



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

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FORUM DISABILITY MINISTERS' MEETING

Rarotonga, Cook Islands
21-23 October 2009

SESSION THREE

**DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RECENT PAST IN FORUM
ISLAND COUNTRIES: A STATUS REPORT**



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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the situation of persons with disabilities and recent disability inclusive developments in Forum Island countries.

Introduction

2. While Pacific Island countries have many common characteristics, they differ in a number of significant dimensions including size of physical land mass and extent of scattered outer islands, population, level of development, resources, wealth and social cohesion. Some Governments in the Pacific have taken steps in the recent past to incorporate the concept of the rights of persons with disabilities into their constitutions, legislation, national plans of action, and policies and programmes¹. Persons with disabilities have been involved in developing these policy documents and have proven their capability of engaging in policy discourse. They have also become increasingly active in the decision-making process at the national and regional levels. An increasing number of international aid, regional NGOs and development cooperation agencies have started to explore and adopt “disability-inclusive development”, which focuses on mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities into general development policymaking and operations. The recent engagement of NZAID and AusAID in this regard in the Pacific today has brought many benefits to the region.

Definition of Disability

3. The way disability is defined and understood has also changed in the last decade. Disability was once assumed as a way to characterise a particular set of largely stable limitations. The WHO defines a disability (resulting from impairment) as a restriction or lack of ability to

¹ <http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/sustainable-development/social-policy/disability/country-profiles/>

perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. One is more or less disabled based on the interaction between the person and the individual, physical, institutional and social environments. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) definition recognises that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The CRPD states that ‘Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments.’ Disability can affect people of all ages.

Disability Data

4. As is the case throughout the developing world, persons with disabilities in Pacific island countries (PICs) are among the poorest and most marginalised members of their communities. Persons with disabilities represent an estimated 10%² of any population. This represents some 800,000 Pacific Island people. According to World Bank estimates, they are over-represented in statistics on people living in poverty, making up at least 20 per cent of the world’s poorest people.³

5. The recent census results and national surveys in the Pacific do not provide an accurate picture of the situation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) as there is not a clear and generally accepted definition of disability, surveys have often been based on small population samples, questions are often unclear and ambiguous and enumerators are poorly trained on disability issues. For example, Inclusion International carried out a survey in Kiribati in 2003-2004 and identified 4.36% of the population as living with a disability; while another survey by Inclusion International in the island of ‘Eua in Tonga in 2007 showed a percentage of 13%. A similar survey in Samoa revealed an incidence of disability of 2.2%. There is a need to improve quality research and data on the prevalence of disability and the issues affecting the lives of PWDs.

6. The number of persons with disabilities is increasing as a result of high rates of diabetes, increasing number of traffic and industrial accidents; increasing life expectancy and the lack of early identification, intervention and referral services.

Identification of Persons with Disabilities

7. There is little early identification of disabilities conducted in the island countries of the Pacific. The Inclusion International surveys were the first of their kind in many instances⁴. The lack of early identification is a source of considerable frustration to many working in the field, as early identification of disabilities, followed up by even moderate assistance, would have considerable impact. Even where disabilities are identified, the services and resources that do exist are severely limited, and vary widely in quality. This creates barriers for many people with disabilities because of the ‘charitable’ approach sometimes taken. That is, it is assumed that any service for people with disabilities is a good thing, and implying that they should be grateful. In

² United Nations (1990), *Disability Statistics Compendium*.

³ World Bank, *The World Bank and Disability* (<<http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/hdnet/hddocs.nsf>>

⁴ Inclusion International conducted surveys in several countries including Cook Islands (2001); Samoa Kiribati(2003-2004); ‘Eua in Tonga (2007)

fact some services may be better *not* provided, where they could even disempower people with disabilities, and potentially aggravate impairments.

Attitudinal Barriers

8. A review commissioned by NZAID⁵ noted that there is a low level of awareness of the existence, needs and aspirations of people with disabilities at village, public, bureaucratic, political and service provider levels in the Pacific. This is partly due to cultural attitudes held by many Pacific Islanders. It is exacerbated by the lack of services and support provided for people with disabilities. The same review also found that within governments, disability is rarely if ever discussed as a policy or funding need, particularly by senior executives. This only tends to change if there is a position or section in government responsible for disability issues and that post-holder has sufficient seniority and/or respect to put the issue on the bureaucratic agenda as well as have it recognised as an issue amongst the range of other policy and programme areas competing for attention and limited funds.

