



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

FORUM DISABILITY MINISTERS' MEETING

Rarotonga, Cook Islands
21-23 October 2009

Ministers from Pacific Islands Forum countries with responsibility for disability issues, met for their first meeting at the Rarotongan Beach Resort and Spa, Cook Islands from 21-23 October 2009. In attendance were Ministers, from Australia, the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Solomon Islands, Senior officials represented Tonga, and Tuvalu. Representatives of Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPO) from Vanuatu and Fiji were also in attendance. Observers from the Australian Human Rights Commission, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community/Regional Rights Resource Team, the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific, and the Pacific Disability Forum were also in attendance.

Opening Session

2. The meeting was opened by the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Hon Jim Marurai. The Prime Minister informed the meeting that although togetherness defines the people of the Pacific, this is a challenge when it comes to considering those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. He noted the progress of his Government in regard to disability, notably the national plan of the Cook Islands that addresses the concerns of persons with disabilities. He expressed his sincere hope that the meeting would lead to strengthening of partnerships, greater disability inclusive development and the endorsement of the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability as directed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders at their 2009 Cairns meeting.

3. In his opening address, the Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Mr Feleti P. Teo, underlined the important role of governments in their leadership in providing robust enabling environments through enactment of appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks to empower persons with disabilities to live a decent quality of life as full participating members of society. He stated that governments cannot, however, achieve everything on their own and should involve all stakeholders in meaningful partnerships, including civil society in particular DPOs, the corporate sector and the media. He reminded Ministers of the responsibility entrusted to them by Forum Leaders to consider and adopt a Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability.

4. Mr Iosefa Maiava, Head, ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre delivered an opening statement on behalf of Ms Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary, United Nations

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. He noted that increased malnutrition and reduced health spending due to the global economic crisis have affected the lives of persons with disabilities. Since their exclusion from the labour force has an adverse impact on economic growth, inclusive and sustainable development, which ensures the employment rights of persons with disabilities, is vital. By guaranteeing their rights and providing them support, he noted that person with disabilities, as part of our workforce and our society, will be able to contribute fully to development at a time when we need them most.

5. In her vote of thanks, Honorable Dame Carol Kidu expressed her appreciation to the high level of commitment given to the issue of disability by the Government of the Cook Islands and its recognition of the importance of partnerships to address the issue of disability. Dame Carol also noted that more women ministers than men were participating in this Meeting.

6. Honorable Ngamau Munokoa, Minister of Internal Affairs, National Environment Services, Youth and Sport and Non-governmental Organisations, of the Cook Islands was unanimously elected Chair of the Meeting.

Keynote Address

7. In his opening keynote address Honorable Bob McMullan, Australia's Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance noted that disability, as an issue, required the attention by governments at the most senior levels, as confirmed in the Communiqué of the Pacific Islands Forum held in Cairns in August 2009.

8. The human rights of persons with disabilities must be recognized and realized, so that countries in the Pacific move towards a more inclusive society and attain their internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In this connection, disability needs to be recognized as a normal part of our lives. To address this issue, attitudes and beliefs need to be changed. Our social barriers, rather than the mental and physical barriers of persons with disabilities, prevent us from addressing this issue.

9. To enable a more equitable quality of lives, both partnership and leadership are essential. Governments need to form a genuine partnership with DPOs as part of its overall approach. In this regard, leadership, both by the governments as well as the DPOs, are critical.

10. Countries of the Pacific have fostered the development of DPOs, built partnerships between stakeholders, and several have signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). It was stressed that it is time to build on this good work and move on to the next stage: implementation of the CRPD as it provides a comprehensive platform to advance the rights of persons with disabilities and, importantly, introduces legal obligations in this regard.

11. Australia remains committed to assisting all countries of the Pacific and “Development for all” forms the foundation for its aid strategy on disability. The Minister also expressed Australia’s endorsement of a regional strategy that countries of the Pacific can share as a framework for action.

