

PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT



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"Disability in the Pacific: Recent Developments and Emerging Issues"

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Introduction

1. Preamble

The review by McKinstry et al on the analysis and discussion of disability legislation, policy and developments in the Pacific Islands has enabled us to gain some useful insights into the various developments pertaining to the advancement of issues faced by persons with disabilities in our region. We have also learnt a lot from the Stubbs et al review which gives the Pacific Regional Health Programme a clear and strategic direction for assistance in the area of disabilities for the next 5 years.

The literature offered by the writers mentioned above has indeed updated us on the attempts made so far to advance disability issues at all levels along with the recognition of stakeholders in disability concerns, at national, regional and international levels. It has also pointed out that in this common journey we are encouraged to understand that our Governments have been identified as the main stakeholders with a primary obligation for upholding the rights of persons with disabilities.

It has also recognized that this can only materialize if done in full partnership with persons with disabilities and their organisations as well as other agencies actively concerned with disability issues. Implicit in this are the recommendations on how to progress and develop a national disability policy in each of the Pacific Island countries.

2. The need for a Paradigm Shift

Persons with disabilities are marginalised in Pacific island countries (PICs) and legislative frameworks, mostly inherited from pre-independence days, do not cater for their rights or guarantee services. In more recent times, attitudes towards persons with a disability have taken a "paradigm shift" from a charity-or welfare-based/medical model to a human rights based model. Internationally this has been recognised, with the adoption of the *Convention for the Rights for People with Disabilities* by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006.

3. Constitutional and Legislative matters in the Pacific Island Country context

In order to have an idea of the extent to which persons with disabilities have been served by their Constitutions in PICs, it is necessary to have an understanding of the historical context in which their Constitutions were adopted. The attitudes towards persons with disabilities today, explicitly emphasizing that they have the same rights as all other citizens, and that these rights should be granted and upheld.

The above mentioned reviews have confirmed that all Pacific Islands constitutions contain extensive guarantees of human rights, but there is no specific acknowledgement that these rights apply to persons with disabilities. They also noted that all Pacific Island Forum countries are member of the United Nations either directly or indirectly and the processes followed a pattern, in that assistance to frame a new constitution, usually based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was given to the emerging countries by the governing country or protective power. They also found that constitutions tend to have similar characteristics although countries that gained their independence later had more individual characteristics in their constitutions.

4. Attitudinal hurdles

Attitudes to disability at the time most constitutions were formulated explain the lack of any explicit reference to persons with disabilities. Disability was not recognized as an issue by most governments and communities. Persons with disabilities were largely neglected and rejected and, where their concerns were raised at all, it was within the *framework of a charitable and welfare approach*. Interestingly indeed it was seen that charitable NGOs were more likely to be concerned with providing services to persons with disabilities than were governments of the region.

Internationally, and particularly in developed countries, the paradigm shift towards a human rights approach to the situation of persons with disabilities was gaining ground in the 1980s and early 1990s but Pacific island countries have been slow to become engaged with international and regional disability initiatives.

5. Disability specific legislation

In the recent past, a number of countries have passed disability-specific legislation primarily in areas relating to education, accessibility, equal opportunities in employment.

In reports to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission (UNESCAP) on achievements made during the first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, a number of governments stated that priorities for further action included anti-discrimination legislation, legislation to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, and revision of existing legislation to remove discriminatory clauses.

6. Discretionary powers

Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have an Ombudsman, who in general terms has discretionary power to investigate acts of Government Departments and officials to determine whether actions have been reasonable. The Ombudsmen have power to make recommendations as to whether remedial action is required, but do not have executive power. Three quarters of the Forum States have systems of legal aid or public defenders, which theoretically should allow litigants who may be termed as poor to bring matters to a Court, but in practice this avenue has not been utilised by persons with disabilities.

7. Current situation in relation to constitutional provisions

As stated earlier, the current situation suggests that in many Pacific Island countries persons with disabilities live under constitutional provisions which are not disability specific. It has also been identified that where guarantees have not been implemented in domestic law for persons with disabilities, these wide principles are unenforceable in practical terms.

The difference between the existence of constitutional and other legal rights, and the implementation and enforceability of those rights is not a problem exclusive to persons with disabilities. However, for persons with disabilities, any potential advantage from these rights decreases because of lack of access to education, information, resources and technology, poverty, physical barriers, and simple lack of support or personal power.

These factors become more marked with geographical isolation and gender discrimination. It is also worth noting that children with disabilities are the most vulnerable. Denial of the human rights of persons with disabilities worldwide has resulted in the development and adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities.

