



Supporting regional efforts in strengthening e-government capabilities in the Pacific

Final report

1 May 2018 to 31 December 2019

(edited for publication on Cybil)

1. Introduction

This report covers the project from its start in May 2018 until December 2019. It describes the context and operating environment of the project, implemented activities, outcomes, details of participants and participating agencies, and lessons learned.

2. Context and operating environment

This project started with a mapping of main stakeholders and points of contact for ICT policy in the Pacific. It required a substantial effort to find the right people who represent the right government departments and to track down their effective contact details.

In the process of scoping out the remit of this project between May and October 2018, it became evident that this was a small and targeted activity compared to the multi-year and multimillion-dollar programs of regional aid providers such as DFAT, the World Bank and others. That said, people who had been working on the Pacific Regional ICT Strategic Action Plan welcomed this project, with its specific focus on e-governance.

ASPI wanted to make sure this project would fit in with ongoing policy, aid and IT initiatives in the region, including those overseen by the Pacific Islands Forum. For the lack of a strong and effective central coordinating platform on ICT issues, ASPI connected to all relevant stakeholders and established a related objective: to build a bridge between (regional) policy discussions and the on-the-ground activities undertaken by the ministries and their agencies.

Working with partners in the Pacific undeniably brings a limited absorption capacity to the fore. Most interlocutors have engaged with great enthusiasm throughout the project despite long travel times. The project also demonstrated the need to manage expectations, as it is evident that their small offices (in terms of human resources) look after a broad range of policy issues.

Finally, the partnership with Estonia's e-Governance Academy was instrumental in providing knowledge and expertise to the region. However, there is a perennial challenge in providing participants with tangible resources that are fit for purpose. There is a continuous risk of project implementers demanding information before being able to provide substantive support. For that reason, ASPI's team focused strongly on providing and facilitating the opportunity for Pacific participants to learn from experts (including those from EGA) and to engage with peers (such as during the site visits and at the DTA conference in Canberra) in the design and implementation of activities.

3. Summary of implemented activities

Kick-off meeting with Pacific diplomatic corps in Canberra

On 13 September 2018, ASPI invited the Canberra-based embassies and high commissions of PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa and Tonga as well as DFAT Cyber Branch to a kick-off meeting. During the meeting, we introduced the project and solicited advice and suggestions for implementation and further communications.

Activity: Regional workshop, Nuku'alofa, 24–26 October 2018	
Implementing agency	ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre, in cooperation with the e-Governance Academy
Current status	Completed, October 2018
Purpose of activity	<p>The purpose of this workshop was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to bring together senior officials who are overseeing e-government programs in their countries to take stock of the current state of e-government development in each of the Pacific states to expose participants to good practices from other parts of the world.
Beneficiaries	Government officials from PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati, and representatives from UNDP Samoa, Victoria University and USP.
Activity outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two-day workshop provided an opportunity for participants to meet counterparts and exchange lessons and experiences on ICT and e-government developments. Based on the sharing of, and reflections on, practices from Estonia and Australia, we were able to review the current state of affairs in each of the participating Pacific island countries. All participating states contributed to the workshop with country presentations and responses to the e-governance questionnaire. This allowed ASPI and EGA to assess areas for potential follow-up.



Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFAT had advised on organising our activities in the region. The workshop in Nuku’alofa was scheduled in early October to coincide with a scheduled visit by the Estonian President. Unfortunately, that visit was cancelled at the last minute. While organising a regional event in Tonga was challenging (because of travel itineraries for some delegates and lack of accommodation due to a coinciding visit by HRH Prince Harry), it paid off in terms of host-nation support and engagement from all participants. • From interactions with the participants, it became evident that work on ICTs and e-government is taking place in siloes, domestically between ICT departments and the rest of governments, and regionally between ministries of information and communications and donors. • The event also showed great appetite for more South-to-South exchange of expertise and experiences, including with Australia and New Zealand. Participation from the UNDP and USP was helpful in terms of consistency and follow-up.
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Activity: Bilateral follow-up missions to Port Moresby, Port Vila, Honiara and Fiji	
Implementing agency	The e-Governance Academy, in cooperation with ASPI’s International Cyber Policy Centre
Current status	Completed, February–July 2019
Purpose of activity	To follow-up on outcomes that were identified during the first regional workshop and to advise on and assist in developing national road maps for the implementation of e-government capabilities.
Beneficiaries	Government departments in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. We also did a follow-up in Fiji through our participation and presentations at the annual meeting of the Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association (PITA) and the ANU’s Pacific Update at the University of the South Pacific in July 2019.



