

COUNTRY REPORT: FIJI
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Greetings to you all from Fiji and I am indeed grateful for the opportunity to participate in this very important Forum.

1. Organization Providing Support and Services

Fiji has only two Blindness Agencies the Fiji Society for the Blind which provides educational and rehabilitation services and United Blind Persons of Fiji, which is largely, an advocacy group. Both of these organizations offer meaningful and valuable services to the blind persons in this country without duplicating each others role. Attempts have been made by the two agencies to maintain a good working relationship between them for the betterment of Fiji blind and visually impaired population.

The Fiji Society for the Blind continues to provide educational, rehabilitation, early childhood intervention, Braille transcription and talking book services to blind and visually impaired children, this organization manages the only school for the Blind in Fiji which Offers both mainstream and special class educational programmes to ensure appropriate and meaningful placement for our blind and visually impaired children.

Our Ministry of Education through its Special Education Department plays a vital role in providing salaries for trained teachers and licensed teachers. The Schools Integrated Education Programme has continued to raise the awareness of regular school teachers and administrators towards equal educational opportunities for all students including those with visual impairment.

The community Based Rehabilitation and Early Childhood Intervention Programmes are being maintained by field workers who are spread over the islands in Fiji. Early referrals from hospital, health centers, regular schools and other disability organizations facilitate early identification as well as early intervention measures.

Braille and talking books continue to be transcribed and recorded, with assistance from volunteers. Hostel accommodation is made available to those children from areas outside Suva, the capital city where the Fiji Society for the Blind is based.

On the other hand, the United Blind Persons of Fiji which promotes and addresses advocacy issues to improve the lives and status of blind persons has established itself quite well since it was set up in 1992. This organization conducts empowerment workshops and forums for its members independent living initiatives are made available to a selected few each years. UBP also provides canes, Braille/ talking watches, talking calculators and primary education kits to its members.

Awareness fundraising is an ongoing programme to educate members of the public on the importance of blindness prevention through publications of brochures, posters and quarterly newsletter. UBP Executive Committee is made up of 9 members. There is also a Women's Committee, which was established after the first WBU Regional Women's Forum, which was held in Fiji. The Women's Committee continues to meet to look into issues concerning blind women.

2. Country Wide Data

To date there is no data on the number of persons with disabilities in Fiji. However initiatives have been taken by the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons and the Government to conduct such a survey.

3. Current Policy and Programme

The law in Fiji says that it is the right of every person in the country to basic education; this includes both primary and secondary education. This right applies to people with disabilities. The school management cannot stop a person with a disability enrolling in a regular school. As a person with a disability it is your right to go to school up to Form 7. It is also your right to have equal access to tertiary education.

Laws and Policies related to education

- Section 39 of the Bill of Rights (Chapter 4 of the Constitution of Fiji)
- Fiji Human Rights Commission Act 1999
- Special Education Blue Print
- Biwako Millennium Framework