

14. DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Drafted by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

SUMMARY

Disability in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) has typically been an invisible issue. There is relatively little accurate official data on the incidence of disability and few services for people living with physical or mental impairments. Very few persons with disability are in decision-making positions at any level and their lack of empowerment is reflected in almost every aspect of their lives. Disability is low on the policy agenda and receives meagre proportions of national budgetary resources.¹

People with disabilities in PICs are among the poorest and most marginalised members of their communities.² Evidence suggests that numbers of persons with disability are increasing due to high rates of diabetes-related amputations and blindness; increasing traffic and industrial accidents; and the ageing of PIC populations. The WHO and World Bank estimate that globally, around 15 per cent of any adult population is disabled³ and an estimated 5% of children.⁴

Disability limits access to education, employment, recreation, health and other social services, leading to economic and social exclusion, while persons with disability and their families face prejudice, discrimination and rejection. Women and children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse. Girls with disabilities are also less likely to get an education, receive vocational training or find employment than are boys with disabilities or girls without disabilities.⁵

Although governments in PICs have been slow to address disability, there have been some positive changes in the past decade. There is increasing awareness of disability issues across the region, and enhanced political will to ensure that policies and development plans are disability-inclusive. Development partners and inter-governmental organisations have taken a strong lead in providing technical assistance and resources.⁶ The Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a comprehensive framework for PICs to shape disability inclusive development.

KEY ISSUES

Disability as a Human Rights Issue and a Development Issue

Disability inclusive development is now recognised as a human rights issue and a development issue, rather than a charity issue where persons with disability were regarded as objects of charity; or a

¹ Tavola, Helen, *Addressing Inequality: Disability in Pacific Island Countries*, 2012, p3.
http://www.addc.org.au/documents/resources/addressing-inequality-disability-in-the-pacific-island-countries_931.pdf (This paper draws heavily on this document)

² Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010-2015*

³ World Health Organisation and World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, 2011, p27

⁴ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disability*, embargoed until May 2013 p3.

⁵ UNICEF, p.1

⁶ Tavola, Helen, op cit, p4

medical model where the aim was to 'cure' the disabling impairment or affliction. A rights-based approach enables persons with disability to be educated, developed and empowered to live with his/her disability and to participate fully in society.

Negative Attitude/accessibility/discrimination

Persons with disabilities are the most marginalised and disadvantaged members of the Pacific society because they are faced with inflexible bureaucracies that cater solely for the 'normal' majority. They are also invisible as they are faced with inaccessible facilities that deny them access to services that others take for granted and they are faced with attitudinal discrimination that is caused by disinterest, fear and ignorance of disability issues.⁷

Lack of Legislation

There has been increasing commitment to disability inclusive development by PIC governments and most countries have now developed national disability policies and action plans. The lack of legislation protecting the rights and freedom from discrimination of people with disabilities poses a significant barrier to their pursuit of opportunities for full participation and equality, and their capacity to contribute to society in both social and economic spheres. Only Fiji and the Cook Islands currently have disability specific legislation although Solomon Islands has a draft bill and others have indicated an intention in this regard.

Lack of Resources

Few countries, however, are committing budgetary or human resources of any significance to disability. In recent years there have been donor resources available for some areas of work but ongoing recurrent budgets are often lacking. Social protection is very limited in PICs and few persons with disability, or those caring for children or other family members with disability, receive state benefits. Governments need to address the challenge of providing sustainable financing to disability, although it is one of many competing priorities in generally weak economies.

The Need to Strengthen Early Identification, Intervention and Rehabilitation

For Pacific children with disabilities (CWD) access to services is poor; especially education where CWD are usually either not sent to school by over-protective parents or not allowed entry by school management. Some PICs have segregated special education or care centres while others have little specific provision. Some countries have made progress with implementing Inclusive Education policies, while others intend to develop such policies. Early detection, identification and rehabilitation is weak in the region. Assistance in this area would have a strong impact as it could significantly improve the lives of children with disabilities; support families; and prevent the development of secondary disabilities.⁸

Issue of Voice and lack of Capacity

Support needs to be given to the collective voice and capacity of persons with disabilities in order to channel their legitimate claims into planning and decision-making processes. Relevant organizations

⁷ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Non-government Organisations in Pacific Disability Development*, p6, Paper presented at PIF Disability Ministers Meeting 212

⁸ Tavola, Helen and Whippy, Nainasa, *Pacific Children with Disabilities*, UNICEF, July 2010, p7.

of persons with disabilities are important partners in policymaking and programme implementation at the local, national, regional and international levels. Supporting local non-governmental organizations that then provide services for persons with disabilities, and providing them with technical assistance are examples of that practice.⁹ Disabled persons organisations in PICs have grown in number and capacity in the past decade and they have become strong advocates of the rights of persons with disability.

Lack of Disability Related Data

There is a clear need for improved data and evidence on disability in PICs on which to base policies and to measure progress. Options to increase the sources and quality of data on disability include the addition of questions to national census questionnaires and household questionnaires (such as DHS and MICS)¹⁰ the creation of more detailed subnational surveys and the provision of training for statisticians on disability-related data collection. Censuses can measure the prevalence of disabilities through the use of an internationally agreed set of questions relating to activity limitations, yet these are not used or promoted for use in PICs. Because children develop and learn to perform basic tasks at different speeds, and because not all forms of disability are well known and understood childhood disability is particularly challenging to measure.

