Electoral, parliamentary and party reform

- Electoral reform:
- Reforms have been in two areas:
  - Electoral administration, eg in Solomon Islands move to paper ballots, trials of computer assisted counting in PNG
  - Electoral systems, eg introduction of LPV in PNG
- LPV in PNG - overall a success, not just in producing more representative members but in reducing campaign tensions
- But problems remain, including widespread vote fraud and inflated electoral roll
- Possible adoption of LPV in Solomon Islands?
- Possible reversion in Fiji – back towards FPTP or to PR?
- Parliamentary reforms widespread across Pacific in recent years
- eg OLIPPAC legislation in PNG which binds elected MPs to continue their support for PM - created more stably governments than before
- But need reforms to deal with party splits and greater enforcement by Speaker and Party Registrar
- Solomon Islands now looking to adopt similar legislation

- Also, revitalisation of committee system in Solomon Islands and elsewhere, with CDI assistance (also to Bougainville, PNG and East Timor)
  • Prior to this, the committee system had been inactive for many years. Most committee members had little or no understanding of the role of committees or the process for conducting an inquiry.
Women in Politics

- Under-representation of women a particularly crucial problem – Pacific has worst record of female representation in the democratic world.

- Lots of money being thrown at this problem – eg $6 million to UNIFEM – but little result so far.

- Quota-style reforms increasingly being considered - eg 3 nominated seats in PNG, reserved seats in Bougainville, possibility of doing similar in other Pacific states?

  - Eg the ABG House of Representatives has 33 directly elected Members each representing a single member constituency, three reserved seats for women and three for former combatants.
  - There are questions, however, as to whether having reserved seats for women mean they then fail to compete in other seats at elections, as was the case in 2005.
  - In PNG, last month the Cabinet approved Dame Carol Kidu’s submission for 3 nominated seats for women for the 2009 Parliament.
Political party reforms

- Cohesive and programmatic political parties are essential to “making democracy work”

- But party development in the South Pacific has been slow – most “parties” remain parliamentary groupings with little or no popular organisation

- Extremely difficult area of reform, but some progress eg work of National Alliance at 2007 PNG elections.

- Also, under OLIPPAC parties are supposed to have constitutions, members, office-holders etc, and can be deregistered without these - but does this happen?

- Again, Solomon Islands are looking at copying some parts of the PNG legislation to “strengthen” their party systems.

- Also, increasing international assistance in this area – but does it work?
- Reforms to Pacific political systems to try to address certain specified problems (eg instability of governments, unrepresentative MPs, lack of women)

- These constitute a process of deliberate "political engineering", a process that has become quite popular in recent years.

- Most of these reforms have had modest but positive impacts eg stability of government in PNG, more peaceful elections, women MPs in Bougainville

- As expected outcomes have not emerged ‘naturally’, reformers attempt to intervene to deliver them – ‘market failure’?

- However, there are also unintended consequences inherent in any effort to engineer politics - I am sure my fellow speakers will have more to say on this subject!