8. The Australian and New Zealand context

The role of Australia and New Zealand in supporting development for persons with disabilities in PICs has been predominantly as regional donor nations. These two developed Pacific countries have adopted legislation to address disability issues. Both countries have social protection systems of benefits to support persons with disabilities, which are arguably not financially feasible for PICs, but other aspects of their legislation, policies and approaches may be useful for consideration. For this paper we will only touch on the NZ support.

i. New Zealand enacted legislation in 2000,

By means of the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act, this required the development of a New Zealand Disability Strategy. The New Zealand Disability Strategy was completed in 2001. Prior to this the focus of attention to disability matters had been limited to social protection and distribution of benefits and assistance, based on a number of separate laws which did not form a coordinated disability policy, but provided some support to some categories of children and adults with disabilities.

ii. The New Zealand Disability Strategy¹

This strategy embodies a human rights approach to disability issues. Its explicit vision and goals include changing New Zealand from a disabling to an inclusive society, removing barriers and creating a society that highly values the lives of persons with disabilities and enhances their full participation in all aspects of community life. At the forefront of a rights-based approach to addressing disability the Disability Strategy is committed to developing a meaningful partnership between disabled people, their families, friends and supporters and government; government leadership taking responsibility for influencing the attitudes and behaviour of society as a whole, so that the issues and aspirations of people with disabilities are considered within a fully inclusive society.

9. International mandates and initiatives and disability

The basic human rights of all people, including persons with disabilities, are grounded in human rights framework based on the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international covenants on human rights and related human rights instruments. These human rights instruments address the rights of persons with disabilities either generally or specifically. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is general and makes no specific reference to persons with disabilities.

10. Disability relevant Declarations, Conventions and Summits and Frameworks

A series of disability-relevant declarations, conventions, summits and frameworks have emerged between 1970 and 2004. Many are disability-specific and others have implications for persons with disabilities.

i. 2000 United Nations Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (2000) reflects the most serious intent of the world community to address the problems of developing countries and the most disadvantaged groups within their communities. To the disability community it was therefore highly significant that although these 8 goals were drafted in the first year of the *new millennium there was still no reference to persons with disabilities*. This indicated

¹ New Zealand Disability Strategy, <http://www.odi.govt.nz/nzds/index.html>

clearly the continuing failure to address the rights of persons with disabilities, including their right to be included in development.

- ii. *2001 Informal Consultative Meeting on International Norms and Standards for Persons with Disabilities.*

This further promoted the rights of person with disabilities to protect and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

- iii. *2002 UNESCAP resolution to extend the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 2003-2012.*

- iv. *2002 UNESCAP High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade 1993-2002 and the coming to being of the BMF*

- v. *Towards the Convention on the Rights for People with Disabilities*

In December 2001 a resolution was adopted by the General Assembly to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. A Working Group was charged with the task of producing a Draft Treaty Text, which was to be presented to the third session of the Ad Hoc Committee in May-June 2004. From then on it took eight meetings for this committee to reach the decision to agree to accept the final draft and to forward it to the United Nations General Assembly for adoption. The process was long and arduous but the outcome was a definitive, binding document which did enshrine and focussed on upholding the comprehensive rights to which persons with disabilities are entitled.

11. Asian and Pacific Regional Mandates

i. The first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002.

The Asian and Pacific Region was the only region to promote a specific regional initiative in the area of disability at the end of the first United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons in 1992. UNESCAP proclaimed the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, by resolution 48/3 in April 1992. The Proclamation was adopted at the meeting to launch the Decade in Beijing, December 1992. The Government of Fiji was represented at this meeting, and was one of the first Pacific countries to sign the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region, together with the Federated States of Micronesia and Australia, in 1993.

ii. Agenda for action

The Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons was adopted by the Commission in 1993. This document provided the blueprint for action, to

guide governments in their policy development, planning and implementation of programmes concerning persons with disabilities. To a greater extent than was the case with the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 1993, the Agenda for Action was framed with a particular focus on developing countries. Two thirds of the world's population live in the Asian and Pacific region. This includes an estimated 400 million of the world's 600 million persons with disabilities. 55 of 62 member and associate member states of UNESCAP are developing countries. This includes 14 of the 16 Pacific Islands Forum countries.

iii. Priority Areas in the Agenda for Action

The Agenda for Action consisted of 12 major policy areas:

- National coordination
- Legislation
- Information
- Public awareness
- Accessibility and communication
- Education
- Training and Employment
- Prevention of the causes of disability
- Rehabilitation
- Assistive devices
- Self-help organizations
- Regional cooperation

12. Regional Evaluation of the AP Decade for PWDs

Regional evaluation of progress towards the achievement of the goals and targets of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons was undertaken by UNESCAP in 2001-2002. A survey was conducted by means of questionnaires sent to government focal points, seeking information on major achievements in the implementation of the 12 policy areas of the Agenda for Action, and identification of priority areas for further action.