Disability Development and Progress in the Pacific: a Status Report

12. The Forum Secretariat presented an overview of disability development in the Pacific. The meeting was informed that 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 programmes and that persons with disabilities have been involved in developing these policy documents

13. While there is a lack of accurate data on the number of persons with disabilities, it is clear that the number 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.

14. Ministers commented on the importance of strengthening health services, including prevention measures, early intervention, rehabilitation, counselling services and assistive devices. Ministers observed that women and girls with disabilities were particularly vulnerable and looked to UNIFEM and other relevant agencies to play a role in addressing this pressing issue.

15. Ministers noted the importance of developing legislation, policy and a budget framework but most importantly how these translate into practical benefits to people with disabilities at the national and community level. Ministers also noted however, that disability is easily marginalised within the wider context of competing development and budget priorities of governments, a situation that needs close attention given the importance Ministers accord to disability.

16. Ministers:

- (a) **endorsed** the issue of disability inclusive development as part of government priorities in all Forum Island countries; and agreed to designate a focal ministry to deal with disability issues with allocated budgetary resources;;
- (b) **noted** the importance of inclusive education for persons with disabilities;
- (c) **noted** the importance of and availability of access to appropriate and / or specialist preventative health services and the importance of addressing the issue of avoidable impairments through increased awareness of non-communicable diseases, accidents, especially traffic accidents;
- (d) **noted** the importance of and availability of rehabilitation and assistive devices, services and counselling;

- (e) **supported** the need to address the specific issues facing women and girls with disabilities and directed the Forum Secretariat to liaise with relevant agencies in regard to assistance ; and
- (f) **agreed** to encourage the use of standardised data definitions such as the Washington Group on Disability Statistics data guidelines.

Key international and regional agreements on disability

17. The Forum Secretariat presented an overview of agreements at the Asia-Pacific, global and Pacific levels, emphasising the links between them and their utility for use at the national level as a guide to policy development.

18. The Biwako Millennium Framework and the Biwako Plus Five have been influential in the Pacific as a guide to countries in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. Pacific Islands Forum Leaders endorsed the Biwako Millennium Framework in 2003. More recently, at the 2009 Pacific Islands Forum, Leaders gave strong support to the Forum Disability Ministers Meeting and the development of a Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability.

19. One of the most significant recent developments in the area of disability has been the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol on 13 December 2006. The coming into force of the Convention marked the beginning of a new era in the global efforts for recognition that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Convention is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension.

20. It was also recognised that countries are at different stages of development of policy, legislation as well as addressing the process of signing and ratification on the Convention. It was recognised that the latter can place a significant reporting burden on countries and that a measured approach to implementation of Convention articles was important. It was recognised that the Convention provides a framework for countries to address disability even for those which have not signed or ratified. Ministers noted the importance of building awareness and understanding of a “rights-based approach.”

21. Ministers recognised the complexities of the links between human rights and culture.

22. Ministers:

- (a) **urged** Forum Island Countries that have not done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the earliest practical opportunity;
- (b) **agreed** that all Forum Island Countries should develop and implement national disability policy and legislation premised on the Convention on the Rights of

- Persons with Disabilities and support the use of the BMF as a policy guideline; including strategic plans and implementation frameworks;
- (c) **urged** Forum Island Countries to increase awareness of human rights generally and the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities specifically, and understanding of the rights-based approach; and
 - (d) **noted** the importance of the International Labour Organization Convention 159 and urge members to develop inclusive employment policy and set clear standards and guidelines on the employment of persons with disabilities.

Non-governmental Organisations in Pacific Disability Development

23. Disability non-governmental organisations including DPOs in Pacific Island countries have been particularly active in the last decade. They place emphasis on their networks with community groups, other NGOs, business and private sectors as well as governments and inter-governmental organisations. Such networks are utilised for multiple purposes, including fundraising, lobbying, and promotion of an inclusive society for persons with disabilities. While progress has been made in terms of their engagement with governments and development partners, many challenges remain particularly in regard to technical capacity and financial resources.

