

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION WORKSHOP OUTCOMES DOCUMENT

“Advancing Inclusive Education in the Pacific”

**(Supported by the Fiji Government, PIFS, PREL, USP/PRIDE,
UNICEF, UNESCO and SPBEA)**

Dates: 1-5 October 2007

Preamble

1. Outcomes from the Inclusive Education Workshop have urged the People of the Pacific to note that Inclusive Education as defined by UNESCO is “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education”. The objective is to support education for all, with special emphasis on removing barriers to participation for children with disabilities and out-of-school children. The statement notes that the overall goal is a school which adapts to the needs of all learners and where all children are participating and treated equally – it is thus imperative that the word ALL, effectively includes children with disabilities.

2. All stakeholders were encouraged to note that in this definition, Inclusive Education will always seek to address the learning needs of all children, with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. Moreover it was emphasized that at the core of Inclusive Education is the fundamental right to education for all, and from the adoption of the principle of inclusive education at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Spain in 1994, and its affirmation at the World Education Forum, the challenge of getting all children into school has been put on the political agenda in many countries and is reflected in the Pacific Islands Forum Basic Education Action Plan as well as Pacific commitments to achieving Education for All (EFA). This has helped to focus attention on a broad range of children who are not in school or may be marginalized within the education system.

3. The workshop noted that the overall goal of inclusive education is to promote opportunities for all children to participate and be treated equally. It is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners and of reducing exclusion to and within education systems.¹ It is from this perspective that Pacific Islanders are encouraged to note that inclusive education is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in both formal and non-formal educational settings and that it advocates for changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, policies and strategies.

4. At the heart of inclusive education is the vision to transform the education system so it can provide improved quality and worthwhile education for all learners. Our schools in Pacific Island Countries can only be inclusive when they are working towards full participation, a sense of community and equality through: respect for differences, respect for different learning styles, variations in methods, open and flexible curricula, corresponding assessment techniques and welcoming each and every child. In other words, inclusive schools are learner-centered and child-friendly.

5. It is inevitable that Inclusive Education is seen by many as a matter of providing education for children with disabilities in a regular school setting. On the other hand it is worth

¹ Overcoming Exclusion through Inclusive Approaches in Education: A Challenge and a Vision. Conceptual paper, UNESCO, 2003.

noting that educational partners are promoting a much broader view of inclusive education, which encompasses all children who are excluded on grounds of gender, ability, ethnicity, linguistic, geographic location or poverty related reasons.

6. Inclusion may also be seen as a continuing process of increasing participation, and reducing segregation as a recurring tendency to exclude difference. In this sense inclusion and segregation are not fixed states or educational placements. Schools are continually working towards inclusion and resisting segregation. They will find themselves at different stages perhaps even taking wrong turns on the road to inclusion.

7. The workshop participants also acknowledged that for Inclusive Education to become a reality in the Pacific we need to eliminate altogether any continuum of service, including special education and special educators as a system of provision. This would require the redeployment of special education staff and resources to mainstream schools, where they will be employed not only for the benefit of students with disabilities but in a supportive role across the whole curriculum. The inclusive schools movement should seek to enhance the social skills and community participation of people with severe disabilities, and in so doing will change the attitudes of both the teachers and students towards disability. However there were differences in opinion on this issue.

8. All stakeholders were also encouraged to keep in mind that Inclusive Education brings together different forms of education. It is *rights-focused* and can be considered the ultimate educational outcome of the principle of normalization. It begins with the premise that every individual has the right to participate in the mainstream of society and enjoy the same privileges, benefits and opportunities as his or her own peers. It is child-focused and founded on the principle that all children, regardless of disability, are capable of learning and should be given the same opportunities to achieve through learning to the best of their abilities.

9. The stakeholders also agreed that Inclusive Education is also a process that involves students, teachers, parents, the school community and the local community. It involves learning and development for everyone who is part of the school community. It involves discussion, examination of relevant issues and decision making based on the benefits for all concerned.

10. These practices are also deeply rooted in Pacific cultures. Pacific cultures have a long and proud history of understanding that learning is about gaining knowledge and understanding of knowing what to do to sustain cultural continuity. Learning is practical and related to shared values and beliefs. As well, relationships among people are core values in Pacific cultures. Relationships are important because they identify individuals and groups and provide a framework for working together. The roles that an individual play within their family and community assist in developing positive skills and social responsibility.

11. It was also noted that the process of Inclusive Education is a natural fit with Pacific culture. It reinforces the importance of working together to share information, to problem solve, to make decisions and to take action. The many roles and responsibilities played by the wide range of people involved in the education process will help ensure the continuing development of a healthy and vibrant school community.

12. Education in the Pacific is in the midst of tremendous change brought about by the current review of systems and practices. It is now faced with greater challenges, as skepticism about education quality appears to be increasing, with higher demands from Pacific citizens for

higher academic standards, greater accountability and improved educational performance. At the same time it is hampered by insufficient funding, overburdened teachers, low salary scales and the persistence of outdated instructional approaches. Though there are signs of development and change, its direction is still uncertain in the sense of policies for all of those who have the fundamental right to receive good quality education.

13. Workshop Objectives:

- 1) To understand the visions, experiences, practices and challenges of Inclusive Education globally and in Pacific countries;
 - i. All persons have the right to access quality educational opportunities and choices which enhance, include and welcome everyone as active contributing citizens in our schools, villages, and societies.
 - ii. Inclusive Education is not about how some learners can be integrated into the mainstream educational system, but an approach of transforming the educational system so it will respond to the diversity of all learners
 - iii. People that learn together, learn to live together
 - 2) To identify key strategies needed for wider implementation of inclusive practices and their implications for children with disabilities in Pacific Island Countries;
 - i. In the Pacific context consultation, collaboration, and cultural competencies among and within countries are vital to advancing inclusive education and must involve people with disabilities and family members at all levels of decision-making.
 - 3) To discuss, explore and investigate future national and regional strategies and actions aimed at strengthening Inclusive Education within the framework of the Education for All initiative;
14. The workshop agreed that three levels of strategies needed to be developed – regional, national and school.