An independent review was carried out by the Regional NGO Network (RNN), which had worked throughout the Decade in a collaborative partnership with UNESCAP. In addition, a specific review of the situation of persons with disabilities in PICs was conducted by UNESCAP Pacific Operations Centre (EPOC), for presentation as an agenda item at the seventh session of the UNESCAP Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries.

Detailed results and recommendations adopted at this meeting are discussed in the next section on Pacific disability mandates, initiatives and progress. The evaluation process revealed that although significant gains had been achieved in some countries, and in some of the policy areas, progress had been uneven. Many PICs had only become engaged with the Decade agenda relatively recently, and were at early stages of development.

Areas of major concern included the continuing lack of comprehensive data on persons with disabilities and the extremely low rate of access to education for children with disabilities throughout the countries of the region. Failure to reach persons with disabilities in rural areas was a further area for concern, as was the lack of barrier-free environments and equal access to information. It was concluded that there was a need for significant further action within the region to reverse this situation. By resolution 58/4, May 2002, the decision was taken to extend the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons for another Decade, from 2003-2012.

13. Towards the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action

In October 2002 a High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons was held at Otsu, Japan representatives from Pacific Island countries included Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, Samoa, Vanuatu, and was also attended by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). Pacific participants played a very active role in the meeting, and sessions were chaired by Ministers of the Governments of the Cook Islands and Fiji. The highlight of this meeting was the adoption of 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).

The Principles underpinning the BMF is focused on the development of persons with disabilities must be actively implemented within a human rights-based approach. This principle requires that governments acknowledge that persons with disabilities have the same rights as all other citizens, and that they are committed to taking the necessary steps to seeing that these rights are upheld. In particular it means accepting and ensuring that persons with disabilities, and their particular needs, are included in all aspects of national mainstream development. Barriers to their inclusion and full participation, such as neglect, rejection and discrimination need to be identified and removed and equal access provided to health, education and all other areas of programme delivery.

14. Pacific Disability mandates, initiatives and progress

The Pacific Island countries response to IYDP and the World Programme for Action, in the 1980s and early 1990s was primarily made by the NGO sector. With financial assistance provided by AIDAB (AUSAid) and NZAID, as well as other donors and agencies active in the Pacific, Red Cross and many small local NGOs, initiatives began to provide some services, particularly for children with disabilities. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programmes were started in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Fiji, some of which were eventually incorporated into government services.

CBR programmes were the only means of providing services to persons with disabilities in rural areas and outer islands. The decade since IYDP resulted in increased disability awareness in some countries, led by people with disabilities themselves and active NGOs and saw the beginning of moves to establish (DPOs). The Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1993. Analysis of the status and date of engagement of Pacific Island countries with the Decade and its Agenda for Action saw that Tuvalu and Nauru did not sign. Inevitably some countries have been more active

than others, and progress towards achieving the goals of the Agenda for Action has been uneven, but some significant improvements have taken place in most countries, and disability is now an issue on the regional agenda.

15. Constraints faced by Pacific island countries

PICs have been constrained by many factors, not the least of which was the distance from Bangkok, where UNESCAP is based and where most Decade-related training and other activities took place. Further constraints included costs of participation and an inadequate flow of information to the Pacific region. But a critical factor has been limited knowledge about disability issues combined with limited commitment by governments to the disability sector. This was evident at both national and regional level. As services have been provided, persons with disabilities have become more visible in their communities and public awareness and concern for disability issues has risen. However, the act of signing the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region is an expression of commitment by national governments, and has usually, but not always, resulted in an improvement in the situation of persons with disabilities in the country.

16. Progress of DPO formation

More recently there has been enormous progress in the formation of organisations of persons with disability (DPOs) at national level and in 2000 the Disabled Peoples' International Oceania Subregional Office (DPIOSO) was formed to be the secretariat to the DPI Oceania, which did strengthen the voice of persons with disabilities in the Pacific region.

