VANUATU
TRUSTED
OFFICIAL
STATISTICS

CO-CREATION PROCESS
NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF
DECISION-MAKING
IN PARLIAMENT

DELIVERING TRUSTED OFFICIAL STATISTICS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND EVIDENCE BASED DECISION MAKING IN VANUATU

Inter-Parliamentary Union
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PARiS
21

PARLIAMENT
PARLEMENT

VNSO
VANUATU NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE
BUREAU NATIONAL DES STATISTIQUES

VANUATU 2030

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Parliament of Vanuatu has four main functions to fulfil: legislation, oversight, representation, and budgetary. However, these functions are limited by the weak links in the Vanuatu Statistical System (VSS), fragmented coordination, conflicting numbers, lack of fully open data, and limited capacity to utilise statistics.

METHODOLOGY

To provide concrete evidence of decision-making in Parliament the VNSO conducted a needs assessment. This information was used to design the interventions needed to build combined individual, organisational and system level capacity of Parliament. The mixed methods needs assessment consisted of focus group discussions, key informant interviews and a short survey designed to evaluate the success of the capacity building. The qualitative components of the assessment included all the Departments within Parliament- Hansard, Parliamentary Committees, Corporate Services, House Procedures, and the Clerk's Office. The quantitative survey included only those being trained (n=20) and focused on evaluating the statistical literacy of participants, using a pre & post training design.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The Hansard Department was established in 2003 and consists of six staff (4 reporters and 2 editors; 3 French, 3 English). Its main function is to keep records (verbatim and summarised minutes) of all the Parliamentary sittings. The departments major challenge is maintaining the original meaning and motives when translating the minutes from Bislama (national dialectic) to English and French. The minutes taken must be approved by Parliament before they are officially released and are stored in an archive (hard copy) or uploaded onto the website (soft copy). The main requests made to Hansard are to verify statements recorded in the minutes to support legal cases. Their role is defined by the Standing Orders, which were revised in 2020, this revision included all minutes to be translated into verbatim which has put a greater burden on staff. The assessment also noted that in Hansard, on the job training is a common practice with a lack of standardised processes. They work closely with parliamentarians to understand the context of the debates and have begun to coach the newly formed Youth Parliament on their procedures and how to conduct sittings.

The Parliamentary Committee Department (9 staff, 4 researchers) supports the three-committee system: Committee of the Hall, Standing Committee, and the Ad-Hoc Committee with a recently formed Portfolio Committee. The Committee of the Hall focuses on Bills. The Standing Committee is made up of four sub-components, Social Affairs Committee, Economics and Foreign Policy Committee, Institutions and Constitution Affairs Committee and Public Accounts Committee (each committee is made up of 7 members- 4 government and three opposition, Public Accounts 8 members- 4 government and 4 opposition), these committees scrutinize government. All Ministries are expected to provide reports to the Standing Committees by the 31st of March, however these are rarely submitted on time. Additionally, the reporting formats are not standardized with limited links to the National Sustainable Development Plan, and the figures provided are often not quality checked against other data sources. A researcher and secretary are assigned to each Committee to analyse the Ministry reports and make recommendations. Parliament is also trying to establish a legal unit to support the Parliamentary Committees. The Ad-Hoc is set up for to resolve specific issues; and the Portfolio Committee investigates Ministerial issues and conducts enquires.

Main task of House Procedures is to assist business of the House in Parliamentary sittings by providing advice on Standing Orders, and protocol within the chamber and proceedings. The House acts as an entry and exit point of all reports, legislation, and bills to be discussed in the parliament and works closely with the Hansard Department. The House Procedures also connect with the Committees for research on specific issues, they register all annual reports submitted to Parliament as required in the Standing Orders, and register reports and Bills into an administrative database. However, the new Standing Orders need to be simplified and summarised for MPs, and the content of the annual reports are often too complicated. Major challenge within the Department is also the inability to track the status and progress of a Bill, which can lead to same Bill being discussed on multiple occasions within Parliament (duplication).

Corporate Services manage Parliaments finances, human resources, communications, library, and cleaning. Finance manages parliaments budget for staff, they prepare the budget cycle for Department of Finance and Treasury, and administer the MPs constituency allowance (3 million VT per constituency). The human resource staff support the Office of the Speaker and control the viewings during Parliamentary sittings. The communications team manage Parliament's information system, they have digitalised all Bills and these are available on Parliament's website (Legislative Management Information System). The library manages information requests on Acts, Amendments, MPs, and Official Gazettes. Major challenges center on financial support for Parliament, limited records on MPs spending on their constituency, and connecting the library to the administrative data system for information requests.

