

TIMOR-LESTE PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with Timor-Leste in 2006. The partnership has focused primarily on supporting the creation of a new parliamentary research service, integrating information technology into parliamentary operations, and encouraging greater legislative oversight and efficiency. The Commission has engaged its Timorese partner legislators during three Congressional and four staff visits to Timor-Leste and nine customized training seminars in the United States (two for visiting members of parliament and seven for visiting Timorese staff). The Commission also authorized an expenditure of \$175,000 to build and outfit a parliamentary library to improve the parliament's capacity for research and analysis, and an additional \$175,000 project to improve the information and communication technology infrastructure of parliament.

Accomplishments

- Built, furnished, equipped and trained the staff of the parliamentary library, which has become the main venue for Timorese MPs and staff to conduct independent research.
- Helped parliamentary leadership develop a parliamentary research service, which provides MPs with a variety of reports and analysis.
- Provided training for library and research service staff through Washington seminars, consultation with current and retired Congressional Research Service staff, and ongoing cooperation with the Jakarta office of the Library of Congress.
- Improved ability of research staff and all MPs and staff to conduct research by funding improvements to information and communications technology.
- Ongoing Member-to-Member consultations with committee leadership in Dili and Washington on the role of committees in oversight, helping to ensure that recent debates on spending petroleum revenues reflect public sentiment.

Background

After an extended struggle for independence from Indonesia, Timor-Leste officially joined the United Nations in 2002. Timor-Leste is a parliamentary republic with a unicameral legislature, a prime minister, and a president. The 65-seat Timorese legislature, known as the National Parliament, is elected by a direct popular vote for five-year terms.

Congressional Delegations

Since the partnership with Timor-Leste was approved by the Commission, there have been three delegations of U.S. Members of Congress to visit Timor-Leste to work with their counterparts. In February 2011, HDP Chairman David Dreier led a delegation of five Members of the U.S. House of Representatives to Timor-Leste. The focus was on providing support to the National Parliament of Timor-Leste, punctuated by a meeting with the president of the National Parliament, where the parliament's many needs were discussed. Chairman Dreier and HDP Ranking Democratic Member David Price signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on behalf of the Commission with the president of the National Parliament, initiating a \$175,000 program to improve the parliament's information technology capabilities. The delegation also visited the library and research center, which was funded through a previous HDP grant. HDP Members then held three breakout sessions with key Timorese committees to discuss their oversight role and parliamentary reform issues. The delegation also met with Timorese President Jose Ramos-Horta, and traveled to the rural village of Manatuto to meet with local MPs and community leaders and visit USAID-funded health projects.

Another U.S. Congressional delegation visited Timor-Leste in July 2009, when six Members led by Representative David Price conducted a three-day visit to discuss the importance of independent research to the policymaking process, committee operations, and legislative oversight of the armed forces and national budget. The delegation visited the parliamentary library funded by the Commission and designed by the U.S. Library of Congress. Members of the U.S. delegation also met with Timorese President Jose Ramos Horta, opposition leader Mari Alkatiri, and President of the National Parliament Fernando Lasama de Araujo. The delegation visited the provincial seat of Maubisse, meeting with local MPs and constituents and visiting a USAID-assisted coffee cooperative.

The first Commission visit to Timor-Leste was organized in February 2006 with four U.S. Representatives, led by Representative Jim Kolbe. The delegation met with counterparts from the National Parliament to discuss the roles of majority and minority parties, the role of legislative staff, and oversight of the security sector. Staff from the U.S. House of Representatives conducted a program for Timorese parliamentary staff on best practices for supporting Members of Parliament.

Staff Delegations

A delegation of retired staff from the Congressional Research Service met in Dili with staff of the Timorese National Parliament in July 2010 to discuss improvements in independent legislative research and analysis. The training consisted of an intermediate course on techniques of public policy analysis and craft skills needed to work effectively with the Parliament. Additionally, it included a seminar on critical thinking for legislative analysts. The Commission consultants met with committee chairs, members of parliament, the secretary general of the parliament, and the director of research to gauge the extent to which MPs were making use of the research unit and how satisfied they were with the services they received from the unit.

In December 2009, staff from the U.S. Library of Congress office in Jakarta, Indonesia, made their third consecutive trip to Timor-Leste on behalf of the Commission. Previous trips in 2008 and 2007 laid the groundwork for the Commission-sponsored parliamentary library, research, and internet connectivity project with the Timorese parliament. These staff delegations also conducted training sessions for Timorese library staff on cataloguing materials and managing information technology resources.

MP Seminars

In September 2008, the Commission organized two legislative strengthening seminars in the U.S. for visiting Timorese Members of Parliament. They joined MPs from three other partnership legislatures for a week-long training program focused on committee operations and oversight. The Congressional Research Service began with an overview of Congress and its committee structure, and committee staff and former Members of Congress spoke to participants about various aspects of committee operations, including the role of staff in organizing public hearings. Roughly a dozen Members of Congress spoke to the participants, describing their personal experiences in utilizing committees to advance their own legislative and oversight priorities.