This has raised the level of self-advocacy to a degree that has begun to have a significant impact on many decisions and initiatives in Fiji, where it is currently based, and in the wider region. Leading disability activists from this organisation have played a critical role in the regional disability developments reported below. They worked in full partnership and collaboration with EPOC and UNESCAP to prepare landmark disability documents outlining the current situation of adults and children with disabilities in the Pacific region for presentation at the UNESCAP Seventh Session of the Special Body on Pacific Islands Developing Countries May 2002, the Forum Ministers of Education meeting, December 2002, and the Forum Leaders meeting in 2003.

17. Disability as an issue at the regional level

It is interesting to note that at the regional level, disability was not an issue on the agenda of the Pacific Islands Forum or the Secretariat (PIFS) until 2002. This was when the Prime Minister of Vanuatu raised the issue for the first time at the 2002 Pacific Islands Forum meeting. This was prompted by the recommendations that were adopted by Pacific Island government representatives at the UNESCAP Special Body Meeting in Bangkok in May 2002. Following on from this, the issues in basic education for children and youth with disabilities were subsequently considered by the Forum Education Ministers' meeting, held in Suva in December 2002, and *Disability in the Pacific region*

was addressed by means of an issues paper presented at the Pre-Forum Session of the Forum Officials Committee in Auckland, August 2003. This resulted in disability being included in the 2003 Pacific Islands Forum communiqué which also included the endorsement of the Biwako Millennium Framework, providing a lasting mandate for regional work.

PIFS in its commitment to advancing disability issues in the Pacific region organized a regional disability meeting in Nadi in 2005. One of the outputs of this was the involvement of RRRT and the planned human rights training in 2008 and the establishment of position of the Disability Coordination Officer at PIFS.

The key roles of this position are as follows:

- Implementation of disability and related initiatives and providing assistance to Forum Island Countries for implementing the disability related components of the Pacific plan
- Monitoring of all regional disability actions undertaken by donors and development partners
- Provide assistance to FICs on Disability issues
- Ensure the timely implementation of the Outcomes of the 2005 Regional Workshop on Disability in a ministerial meeting to be planned for the end of 2008. This is envisaged to provide high-level mandates for our Forum Island Countries and possibly endorsement of a regional disability strategy (that will be drafted consultatively).

18. The catalyst for regional attention to disability matters by the Pacific Islands Forum

This was the outcome of the Seventh Session of the Special Body on Pacific Islands Developing Countries, held by UNESCAP in Bangkok, May 2002, the topic of “Participation of persons with disabilities in PICs in the context of the Asian and Pacific Decade, 1993-2002, and beyond” had been selected to focus the attention of Pacific Governments on the situation of persons with disabilities in Pacific countries at the end of the first Asian and Pacific Decade.

The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for government representatives to become better informed about disability issues and to adopt recommendations with a view to developing national and regional priorities for action. This outcome was achieved with the adoption of a series of recommendations at both national and regional levels.

19. Recommendations on a national level

At national level, key recommendations were that:

- Disability issues should be included in all national development policy. National disability policy and legislation should be formulated within a human rights based context, fully informed by adequate and comprehensive disability data.

- The focal point for disability issues should be a national coordination mechanism with organizations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) playing a key role in decision-making.
- Formation of DPOs should be supported and empowered to fulfil this decision-making role.
- Children with disabilities should be a priority focus for governments. They should have equal access to education and be included in national education plans.
- Special services to identify children with disabilities from birth should include early intervention and support for families.
- Issues of access to the built environment, vocational training, employment and opportunities for persons with disabilities to be included in information and communications technologies initiatives must be addressed.

20. Recommendations on the regional level

i. Three of the recommendations at regional level have been, or are in the process of being addressed:

- Place disability on the Pacific Islands Forum agenda.
- The Forum Education Ministers Meeting should address the issue of access to education and support for teacher training with a view to having all children with disabilities attending school, with appropriate support.
- Convene a regional meeting to develop and adopt strategies for the implementation of the framework for action (BMF) with a view to strengthening regional cooperation among Pacific island countries.

ii. At the Forum Education Ministers meeting, held in Suva in December 2002, the issues of access to education and teacher training were addressed, and three key recommendations adopted:

- A target of 75% should be set for achieving access to primary school education for children with disabilities by 2010
- The Forum Secretariat should review regional teacher training and curriculum for special needs teachers, with a view to strengthening regional teacher training opportunities.
- The Forum Secretariat should, in collaboration with donors, develop a regional programme to develop capacity that will provide inclusive education for children with disabilities.

iii. Articles 50 and 51 of the Forum communiqué, quoted in the Introduction were the outcome of the attention to disability by the Forum Leaders, at their meeting in August 2003. The statements confirmed:

- The commitment of the Pacific Islands Forum to the implementation of the goals and targets of the BMF during the next decade.
- Forum support for regional and international coordinated research to assist policy development and enhanced disability awareness.