(a) Strategy at the Regional Level – the policy level

The region includes 14 Forum Island countries, plus Tokelau.

1. Signing, ratification and implementation of significant documents.
2. Advocate for support for inclusion in the Pacific Plan.
3. Establish a Pacific Island EENET for IE.
4. Undertake qualitative and quantitative research to inform policy and practice of inclusive education. This includes disaggregated data to reflect key issues (including data that identifies all marginalized/vulnerable groups).
5. Development of sustainable systems for the acquisition and provision of training on assistive technology devices and supports. This includes low and high tech devices.
6. Support for mobilizing funding, including technical assistance in funding acquisition.
7. Create a media initiative to implement systems and programs of awareness (including such media as television, public service announcements, radio

programs). Vision: a television series celebrating the story of “inclusion” within the “heart of the Pacific.”

8. Provide regional teacher training and professional development, teacher exchanges and regional mentoring/study trips in order to upgrade teacher competence. Vision: A teacher training “package” or “tool kit” – including learning strategies, assessment strategies (updated “best practices” on inclusive education).
9. The Pacific Island Forum Secretariat is to monitor curriculum to ensure “Best Practices” on all levels of education in IE, with particular emphasis on tertiary teacher programs and international disability development programs.

(b) Strategy at the National Level

Policy

1. Formulate national IE policy and advocacy for policy makers on IE.
2. Include persons with disability and parents and/or caregivers into all related policy development activities.
3. Support for parents and care givers of all children including children with disabilities and involvement in their child’s educational process.
4. Advocate for improved opportunities for the transition of students with disabilities from education to employment.
5. Ensure consultation as an integral process involving parents of children with disabilities.
6. Implement early detection and early intervention.
7. Ministries of Health should establish case-management databases with a referral management system for children with disabilities from birth to 6 years.
8. Strengthen preventative measures: (e.g. immunization, pre and post natal care, etc)
9. Promote awareness on disability issues in villages and communities.
10. Develop in-country culture of IE discourse / sharing.
11. Provide ongoing professional development of teachers.
12. Development of sustainable systems for the acquisition and provision of training on assistive technology devices and supports. This includes low and high tech devices.

Collaboration

1. Promoting collaboration amongst Ministries, stakeholders and NGOs.
2. Actively support groups for people of disabilities.
3. Networks amongst professionals.
4. Collaboration across teacher training institutions in the country
5. Preventative measures, immunization, diet.
6. Develop systems that support collaboration between the formal and informal educational system.
7. Establish effective coordination and communication mechanisms between Ministries in the provision of services to young infants and children with disabilities in terms of early identification, assessment, referral to enrolment in early intervention services, pre-school and schools.
8. Actively seek innovative and creative approaches to IE.

Research

1. Undertake qualitative and quantitative research to inform policy and practice of inclusive education. This includes disaggregated data to reflect key issues (including data that identifies all marginalized/vulnerable groups).
2. Implement or advocate for changes in an Educational Management Information System (EMIS) system that will include significant questions and data for all children, especially children with disabilities.
3. Ensure that the research process is culturally sensitive and significant.
4. Share “best practice research methodology” related to IE.

Budget

1. Value for money budget
 - i. Establishment of structure within the system
 - ii. Targeted budget allocations
 - iii. Assistive technologies.
2. Create policies and programs that are fiscally sustainable and that it fits within current budgets or are a minimal strain.
3. Strategically plan and acquire funding to support IE systems and resources.

Implementation

1. Develop IE policies and practices that are easily replicated in isolated islands.
2. IE training compulsory for all pre-service teachers.
3. Provide for continuing IE in-service training.
4. ACCESS - Need for “interpreters”; sign languages for each national language; on-going training; a deaf education policy leading to inclusion into society; sign language as a language; hearing aids. Also, the need to develop effective measures to address barriers that limit access to education, e.g., alternate or additional forms of communication (Braille, sign language, augmented communication, etc.), physical access (such as ramps), etc.
5. Clearly define and designate responsibility at a senior level for inclusive education within MoE.
6. Provide or strengthen screening processes for all disabilities supported by subsequent referral systems where necessary.
7. Provide training and support for teachers to conduct low technology methods of screening (e.g. vision and hearing).

(c) Strategy at the School Level

1. Prepare teachers and students for effective inclusion of individuals with disabilities.
2. Foster commitment of all – leaders, teachers, children, community.
3. Provide safe environments through a culture of acceptance, understanding and support.
4. Focus on the holistic development of the child and his/her learning styles and needs.

-
5. Develop teams which support internal capacity building within schools to support effective inclusion.
 6. Use inclusive teaching practices.
 7. Collect in-school data, participate in action research and support wider research activities
 8. Strategic plan and budgetary support for inclusion.
 9. Provide support for students using assistive devices.
 10. Conduct low technology screening (e.g. vision and hearing).
 11. Teach basic ear and eye healthcare routines.

15. Workshop Output

(1) A common Pacific definition of Inclusive Education based on the discussions around an appreciation of what Inclusive Education means in each country and at the regional and international level.

Each country needs to make known its position on the following terms:

- Inclusive Education
- Mainstreaming
- Special Education
- Special School
- Integration
- Mainstreaming
- Segregation
- Special Units
- Specialized Classrooms, and so forth.