24. Ministers acknowledged the critical role of civil society partnerships and the importance of engaging with DPOs as partners in policy development, effective service delivery and advocacy. Such engagement also empowers DPOs and strengthens partnerships in disability inclusive development. Ministers further acknowledged the importance of DPO's independent voice in shaping policy development.

25. Ministers:

- (a) **acknowledged** the contributions made by non-governmental organisations in Pacific Island countries to facilitate disability development activities at local, national and regional levels with the support of international non-governmental organisations and development partners; and
- (b) **agreed** to strengthen engagement with disability non-governmental organisations and especially DPOs at both national and regional levels to build community partnerships and disability inclusive development initiatives in Pacific Island countries.

Country presentations

26. A number of common issues were reiterated in the presentations made by countries of the Pacific. Countries of the Pacific are aware of disability as an issue. These countries, however, have addressed this issue in different ways and degrees of commitment. Countries recognise the need to improve understanding of the full implications of a rights-based approach within the context of Pacific communities.

27. Barriers, whether physical or attitudinal, against persons with disabilities continue to exist. Families and communities assume an important role in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities. Given the geographic characteristics of Pacific countries, it is difficult to provide appropriate services in remote as well as rural areas. In some countries which have experienced high-levels of violence, the need for psychosocial counseling has yet to be recognised.

28. Governments recognise the importance of partnerships with civil society as well as the private sector. National coordinating councils have played a key role in strengthening partnerships and delivery of services. The limited human resources, both within the government as well as their partners, affect their effectiveness. Since many DPOs and NGOs are driven by a few key individuals, they were often institutionally fragile.

29. Since the various dimensions of disability need to be addressed by different sectoral ministries within the government, responsibility for addressing this issue was often fragmented. An office to coordinate and mainstream this issue across sectoral ministries is therefore essential. There is often insufficient data and research to support the development of appropriate policies and legislation as well as requests for budgetary allocations.

30. Few countries are able to provide adequate, health, rehabilitation and preventative care services, as well as appropriate benefits to address the needs of persons with disabilities. Programmes to address their needs, even in basic education and health, were often insufficient.

Second keynote address

31. Mr Graeme Innes AM, Disability Discrimination Commissioner and Race Discrimination Commissioner, Australia, delivered the second keynote address.

32. Mr Innes reminded the meeting that no society has attained a fully inclusive environment. He stressed that partnerships are vital, in particular those with persons with disabilities.

33. Mr Innes informed the meeting of the recent appointment of Professor Ron McCallum of Australia as the Chairman of the Convention treaty body for the CRPD, which is a positive development for the Pacific region and for persons with disabilities.

34. Mr Innes stressed that the CRPD is more than a legal framework and that it requires a societal change with a shift in thinking. The CRPD does in effect God's work, by viewing all people as equal. The CRPD provides a tool for progress and is the first international Convention of the 21st century. Although there were previous agreements, they did not provide protection for persons with disabilities. In previous agreements, persons with disabilities were viewed as objects, whereas in the CRPD, they are subjects.

35. Mr Innes underscored that consultation between all parties including persons with disabilities and their families and communities is an essential contribution in disability inclusive development, as it was with the development of the CRPD. He advocated for the mainstreaming of children with disabilities into all schools, rather than separate schools.

Disability in the national planning process

36. ESCAP convened a panel to discuss the relationship between global commitments, national planning priorities and processes and national policies and policy implementation processes.

37. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol as well as the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific noted the importance of integrating disability, as an issue, in the national planning process so that the rights of persons with disabilities are recognized and their concerns are consistently and evenly addressed across all sectors of the economy. This requires consultations with persons with disabilities when developing national plans and budgets and strengthened coordination and collaboration amongst government ministries as well as with other stakeholders in civil society.