21. Stages of development

Individual countries are at different stages of development in addressing disability issues, have different levels of resources, and will have different priorities, but efforts at national level will be supported and strengthened by a regional agenda on disability. At present, few countries have developed comprehensive disability policies or strategies, or national coordination mechanisms with clearly defined responsibilities for consultation with the disability community, multi-sectoral implementation of programmes, and mechanisms for monitoring progress.

Those countries which have made progress have often done so in isolation, and the lessons they have learned are not readily available to others who may be facing similar problems and seeking similar solutions. The adoption of a shared framework to guide development on disability issues at national and regional level would establish a common approach that should facilitate decision-making and the sharing of information. *The BMF has been adopted by the Pacific Islands Forum for this purpose.*

22. Disability legislation must be enacted and enforced, a national coordination mechanism established, and disability policy and action plan developed and implemented.

The BMF principles set out the steps that must be taken when a government has made a commitment to address disability as part of national policy development. Examples from PICs suggest that it is possible to develop national coordination mechanisms and disability policy without enacting legislation first. Legislation normally establishes the right of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and lays down the focal point for responsibility for disability issues within government and the structure for developing and implementing disability policy, most commonly a national coordination committee.

This committee should be multi-sectoral and should include representatives of all disability-relevant organizations. Persons with disabilities and their organisations must have a key role on the committee and a significant voice in all decision-making.

23. National Coordination mechanisms in Pacific Island Countries

The Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji and Palau all have national coordination mechanisms. In Fiji and FSM, they were established in 1994 by means of legislation. The Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, FSM and PNG are the only PIC to have developed comprehensive National Policies on Disability. The Cook Islands is the only one to develop a five-year National Action Plan (2003-2008) with targets for achievement of its goals. The first objective in their national plan is to enact legislation to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities so that they can participate fully in community life.

24. The critical factors faced by persons with disabilities in PICs are:

- Government commitment to action,
- Determination of the focal point for responsibility for disability issues,
- A coordination mechanism which incorporates the views of all disability stakeholders, and gives a primary role to DPOs in consultation and decision-making
- Development, by means of full consultation, of a National Disability Policy or Strategy, with an Action Plan that will be implemented with budgetary allocation, monitored and evaluated at regular intervals.
- The detailed process by which this is achieved will probably vary from country to country.
- Include disability dimensions in all new and existing laws, policies and plans and programmes.
- All new legislation should include disability dimensions, which should be specified explicitly where appropriate.
- The insertion of clauses on the rights of persons with disabilities in the 1997 Constitution of Fiji provided the basis for the inclusion of the needs of children with disabilities in national education policy in Fiji.
- It is important for Pacific Governments to examine and amend existing legislation, when opportunities for general reviews or amendments occur.

25. Pacific Disability Stakeholders and Partners

The history of the development of concern for people with disabilities and their issues has clearly shown that the initial action was taken by NGO in partnership with donor agencies, accompanied by the steady development and strengthening of organizations of persons with disabilities.

However Pacific Governments have increasingly been taking responsibility for disability policy and action in many countries, working in partnership with DPOs, NGOs and donor agencies. In determining strategies and patterns for future development it is important to identify the major stakeholders and partners in disability development in Pacific countries. Key agencies have been identified and in many cases additional information provided on achievements and examples of good practice which may provide models or act as catalysts for further initiatives within the region.

26. Governments' responsibility

i. National level

Government has ultimate responsibility for safeguarding the rights of all its citizens, including citizens with disabilities. In adopting the BMF Pacific Governments have committed themselves to including persons with disabilities in all national development initiatives, to developing national policy on disability in full collaboration with persons with disabilities, and their organizations, by means of an instituted national

coordination mechanism within government, with representation of all disability stakeholders, including DPOs and NGOs.

They have also committed to providing protection from discrimination. Disability data collection is an essential task of government but must be undertaken in a manner which reflects the real situation of persons with disabilities and their families, and allows accurate analysis of their needs, to assist with policy development.

DPOs can assist with this process, but national Statistics Departments should be strengthened in this area, and regular data collection introduced, with disability questions included in national census but also with more detailed survey methodology.

ii. Regional level

- **Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)** is the regional body representing all governments of the Forum Island Countries. As such it is the body responsible for working with relevant stakeholders to implement decisions that are taken by the Forum.
- However, it should be noted that when Leaders adopted the BMF, implementation is at the national level and the onus is on member countries. *Since the BMF is a UN initiative, monitoring is primarily the responsibility of UNESCAP.*

27. Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs), including organizations of Women with Disabilities (WWD).

i.. National level development

a. DPOs have been developing over a period of more than a decade in PICs.

