The Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) responds to the needs of developing countries in the field of good governance and democratic institutions. Our geographic focus is the Asia-Pacific region. We conduct a series of activities within the region to address these goals.

This project involved facilitation and support services to the National Parliament of Vanuatu in the conduct of an Induction Program for Members elected at the General Election held on 2nd September 2008. It follows the highly successful induction program for the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea in August 2007. As with that program our objective was to encourage parliamentary staff and national agencies to deliver the program and to feel a strong sense of ownership over its content and presentation.

The Vanuatu Parliament is a mix of very long serving Members, some since independence, and a majority that is the product of a large turnover at each election. This is partly due to their system of voting, the Single Non Transferable Vote, which served the country well in the years immediately following independence but now is showing some signs of having outlived its usefulness. The high turnover has led to considerable Government instability, with no confidence motions against incumbent governments being quite common. This has led to a more significant concentration on politics rather than parliament and has held back the development of a productive parliamentary culture. The Parliament also has very limited resources in terms of parliamentary officers who struggle to support its fifty two Members. The induction program was designed to deliver some impact in each of these areas.

Vanuatu has not previously had an induction program although there have been some short training seminars. We were privileged to be the first team given approval, and unconditional support, to run a full scale induction program. Agreement to conduct the program was negotiated by Mr. Quinton Clements, CDI Deputy Director, with the previous Speaker, the Hon. Sam Avock and the Clerk, Lino Bulekilu dit Sacsac. Following the election the program was enthusiastically embraced by the new Speaker the Hon. George Wells who is anxious to take a pro-active role towards strengthening Parliament.

Once again, the Hon. Kevin Rozzoli, former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, working in partnership with Mr. Clements, assisted in the design and delivery of the program. We were supported in the induction sessions by the Clerk of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, Mrs Taesasi Sanga, and Mr Warren Cahill, UNDP Parliamentary Project Support Officer in the Solomon Islands, the Hon. Mike
Reynolds, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, and Ms Leanne Clare, First Clerk Assistant, Legislative Assembly of Queensland. We were also supported by the UNDP Multi Country Office in Fiji who funded the catering of functions associated with the induction and a range of consumables. We acknowledge the role of Mrs. Laisa Bale-Tuinamoala in this regard.

The Hon. Kevin Rozzoli brought considerable experience to the project - as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales for thirty years and Speaker for seven years. He is currently an Honorary Research Associate with University of Sydney’s Department of Politics and Government and an Honorary Research Fellow with Monash University’s Department of Management, Parliamentary Studies Unit. He is also National President, Australasian Study of Parliament Group and the author of “Gavel to Gavel, An insider’s view of parliament”, published by UNSW Press in 2006 and numerous papers and articles on parliament and parliamentary processes. The research team at Monash, of which he is a Chief Investigator, has recently been successful in obtaining an ARC grant for a project titled ‘Parliamentary Careers: Design, Delivery and Evaluation of Improved Professional Development’ in which it will be partnered by AusAID and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The First Phase

On 22nd August Mr Clements and Mr Rozzoli traveled to Vanuatu to assess needs and plan the broad outline of the program. During this visit we met with a significant number of stakeholders to discuss their potential contribution. Stakeholders included the Clerk and Assistant Clerk, Hansard Editor and Librarian, the UNDP, the official Secretary to the President of the Republic, and relevant government agencies and stakeholders. The latter included the Public Prosecutor, Ombudsman Commission, Electoral Commission, State Law Office, Audit Office, Public Service Commission, National Council of Chiefs, Prof. Don Paterson of the University of the South Pacific, Transparency International as well as representatives of the media in Port Vila. We also met with the Australian High Commissioner, Mr. John Pilbeam.

From these meetings a draft program was drawn up which was submitted to the Clerk for general approval. This was accepted enabling firm details to be finalised, including timeframes for presentation and the allocation of tasks and responsibilities. This included preparing scripts and materials, confirming formal administrative details, issuing invitations, coordinating presenters, compiling necessary materials such as the Constitution, Leadership Code, Parliamentary Standing Orders, organizing equipment, making security arrangements, attending to protocol and hospitality arrangements, briefing key participants and preparing a strategy for evaluation. We returned to Australia on 27th August.

