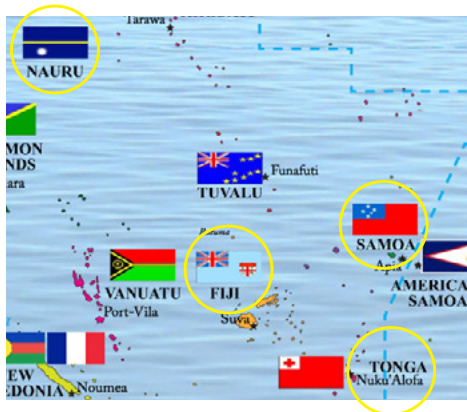


# PASAI *SAI insights*

*Pacific Auditors working together*

## A report on PASAI's peer-to-peer support initiative, the Financial Audit Secondment Technical Support (FASTS) program

By Gillian Itsimaera, Nauru Department of Audit, and Sisilia Feiloaki, Tonga OAG



### In this report, read:

- how three SAIs in the PASAI region supported Nauru Department of Audit with its 2015 - 2016 Financial Statements of Government;
- how PASAI SAIs worked together in the achievement of Strategic Priority 3, for high quality audits to be provided by SAIs on a timely basis.

When auditors from three other SAIs in the region arrived to offer hands-on learning experiences and expertise, the Nauru Department of Audit experienced a true example of 'Pacific Auditors Working Together' in PASAI.

One particular aim of Strategic Priority 3 is to improve the timeliness of the audits of Financial Statements of Government or FSG - also known as Whole of Government (WoG) accounts or Public accounts (PA). Nowhere was this of greater relevance than for the Nauru Department of Audit (NDOA). Even with a lack of experienced or qualified audit staff and - as one of our smallest pacific nations - a population of approximately 10,000, the NDOA reached a historical milestone on 30 May 2017. After a 15 year gap, the Government of Nauru's Public Accounts for 2013/2014 were audited and tabled during a Parliamentary session.

To capitalise on this momentum, an innovative approach to providing ground-up technical support and local learning was approved, and three other Pacific SAIs resourced the NDOA with expertise and experienced auditors to assist with conducting the Whole of Government account audits of 2014/2015 and 2015/2016.

The idea behind this initiative was to provide sustainable support to NDOA given the small population, by utilising our PASAI motto of "Pacific Auditors Working Together". With the support of ADB, the South-South Cooperation initiative developed by PASAI called "Financial Audit Secondments Technical Support" or "FASTS program" commenced in March 2018.



The first secondee arrived on 11 March 2018. Hailing from Fiji SAI, Mr Emosi Rokoleakai was warmly welcomed by Nauru SAI, who are keen to learn and to further develop their auditing skills, especially in financial audits. He assisted with the Planning Phase of the audit which included the allocation of audit components to SAI staff. After six weeks with us, Emosi completed his secondment and departed Nauru on 8 April.

After a three-week gap, Violet Roebeck-Fasavalu, our secondee from Samoa SAI, arrived in Nauru for the second phase of the program. Violet provided guidance on the audit fieldwork, letting the staff have hands-on experience with the audit. The extra week in May was a bonus to Nauru SAI as Violet got to stay five weeks instead of four. It was a teary farewell for all on 1st June.



The final stage of the program came with the arrival of Sisilia Feiloaki from Tonga SAI on 1 July 2018. As with the two previous secondees, Lia's assistance with the audit proved to be especially beneficial for capacity building of the staff.

It was obvious that, even though there's still a long way to go, there's been a huge improvement in the understanding of the audit work for the staff. Overall, it has been

a successful program with many lessons learned and friendships formed. We hope that the secondees have benefitted from and enjoyed the experience as much as the staff of Nauru SAI!

Nauru SAI would like to express its acknowledgement and appreciation to PASAI and ADB and also the SAIs of Fiji, Samoa and Tonga who made this possible.



My experience in Nauru was unique, challenging and rewarding. In order to make a positive contribution to the Audit Office, one has to embrace the whole of government operation, to understand the big picture instead of singling out the audit office as a silo. Understanding the culture, which has a great impact on the way the office operates, also contributes to better understanding and appreciation of this big picture.

To come to terms with this and to reframe the perspective into a 'can do' attitude was challenging. However, every day spent in the office was also very fulfilling. From explaining in detail the audit program of a specific account balance to running after the information requested, the whole experience was an adventure. Working through something that they had not done before with each staff member gave me the satisfaction and knowledge that, every day, I was contributing to the betterment of their auditing skills.

Obtaining information from the line ministries and the Finance department was a struggle. At times like this I would have to think outside of the box - taking what would work in an ideal audit situation and tailoring it to make it work in Nauru, whilst maintaining professionalism and getting the information we needed. This was productive, because it was only through these experiences that the relevant departments were exposed to the kind of information auditors were after, and will continue to ask for in future audits.

Above all else, the hospitality of the staff at the office and their interest in learning made the whole experience enjoyable. I strongly believe that Nauru Audit Office has the potential to grow; as long as the right support is provided, we will see them flourish in the future.

*Sisilia Feiloaki, TOAG*

## CONCLUSION:

There is much to be learned from this program which will provide good input into the program design for technical support to Nauru in the future. In particular, three key lessons were learned:

1. The lack of capacity of the auditees meant the audit process takes longer, so the duration of the secondment should be for longer periods;
2. Outgoing secondees should remain in-country to effectively hand-over their work, discussing progress and challenges with the incoming secondee;
3. The delivery of training and workshops should be tailored to suit the experience levels of all staff.

The success of this FASTS program was largely dependent on the knowledge and experience of the secondees and the willingness of the Nauru staff to cooperate. PASAI acknowledges the great support and cooperation amongst all parties involved and thanks ADB for supporting this highly successful new initiative.

The exchange of resources, knowledge and skills in public sector auditing between developing Pacific countries has made significant contributions to helping PASAI achieve its core Strategic Priority 3 to conduct high quality audits in a timely manner. It is hoped by sharing this approach and our story we are helping all SAIs globally to make a difference.