National cross-disability DPOs are established in Cook Islands – includes 9 outer island disability committees, Fiji – includes organizations at district level, Plus Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

b. Parent associations have been formed in:

- FSM, Kiribati, Palau, Fiji

c. WWD organizations have been formed in Fiji

These organizations have worked tirelessly to improve the situation of persons with disabilities in their countries, have advocated to and worked with government, where government has been responsive, and have worked with local and regional NGOs, and benefited from programmes that have been provided by these agencies.

They are the key partners to work with government in a consultative and cooperative role in determining policy and programmes, and the means by which disability will be integrated into all national development agenda. They have the expertise to advise government in the area of disability issues. They need to prioritize their concerns and acquire the skills to advocate, consult, advise and work in partnership with government to develop policies and programmes, which they may play a key role in implementing and monitoring.

ii. Regional level voice of persons with disabilities

a. DPI Oceania

DPI Oceania is the Pacific regional organization of DPI, one of the seven global disability organizations that make up the IDA, previously referred to. It is one of several sub-regional offices in the Asian and Pacific region, under the regional office which has its headquarters in Bangkok. DPI Oceania therefore represents all national level DPOs in the Pacific region, and has the responsibility of assisting people with disabilities in PICs to form national and grass-roots organizations.

b. Pasifika WWD Forum

This organization held its inaugural meeting in Suva in December 2003. The goal of the Forum is to build the capacity of women with disabilities in the Pacific and to promote their equal treatment and full participation in the development and implementation of national, regional and international initiatives concerning women with disabilities. The Forum has active members from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It has the objective of extending membership to all Forum countries. It has a constitutionally guaranteed role in PDF, and membership of the wider Asian and Pacific WWD Network.

c. Pacific Disability Forum (PDF)

The Pacific Disability Forum was formed at a meeting organized by DPI Oceania, in December 2002, attended by individuals and representatives of many organizations involved in disability work in the region. It was formed to serve as the regional mechanism and focal point for individuals and organisations from within the region actively engaged in the disability sector. In December 2003 a planning meeting for PDF was held in Suva, Fiji, to determine the structure, Constitution, and goals of the organization and to discuss draft plans and programmes. A meeting to officially launch PDF, with adoption of its Constitution and election of Council members, will be held in July 2004.

The purpose of PDF as a regional mechanism is to:

- Advocate for the full participation, fair treatment and equal recognition of persons with disabilities and their organizations
- Sensitise and work in consultative partnerships with governments and regional institutions on disability-related concerns and initiatives
- Represent the views of organizations of and for persons with disabilities to relevant regional and international meetings
- Provide a Pacific-based, culturally-sensitive, informed and collective approach to disability initiatives at regional and international levels
- The PDF sees itself as an appropriate, valuable and enthusiastic partner to other civil society organizations, United Nations bodies, aid and development agencies, and other interested groups in the region and beyond, concerned with disability work in the Pacific.
- PDF has the potential to become the civil society disability sector counterpart to PIFS in terms of disability rights and issues.

d. Vision Pacific Trust

- Vision Pacific trust is an incorporated charitable trust, governed and managed by Pacific and Maori disabled people, for the benefit of disabled people.
- The vision and goal is for an equitable society, free from discrimination and inclusive of people with disabilities.

28. United Nations Agencies

i. UNESCAP

UNESCAP has been the focal point and driving force behind the development and implementation of both the first and second Asian and Pacific Decades for Persons with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region. It was responsible for the development and adoption of the BMF as a regional policy blueprint to guide action to achieve the goal of inclusive, rights-based and barrier-free societies in all countries of the region, including PICs. It has been active in the past conducting training in the Pacific region, and strong advocacy should be applied to maintain this trend, as well as seeking strong Pacific representation at meetings and workshops scheduled in Bangkok.

ii. UNESCAP Pacific Operations Centre (EPOC)

The EPOC office is based in Fiji. The EPOC office and the Social Development and Planning Regional Adviser have been active in disability support and cooperation for a number of years. While its traditional role is providing support to governments, during recent years it has formed a very strong partnership with DPOs and disability-related NGOs, assisting with development of policy, problem solving, and documenting the situation of persons with disabilities for consideration by Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers (2002) and Forum Island leaders (2003), as well as UNESCAP Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries. A recent review of EPOC has indicated that it may have an increased capacity in cooperation with UNESCAP office in Bangkok to develop and support disability projects in PICs and with PIF.

iii. UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNDP, FAO

Many UN agencies are represented in the Pacific, and some have been engaged in disability-related work. Funding for small projects may be available and advocacy for the inclusion of a disability dimension in all their work should be undertaken. UNESCO has been actively promoting inclusive education in the Pacific, especially in Samoa.