9. While families can offer much protection, care and support for family members with disabilities, the converse of this can mean that families too frequently perpetuate negative attitudes⁶. Negative attitudes are too often accepted by people with disabilities themselves. Many of the same attitudes experienced by people with disabilities in the general community are experienced within the family. In particular there is a “concentration on people’s limitations”. These attitudes are informed by the shame and guilt which family members feel about the existence of disability, and which can be transferred to the wider family of a person with disabilities. Nevertheless, this indicates how pervasive the barriers are that people with disabilities face.

10. The NZAID review⁷ states that many persons with disabilities in the Pacific appear to be denied any opportunities for education, recreation and employment. Most of the opportunities that are available appear to be segregated and frequently of a lower standard than services provided for the able-bodied. The review goes on to say that the process of segregating people with disabilities in education, recreation, employment and other fields causes a long-term limitation on those people’s ability to reach their potential in society and any mainstream position people with disabilities may wish to take up is limited by their life experience of segregation. In particular, and sometimes despite the best efforts of dedicated individuals involved, segregation often means that people with disabilities, for example, do not receive the same level of education nor are pushed as hard.

11. Part of the barrier, however, is the attitudes and self-awareness of people with disabilities themselves. They are no less the products of their societies than non-disabled people and share many of their attitudes and assumptions. ‘Rights’ are not necessarily something which most

⁵ Daniel Stubbs & Garth Nowland-Foreman: Free and Equal: A Review of NZAID Pacific Regional Disability Programme for New Zealand Agency for International Development, October 2005

⁶ This phenomenon is by no means restricted to Pacific nations. A recent survey in New Zealand identified that the single biggest self-identified source of discrimination for people with experience of a mental illness was their family members (Mental Health Foundation, 2003).

⁷ Op cit

Pacific Islanders identify with, but people with disabilities have learnt to see themselves, often, as having fewer rights than non-disabled people. This is very disempowering and will require long-term development work in terms of self esteem, confidence building and human rights training for people with disabilities.⁸ Streetscapes, buildings (public and private) homes and roads are often inaccessible for people with mobility disabilities, (such as physical disabilities, blind, or vision impaired). This is often the case even for new buildings and there are usually no accessible toilets in public places. This too contributes to the inability of people with disabilities to readily interact in the community and therefore also conspires against their visibility as a part of society.

Assistive Devices

12. Recent surveys show that people with disabilities in the Pacific need the most basic equipment, services and interventions⁹. There are many examples of people with physical disabilities having to crawl or people with intellectual disabilities left homeless after the death of elderly parents. Although these needs may be met by close and supportive village communities, the culture and attitude toward disability also hinders this. In Pacific Island countries there is no capacity in remote areas to correctly fit and maintain basic equipment such as wheelchairs, prostheses, crutches, magnifiers, etc. Life in rural areas is hard on equipment like wheelchairs so the provision of such equipment is not sustainable without maintenance. There is some limited fitting and maintaining capacity in most main hospitals, in capitals and main cities.

13. Lack of access to basic communications technology can provide serious barriers to people depending on their disability type. Again, this is particularly the case in rural and remote villages and islands where people with disabilities can suffer more profound isolation than their non-disabled peers. Because even telephones are seen as a luxury for most in remote villages and outer islands, people with disabilities are very unlikely to gain access to most forms of communications technology. The poverty experienced by Pacific Islanders with disabilities creates a double disadvantage. Even those able to work are usually not in employment, for the range of educational and attitudinal reasons discussed above. If there is a form of government income support, it is easily taken up by the barest essentials for living, leaving nothing to cover the extra costs of someone's disability such as transport, communications or support. To alleviate this some disabled people's organisations have identified income generation projects as an important way of promoting financial independence for people with disabilities.

Employment of Persons with Disabilities

14. The position that people with disabilities are placed in by not enjoying access to work (in either the formal or informal sector) has complexities beyond their own economic well-being. The guilt carried (including by women due to their inability to contribute to the family in the home in the same way as others) creates considerable stress. The inability to access transport or transport oneself creates extra costs or demands. If someone with a disability requires help in or

⁸ Fiji Disabled Persons Association is currently undertaking a human rights project to have people with disabilities train other people with disabilities on their human rights, which may be worth adapting elsewhere.

⁹ Inclusion International surveys in Kiribati, Tonga and Samoa

outside the home then this will add to the perception of being a burden, because someone else is stopped from working.

