

Country: Fiji

Theme: Inclusive Electoral Literacy Through Informal Education Channel

Sub Theme: Any Other-Reaching out to those outside schools and other marginalised groups

Title of The Best Practice / Case Study: Face to face awareness sessions to reach all communities from rural to urban settlements for the 2014 Fijian General Election.

Area of Coverage: The Voter Education and Awareness teams were sent out to the 14 provinces of Fiji with an aim to reach all communities starting in the rural centres before moving towards the urban settlements. A total of 42 teams inclusive of 100 plus workers were hired to meet the area of coverage.

Period of implementation: The awareness sessions took place from 15 June to 05 September 2014 comprising of 12 weeks altogether.

Background: The face to face awareness sessions entailed the use of a multi-pronged undertaking to reach the voters using both the “bottom up” and the “top down” approach. This combination of both approaches not only ensured that voter awareness reached all the voters but that there was continuity once the teams returned from the field. The Awareness team visited all the 14 provinces in Fiji and the sessions were effectively presented to a wide cross section of registered and non-registered voters alike. This holistic approach to voter awareness heightened interest amongst the communities reached and also created a new generation of patriotic first time voters.

Brief Description of Best Practice: The Fijian Elections Office (FEO) is an independent electoral management body formally established in March 2014 under the Electoral Decree, 2014. The FEO’s role is to deliver credible Elections in line with international best practices. The 2014 General Election was conducted after a lapse of eight years under a new electoral system; Open List Proportional Representation. The FEO organised and conducted the Fijian General Election for the new 50 member parliament under the 2013 Constitution. The Multi-national Observer Group (MOG) highlighted that the 2014 General Election in Fiji was credible and broadly represented the will of the Fijian people. The 2014 General Election also saw the lowest number of invalid votes in Fiji’s history 0.75%. The low number of invalid votes amongst those voting demonstrated the strength of the new electoral system, which gave every registered voter a single vote in a multi-member national constituency. Fiji recorded an impressive 84.6% voter turnout during the 2014 General Election. During the 2014 General Election, the FEO engaged numerous mediums of Voter Education and Awareness in the management of its historic Election. One of the best practices in Voter Education was the face to face awareness session in rural and urban settlements. The idea to engage the face to face awareness sessions was a very effective medium reflected in the 0.75% of invalid votes tallied during the 2014 Elections. This has proved to be a positive leap

from the 9% recorded in the 2006 Elections or the 11.89% in 2001. The 42 awareness teams went through an extensive five days programme to ensure they were well equipped for field work, travel and presentations. The team was trained well to successfully conduct voter awareness in the communities. Apart from being trained to present in English, the team was also trained to present in other common languages in Fiji including i-Taukei, Hindi, Rabi, Tuvaluan and Rotuman to ensure that voters understood the electoral process and information well. The teams used Informational, Educational and Communicational materials including flip charts and pictorials to better aid their presentations.

Challenges : Challenges: Various methods of transportation had to be arranged to reach settlements, for example boats. Could not reach all the settlements due to time restraints. SWOT Analysis Strengths: Good, well-trained teams to conduct awareness sessions. Weaknesses: Short and strenuous timeframe to deliver awareness. Opportunities: Develop materials that encourage participation in the awareness activities instead of one way streaming. Threats: Information being presented by the teams may be deviation from the norm.

Outcome: The team managed to achieve 81% coverage - 1862 of the total 2296 villages and settlements in Fiji. Total number of reach out teams is outlined below: Provinces: No. of teams: Lau Province 8 Northern Division (Macuata/Bua/Cakaudrove) 4 Central Division (Tailevu/Naitasiri/Serua/Namosi/Rewa) 12 Western Division (Navosa/Nadroga/Nadi/lautoka/Ba/Tavua/Yasawa/Mamanuca) 7 Ra 2 Lomaiviti 2