38. Ministers noted the difficulty in setting priorities and allocating resources from national budgets to address the needs of persons with disabilities across sectoral ministries. They further recognised the need to align and integrate national plans with provincial, divisional and district plans so that actions reach the people;

39. Ministers:

- (a) **supported** the need for consultation and meaningful involvement with persons with disabilities and related disabled persons organisations in the development of national and provincial or state plans and budgets.
- (b) **noted** the need to consider how policies could be designed to include the family, community, traditional social structures and faith based organizations as well as government.
- (c) **considered** developing a “no gaps” approach to disability inclusive development through reviewing policy and legislation, strengthening coordination and collaboration amongst government ministries as well as with other stakeholders in civil society, including disabled persons’ organization, non-governmental organizations, private sector employers, training organizations and faith-based organizations to ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities are consistently and evenly addressed across all sectors.

The Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability

40. The meeting received a presentation on the proposed Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010-2015. The purposes of the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010 – 2015 are to: support Pacific Island Forum member countries to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities; provide a framework for the coordination of development partners, governments and civil society in building a disability inclusive Pacific; and strengthen commitment of all stakeholders towards implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other human rights instruments which/that relate to disability.

41. The adoption of a Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability is a response to the directive of Pacific Island Forum Leaders as well a response to the spirit and principles of the Pacific Plan on enabling Pacific people to live free and worthwhile lives in the context of increased regional integration

42. The Biwako Millenium Framework and Biwako Plus Five provided regional mechanisms to assist countries to address national priorities for persons with disabilities. The Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability will provide a tool to assist countries to set national priorities to address the articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

43. Ministers gave their support to the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability and made several points that would strengthen it. These related to concerns on indigenous rights; on resource implications; the inclusion of health related issues and on building awareness on the issue of disability. Ministers further noted that there is some urgency to the issues.

44. Ministers:

(a) **endorsed** the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010-2015

(b) **directed** the Forum Secretariat and development partners to develop an implementation plan including a monitoring and evaluation framework taking note of the Ministers' concerns in paragraph 43; and coordinate the mobilisation and provision of resources and technical assistance for Forum Island Countries.

Closing Session

45. Ministers presented the outcomes of their retreat, reporting that while there is a sense of urgency in progressing work on disability, countries must be in control of their own situation. They noted that countries will need upskilling before they are in a position to ratify the CPRD. The resource implications of ratification were also discussed.

46. Ministers raised concerns on reporting on UN Conventions and proposed streamlining of reporting in the Pacific region, in order to reduce costs. They also noted the potential synergies between reporting for various agreements and urged reporting on the PRSD to take this into account.

47. Ministers urged the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to report on outcomes rather than activities.

48. Ministers requested the Forum Secretariat to convey the outcomes of this meeting to the forthcoming Forum Economic Ministers Meeting, with an accompanying letter from the Chair to stress the importance of including the needs of persons with disability in the national planning process.

Appreciation

49. Mr Sumasafu Tuatoko Vilsoni, President of the Pacific Disability Forum, made a closing statement on behalf of the Disabled Persons Organisations represented at the meeting. He noted the progress that the Pacific Disability Forum had made since its inception in 2001. He thanked the Forum Secretariat for including DPOs in the meeting.

50. Mr Vilsoni reported that the DPOs in the region also endorsed the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability and requested that they be consulted and included in the development of the implementation framework. DPOs would like to attend the next ministerial meeting on disability and would like the opportunity to meet a day ahead of the main meeting.

51. Mr Feleti P. Teo, Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, thanked the Government of the Cook Islands, especially the Ministry of Internal Affairs, for their hosting arrangements, hospitality and for chairing the meeting. He reiterated this sincere gratitude to the Government of Australia for their major financial support and to ESCAP for their financial contribution and for their significant technical assistance.