29. Regional Disability Development Centre

The Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability (APCD) Project is a technical cooperation project between the Government of Japan and the Government of Thailand, which started in Bangkok in August 2002.

The overall goal of the APCD project is to promote the empowerment of people with disabilities and a barrier-free society in developing countries in the Asia and Pacific Region. The Center was established as an outcome of the first Asian and Pacific Decade for Disabled Persons. Although Pacific countries are part of the focus of the work of APCD, and very few participants from Pacific countries have attended training on non-handicapping environments, information and communication technology or website design. Missions to Fiji and Vanuatu have been undertaken with a view to determining the most appropriate forms of support to Pacific persons with disabilities and their organizations.

30. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs and INGOs)

i. National level

- Local and national NGOs have made significant contributions to improving the situation of children and adults with disabilities in many PICs over a number of decades, but most noticeably since IYDP.
- Trends over time have resulted in closer collaboration with each other and with DPOs to strengthen the voice presented to Government for action to place disability on the national agenda, at the same time as they have been actively engaged in service delivery.
- This has been particularly successful in Samoa.

ii. Regional level (INGOs)

- Many INGOs have been active in the Pacific region over a long period of time; among them World Blind Union, Sight Savers, Christoffel-Blinden-mission (CBM), Inclusion International, and Red Cross.

a) Inclusion International (II)

- Inclusion International is a worldwide non-governmental human rights organisation which advocates for and supports persons with intellectual disability and their families. Persons with intellectual disability are among the most marginalised of all disabled groups, and even in many developed countries they have been institutionalised and denied their human rights.
- This has given rise to strong organizations of families and supporters of children and adults with intellectual disabilities whose members have not wished to abandon their children into institutionalised care, and have advocated for increased services and access to facets of life available to all others.

b) Fred Hollows Foundation.

- In 2002, the Fred Hollows Foundation established a Programme Office in New Zealand to extend the work of the Foundation to Fiji and Polynesia. The Foundation works with local blindness prevention agencies in 29 countries to establish mechanisms to treat and prevent avoidable blindness.
- In the Pacific they have worked in Tonga, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The objective of the

Foundation is to develop a national eye care plan unique to each particular country.

- Funding for the programme has been raised in New Zealand with assistance from AusAID.

c) Femlink Pacific

- Femlink Pacific is the first example of a mainstream women's organization adopting and including issues of women with disabilities in its agenda. Its primary concern has been with the inequitable portrayal of women in the mainstream media as a whole.
- The response has been to develop community media to redress the balance, driven by social objectives rather than profit motive, to empower people rather than to treat them as passive consumers.
- It is committed to human rights and social justice, and is inclusive of women, youth and other marginalised groups, including women with disabilities. It welcomes these groups as partners, to work together to produce their own media.
- Femlink Pacific has offered ongoing support to ensure that the portrayal of, coverage on, and representation of women with disabilities, is undertaken in a respectful and consultative manner.
- The power of the media in changing attitudes is well recognized, and the alliance between Femlink and WWD Pasifika may see important usage of the media for disability advocacy in many PICS in the years to come.

32. International and Pacific Regional Donors

Bilateral aid is the most common form of aid to PICS but multi-lateral aid projects have been undertaken in the disability area over time. The predominant donor agencies also vary from time to time in line with their changing priorities. AusAID and NZAID have long histories of funding disability initiatives in the Pacific region, many of them small scale.

i. AusAID.

- AusAID's current stated focus of activity in the Pacific is on good governance but disability and special or inclusive education is still issues of concern.
- In the 1990s AusAID funded a four year project on Childhood Disabilities, with activities aimed at strengthening small-scale NGO centres for children with disabilities in Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Solomon Islands.
- A course in early intervention was conducted in Fiji, and teachers from other PICs spent some time gaining experience at the Early Intervention Centre in Suva, Fiji.
- Expertise was provided to the Ministry of Education and assistance given in developing the curriculum for regular and special education training at the Lautoka Teachers Training College.