The Inter-Parliamentary Relations unit work closely with the Clerk's office to connect Parliament within global bodies through multi-literal agreements. The unit was established in 2018 and consists of three staff members. They often develop briefs and presentations for Ministers on foreign missions and are currently coordinating virtual conferences for the Parliamentary Committees. The unit often receive data requests from Ministers for health and educational indicators, however sourcing this information from the VSS can be difficult due to limited knowledge of data producers, and the data is not always available in the format needed. Additionally, there is a lack of statistical capacity to interpret statistics, as well as develop briefs, reports, and presentations to support MPs.

RESULTS OF SHORT SURVEY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	SUBJECT MATTER	SCORE
Understand that the Vanuatu Statistical System (VSS) should supply relevant, timely and usable official statistics to set priorities, make informed choices and implement better policies for sustainable development, and for data to be useable government frameworks should be aligned to national priorities.	Vanuatu Statistical System	33%
	Fundamental Principle of Official Statistics	17%
	Government Frameworks	67%
Understand that data is a prerequisite for delivering the NSDP, better data can help design more effective public policies; it must be transformed, analysed and used to be useful for policy making, monitoring and accountability.	Data Use	83%
	Metadata	33%
	Disaggregation's	67%
Understand that trusted statistics are crucial for monitoring progress of the NSDP implementation and for Parliament to perform its oversight and accountability role effectively	Components of Trusted Statistics	25%
Understand the primary focus of Censuses, Surveys and Administrative Data, and how the information can be used to inform decision-making, and that outdated statistics limit a country's ability to measure growth, productivity and poverty, and the data revolution has the potential to transform the operations of the VSS	Traditional Data Sources	25%
	Definition of National Population and Housing Census	50%
	Administrative Data	92%
	Advantages of Administrative Data	50%
	Non-traditional data sources	17%
Understand practical skills related to the reading of tables and graphs summarizing data, understanding summary statistics describing variable of interest – a set of data values describing a given feature	Case Study- Bar Graph	75%
Understand that data communication is critical to making data meaningful, it can help bridge the data literacy gap and engage with the public.	Case Study- Infographic	50%
Understand the key role of data in public sector accountability; enables parliament to examine the Government's use of resources and agencies' financial operations and focuses on whether agency programs are achieving their aims.	Responsibilities of Public Accounts	100%
	Government Financial Statistics	83%
	Financial Statistics	42%

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT PARLIAMENT

HANSARD

Training manual for new recruits

Create network of stakeholders to support Hansard
(New Zealand Parliament, Inter-Parliamentary Union)

Translation software

Training in minute taking, and shorthand summaries

Training in languages - French and English

Improve system of archiving
and cataloguing minutes

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS

Develop templates for briefs, and presentations -
support Ministers Missions

Training on development of briefs and presentations

Create network of data producers and users in NSS to utilize
- contact points in Ministries to support coordination

Training to improve statistical literacy- data use
and interpretation, linking statistics with policies
(aligned to National Sustainable Development Plan-NSDP)

Develop relationship with Department
of Foreign Affairs as they also support
the governments international missions

HOUSE PROCEDURES

Create electronic monitoring and evaluation
framework to track Bills (number, register,
consultations, effectiveness)

Development of infographics to simplify new
Standing Orders- handbook processes,
procedures, Bills and Legislation

Develop template for Ministerial annual reports
- simplify for better understanding

COMMITTEES

Develop reporting template for Ministries

Develop network between Parliament and
Ministries to improve response time

Statistical capacity- data interpretation and use,
and alignment to NSDP

Develop template for Parliament to evaluate reports
(oversight) linked to NSDP (Targets)

Train official statistics standards, and tools
to quality check information

Training on institutions
and good governance

CORPORATE SERVICES

Develop template for financial record keeping
by MPs- issue they don't have to submit

Develop comprehensive ICT system including
indicators monitoring Bills that MPs can view,
and connect to other data sources

Training in developing Corporate and Business Plans

Development of a Human Resources
Capacity Building Strategy- seek support to implement

Build statistical capacity - data tabulation
and interpretation, and use