52. Hon Faustina Rehufer-Margg, Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs of Palau, delivered a vote of thanks to the Government of the Cook Islands for their generous hospitality. She also delivered a traditional Palauan chant which contained the message that we all need to paddle our canoe in the same direction.

Next meeting

53. Ministers agreed that their next meeting should be in early 2012 to coincide with the end of the Biwako Plus Five time-frame and the mid-term of the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability. Papua New Guinea agreed to host the next meeting. Ministers recommended that this meeting should follow a similar format to the 2009 meeting and should include DPO representatives.

*Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
Rarotonga, Cook Islands
23 October 2009*



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

THE PACIFIC REGIONAL STRATEGY ON DISABILITY 2010-2015

Purpose

The purposes of the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010 – 2015 are to:

- Support Pacific Island Forum member countries to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Provide a framework for the coordination of development partners, governments and civil society in building a disability inclusive Pacific; and
- Strengthen commitment of all stakeholders towards implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other human rights instruments which/that relate to disability.

Definition

2. This Strategy uses the definition of disability from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that 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 which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.’

Background

3. Persons with disabilities represent an estimated 10 percent¹ of any population. This represents some 800,000 Pacific Island people. Recent census results and national surveys do not provide a clear and accurate picture of the situation of persons with disabilities as there is not a clear and generally accepted definition of disability, surveys have often been based on small population samples, questions asked are often unclear and enumerators are poorly trained on disability issues². There is a need to improve quality research and data on the prevalence of disability and the issues affecting the lives of persons with disabilities in the Pacific region.

¹ World Bank estimate as in Social Analysis and Disability: A Guidance Note, 2007, p6.

² For example Inclusion International carried out surveys in Kiribati in 2003-2004 and identified 4.36% of the population as living with a disability; while another survey 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%. The 1996 Fiji census included a question on disability and the 12,000 or 2% of the population identified as having a disability.

4. 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.

5. Persons with disabilities and their families face prejudice, discrimination and rejection. Children with disabilities are consistently excluded from attending school (less than 10% have access to any form of education and many not attending at any time in their life³), health and welfare service provision is poor and largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities and there are few employment opportunities. Where services exist, implementation tends to be ad hoc, uncoordinated and poorly funded. Most governments are not making provision for disability services and inclusive policies in their budgets.

6. Persons with disabilities in Pacific island countries are among the poorest and most marginalised members of their communities. The link between disability and poverty and social exclusion is proven.⁴ Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty.

7. Studies have shown that the traditional view in the Pacific is that persons with disabilities are to be looked after or cared for, and cannot be expected to take a full and active part in village community life, thus marginalising them from mainstream life⁵. This view of persons with disabilities as dependent typifies a 'charity' or 'welfare' approach and is by no means unique to the Pacific. A 'medical' approach is also widespread, where disabilities are seen as health impairments that can be cured. It is only in the last few decades that persons with disabilities in any part of the world have been recognised as fully participating members of society.

8. Forum Island Countries are at different stages of development in regard to disability.⁶ Until relatively recently, the national disability agenda has been largely neglected. While many countries have clear rights-based policies, few have specific legislation. Many have active Disabled Persons Organisations (DPO) that have largely lead the disability agenda in collaboration with governments. The role of DPOs has been central to the implementation of the Biwako Millenium Framework.

9. Persons with disabilities must be included in national development processes. Development of rights-based policy, legislation and service provision must be established in partnership with organizations of persons with disabilities and other concerned agencies. Persons with disabilities have proven their capability to contribute to this process.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Issues in Basic Education for Children and Youth with Disabilities, paper for 2002 Forum Education Ministers Meeting

UNOCHR and IPU From Exclusion to Equality: Realizing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007, p1; ILO Achieving Equal Employment for People with Disabilities through Legislation, Guidelines, 2004, p.1; Fiji Poverty Report 1997. Govt of Fiji and UNDP, pp55 and 65.