15. The International Labor Organisation (ILO)¹⁰ has had a long involvement in promoting Decent Work for persons with disabilities based on the principles of equal opportunity, equal treatment, mainstreaming, and community involvement. The principle of non-discrimination is increasingly emphasised as disability issues have come to be seen as human rights issues. Key ILO instruments relating to the right to decent work of persons with disabilities and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability include: ILO Convention No. 159 on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), 1983, and its accompanying Recommendation No. 168. Convention No. 159 has been ratified by 80 countries (June 2008). There are eight Pacific Island countries¹¹ that are members of the ILO and out of these only Fiji has ratified ILO Convention 159.

Policy and Legislation

16. The lack of policies and legislation on which to base advocacy is also problematic. Few Pacific Island countries have a legislative base for the rights and entitlements of people with disabilities, despite all Pacific governments having committed to the *Biwako Millennium Framework*. This is often an indication of the lack of full and practical government support for the issue, but local and regional developments in this area can also operate to help motivate and support government action on disability issues. One important dimension is the extent to which governments have acknowledged the existence and issues of people with disabilities in their communities, and have taken steps, by means of legislation, policy and programme implementation, to address their obligations in terms of upholding their rights and meeting their specific needs. In assessing the extent to which persons with disabilities in the Pacific have been served by their Constitutions one will see that it is linked to the historical context in which the Constitutions of Pacific island countries were adopted.

17. A review on policy and legislation¹² commissioned by the Forum Secretariat¹² notes that the current situation suggests that in all Pacific island countries, except for Fiji, persons with disabilities live under constitutional provisions which are not disability specific. It also states that where guarantees have not been implemented in domestic law for persons with disabilities, these wide principles are unenforceable in practical terms. Few countries in the Pacific have passed legislation to address the rights and needs, including access and equity issues, of people with disabilities. More extensive legislation has been passed in Fiji since 1994, with protective provisions in the Bill of Rights of the 1997 Constitution, including Equal Employment Opportunity. Solomon Islands is now finalising its disability Bill and will table it in Parliament in November of this year.

¹⁰ http://www.ilo.org/skills/what/pubs/lang--en/docName--WCMS_103529/index.htm

¹¹ Fiji Vanuatu, Samoa, PNG, Solomon Is, Kiribati, Marshal Is, Tuvalu

¹² Daniel Stubbs & Garth Nowland-Foreman: Free and Equal: A Review of NZAID Pacific Regional Disability Programme for New Zealand Agency for International Development, October 2005

¹² McKinstry, G, Price, P., & Macanawai, S. (2004). "A Review of Policy and Legislation on Disability in the Pacific". Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

Disability Policy

18. There has been significant progress in the development of national disability policies in the Pacific. This is the statement which embodies the commitment of Governments to people with disabilities. Currently the following countries have a disability policy but are at different stages of development and implementation:

- Cook islands - completed
- Federated States of Micronesia – completed
- Fiji islands – completed
- Kiribati - draft
- Niue - draft
- Papua New Guinea - completed
- Solomon Islands - completed
- Vanuatu – completed
- Tuvalu – commencing drafting of communication process

19. Disability policy in these countries affirms the constitutional, legal or other basis under which the rights of persons with disabilities will/should be upheld. It defines the nature of an inclusive and barrier-free society in the particular national context and designates the structures and responsibilities within Government which have been established to implement disability policy and address disability issues. It defines the population in question in functional terms, with due reference to disabling social and environmental factors, rather than only in medical terminology. It further provides a statement of vision, goals, and a series of specific objectives, supported by identification of tasks or actions which must be undertaken in order to achieve each objective, and the overall goal of an inclusive society. Policies should be developed in full consultation with persons with disabilities and their organizations, and all other disability stakeholders and partners and ensure that the voice of those disabled persons and their families who live in rural and outer island locations are included.

Inclusive Education

20. Very few children with disabilities attend school at any stage of their lives in Pacific Islands Countries. While some countries have ‘special schools’ that provide segregated schooling, these cater only for a very few children in urban areas. Countries in the northern Pacific are, however, relatively well provided for in terms of special education. All Pacific Island Countries are committed to the global ‘Education For All’ initiative, but this goal will not be achieved when the majority of children are unable to attend their local schools.

21. Inclusive Education is “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of learners by increasing participation, in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education”¹³. The objective is to support education for all, with special emphasis on removing barriers to participation for children with disabilities and out-of-school children. The statement,

¹³ UNESCO Definition – http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=7501&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

notes that the overall goal, is a school which adapts to the needs of all learners and where all children are participating and treated equally. This means that all children should have the right to attend their local schools and be provided with extra support if necessary. Inclusive education has not been widely practiced in Forum Island countries. Only the Cook Islands and Samoa have been practicing inclusive education in their schools although there are isolated incidents of it elsewhere.