- Short-term intensive teacher training funded for teachers at NGO schools and pre-school in Tonga, and support for CBR training in Solomon Islands and southern group outer Cook Islands was carried out.
- Continuing projects have included the placement of disability volunteers, currently at FDPA in Suva, and youth ambassadors have been placed in several countries, with a disability-specific focus.
- AUSAid has developed and implemented a framework for including sensitivity to disability issues in all projects, in the same way that all projects are required to be gender-sensitive.
- A project for supporting children with disabilities in Nauru has been under consideration since 1993.

ii. NZAID

- NZAID has been the most generous and the most consistent supporter of disability initiatives in PICs extending over a period of more than decade.
- This has included funding CBR training for outer island health and disability workers, and a national workshop on disability which resulted in the formation of a National Disability Council in the Cook Islands. Particular support has been provided more recently, as was noted, in partnership with Inclusion International.
- However the availability of aid is currently constrained by the need for disaster relief, but both Government and NGO funding coordinators have included disability issues within their parameters.
- Other agencies currently active in the region include Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Canada Aid, USAid, European Union, Peoples Republic of China, and Taipei, China. The Nippon Foundation supported the founding of DPI Oceania.

33. Inter-agency organizations

- The Asian Development Bank in one of its recent reports on poverty in the region has emphasized that the poorest people identified in Pacific countries stated that their highest priority was for increased access to social services, health and education in particular.
- Although persons with disabilities were not specifically identified, there is evidence from World Bank studies that persons with disabilities are over-represented in poverty statistics.
- It is important that advocacy to ADB by all agencies should request specific attention to persons with disabilities in poverty initiatives.
- Many problems have been faced in the quest for donor assistance. Donors may feel that countries with relatively small populations and indeterminate numbers of persons with disabilities warrant less attention than larger countries, perhaps closer to home.
- Specialist organisations, of which there are many in the disability sector, may decide to cater for people with a particular category of disability but not provide assistance in the wider context.

- There is evidence that approaches to seeking aid for disability-specific projects are becoming more focussed, and with more clearly articulated outcomes and longer-term objectives.
- DPOs are more likely to be partners in the process rather than recipients of a charitable relationship. They must be aware that INGO, NGO and donor agencies and organisations will require well defined projects, with measurable outcomes if they hope to attract overseas aid. Joint projects with government are more likely in the future.
- Persons with disabilities in the Pacific can and should expect more specific and focussed aid from traditional and redirected sources, from NGOs and international partners. They can also expect that as Governments adopt policy on disability there will be an increase in budgetary resource allocation from within their own countries, as the collaboration between Governments and persons with disabilities becomes a reality.
- Pacific countries, due to their relative isolation, may be unaware of some of their exceptional achievements. With the relatively small populations in the island states, there have been recent activities and advances which may be difficult to achieve in more densely populated countries.
- Small projects can be remarkably successful and provide models of what can be achieved to neighbouring countries, and shared beyond the region. The strong and coherent leadership of DPOs provides an example that could usefully be followed by more developed countries within and beyond the region.

Conclusion

If people with disabilities are to be included in the national development process, then the development of policy, legislation and service provision must be established in full partnership with organizations of people with disabilities and other concerned agencies. Only when this collaborative process is undertaken will people with disabilities experience acceptance in Pacific societies. Assessment of the current situation suggests that serious attention is needed to address these issues.

We are here to:

- review progress in the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework in the last five years especially in the seven priority areas and chart a new strategic direction for the next five years
- confirm the need to increase our awareness and those of others in understanding of the “rights based” development of persons with disabilities
- deliberate on strategies that will encourage the development of policy and programme capacity within governments and national NGOs
- ensure the strengthening of government and NGO partnerships at the national and regional level

Desired Results

- For us to identify immediate priorities in addressing the targets of the BMF for the next five years
- Identify initiatives to strengthen sharing of information in the implementation of the next stages of the BMF
- Ensure strengthened commitments by national governments to address the reviewed priorities and targets of the BMF for the next five years
- Encourage the strengthening of partnerships between disability NGOs and governments
- Put in place strategies for the effective sharing of information and experience on the development of national legislation, policies and strategies protecting the rights of people with disability in pacific island countries
- Ensure the involvement of people with disabilities and NGOs in the policy development process throughout the region
- Strengthened capacity to develop indicators, gather information and monitor progress on the implementation of BMF targets for the next five years
- Strengthened capacity to address a “rights based approach to development.”

Reference

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2. Garth Nowland-Foreman & Daniel Stubbs 2005. “A Review of NZAID Pacific Regional Disability Programme for New Zealand Agency for International Development”
3. Alastair Wilkinson 2005 “Making Disability Policy in the Pacific Rights-Based Policy”