⁵ McKinstry, G, Price, P., & Macanawai, S. (2004). "A Review of Policy and Legislation on Disability in the Pacific". Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Nowland-Foreman, G. & Stubbs, D. (2005). "Free and Equal: A Review of NZAID Pacific Regional Disability Programme for New Zealand Agency for International Development"

⁶ ESCAP Disability at a Glance

10. While some persons with disabilities are becoming empowered, the diversity among persons with disabilities needs to be acknowledged and attention should be paid to marginalised groups, such as those with psychosocial disabilities, intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, women and youth and those living in rural and remote areas.

11. A recent UNDP study found that throughout the Pacific region, in both rural and urban areas, women and girls with disabilities face multiple and compounding forms of discrimination. Despite some helpful laws, policies and systems of practice in some countries, women with disabilities are less educated, experience higher rates of unemployment, are more likely to be abused, are poorer, are more isolated, experience worse health outcomes and generally have lower social status.⁷ Concern regarding women with disabilities is a priority area of the Biwako Millennium Framework and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

Regional and International Commitments

12. At the 2002 inter-governmental meeting to conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002), governments, including those from Pacific Island Countries, adopted the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (BMF). It builds on the agenda for action which guided the first decade. It outlines a set of principles, strategies, goals, targets, and directives for action, and forms a comprehensive set of guidelines for countries to use in developing policies and planning and implementing programmes for persons with disabilities. While the BMF officially ends in 2012, its utility as a framework will remain.

13. At the 2003 Pacific Islands Forum, the leaders of Pacific Island countries endorsed the BMF as providing a set of goals for Pacific countries to work towards over the next ten years.

14. Pacific Island leaders adopted the Pacific Plan in 2005. The overall emphasis of the plan is to create stronger and deeper links between the sovereign countries of the region. Disability progress and development is reflected in Initiative 12.5 of this plan. A disability desk has been set up in the Forum secretariat for the purpose of coordinating the development and progress of disability initiatives in the Forum island countries.

15. In 2009 Forum Leaders reiterated their support for people with disabilities and reaffirmed the need for more attention to be directed to the most disadvantaged group who are among the poorest and most vulnerable. They acknowledged that people with disability face many barriers to full participation in society. Leaders further noted that the Regional Disability Strategy should focus attention on the need to address issues facing persons with disabilities in the Pacific, to build greater awareness on the importance of allowing access to greater and more equitable opportunities to enhance their quality of life and full enjoyment of all inalienable human rights.

⁷ UNDP Pacific Centre, 2009, Pacific Sisters with Disabilities: at the Intersection of Discrimination

Disability as a Human Rights Issue

16. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the 13 December 2006 and came into force on 3 May 2008. The CRPD is a binding treaty that provides a universal standard for the human rights of people with disabilities. The CRPD promotes a shift in understanding that recognises the limitations created by disability not as a problem of a person but as a problem of barriers created by society. The CRPD can provide specific guidance and a framework for national action even for countries that have not yet ratified.

17. A rights-based approach represents a paradigm shift from earlier charity or medical models. The rights of persons with disability and their participation is central to this approach. Persons with disabilities have argued that their ability to function as full and active citizens in a modern society is limited not by their disability but by society's failure to recognise them and accommodate their needs.

Why we need a Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability (PRSD)

18. Disability is an issue that lends itself to a regional approach. The PRSD reflects the reality and needs of the Pacific and its unique social, economic and geographic context. It represents a common agreement on how to progress and a means for sharing experience and practice. The PRSD is designed to provide guidance to PICs in advancing their work in disability. It allows the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and other regional organisations, development partners and civil society a platform for engaging with governments on disability inclusive development and progress at the national and regional level. Few Forum Island Countries, especially very small island states, have the necessary capacity and expertise to develop policy legislation, and programmes, thus support from regional sources is critical.