The Second Phase

Based on the information collected during the preliminary visit a program was then completed, aimed at addressing the areas that had emerged as critical to informing new Members of their roles, responsibilities and obligations. This program was again approved by the Clerk and apart from some small changes in detail and programming remained the basis of the program.
Several themes were identified. Firstly, the need to emphasise the requirements of the Vanuatu Constitution in relationship to its integrity elements and Leadership Code, secondly, the need for Members to have basic information and advice on parliamentary standing orders, conventional practice and procedure and how to capacity build their role as parliamentary representatives. Many Members are only educated to primary or early secondary grades and although highly intelligent need guidance on how to pursue national and constituency issues. Thirdly, there was a compelling need to raise the status of the Parliamentary Service as a significant force in the conduct of the Parliament, including building a case for increasing its numerical strength to provide service enhancement and depth of parliamentary knowledge.

The underpinning principles of the Program were:

1. The Parliament is a sovereign institution under the Constitution and therefore independent of Government.
2. The Parliamentary Service is apolitical.
3. An effective Parliament is fundamental to the good management and well-being of the country.
4. The parliamentary institution, while based on the Westminster system, must reflect these principles while taking into account local custom and the aspirations of the people.

Recognising these principles the Program was designed to deliver the following goals,

1. Advise Members of their rights, responsibilities and obligations.
2. Educate Members on the constitutional and legal framework established by the Constitution, Leadership Code and other statutory instruments.
3. Give an introduction to relevant practice and procedure as set down in the Standing Orders and established conventions of parliamentary practice through the conduct of a Mock Parliament.
4. Explain relevant matters relating to the administration of the Parliament.
5. Stress the need for integrity, accountability and transparency when dealing with parliamentary and public issues, particularly those relating to the expenditure of public monies.
6. Outline the framework, duties and functional role of key State agencies.
7. Advise on the management of their role as representatives of both their local and national constituencies.

The Program

Based on the above a Program was developed that was considered directly relevant to the immediate needs of the Vanuatu Parliament. Its principle features were:

1. The program would be delivered over three days with the majority of the second day being devoted to a mock Parliament session which would take Members through all procedures that occur on a typical sitting day by explanation and role play.
2. All sessions to be themed so that earlier programs provided the foundation for later sessions.
3. Most sessions to be delivered in Bislama, the national language, while all documents and records of proceedings would be produced in English and French, the two official languages.

4. Day 1 would deal with the constitutional and legislative framework, integrity, scrutiny and the role of Members, Day 2 the mock parliament, Day 3 Agencies with roles defined within the Constitution and the administrative aspects of the Parliament.

5. The President of the Republic would be invited to deliver a keynote address to add stature to the proceedings.

6. Each day would open with prayers.

7. The Induction would be held in the Parliamentary Chamber.

8. Two social functions to be organized being a cocktail party on the evening of the first day and a dinner on the evening of the last day.

The Third Phase

We arrived in Port Vila a week before the Induction to ensure all preparations were in order, presenters had their material prepared, necessary equipment was available and working. Each presenter was given the opportunity to trial their presentation at a rehearsal held the day before.

To avoid the difficulties experienced in Papua New Guinea with incompatible computer systems the material we were responsible for was developed prior to returning to Vanuatu on our own equipment as simple Word documents thus allowing easy transfer, amending and editing. Apart from one small glitch this worked very well.

Material to be provided by the Parliament included copies of the Constitution, Leadership Code, Standing Orders and parliamentary documents relevant to the function and conduct of the mock parliament. Consumables and a satchel were supplied by the UNDP.

One previously unperceived complication was the lodging of a motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister by Opposition Members only a few days after the Prime Minister’s election at the first sitting of the new Parliament on 22nd September, together with a request for an extraordinary session to consider the motion. This had the potential to disrupt the Induction and was very distracting for a number of the key players, particularly the new Speaker who was also Acting President of the Republic in the absence of the President overseas. In our discussions with the Speaker we had strong support from the Clerk who impressed on the Speaker the importance of the Induction going ahead. The Speaker on his part showed a determined commitment to do everything possible to prevent any threat to the Induction. After much negotiation, and to our great relief, it was determined that the no confidence motion would be debated at an extraordinary session to be held on the day after the induction concluded.