22. Inclusive education is not synonymous with integration or mainstreaming, nor is it concerned only with the education of students with disabilities. The philosophy underlying inclusive education is that schools have the responsibility to meet the needs of all children, and that teachers should be able to differentiate and adapt curriculum and instructional strategies to suit the differing needs and abilities of each child in the classroom. For inclusive education to become a reality in the Pacific, we need to eliminate any continuum of service, including special education and special educators, as a system of provision except in very severe cases of disability. This would require the redeployment of special education staff and resources to mainstream schools, where they will be employed not only for the benefit of students with disabilities but also in a supportive role across the whole curriculum. Inclusive schools should seek to enhance the social skills and community participation of people with severe disabilities, thereby changing the attitudes of both teachers and students towards disability.

Women and Girls with Disabilities

23. Throughout the Pacific region, in both urban and rural communities, women and girls with disabilities face multiple and compounding forms of discrimination. They are targets of discrimination not only due to their disability, but also their sex. In addition, they are often poor and/or face various other challenges unknown to most people. Wherever discrimination occurs, they often experience further prejudice, based on common assumptions and widely held beliefs about their status and capacity both as females and as people with disabilities. Concern for women with disabilities (WWD) expressed in the Biwako Millenium Framework (BMF) which states that they are one of the most marginalised groups in society, as they are multiply disadvantaged through their status as women, as persons with disabilities, and are overly represented among persons living in poverty. The BMF also states that women and girls with disabilities face discrimination within their families are denied access to health services, education, training, and employment.

24. A recent UNDP report¹⁴ on women with disabilities in the Pacific found that women and girls with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination, in particular, forms of intersectional discrimination¹⁵. The resulting challenges do not occur in isolation; they occur as a result of one

¹⁴ Stubbs, Daniel and Sainimili Tawake, Pacific sisters with disabilities: at the intersection of discrimination / Daniel Stubbs and Sainimili Tawake. – Suva, Fiji : UNDP Pacific Centre, 2009. Pacific Sisters with Disabilities at the Intersection of Discrimination

¹⁵ Women and girls with disabilities experience various forms of discrimination. Rather than thinking of each form independently, the concept of intersectional discrimination recognizes that new forms of discrimination are created when two or more types of discrimination combine.² For example, a woman who is also a person with a disability will face discrimination based on both of these characteristics when seeking education, training and employment. The overall effect is a third form of discrimination that transcends the two separately and is often imposed or reinforced without challenge by many decision makers.

or more forms of discrimination and can lead to further barriers. The need for integration and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all aspects of society is set out in international human rights conventions but the challenge has not yet been met. The data, research and anecdotal evidence drawn on in the UNDP report show that, despite some helpful laws, policies and systems of practice in some countries, compared to their disabled male peers, women with disabilities are less educated; experience higher rates of unemployment; more likely to be abused; poorer; more isolated; experience worse health outcomes and generally have lower social status.

25. The consequences of discrimination against, and inadequate provision for, people with disabilities are particularly serious for women. Women are often subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages, which impede their access to health care, education, vocational training and employment. If they have an intellectual disability or mental illness, their chances of overcoming the barriers that disabilities create are further diminished. Because views about gender relations tend to put women in a lower place in most hierarchies, it is difficult for them to take a full and active part in community life, which is so important to many Pacific Island cultures. Gender issues are evident in the different life experiences of women and girls with disabilities from men and boys with disabilities. While women with disabilities do have some experiences and challenges in common with men with disabilities, in many circumstances, the former face multiple and intersectional discrimination. Therefore, they are often profoundly more disadvantaged than men with disabilities in similar situations, leading to the denial of rights, opportunities and resources.

Challenges Remain

26. Despite some progress, challenges and obstacles still remain. The lack of availability and the quality of demographic data and socio-economic indicators concerning disability continue to be major problems. Many governments and other stakeholders report that the lack of financial and human resources, technical knowledge and capacity hinder their capacity to progress disability issues. Although we can say that the Pacific region enjoys steady improvement in the development of disability policy and some legislation, the implementation of such policies and legislation has to be ensured and their impact measured.

Recommendations

27. Ministers are invited to:
- (a) **endorse** the issue of disability inclusive development as part of government priorities in all Forum Island countries; and
 - (b) **note** the importance of disability specific policy and legislation;
 - (c) **note** the importance of inclusive education for persons with disabilities; and
 - (d) **support** the need to address the specific issues facing women with disabilities.
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Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
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