



2021 RWG Annual Meeting

24 - 26 August, 2021

23 - 25 August 2021 (Cook Islands)

Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative

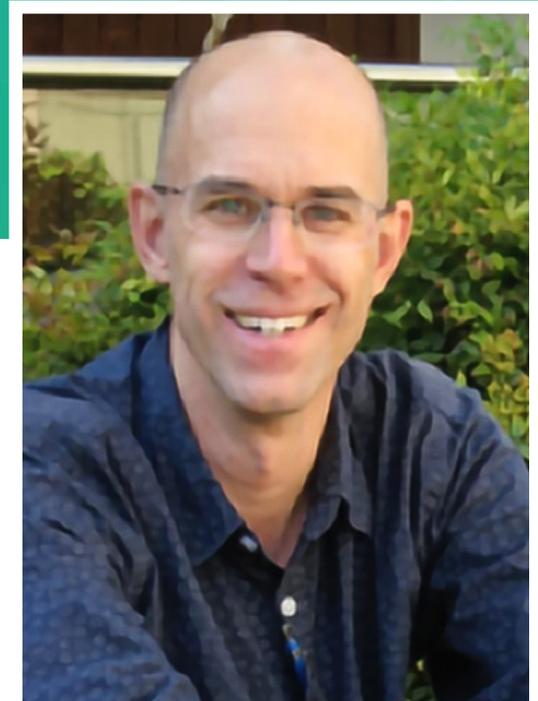
ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Mr. Lorenz Metzner

Team Leader, Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative

Lorenz is a justice reform and leadership professional with over 20 years' experience providing strategic and technical advice, and capacity building support to rights-based, rule of law and capacity building initiatives across the Pacific, Asia, and Africa.

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OBJECTIVE OF THE PRESENTATION:

This presentation aims to showcase the experience of the Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative (PJSI) in promoting accessible, just, efficient and responsive justice - in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, enabling the courts to remain open, remotely; and to respond to sharp increases in gender-based and family violence.

PJSI is a partnership between the judiciaries of 15 Pacific Island Nations, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Federal Court of Australia.

BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENTATION TOPIC:

The operating realities facing Pacific courts and the needs of the communities they serve were radically affected by COVID-19. Isolation, restrictions on movement, and physical distancing requirements presented unprecedented challenges to courts to remain open, and to deliver well governed and accountable justice, it also resulted in rapid and sharp increases gender-based and family violence.

To respond to these rapidly emerging needs, the Initiative was re-built. We pivoted all our activities to be conducted remotely, enabling our partners to be supported to adapt quickly and confidently to the new operating environment. We equipped partner courts with the technological tools, processes, and capacity to remain open, while continuing to also function effectively and efficiently.

KEY MESSAGES:

Initially our partners found it challenging to adapt to using new and more technologies. Quickly however, acceptance and deployment of remote technologies became widespread. This represents a fundamental transformation in court operational culture across the region.

Urgent cases, and those involving vulnerable witnesses, are being heard, even in crisis conditions, and/or when parties and judges cannot be physically present in the court room. This has substantially improved access to the courts in a way that is cost-effective and sustainable.

PJSI has continued supporting courts to better respond to gender and family violence cases. This has been through (remote) training on international and domestic law and contemporary attitudes towards the unacceptability of gendered violence.

Targeted resources and toolkits on Gender and Family Violence, Human Rights and Conducting Remote Hearings have been developed, socialised, translated to support partner court in these endeavours.

We have also supported outreach to remote communities previously marginalised from the formal system.

As a result of this support, Pacific courts are measurably more responsive to gender and family violence cases and there is evidence of significant improvements in the way they are administering justice. A number of courts have conducted community perception surveys. They record substantial improvements in public trust in the judiciary and more cases are being filed as a result. Additionally, delay and backlog have, in some courts, been halved and case disposal rates have correspondingly increased.

COVID-19 has had a silver lining. It has spurred our partner courts to innovate and improve their performance and services. These innovations have improved access, responsiveness and accountability. They have enabled courts to better administer justice to their respective communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. And these major improvements will outlive the pandemic.