Mainstreaming Disability Inclusive Development

As well as activities focussed on persons with disabilities, there is also a need for governments to integrate and mainstream disability inclusive development across all sectors, including areas as diverse as disaster risk management and sports. All sectors of government have an impact on the lives of PWD and there should be collaboration between them. Disability inclusive development should also feature in national development plans. Currently eight PIC national development plans mention disability with references in regard to vulnerable groups and only one (Fiji) mentions mainstreaming disability across all sectors. The other PICs make no mention at all of disability or the needs of PWD in their national plans. Planning on disability inclusive development should include appropriate indicators so that progress can be measured, monitored and evaluated.

BACKGROUND

Disability has been an invisible issue in the international development agenda until the last decade, apart from the efforts of a few bodies such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) that has been involved for over two decades. The Barbados Plan of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are silent on disability, yet at least six of the MDGs will not be achieved if the needs of persons with disability are not taken into account. For example, persons with disability are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty and most children with disabilities do not attend school, which means that universal access to primary education will not be achieved without taking this group into account.

⁹ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons: the Millennium Development Goals and synergies with other United Nations disability instruments* [A/62/157, 2007, paragraph 16]

¹⁰ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disability*, embargoed until May 2013 p63.

The issue of disability has now found its place in development discourse, at the Pacific regional and the international levels. Disability has proven to be an issue that can be effectively addressed at the Pacific regional level.

Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Leaders first raised the issue of disability in 2002 and again in 2003, when it endorsed the Biwako Millennium Framework towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society in Asia and the Pacific.¹¹ In their Communiqué, Leaders agreed that immediate priorities for Pacific Islands Governments should be to address policy that would dismantle barriers and improve access for persons with disabilities. The Communiqué also encouraged regional and international organisations to continue coordinated research that would assist policy development and enhance awareness in Pacific countries on disability.

In 2009, PIF Leaders 'reaffirmed the need for more attention to be directed to the region's most disadvantaged group - people with disabilities - who are among the poorest and most vulnerable in the world. People with disability face many barriers to full participation in society, and this is no exception in the Pacific.'¹²

Pacific Ministers responsible for disability inclusive development met for the first time in 2009 and endorsed a **Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability (PRSD)** that provides a framework for national and regional level coordination and cooperation. The PRSD is based on human rights principles, reducing vulnerability and risks of disabilities; and improving care, support and partnerships. It is relevant to the Pacific region and provides achievable guidelines to support national efforts to advance disability issues. It is currently being implemented with the assistance of the Government of Australia.

In 2009, PIF Leaders reaffirmed their strong support for the PRSD endorsed by the Forum Disability Ministers: "to support Pacific Island Forum member countries to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities; to 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 relating to disability."¹³

At the second Pacific Disability Ministers Meeting held in Papua New Guinea in October 2012, the PIFS reported on the implementation of the PRSD. Also at the 2012 Ministerial meeting, Pacific Ministers unanimously agreed that it is necessary to include disability issues in the global discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda/Sustainable Development Goals; and called for disability

¹¹ The Biwako Millennium Framework (BMF), endorsed by the 56 members of the ESCAP region, was significant for emphasising the paradigm shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based approach to the development of persons with disabilities and for providing policy guidelines that have been widely used in PICs. Although its time-frame expired in 2012, the Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, endorsed in November 2012, builds on the BMF.

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<http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2009%20Forum%20Communique,%20Cairns,%20Australia%205-6%20Aug.pdf>

¹³ http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2010_Forum_Communique.pdf

inclusive development targets and indicators to be included in the Post-2015 Development Agenda/Sustainable Development Goals.

The **Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD), which came into force in 2008, has been rapidly endorsed by the international community as a key human rights treaty.¹⁴ The CRPD provides a comprehensive policy framework that is increasingly being signed and ratified and incorporated into constitutions, legislation, national plans of action, and policies and programmes by PIC Governments. Three PICs have ratified the CRPD (Cook Islands, Vanuatu and Nauru) and a further five have signed (FSM, Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Tonga). At least three others have indicated their intention to sign in the near future. Only the Cook Islands has submitted (but not presented yet) its first report on the CRPD. Eight PICs have Universal Periodic Report recommendations that refer to the rights of persons with disability. Some of these recommendations refer specifically to improving inclusive education, early detection and data collection.

The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (**Rio+20**) outcomes affirmed that ‘Sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of all major groups’¹⁵ including persons with disabilities, which are essential if the global goal of poverty eradication is to be realised.

The existence of the CRPD, the Rio+20 outcomes and the concerted commitment and action at the Pacific level all provide compelling evidence and a great opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of persons with disability in the Sustainable Development Goals. We cannot afford to again overlook this significant group in our Pacific community from the mainstream of development.

KEY DOCUMENTS AND HYPERLINKS

The Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

World Health Organisation and World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, 2011

¹⁴ Since the CRPD opened for signing in 2007, there has been 127 ratifications and 155 signatories; 76 ratifications of the Optional Protocol and 90 signatories to the Optional Protocol.

¹⁵ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, *The Future we Want*, 2012, paragraph 43