19. The BMF and Biwako Plus five provided regional mechanisms to assist countries to address national priorities for persons with disabilities. The PRSD will provide a similar tool to assist countries to set national priorities to address the articles of the CRPD.

20. The Strategy identifies thematic areas that would most effectively advance the rights of Pacific persons with disability and ensure their participation in national development processes. The proposed thematic areas are those that can be realistically addressed by countries. Under each thematic area are selected indicative areas for actions designed to provide guidance to countries in regard to how they might address their own priorities and commitments. These activities are also to facilitate coordination with other regional frameworks, such as the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF), which includes inclusive education as a cross-cutting theme⁸

⁸ Other regional strategies include the Digital Strategy; the Pacific Platform for Women; the Pacific Regional HIV Strategy; the Forum Economic Ministers Action Plan etc.

Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

21. The PRSD will be implemented over a five year period, 2010 to 2015 by governments in collaboration with civil society, regional stakeholders and development partners. An implementation plan will be developed in consultation with stakeholders and a monitoring and evaluation framework will also be developed once the PRSD itself has been endorsed by Ministers. Strategy targets will be linked to regional and international commitments to the BMF and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

22. There will be regular reviews over the life of the Strategy in order to monitor progress and implementation; identify policy gaps and resource constraints.

THE PACIFIC REGIONAL STRATEGY ON DISABILITY

Vision

An inclusive, barrier-free, and rights-based society for people with disabilities, which embraces the diversity of all Pacific people.

Goal

To improve the lives and status of persons with disabilities in the Pacific region.

Overarching Principles

The Strategy:

- i) acknowledges the Vision of the Pacific Island Forum Leaders as reflected in the Pacific Plan;
- ii) affirms the protection and promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities;
- iii) emphasises the need for political leadership in addressing disability issues at the national levels;
- iv) is linked to the Pacific Plan, national disability policies, regional and international mandates;
- v) affirms the need for an enabling environment for persons with disabilities;
- vi) affirms the central role of persons with disabilities in the development and implementation of policy that concerns them.

The Strategy identifies the following thematic areas for special attention:

- i) Strengthen Political Leadership and an Enabling Environment
- ii) Recognition and Protection of the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- iii) Strengthen Partnerships: Coordination and Collaboration
- iv) Disability Inclusive Development
- v) Enhancing the Central Role of Persons with Disabilities
- vi) Mobilisation of Resources

THE PACIFIC REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISABILITY 2010 - 2015
THEMATIC AREAS

1. STRENGTHEN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Strong political leadership is necessary to build an inclusive society and ensure that national plans, policies and priorities address the concerns of persons with disabilities. Inclusive policy, legislation and financing are needed to provide an enabling environment for all stakeholders to advance the cause of persons with disabilities.

OBJECTIVE	To achieve and sustain commitment and action for the development and advancement of persons with disabilities from all leaders at all levels ⁹ .
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INDICATIVE AREAS FOR ACTIONS

- Advocate for the signing, ratification, implementation and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- Advocate for the establishment of National Councils for Persons with Disabilities and advisory committees with clear terms of reference in all FICs;
- Develop and/or strengthening disability policy and legislation;
- Allocate funds in all key budget areas for disability inclusive policies and programmes;
- Encourage regional organisations to integrate disability issues into their mainstream programmes
- Work with Ministries of Education to encourage and promote inclusive education;
- Work with Ministries of Health, including increasing awareness of non-communicable diseases, accident prevention, avoidable impairments, rehabilitation and counseling;
- Build increasing awareness on disabilities; and
- Advocate for the signing and ratification of the International Labor Organisation Convention 159 (ILO 159).

⁹ Political and traditional leaders, religious leaders, business and community leaders

2. RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international treaty that identifies the rights of persons with disabilities as well as obligations on States parties to promote, protect and ensure those rights. This underscores the universal acceptance of disability as a human rights concern relevant to all countries. The CRPD reinforces the shift in thinking from disability being seen as a charity or welfare concern to being one of human rights and incorporates a social development perspective.