Day One

The first day commenced at 8.30 am with an opening address by the Speaker, the Hon. George Wells, followed by addresses from Mr. Richard Dictus, UNDP Resident Representative on the role of the UNDP in the Pacific and the Hon. Mike Reynolds AM MP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland who spoke about the twinning arrangement, sponsored by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, between his
Parliament and Vanuatu, and the support that could be provided to the Vanuatu Parliament.

Professor Don Paterson of the University of the South Pacific then presented on the framework of the Constitution, the implications of the Leadership Code, the concept of the Separation of Powers and the overall structure of Government, concluding with a reference to the Standing Orders and the meaning of Parliamentary Privilege.

We were fortunate to have the services of Mr. Sethy Regenvanu, a distinguished former Member for Malekula, who served during the first sixteen years of the Parliament. Mr. Regenvanu spoke to Members about his experience and the role of a Member from the local perspective. Mr. Rozzoli then provided a broader overview of the elements that shape parliamentary representation based on overseas experience and the importance of considering policies and actions from both a national and constituency perspective.

Following this session Members divided into three groups led by The Hon. Mike Reynolds, Mrs. Taeasi Sanga and Mr. Rozzoli. These groups worked through the earlier presentations to explore how Members might apply these frameworks in furthering the interests of their constituents while putting that work into a national framework. Particular attention was given to greater use of the opportunities within the Standing Orders to advance these efforts in Parliament and so make their parliamentary role more participatory that has been the custom. The session was highly successful and ran overtime.

The next sessions focused on integrity and external scrutiny including an interesting session with representatives of the media. Ms. Marie-Noelle Ferieux Patterson, a former Chief Ombudsman, representing Transparency International Vanuatu spoke in detail of the importance of the national integrity provisions and the need for compliance as a measure towards raising the image of Parliament and parliamentarians in the eyes of the public. She emphasized that respect for Parliament is an important aspect of good governance and law and order.

The media session opened with a comprehensive address from Mark Neil-Jones of the Daily Post on behalf of his own paper, The Vanuatu Independent (a weekly paper) and radio FM 107. The national radio station is government owned and government controlled. It broadcasts Parliament live but offers little in the way of editorial comment. The concept of a free press is relatively new in Vanuatu and Mr. Neil-Jones’ address together with follow up comments by Bob Makin of the Independent and Godwin Ligo of FM 107 sparked lively debate with some Members upset by reporting of lamentable transgressions on the part of some Members. The media were accused of not being sensitive to cultural traditions and of bringing overseas concepts to Vanuatu that were inappropriate. In the end they agreed to differ. Given the growing public interest in these media stories it is evident Members need to be mindful of the scrutiny provided by a free press.

The day concluded with more group work that built on the previous group session with particular focus on role of the Opposition, Committees, Committee of the Whole, Question Time, Private Members’ Bills & Statements, Motions, the importance of research & the capacity of the Parliamentary Library to assist Members. This session also ran over time.
Day Two

Proceedings commenced with Members being given an overview of Parliament’s responsibility for law making by the Clerk after which Parliamentary Counsel provided an overview of how legislation is drafted using a sample bill.

This was followed by a keynote address from the President of the Republic, H.E Kalkot Mataskelekele Mauililiu, who spoke on the need for integrity and an adherence to the underlying principles of Vanuatu culture, respect for one another and strong Christian principles.

The mock parliament, which occupied the remainder of the day, was very successful. As well as new Members, continuing Members commented on the value of the session. The day’s proceedings were fully scripted and all new Members were given the opportunity to speak and participate in the procedures.

The script was prepared using extracts from previous parliamentary sitting days. An explanation was given by the Clerk of each procedure followed by role play. The proceedings were chaired by the Speaker supported by the First Deputy Speaker. Members entered in to the spirit of the occasion and, based on later feedback, gained great value from the experience. Many elements of the Standing Orders have been poorly used in previous Parliaments leading to a lack of knowledge even amongst continuing Members of their value and potential. The development of a full script was one of the lessons learnt from Papua New Guinea. It cannot be assumed that Members will even have a rudimentary understanding of the rules or the confidence to ad lib even short speeches.

