the Good Governance Program the radio and television programs will continue.

1.3. *Education and Outreach Program; School Visits.*

In 2011 the Ministry of Education trailed a new curriculum "Tongan Society and Culture" for forms one and two students. The first part of the new curriculum deals with Parliament. During the trial process in 2011 Tonga High School the premier school in Tonga requested assistance from the Parliament's Outreach and Education Unit staff to talk to both students and teachers about Parliament. It was found that both teachers and students lacked the knowledge and know very little about Parliament, its functions, the legislation process. Interestingly it was also noted students and even teachers do not know the Members of Parliament. With the approval of the Speaker, The Outreach/Education team led by the former deputy Speaker Lord Tu'iafitu travelled to all the islands to visit schools where the

Tongan Society and Culture was trialled. It was noted that all the schools had common problems.

The team returned and decided to compile some materials based on the feedbacks from the teachers. Due to the time and financial constraints it was decided that a Handbook that was produced by Dr. Malakai Koloamatangi for the members be refined and modified to suit teacher's needs. With the help of UNDP over 400 copies the handbook "Your Parliamentary Journey" was produced. The handbook is based on the first edition of the Tongan Society and Culture. Prior to the delivery of the handbook a copy was delivered to the director of Education and for her approval before the outreach site visit program. After receiving the director's approval and endorsement of the handbook it was decided that the site visits should be conducted at the beginning of the school year.

Methodology:

After consultations with the Ministry of Education it was agreed that the priority should be teachers instead of students! The reason is that when teachers understand it will be easier to teach students. However after consulting schools for the site visit, some school Principals and teachers preferred the team to also talk to students also.

Workshops with teachers were conducted by the team including brief presentation about the functions Parliament, the handbook, how laws are made this was followed by answering question session with teachers. The Education team will also brief the teachers in a workshop type meeting before talking to students and conducting the role play. In some schools teachers preferred to talk to both students and teachers and answers questions at the same time.

In the outer islands because Television Tonga can only be received in Tongatapu, part of 'Eua and part of Vava'u. The team conducted role plays where students take part in a mock parliament beginning from how the Speaker enters parliament, a Bill is introduced and read in the House, how it is debated in the Committee of the Whole House before it is returned and read in the House for the second and third reading up to when the Bill is passed. The team prepared a sample Bill for the kids to debate on.

Outcome:

The workshops with teachers and the role plays clarified a lot of confusions and misunderstanding especially among teachers about Parliament. One of the Principals admitted that after watching student's role play he can now understand the functions and difference between the Legislative Assembly and the Committee of the Whole House. In the outer islands the majority of teachers did not know the functions of Parliament except its Law making role. Majority of the Students in the outer islands did not know all of the Members of Parliament, Speaker of Parliament, Prime Minister and his Cabinet.

It was evident that majority of the teachers were not well versed with the reforms that took place in 2010 as they were still teaching students about the old system. For example, when asked about the number of people's representatives they answered 9. This is just one example. In some of the schools when the team asked who the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly is, some answered Lopeti Tu'ivakano, 'Akilisi Pohiva, 'Uliti Uata to name just a few that was brought up by the students.

Teachers felt that the Ministry of Education should have provided extra resources especially for the Tongan Society and Culture about Parliament. Teachers were content that the "Your Parliamentary Journey Handbook" is a great resource for the teachers. The team also gathered feedback from teachers to add materials as they went from school to school. These included black and white photographs of MPs and Ministers, seating of the House, How Laws are made among others. This was very useful the team found in all of the schools.

It was also found that the materials produced was also useful for other subjects including forms 4 History, Tongan Studies (form 5) and Biblical Studies (form 5).

Proposals:

- A member of the team to revisit all the schools to distribute the additional materials, a DVD of when a Bill is introduced to when it is passed after the 3rd reading.
- A second volume of the handbook to be produced taking into account the feedbacks from the teachers.
- To also look at producing materials for class six Primary School students. The reason is to prepare the kids for the secondary level.
- That the team conducts a survey on all of the schools to get the targeted Performance Indicators.
- A second follow up visit to the Schools in 2014 plus Primary Schools.
- To produce materials for Tongan Studies in the Tongan Language.

Due the fact that population is scattered throughout a vast area of ocean, transport costs is very high and time consuming. The best approach given the circumstances is the utilization of the media through Radio programs. Radio Tonga is the only medium that covers the whole of Tonga. However, during the school visits, the team was able to visit some of the communities in the outer islands during the evenings and answered their questions. Members of the five-member team went to different village kava sessions. Tongatapu and 'Eua are fortunate that people can access television. Community visits will be carried out during phase 2.