OBJECTIVE	To protect and promote the human rights of persons with disabilities.
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INDICATIVE AREAS FOR ACTION

- Advocate for the recognition of the human rights of persons with disabilities as reflected in the CRPD;
- Utilize national, regional and international human rights declarations and agreements to develop national policies and legislation for persons with disabilities;
- Collaborate with development partners for the sustainable funding of human rights training for persons with disabilities;
- Collaborate with major stakeholders to implement training on the human rights approach to issues facing persons with disabilities;
- Strengthen and support national human rights advocacy; and
- Critically analyse indigenous rights and responsibilities frameworks to integrate with and harmonise with universal human rights principles.

3. STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS: COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Disability needs to be addressed by all stakeholders: governments, civil society, disabled persons organisations and development partners working in partnership and recognizing that disability is a cross-cutting issue affecting all sectors of society.

OBJECTIVE	To promote and encourage effective coordination, collaboration and partnership amongst all stakeholders.
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INDICATIVE AREAS FOR ACTION

- Establish and/or strengthen communication and coordination between Governments and Disabled Persons Organisations;
- Ensure coordinated efforts between local, national and international development partners
- Strengthen partnerships for the implementation of the regional strategy;
- Promote and support regional and national initiatives in the prevention of avoidable disability, in particular in addressing and raising awareness of preventable blindness; traffic injuries; sports and work place injuries and advocate for greater awareness of the relationship between non-communicable diseases and disabilities;
- Identify areas for research and mobilise partnerships and funding;
- Take account of the critical roles of families as carers and the provision of support for them;
- Promote and support the development of early identification, intervention and referral services

4. DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

All parts of government and civil society need to include disability into their work programmes so that the issue is not marginalized or compartmentalised.

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that disability is mainstreamed into all local and national policies and practices so that the issue is not marginalised or compartmentalized.

INDICATIVE AREAS FOR ACTION

- Include disability-related concerns into:
 - National and sector planning and resourcing
 - Disaster planning including evacuation plans;
 - Food security
 - Impacts of climate change
 - Sports, recreation and cultural activities
 - Education and training
 - Accessibility provisions in building codes and infrastructure provision
 - National census, labour force and Household Income Expenditure Surveys
 - Employment policies

5. ENHANCING THE CENTRAL ROLE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

‘Nothing about us without us’ is the motto of persons with disabilities¹⁰ and speaks to the human rights of each person to determine his or her own fate. Persons with disabilities are the most equipped and best informed to speak on their behalf and can contribute to solutions on issues that concern them.

OBJECTIVE

To recognise the central role of persons with disabilities and their organisations in addressing their issues

INDICATIVE AREAS FOR ACTIONS

Financial and human resources are required at local, national and regional levels to implement activities on disability inclusive development, as this has been typically under-resourced.

OBJECTIVE

To have sufficient resources and funding to realise national and regional responses to disability.

INDICATIVE AREAS FOR ACTION

- Advocate for adequate allocation of funding for disability responses in the national budget;
- Explore the feasibility of establishing a regional funding mechanism for specific disability issues;
- Encourage development partners to increase and sustain funding to support responses to disability;
- Encourage countries to establish a civil service position dedicated solely to disability inclusive development work;
- Establish a central information database of skilled individuals and organisations available to provide technical support for disability responses.

6. MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES

Financial and human resources are required at local, national and regional levels to implement activities on disability inclusive development, as this has been typically under-resourced.

OBJECTIVE

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INDICATIVE AREAS FOR ACTION

- Advocate for adequate allocation of funding for disability responses in the national budget;
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- Encourage countries to establish a civil service position dedicated solely to disability inclusive development work;
- Establish a central information database of skilled individuals and organisations available to provide technical support for disability responses.

¹⁰ This was first coined by Disabled Peoples International and is widely used by persons with disabilities.