The Order of Business was as follows

Mr. Speaker takes the Chair
1. The Prayer
2. Opening remarks by the Clerk
3. Reading of the Agenda by the Speaker
4. Confirmation of Minutes
5. Announcements by the Speaker
6. Statements by Ministers
7. Tabling of Documents
8. Urgent Debates
9. Private Bills
10. Government Bills
11. Oral Questions
12. Written Motions
13. Written Questions
14. Written Motions
15. Oral Questions
16. Statements by Members
17. General Debate
Day Three

The final day was occupied with presentations from the various Constitutional office-holders. This was the first time these agencies had ever been asked to explain their role and without exception they accepted the challenge with great enthusiasm. Each presentation was excellent. All used powerpoint displays which were comprehensive and articulate, backed with valuable hard copy information which was handed out to Members.

Those presenting were Chief Gratien Alguet of the National Council of Chiefs; the Chief Justice, Mr. Vincent Lunabek; Mrs Kayleen Tavoa, Public Prosecutor; Mr Hillary Toa, Public Solicitor; Mr Peter K. Taurakoto, Ombudsman; Mr Henrickson Malsokle, of the Audit Office; Mr Martin Tete, Principal Electoral Officer; and Mr. Mark Bebe, Secretary, of the Public Service Commission.

In addition to these speakers there were presentations from Mr Greg Nimtik, Director of Planning Process Division, Office of the Prime Minister on the public policy planning process and Mr. David Thomas, Director of Finance, Unit of Expenditure, Research & Analysis on the budget process.

Final presentations were from the Editor of Debates and the Librarian on the functions of their departments and a talk by the Clerk on parliamentary salaries and entitlements.

Concluding remarks were delivered by the Speaker who expressed his thanks and sincere appreciation to all who had contributed to the success of the program. Mr. Clements spoke on behalf of CDI, and Mr. Robert Dictus of the UNDP outlined a timetable for further assistance that the UNDP is keen to offer along the lines of the successful Solomon Islands project. This timetable had however been drawn up with no consultation with the Speaker and the Clerk and represented an overly ambitious and unrealistic timeframe for the work set out in the program.

Summary

By most measures the Induction Program was an outstanding success. The Program covered issues of direct relevance to both new and continuing Members as was evinced by the level of attendance. Of the 52 Members, two-thirds attended the three day induction program. A majority of the new Members of Parliament and many re-elected Members attended each day including Deputy Prime Minister, Hon. Ham Lini, and several other ministers. Members from both the Government and Opposition sides attended. The Parliamentary Service and outside presenters enthusiastically cooperated and there was general agreement that the underlying principles were sound and of practical value.

As has been the case previously there is always the need for the facilitators to be able to rise to the occasion for whatever is required, advice, assisting with the preparation of presentations, providing guidance and leadership, team building, writing speeches and so on. It is our philosophy that as far as humanly possible every aspect of the induction should be of the highest quality and that the team be encouraged at all times to meet the highest goals.
The key to success, as it was in Papua New Guinea, was in creating a sense of local ownership for the program. This strengthens the Parliament internally and generates a desire to continue with further training, development and empowerment of Members. Because of the background research conducted before each induction CDI programs are sensitive to local needs and culture, a major contributor to the trust, warmth and sincerity that grows during the period of engagement.

The following day we attended the extraordinary session to hear the no confidence motion debated. We were impressed by the conduct of proceedings and the liveliness of the debate. The Prime Minister comfortably survived having further bolstered his numbers during the intervening days.

Acknowledgements
The program would not have been successful without the active involvement and support of the Vanuatu Parliamentary Service. Accordingly CDI extends its deepest appreciation to the Clerk, Lino Bulekilu dit Sacsac, for his outstanding support and leadership of the parliamentary team. Our thanks also go to the Clerk’s secretary, Mrs. Stephanie Mailesi, and Terri Maher, Library Support Worker, for their invaluable assistance. CDI also acknowledges with much gratitude the kind assistance and support of Mrs Taeesi Sanga, Mr Warren Cahill, the Hon. Mike Reynolds and Ms Leanne Clare. Without their genuine interest, enthusiasm, patience, extraordinary skill as facilitators and presenters and deep knowledge of their subject areas, the program would not have been the success it clearly was. To the many others who contributed, too many by far to mention individually, our sincere appreciation of their efforts.

And so to the Future
Before leaving Vanuatu we discussed with the Clerk the possibility of further assistance. The Clerk expressed a wish to continue the association with CDI and outlined two areas which he would like to pursue in 2009. These were a workshop on Committee functions and administration, and a rewrite of the Standing Orders together with a procedural manual along the lines of the one produced for Papua New Guinea. We indicated we would be happy to work on both projects.