Activity outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A program of 3–4 days in Port Moresby, Honiara and Port Vila consisted of meetings with stakeholders representing the whole of government as well as with embassies and international organisations. • A concluding ½-day whole-of-government workshop discussed findings and presented recommendations for e-government road maps. • A summary report with findings and materials was shared with local interlocutors after the visit.
Lessons learned	The limited scope of this project restricted ASPI and EGA in our ability to respond and answer to follow-up work in supporting the development of road maps and reviews of policies and strategies. Welcome exceptions were those situations in which existing aid programming was ongoing, such as in Solomon Islands with DFAT’s governance support program and in Tonga with the World Bank’s digital government project.

Activity: Regional workshop, Canberra	
Implementing agency	ASPI’s International Cyber Policy Centre, in cooperation with the e-Governance Academy
Current status	Completed, October 2019
Purpose of activity	<p>The overall purpose of the activity was to share experiences and draw a shared way forward. Specific objectives for the workshop were to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share findings and recommendations from the baseline assessment report and the ‘advise and assist’ missions • compare and assess specific subsets of e-government capabilities that are common in the region and could benefit from international good practices • provide participants with relevant e-government knowledge resources • facilitate networking with Australian Government agencies, international organisations and other expert agencies.
Beneficiaries	Government officials from PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati and New Caledonia’s Southern Province, and representatives from the



	World Bank and Divine Word University in PNG. Representatives from Standards Australia and the Oceania Cyber Security Centre joined as observers during the workshop.
Activity outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two-day workshop provided an opportunity to deep-dive into three common regional enablers for sustainable e-government: a single access platform, national digital identity schemes and cybersecurity. All participating states contributed to the workshop with updates on their previous country presentations, which were facilitated by South-to-South discussions on common challenges and good practice solutions. Attendance at the DTA Digital Summit on day 3 allowed participants to learn about case studies of digital solutions from a variety of Australian Government agencies and to connect with Australian Government representatives and private-sector exhibitors. The meeting verified and reached consensus on the country profiles of the baseline assessment report on e-government capabilities. At a public event hosted at ASPI, DFAT's Office of the Pacific provided a keynote speech on the topic of the 'digital revolution in the Pacific'.
Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity to get together as public officials working on e-government and digital government once a year was highly appreciated. It was suggested that such annual get-togethers should be continued. The opportunity to attend the workshop alongside a conference such as the Digital Summit was greatly appreciated.

Activity: Baseline report of e-government capabilities and project coordination	
Implementing agency	ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre
Current status	Completed, February 2020
Purpose of activity	The purpose of the baseline report was to establish a common understanding of current e-government capabilities in each of the Pacific island countries selected for this project.

Beneficiaries	Officials from Pacific island countries, donor agencies and other professionals working on ICT and e-government development in the Pacific region.
Activity outcomes	The baseline report, published in February 2020, contains an overview of e-government capabilities in six Pacific island countries and a set of conclusions and recommendations.

4. Analysis of project outcomes

Overall program objective

To raise awareness about the opportunities of digital service delivery among governments in the Indo-Pacific region.

Assessment and overall conclusions

1. The ASPI/EGA workshops presented participants with an overview of e-government development steps in each of the participating Pacific island countries, which encouraged peer-to-peer experience-sharing and a mounting awareness of potential regional solutions to address common challenges.
2. During the second workshop, a thorough review of key e-government enablers (national digital ID, cybersecurity and single access platform) was conducted with case studies from Tonga, Fiji and Samoa and accompanied by presentations from Digital Identity NZ, Standards Australia and the e-Governance Academy.
3. The bilateral follow-up missions enabled EGA and ASPI to underscore the importance of a whole-of-government approach to ICTs and the further building of e-government capabilities. Intragovernment coordination between agencies (often in ministries of finance or ministries for ICT) responsible for e-government and the rest of government is persistently seen as a risk to sustainability. On the donor side, the follow-up missions demonstrated an opportunity for aid programs in support of national and subnational governance to make more use of cyber capacity-building (including e-government) expertise available in the region.
4. Participants provided country presentations and updates as part of the workshop agendas and shared relevant publications, such as policies, strategies and evaluations. ASPI and EGA developed and shared with the participants a set of materials that will be made more widely available in a redacted form.

5. The Estonian experience of developing into a digital nation and its associated socio-economic benefits was shared extensively with participants during the two workshops. Also, various case studies from Australia and New Zealand were brought up and discussed. The workshop in Canberra included site visits to the Department of Human Services and Canberra Data Centre as demonstrations of practical e-government enablers (data storage) and e-services.
6. Participants joined the inaugural DTA Digital Summit conference, which showcased best practice case studies of e-government applications and services from different Australian Government departments. The workshop in Canberra also included a roundtable discussion with donors active in the area of digitisation in the Pacific, such as the World Bank, DFAT and the US Embassy.
7. The baseline assessment report provides a common understanding of achievements in developing e-government capabilities in the region. It should serve as an encouraging testament to the work done so far, but also provide an incentive for a greater effort to guide policy development and capability investments in a more coordinated and regional manner.