The first U.S.-based Commission seminar for Timorese legislators was held in April 2006. Over a 10-day period, members of the National Parliament visited the Arizona district of Representative Jim Kolbe to learn about state legislatures, local government, and constituent relations. The Timorese members of parliament then participated in an extensive program in Washington that paired MPs and staff with their counterparts on various House committees, with an emphasis on encouraging sustainable peer relationships. Visiting MPs and staff also attended three day-long workshops on committee administration, and the legislative, budget, and appropriations processes.

Staff Seminars

In June 2010, two staff members of the Timorese National Parliament traveled to Warsaw, Poland to attend the 20th anniversary of the Frost-Solomon Commission, which was the predecessor to the House Democracy Assistance Commission. They were joined by 22 staff members from 11 partnership countries, along with MPs and research staff from former partners of the Frost-Solomon Commission. While they were in Warsaw, current and former staff of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) worked with the Timorese staff to help them further develop their parliamentary research service through workshops, peer-to-peer discussions, and open forums. Speakers underlined the importance of reliable, impartial, timely, and accurate research to the work of democratic legislatures. They also shared tips on how to engage legislators and help them see the value of research, a concern shared by a number of participants.

The Commission arranged for staff of the Timorese parliament to travel to Nairobi, Kenya for a weeklong seminar in November 2009. The seminar presented the opportunity for the Timorese to learn from U.S. and Kenyan counterparts the importance of an independent budget review and oversight. The program included hands-on workshops and presentations on budgetary modeling, macroeconomic forecasting, and the role of civil society organizations in complementing the legislative oversight function of a parliament.

Staff from the Timorese parliament have also participated in all nine Legislative Staff Institutes organized by the Commission since 2007. In October 2012, two staff members from the National Parliament of Timor-Leste participated in a staff institute to strengthen legislative budget analysis. Twenty-three staff from twelve partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Budget, Appropriations, Agriculture, and Ways and Means Committees. Participants also met with representatives from the Government Accountability Office, the World Bank Institute and the International Budget Partnership.

In January 2012, two staff members participated in a training seminar on legislative research and analysis. They were joined by colleagues from 12 other HDP partner countries. The parliamentary staff institute included presentations and discussions with Members of Congress and top officials from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Current and former CRS staff provided the participants an overview of basic legislative research and analysis techniques including identifying sources of information, basic policy analysis, developing alternatives for the legislature, and conducting impact analysis.

In December 2010, Timorese staff took part in a staff institute focused on committee operations, meeting with the Congressional Research Service, staff from several House committees, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Commission. In addition, committee staff from the Republic of Macedonia shared their experience in developing procedures to begin using oversight hearings as an element of the work of their parliamentary committees.

In October 2010, staff from the Timorese National Parliament participated in a staff institute that focused on strengthening legislative budget analysis capacity. Twenty-one staff from 11 partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with or presentations by officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Committees on Budget, Appropriations, and the Joint Committee on Taxation. Additionally, budget analysts from the Kenya National Assembly shared their experience in establishing and developing a parliamentary budget office.

The fifth staff institute was held in December 2009 and was organized in conjunction with CRS. The Institute hosted 27 participants from 12 partner countries, who were mostly officials and analysts of their respective parliament's research services. The program focused on the role of a research service in providing independent information and analysis to members of parliament and their staff.

In November 2009, Timorese parliamentary staff participated in a staff institute centered on the third annual World E-Parliament Conference, which specifically addressed the manner in which information and communications technology can help improve legislative representation, transparency, accountability, openness, and effectiveness.

Timorese parliamentary staff joined 28 parliamentary staffers from 10 partnership countries in Washington in December 2008 for an LSI focused on strengthening committee operations. Participants gained an understanding of committee operations in the U.S. Congress and explored topics such as staff roles and responsibilities, legislative analysis, drafting and research, legislative-executive relations, and media relations.

An staff institute in October 2008 centered on congressional oversight and budgeting again included staff from the Timorese National Parliament. Participants were given an overview of the budget process in the U.S. and the structure, organization, and services provided by the Congressional Budget Office. The program dealt with transparency, revenue estimation, and key budgetary policy issues such as health, defense, agriculture, infrastructure, and education.

Timorese parliamentary staff were present for the inaugural staff institute in December 2007. The Institute offered a two-track program, one for senior parliamentary administrators and the other on research and analysis services for the legislature. The program included a three-day overview of the U.S. Congress, a one-day visit to the Maryland Legislature to learn about state and local government, and a five-day series of meetings and workshops with current and retired Congressional research and administrative staff.

Material Assistance

In 2008, the Commission dedicated a \$175,000 project to build and outfit a national parliamentary library. This project created the first and only functioning information and research service center for the Timorese parliament. This project is designed to create a functioning and well-equipped parliament library that will provide information and research services for members of parliament to support the furtherance of democratic governance, production of high-quality legislation and effective oversight of the government.

With the parliamentary library established as a base, the Timorese National Parliament initiated the creation of a parliamentary research service to provide research and analysis services to members and staff. In order to improve access to the internet and connectivity within parliamentary offices, the Commission in July 2010 approved a follow-on \$175,000 project to improve the parliament's e-infrastructure through the provision of more stable internal and external network communications and quality internet access.